

## Ian Rose: interview at home, October 2012

### Marion Lowe interviewer

My name is Ian Rose, I am 40 years old, and I am married with two children, who are both keen sports people. I was born in 1972 and at six months contracted eye cancer: retinoblastoma, and had a lot of operations and spent a lot of time at Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

Basically I lost my left eye, and they managed to save some of the sight of my right eye, but the operations that I had slowed the growth of the bone at the side of my face and I have an indent. It also means that I have to wear some pretty thick glasses. Through the age of six months to the age of seven it wasn't a problem at all because I didn't have to interact with children, who thought that the way you looked was important, but this changed and I was being teased. I was being teased about something I could do nothing about and my self esteem ended up on the floor. I didn't want to be me, and my Mum and Dad, said we've got to help, and they took me to a local Judo Club. This was only because they knew somebody, who knew somebody, who knew somebody who coached the club. We walked through the door not knowing what to expect, and I was shaking like a leaf I was told. I was introduced to Ron Cleere, who had started the club with another guy called John Oke. Ron ran the beginner's sessions and we did the big man handshake, me aged 7, and he said 'So you want to have a go at Judo'. I froze and said 'I dunno'.

The one thing that is the biggest problem for someone with no self esteem is to know what they want to do, and to talk to people, and this was one of the barriers I had to overcome. But he made me feel at ease and I agreed to have a go. Just before I went on the mat Mum and Dad let Ron know that I was visually impaired. He said two words that basically changed my life. He said 'So what'. Get him on the judo mat and see what he can do. He didn't know, as a volunteer coach, someone that wasn't being paid, how much he was affecting my life and hundreds, possibly thousands, of kids lives who walked through the front door of the Judo club. So we got on the mat, and within three months the teasing stopped. It wasn't because I fought back or because I teasing the guys who had teased me, but I now had this new confidence, and self esteem. I liked being Ian again, I liked myself, but more importantly, I was forced into a situation which meant I had to learn how to talk to people properly and I had to meet new people, because it was all about one-on-one combat on a judo mat and you can't do that without knowing the person you are with and talking to them. Ron and John were taking me round the country to competitions and to the age of 16 and when I got my black belt I was fighting guys who were fully sighted and who were completely mainstream and it was difficult but it was rewarding because I was this poor little visually impaired boy and could beat people who could see, and it felt great. Some of the best moments of my early career were getting on the Under-21s National Team, not representing Great Britain, but being 3rd reserve,

which was great; winning numerous medals round the county and representing Home Counties, regional championships, winning medals, regional championships such as the Kent International and Heart of England, - major competitions for those who know about Judo. Competing in the British Closed and the British Open, not doing so well in those, but actually being there and feeling those emotions. It was a learning curve.

And at one of these competitions in 1989 around the age of 16, Stephen Pullen MBE, National Coach for the Visually Impaired Team, tells Ron that he had spotted me and thought I was good. He was backed up by a chap named Alan Sloman, who was a current visually impaired player at that time, and Alan convinced me that it would be good for me to give it a go on the visually impaired side of things. I needed some persuading but I went to a national training weekend and had fun and met loads of good new people. A few months later I had a letter through the door saying 'Congratulations, you've been selected to fight in the Visually Impaired European Championship'. This was my first Cap, my first selection to fight for my Country, and my emotions were all over the place. I was still in 5th year at school, still doing my exams, and we wanted to go somewhere sunny, Ron wanted to go somewhere sunny, and I wanted to travel the world, but we ended up in Manchester in the rain. We were at the George Carnall Sports Centre, next to Old Trafford where David Beckham played. I came back from that competition with a bronze medal. It was my first competition against grown men as a still growing, still developing 16 year old. When I got back to school I was over the moon, my head was that big it was unbelievable.

The thing that Ron and John were experts in was saying the right thing at the right time so that the full potential of their player was realised, not only in Judo but in life, and this was the important thing that you need to realise as a Coach is that you have the power to change somebody's life to actually make someone have an awesome life. You know when to get them motivated on the judo mat, but also you need to know when to hang back a bit and concentrate on other things, like for me, education. So Ron and John said to me, this is great, you've done the Club proud and done your family proud, well done. But, we now know you've got a talent for this sport. We now know you can travel the world and win these medals but what happens if it goes wrong? What is your Plan B? They told me I should come down off my cloud nine and come back to earth, do my education, achieve my full potential at school, achieve my full potential in my exams, and once I've have done that they would help me go round the world in these competitions. I am so glad they did that, because sport is great, and while you are winning you feel bullet proof, and nobody can touch you when you're in that state of mind and you've done all that training everything goes right and you come back with a medal: if you stay focussed. Eventually you need to take a break, eventually you need your Plan B. If you haven't planned for that it is a massive shock.

