
Heptathlete Klučinová throws crutches away and looks forward to Olympics

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For four years she suffered pain. In the last one she could hardly walk. Finally, the Czech heptathlon record holder Eliška Klučinová decided to undergo a risky surgery in June to have a malunion removed from her left foot. After a four-month recovery break she is training at full speed again to be able to make her dream come true and take part in the London Olympics next season. "I once again feel like training, maybe I will finally start enjoying it," says the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education student who came seventh in the European Championships in Barcelona.



I hear you almost became a javelin thrower because of your health problems. Is it correct?

If the pain in my foot had continued and I couldn't run, I would probably have switched to the javelin. But I probably would not make it to world-class level. I would only compete nationally.

Maybe you don't have enough faith in yourself?

Well, it is tempting, definitely. Frankly, the heptathlon is very tough. To run 800 metres for a woman of my build is not easy at all. (laughs)

Did you ever consider quitting because of your health problems?

The foot pain troubled me for four years and it was really bad in the last two. I couldn't keep my running shoes on even for a whole training session. I always had to take the shoe off between individual stretches and walk barefoot because it was unbearable. After the spring training camp in Africa I could hardly walk. So I was deciding whether to have an operation which often fails or to quit track and field.

You did not train for four months. What did you do during that long pause?

I enjoyed my first summer vacation after a long time. I went to the Croatian seaside twice. First I went camping with my mum and sister and then yachting. I really enjoyed myself and did things I normally don't have the time to do: I went roller-skating, cycling... It is not a bad thing to take the occasional break from track and field.

So you weren't bored?

Not really, one does keep oneself busy. *(laughs)*

But still, did you look forward to running into the track and field stadium again?

I was tempted so I at least worked out a bit. Interestingly, I did not miss running too much. But I did miss the feeling when you finish a training session and all the endorphins kick in.

What was your first training session like? Did it hurt?

It did! When one does not work out for several months, everything hurts. Now I have got used to it and got back into the old rhythm. But more importantly I keep saying to myself: "What hurts makes you stronger."



Can the break help you physically? The body is rested and can take more...

I believe that sport and every performance is primarily a matter of the mind. Above all I took a mental rest and that might help me. For four years I suffered pain and now I have instilled new blood into my veins and I feel like training again. Maybe it won't hurt and I will finally enjoy the training sessions.

The coming season will have two peaks in the summer: before the Olympics, the European Championships will be held. Will you take part in both?

I'm planning to prepare for both events. I will stand better chances in the European Championships even though not many contenders will be absent, maybe none of them. And the Olympics – that's perhaps every athlete's dream...

Will the European Championships be a priority for you?

Yes. Even though the Olympics are the highlight of the year, the Championships will be the main competition for me so I will prepare for that in every way. Above all I would like to defend the seventh place from Barcelona from 2010.

What does your training look like?

First of all I will finish a training camp in Zadov and at the end of November our group is flying to South Africa. When we return I will have the screws and a titanium plate removed from my foot. I poorly tolerate foreign objects in my body,

even earrings. So it is better to have them removed. Besides, having titanium in my foot does not even increase my value. (laughs)

Is it a problem when you are running?

I have bought softer shoes and so far it does not get in the way. I have a whole collection of shoes because of that. But still I will have that operation by Christmas, at least I can enjoy Christmas with my foot up. And then? I will start working hard again.

Do you think you will be beeping at the airport with a metal plate in your foot?

(laughs) It would seem so... I hope they will not make me take off my shoes everywhere and search me. But I am prepared for that eventuality. I have not flown on an airplane with it yet, so I am curious.

Eliška Klučinová (*April 14, 1988, Prague)

A year ago she evened up the Czech heptathlon record (6268 points) as part of the TNT – Fortuna meeting in Kladno. In the same year she took seventh place in the European Championships in Barcelona. As part of the Fast Girls Group she is preparing with indoor 400-metres European Champion Denisa Rosolová and the seventh woman in the world in the 400-metres event Zuzana Hejnová. She is studying at the Charles University Faculty of Sport and Physical Education. After long term health problems she underwent a surgery to have a malunion removed from her left foot in June this year and missed training for four months. Currently she is preparing for the upcoming season.

