

Rachel Smith

GB Dragon Boat Gold medal & world-record holder & Atlantic Ocean Rower

Profile

Rachel Smith has represented Great Britain in World and European Dragon Boat Racing Championships and holds an astounding 25 medals (including two World Records). In 2008, Rachel joined the small group of elite women who have successfully rowed across the Atlantic Ocean. Many are surprised to learn that Rachel has achieved all this while balancing a successful and full-time career in marketing.

At her speaking engagements, Rachel draws on her marketing and business background to ensure that the messages arising from her sporting adventures have real resonance as well as practical application. Engaging and modest, Rachel's enthusiasm is infectious and she has the ability to reach audiences no matter what their age or status. She regularly works for the Princes Trust encouraging young people to make the most of opportunities and work towards goals.

Rachel wasn't particularly good at sports but at her school in the North West of England she was introduced to kayaking and dragon boat racing and loved it. Following studies in Equine Science and Business, Rachel worked in Italy and the USA before changing career and returning to the UK to work for the Bank of Scotland in telemarketing. A year later, Rachel put forward an idea that resulted in a move into marketing to research and launch a new product on behalf of the bank.

An opportunity to pick up Dragon Boat Racing again saw Rachel at the first World Championships in China in 1995. Totally inspired by Olympic coaches such as David Hemery, Rachel realised what could be achieved if you really want to do something and are prepared to focus on taking the steps to

succeed. She qualified for the National Team on every attempt over the next ten years.

As part of the GB team, Rachel won 25 World and European Championship medals, a world-record for the 1,000m Women's event and a host of other international titles. In 2005, she became one of just five women who have paddled and helmed (steered) for Great Britain. Rachel knows that winning at competitive sport can only come with a real understanding of teamwork, staying focused during tough times, and using techniques such as visualisation to achieve goals.

It was friend and solo trans-Atlantic rower Debra Searle who encouraged Rachel to take on the Atlantic challenge. Rachel decided to row in the two-handed Atlantic race with her friend Lin to raise funds for Breast Cancer Care having lost her Grandmother to the disease. For Rachel, raising awareness and funds was taken as seriously as training to row an ocean and she raised over £60,000 for the charity. Recognition came in winning an HBOS Award for fundraising and reaching the final of The Sun/Everyclick Fundraiser of the Year Awards (run in honour of Jane Tomlinson).

During talks, Rachel brings alive the experience of rowing the Atlantic – two-hours on and two hours off. In February 2008 after 76 gruelling days rowing across the ocean, Rachel and Lin arrived in Antigua surviving a terrifying capsizing just 300 miles from the finish line. They won the Women's pairs class.

Following sixteen years in financial marketing, Rachel has recently moved to to help launch an innovative new sporting challenge to Row Round Britain in 2011 – a race designed to be open to novices as well as top athletes.

Rachel continues to write and take photographs as a freelancer for a variety of sporting publications and yachting/rowing websites. She has also recently finished a book about her experiences.

Rachel had appeared on *This Morning*, *Ready Steady Cook*, *Granada Reports* in addition to numerous interviews about rowing the Atlantic and Dragon Boat Racing on television, newspapers and magazines.

Continually challenging herself by setting goals and wishing to try new things, Rachel has acquired her full motorcycle licence and is qualified to scuba dive, sail and drive a power boat and enjoys surfing, horse riding, and walking. In the summer of 2009 she took part in a 39mile kayak marathon with her cousin. Together they paddled the length of Loch Lomond, Windermere and Bala Lake in just 14.5 hours (including the driving) and raised over £2,300 for Christie's Hospital.