Ron convinced me to do my education, get my exams, and achieve my potential in those areas so that when I needed to get a job it was the job that I wanted, and not the job I needed. I wanted to be a salesman in the IT industry, but I needed the qualifications to be able to do that. So we set out that Plan B and made sure that it worked. So I got the first steps to Plan B out of the way, but I still had my Plan A. I still wanted to be the best in the world at Judo. I then went on to the European Championships, and then to Barcelona in 1992. That was my first Paralympic Games, and I came last. I came last because I went to Barcelona thinking the same as the public, 'Isn't it great, these disabled guys are having a go at sport'. But it is completely the other way around. These guys that compete in the Paralympic Games, back then, and now, are elite sports people who just happen to have a disability. Nothing else matters. And in the judo world they were visually impaired, same as me. It taught me a very valuable lesson.

Also at Barcelona I found that I suffered with nerves in front of vast crowds of people, and I had to find a way of overcoming that. So visualisation became very important to me. Instead of me being in the massive arena with thousands of people watching us, I visualized being at home in my club having a practise match with one person, and if I beat that one person I then moved on to the next person and the next person. If I lost to that first person it might never get to the second person, so I had to visualise being in a local judo club. Take the 6 or 7000 people that were making all that noise out of the equation and forget about them. After getting back from Barcelona and making a few promises to Ron and John that I was never going to lose again, I had to put a plan in place to actually follow that through. I won the World Championships in 1995: one of the best feelings of my life. I stood on a rostrum, having the National Anthem played for me, being the best in the World on that one day. You must enjoy that feeling when it happens because it doesn't happen to very many people - being the world champion in the sport that you love. Enjoy that feeling; soak it up, as the day after you may not be World Champion. I went to Atlanta in 1996 [1996], which was my second Olympic Games and I was determined that I was going to win. I was going in to the competition as current European Champion and current World Champion. I was favourite to win. But I was also going in with a lot of pressure on my shoulders, the expectation was that Ian was going to do this - and I got Bronze. I missed out because I lost my first fight. I forgot the golden rule in sport - never underestimate the competition, ever. I went out to Atlanta quite complacent- I was current European and World Champion - who was going to beat me? No-one! But then this new Brazilian came along and beat me in the first fight. It was really hard to come back through that to win Bronze and that was a good feeling, but hard at the same time, but I had to learn some lessons.

Right the way up to this point (and to 2000 when I went to Sydney) I was working because there was no money in sport back then. There was no Lottery funding, no English Institute of Sports, no UK Sport to pay for going to the gym to build yourself up and go there and win. There were no psychologists to help you.

There were physiotherapists but you had to pay for them yourself. So I was going back to my desk job every day after training and after these competitions, and I was back into real life. It was quite difficult. But then something happened in between Atlanta in 1996 and Sydney in 2000 which was simply the best day of my life. In May 1998 I got married to Debbie who I'd known for many years. We decided to get married and start a family and at the end of that year our daughter was born. We worked as a family and I trained and trained hard and put all the commitment in with the support of my family - which made it slightly easier because I could share things with Debbie when I was having a hard day, and Debbie could kick me off the sofa when I needed to go training. But life is about choices, and you choose to sit there or you chose to actually go out and do something, and sometimes I needed that kick. Then Sydney 2000 came round and I came 5th. For some reason at that one point in time at that competition I lost belief in myself that I could win. Within sport especially at the elite level, belief that you can win is a large percentage of being able to go and perform and win at the top level, so I had to find a way of getting it back. So when I came back from Sydney, Ron, John and I had to sit down and have a very, very frank and honest conversation about where I could go with my career from there.

And I was lucky then because money started coming into the sport after Sydney and I managed to get myself on the UK World Class Performance Programme which is funded by the National Lottery. It wasn't a massive amount of money coming in but it meant that we as a family didn't have to find the money for me to travel to training camps and clubs, and buy new judo kit and all the extra food I had to have so I was ready to rock and roll when the referee shouted 'Start'. Sydney had happened, money had come into sport, and I had to cope with that because that was a big challenge in itself, when the sport said we'd like to pay you to do what you love doing and it was a new thing. I was training hard and winning competitions, and in 2003 my son was born. Again, it was one of the best days of my life. Two children, my wife and myself: the perfect team moving forward. We as a family needed to pull together and at the same time I had the tickets in my hand to go to Canada for the qualifying competitions for Athens 2004 which was the next chance for glory and going for Gold. But my family was the most important thing for me and they needed me - so I retired, and handed the tickets back. In January 2004 I was at work, in the job that I wanted, when I had a phone call from Steve Pullen, who was the Visually Impaired National Coach. He said 'How are you doing' I said 'Fine' and he said 'How's your body', and I said 'Fine' because when you go into competition at the highest level there is usually some kind of small injury - for me a broken finger or broken toe, even as small as a broken finger nail. You might say don't be soft, but a broken fingernail is difficult because judo is a gripping sport, and the suit your opponent is wearing is a very rough canvas material and a broken fingernail will put you off. But I had none of that. He said, "That's good - the guy that's in charge of European Judo knows your situation and wants to know if you can fight in Athens". I said, "I can't I haven't qualified". He said "I've got you a wild card". 'What's that then?' He said, "It's a space in a weight group that hasn't got the full

