



The Abbey

KINDNESS

What can sport teach you about being kind to yourself?

Hannah, Upper VI (Year 13)



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Sport is all about pushing yourself. You always have to find flaws, train as much as possible, and try to be perfect, otherwise you are failing. After all, no pain no gain, right? In my experience, this is wrong. Of course sport is about doing your best, but it doesn't always have to be painful. In fact, one of the key lessons I have learned through sport is how to let kindness and compassion towards myself guide my progress as an athlete.

Around seven years ago, I learned to shoot Air Pistol with my local Scout group. A few years later, in 2019, I won my first international medal at Intershoot, a competition in the Netherlands, and soon after that I set a British record. Despite my success, there were some huge flaws in my training. I was focusing entirely on the technical side of the sport, almost completely neglecting the mental side. I learned the consequences of this the hard way. At Intershoot 2020, the first international I had been to twice, I suddenly felt huge pressure to beat my scores from the previous year. I lied to myself and to my coaches that I was feeling fine, but really I could no longer cope with the pressure I was putting myself under and ended up with a score lower than the one I had shot at my first ever competition. I had no strategies for coping with an event like this, and it would take two years for me to recover my confidence.

During those two years I learned a lot. Most importantly, I learned the importance of being kind to myself. To me, this does not mean being easy on myself. I still train even when I'm tired and I don't want to, and I always push myself to do better. The difference is that I no longer only look for my flaws. It is true that we are often our own harshest critics,

but it is so important to try not to be. Today, when I train I observe my performance as objectively as possible, and I never leave a training session without finding at least one positive outcome.

Acknowledging the good within the bad has been revolutionary for my self-confidence. Instead of spiralling downwards when something isn't going well, I am able to stop myself and think rationally: whatever the outcome, there will be something positive, so relax, focus on your goal, and remember that you don't have to be great every day, you just have to get better. Learning this approach was difficult, but to anyone who is struggling under pressure and lacking in confidence, I would really encourage you to try because it has been helpful for me in so many areas of my life.

I am proud to say that thanks to this new mindset, I recently matched my personal best score, three years after it was first set. The first time I shot this score, I looked to my future with an uneasy feeling, not really believing I deserved my success, and feeling pressure to repeat my performance. Now, I look towards the future with confidence and excitement, eagerly anticipating the challenges to come.



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