

Interview with Rowan Cheshire – Recovering from Concussion

The crash happened at the very last training session on the day before Rowan Cheshire was supposed to represent her country at the Sochi Winter Olympics.

Putting the finishing touches to her Freestyle Half-Pipe Skiing routine, the 20-year-old miss-judged a jump, over-rotated and landed face-first on the ice from a great height.

She was knocked out instantly and her goggles were crushed into her face under the force of the fall, fracturing her nose and leaving cuts to her lips and face. Later on, she would also be diagnosed as having had spinal whiplash and spinal compression.



She finally came round later on in her hospital room with her coach next to her. The only good thing about the crash was that she couldn't remember a thing about it. Her memory is non-existent of the immediate hours before and after it too.

The only evidence she has is video footage of the incident. Watching it back is like some surreal out-of-body experience.

Those living moments are still blanked from her memory banks but her forced withdrawal from the Olympic Games will always be there in black and white. Rowan will be back though. As they say, time is most definitely on her side.

After the accident, she stayed in Russia for a few days and the recovery was a slow one. Her head wasn't where she wanted it to be and it was hard for the Alsager-born athlete to determine where her recovery was at.

Upon returning to England, she saw a doctor in Manchester and began the SCAT (Sport Concussion Assessment Tool) tests that enabled her to have a much clearer picture. It's a standardised tool for evaluating people who have suffered some form of concussion.

Athletes complete a series of tests before they compete when they are in a 'normal' state. Their score is then compared to the score they get after any concussion symptoms are shown. The closer athletes get to returning to their 'normal' score, the better their condition is assumed to be getting.

Months before her accident, Rowan had taken one to get her baseline score which was then used as a target during her recovery.

"Because I didn't remember the crash or the events leading up to it, it was almost like it had never happened," she said. "That is why the SCAT test helps so much to be able to let you see what stage you are at on your recovery because it is hard to tell sometimes. You might think you are getting better, but you might not be."

The awareness of concussion has improved dramatically in the last 18 months and the BSS is now instructing all of its top athletes to complete a mandatory SCAT test before they can compete. Below them, everyone within the program are also being encouraged to do one.

"I'd definitely advise people to take one," said Rowan. "It's extremely useful for the doctors who are monitoring your condition after any accident and useful for yourself to know where you are in terms of getting back to fitness."

*** Rowan Cheshire has now made a complete return to action and was speaking having just come back from training in Colorado. She worked with Function Jigsaw, BSS Injury and Rehab Specialists - <http://functionjigsaw.co.uk/>**