quota of 12 qualified people. People might be injured, or there might not be enough visually impaired people around the world in a weight group". I said 'OK, I'm not sure' – I was enjoying working and earning money and having a good life with my family. So Steve said what he had said

Before, "Do you want to be the best in the world? Do want this next chance?" And I said "OK, Yes". He said how much do you weigh? And I said 88 kilo, thanks, and he said problem - we need you to fight in the 100 kilo category. My instant reaction was 'Whoa! That's the big boys. If you can imagine Bruno or Tyson in the boxing ring I had to fight guys as big as that. He then explained that there was a team of people set up by UK Sport called the English Institute of Sport who would get a team of people behind me to help me put on the weight on in 8 months the right way. We went through all the goal-setting issues with 'That's simply 2k a month for 8 months – easy'. For the first 2 kilo, great, for the first month, great, training was good. I had to change everything in the gym from going in to get fit to going in to building a body and the EIS guy would say we've set up a weight in the corner there – go and lift it ten times. Go out of the gym and eat.

'Great!' I had 4 meals a day prepared for me, which was unbelievably cool for the 1st month. It was good low fat food, because it would have been very easy to go to a burger bar every day and eat lots of fatty food and put the weight on the wrong way. I needed to fuel what I needed to do in the gym. I had a dietician who put together a diet for me and when and how I should eat it. There was a guy in the gym that made a training programme so I could put weight on in the right way without injuring myself too much, but it hurt. I was fighting guys on the judo mat who were +100k – all of my competitions I now entered were in the higher weight category. They were making me into a heavy weight judo fighter, not the person I was there and then. I made 98 kilo but couldn't get any further, so they changed the training again.

I'm so glad of the support from them, from Debbie, and the EIS guys. I was doing exercises like the 'World's Strongest Man' competition like the tractor tire flip and pulling things on sledges in fields. I was doing leg presses in the gym but not stopping at the 300k on the weights but I had people pushing against it as well, and sometimes it hurt that much that I would end up falling off and unable to walk for a few minutes. But that was what had to be done to get me away from the 98k to about 106k. They knew that as soon as I reached the pre-games training camp in Cyprus and started training in hot temperatures, at least 4 kilos would drop off me in a week - and they were dead right. On September 20th 2004 at 6.00 a.m. I was on the weigh-in scales at 102 kilo bang on. I'd made it! First step done, but what I hadn't thought of until that day - when I got off the scales I bumped into a French guy who was 150k. He was in my weight! I'd had to put on 16k and he was 48k heavier than me. Luckily enough I didn't have to fight him, but I lost to an Azerbaijani in the final. Coming home with Silver I had mixed emotions. I'd spent all this time training, putting weight on, going for Gold, and I'd lost in the final – I wanted to cry. But I had Silver and I realised second in the world isn't that bad! After all that effort, entering the competition as

