

## A year in the life of an AD Astra Elite Athlete

Hi my names Robert Hendrick, I compete in the sport of Canoe Slalom and have been a member of the AD Astra Elite Athlete Academy and Irish Senior/U23 National Canoe Slalom Team for the previous three years.

In September 2018 I returned to UCD to complete stage 3 of Health and Performance science. Canoeing is a summer sport with athletes having a long pre-season between September and April and then we begin travelling for the summer, following the various competitions across the canoeing circuit. As I reflected on my summer racing season and prepared for my final year I knew I had one major goal, to prepare for the 2019 Canoe Slalom World Championships in La Seu D'urgell, Spain in September the following year.

Beginning in September 2018 I wished to bring a new intensity to my training. I can honestly say it would not have been possible without the support of the Ad Astra Academy. The support I received in Strength/Conditioning, Sport Science, Nutrition, and Sport Psychology were world class. Mine is a very different sport to all the others in the academy. It was so motivating to see the services like the S&C coaches excited about the challenge of applying their skills to a sport as unique as white water canoeing. Whenever I needed help with any part of of my training or had any concerns I knew there was a support network in the academy I could rely on. DBC Phyiotherapy Clinic were amazing to accommodate me quickly whenever I had any niggles or pains that needed looking at. The daily wellness monitoring which tracked my health and overall training load kept me healthy with no danger of over-training. Canoe Slalom involves lots of travel all year round and the academic support was essential to being able to balance my final year with with my sporting ambitions. The welcoming atmosphere of the academy meant I was never afraid to ask for some help with my studies if I felt I was losing the balance. One example of this is when the High Performance Gym facilitated a bulky canoe ergometer in the gym for days when college life kept me from getting close to a river.

I've just returned to Ireland after over 2 months of travel and racing on the canoeing circuit. In all that time I was never injured, sick, over trained mentally or physically and was able to do more canoeing in that space of time then I've ever been able to do before. The Ad Astra Academy put me in the best position to compete in my sport at the U23 World Championships in Krakow, Poland last weekend.

Finally the last thing I'd like to say is, being a student/athlete can be tough with a lot of us trying to get the balance right between excelling in our chosen studies and competing and the highest level of our sports. Although it's not talked about much, I think being a student athlete can be a hard patch in a lot of young Irish athlete's careers as they are making the hard transition from junior to senior level. Athletes who enjoyed success as a junior, finding themselves struggling to bridge the gap into the senior ranks with lots of hard losses and bitter defeats. I've been no different. But academy has always supported me to keep pursueing my goals and keep my ambitions high. I've no doubt lots of other athletes in the academy have shared the same experience and I'm really proud to say they've been a part of my sporting journey.



Weaving through poles in Spain on my way to finishing 7<sup>th</sup> at the Segre Cup in April 2019



Enjoying a warm January Camp in the Pyrenee Mountains



All set to compete in the U23 Europeans Championships in Slovakia, Repping UCD kit!



Putting the hours in the gym so I can stay healthy when I get in the boat!



Getting an erg put in to the gym helped me balance my studies on days when I just couldn't get near a river.



Trying not to think about all my assignments due while battling through white water