an underdog, not being known about, second isn't so bad. I started to cheer up. At that point I think I realised that people needed to hear about my story, my life travels so far, specially kids in schools. I realised it was quite motivating. So I started talking – I started visiting schools to share my story with school children to get them motivated to do one thing – that is to achieve their particular potential - because that's all we want for kids. If the Paralympics can inspire kids to do that then it's my job as a Paralympian to go out there and inspire them. But I didn't want to stop my competitive career. I wasn't finished, I still had 4 years to go to Beijing. I was at that point working part-time for the IT Sales Company because there weren't enough hours in the day to train and compete. By winning that silver medal I was given a grant of more money, and I could actually give up work and I had enough coming in to support the family, and still do my hobby and sport that I loved and achieve my full potential. I wanted Paralympic Gold – that was the only medal that was eluding me. So I did all the training I had to do to get me in the best shape possible mentally and physically to go to Beijing in 2008. All sorts of things happened along the road, with injuries that were trying to knock me off the road, and I turned up in China at the Opening Ceremony and then weighed-in in the morning and got to the competition day and I came last. Because what I was slowly realising was that I was getting older, more injured and slower, and the guys I was fighting were young, faster and I couldn't keep up with them. Time was catching up with me – the thing we can't control in life. I think I realised that the Silver in Athens was probably the best I could do. The lesson I learnt there was this – life throws you opportunities, - it's your choice whether you take it or not but at a certain point in time and eventually opportunities in certain areas are going to run out. Now 3 yrs earlier in 2005 it had been announced that London would be hosting the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and at the point in time I was in Stoke Mandeville stadium entertaining some French guys who were over for a small International event. So there I was with the BBC filming me and I was cheering, and London was announced and I was jumping up and down with excitement, but all the French went quiet. But just after Beijing that hit home again – the next games is London – I can't miss that – if I had half a chance of competing in London I would be silly not to try. So I took a year or so out and went back into work, but then an opportunity presented itself to me at the end of 2010 and the Programme Manager for the Paralympic Team for British Judo approached me and 'We're in process of preparing the Paralympic Team for London – are you sure you don't want to do this' and I was at that time really sure I didn't want to compete. But actually I really didn't because I was in my comfort zone and enjoying work. We had a frank conversation and this thought that I had when I got off the plane from Beijing if I've got half a chance of competing in London I've got to take that opportunity because it will never happen again in my lifetime – so I took it and started training. I went to my first International competition since taking time off after Beijing and I got Silver at the US Open in Miami. I was very nervous and it was very tough, but that was to be expected because it was my first one back. I started training for the European Championships which were going to be held in November 2011 and this was the competition I had to compete in, and I didn't

have to do that well in it, just step on the judo mat. I had to tick the box that said I had to compete in a major international event within a year before the games. The European Championship was the only opportunity. I was doing well in the training camps; I was absolutely taking apart the guys who were the medal threats in the Europeans, including the 150 kilo French guy, so I was doing well.

Then two weeks before the Championship I snapped a ligament in my knee in training. It happens, nothing I could do about it, and that was me done. There was an operation which needed at least 9 months rehab, and because I was now 40 I'd probably need 18 months to come back from, so I travelled to Dartford where the British Judo based the elite team from, (and I will always remember the train trip as one of the longest I'd taken because I was going to discuss my future and discuss me competing in London), because they may have been able to get me through because of extraordinary circumstances in some way but I sat down with the Coach and Performance Manager, and we had a frank conversation in which we were all agreed – it just wasn't going to happen. So I accepted it, I had the operation and did some rehab to get walking again, and half way through 2012 the biggest honour in sport was given to me apart from competing – they asked me to carry the Paralympic Torch in Tring.

Round about 1.00am in the morning and there were hundreds of people out that night 6 deep on the pavement, it was an amazing honour and an amazing feeling and the beginning of an amazing 2 weeks of my life. I finished that, went home about 3.00am, up early the next day because I had been asked to be a performer at the Opening Ceremony, and if you watch out for the six retired Paralympians who fly in and fly out doing somersaults and tricks and moves – I was one of them – what a massive honour. But I would have given that all up to compete in London and have a last shot at winning gold, but it wasn't meant to be. Now the opportunity for International sport has effectively stopped for me because of age and injury, what do I do now? You need to carry on that Paralympic Legacy and the big word around London was 'Legacy' and there are organisations around this country that are already set up to deliver a Legacy for London and doing an amazing job with that. There are local ones round the Buckinghamshire area where I live for example one called 'Driving Inspiration', which is run in schools by artists, and links artists with elite Paralympians to go in and inspire kids – it works so well. Another is the national Youth Sports Trust that looks at older secondary school children of 14-16 yrs to get them inspired to start sport, to continue and achieve their full potential at sport. I also work with the 21st Century Legacy Trust which was set up by David Emery CBE who go into school and are centred on goal setting and achievements in life, not just sport. All of these have an amazing part to in the life of a youth or a young person that is either gifted or talented or has lost their way slightly and just needs a little bit of help. What have I done since I got back from the excitement of the Paralympics? Well one of the excitements for me is the Award I collected at the Wycombe Sports Awards in October 2012 for the Inclusive Judo project. I started this project with a young man called Jonathan Purssey who is current

Commonwealth champion and we go round schools in the local area inspiring children through sport, not any old sport but judo using blind folds. And we link that sport into the curriculum and we run sessions on goal setting, inspiration, and taking responsibility, which will hopefully inspire children not just to start sport, not just to compete but to achieve their full potential in the community and making their communities a better place.