

Jessica Cooper Lewis Paralympian, Newsletter #5, 2021 - Tokyo part one

Hi everybody!



What a whirlwind it has been. I had full intentions of writing a newsletter while over in Tokyo before the races started but time just got away from us while settling in and my preparations. I have split up this newsletter into two parts so that it won't be too long at once.

We flew to Tokyo on August 20th in first class style! From the time that we landed until we were on the bus heading to the village took about 4 hours. There was so much paperwork, and apps that needed to be done and downloaded that would allow us access into Japan and to keep track of our first 14 days there. We were also tested on arrival and were not able to leave the airport until we received a negative result.

The trip started out a bit rocky once arriving as our 3 suitcases full of all our clothes didn't arrive. Very frustrating as it was a direct flight and we paid to have priority and business class seats. All of my equipment arrived which was good. Usually mom and I will split up our clothes between each suitcase so if one doesn't arrive we will have back up clothes to get us going. Unfortunately that plan didn't work for us this time as none of them arrived. It took 3 days for the bags to get there.

As part of the Tokyo 2020 games, ASICS provided a program for countries that had less than 2 athletes at the games where they provided some uniforms (t-shirts, shoes, shorts, and a track-suit) with the country name on them. This helped us to get through those first few days. I am also so grateful to my friend Kelsey LeFevour, who competes for the US, who lent me a few plain training clothes so I could continue my preparations.

We were also lucky that my mom and my opening ceremony uniforms were in the one suitcase that did arrive so we were still able to attend that. Curtis was also able to join as we had his Bermuda shorts and he was able to wear our Bermuda polo shirt as part of our regular uniform. It certainly added a lot more stress and worry for me which, with coach Curtis's help, I tried to not focus on but it was difficult to try and stay focused when I didn't have all of the things I needed, and we weren't sure how long it would take to get the bags. Needless to say we have never been more excited to see luggage before in our lives. It was like Christmas morning!



One of my favorite things about being in an athletes village is to see all the different countries' flags hanging from the balconies of the residence buildings. Our apartment was in the building with the US team. There were US flag's, and message boards everywhere and then on the one balcony was our little Bermuda flag!! Usually each country would have an official welcoming

ceremony but those were cancelled this time around. There was a time slot for each country's Chef de Mission to go and meet the mayor of the village though.

I can't remember in a past newsletter if I mentioned the Host Town program as part of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Each delegation was assigned to a different town in Japan. The idea behind this program, pre-pandemic, was that representatives from the town would come to the games to cheer on the country's athletes, and then the country would send representatives to visit the host town. Unfortunately with the pandemic all our interactives turned into the virtual platform. Bermuda was partnered with a town called Ikata. Flora Duffy and I had a few zoom meetings with some people from the town, as well as we each did a presentation to one of the schools about our sports and a bit about Bermuda.



They also hosted a candle light service ceremony for Bermuda to celebrate the start of the Olympic games where they put candles together and made the words "One Love" Each of the candle jar holders had Flora and my pictures on them with well wishes written in them from students in Ikata. Such a cool program to be a part of. Bless Mr. Hyashi who came to meet us at the airport when we arrived and when we were leaving. While in Tokyo we also had another zoom meeting with the mayor of Ikata, where we talked

about our experience in Tokyo so far.

In the village they had autonomous cars that could be used to transport people around. However, during the games they were having a few malfunctions and ended up having to park them. There was one incident in which a visually impaired athlete tripped and the car didn't sense that he was there and hit him. Luckily, the athlete is fine. They were really cool, and we got to ride in one once, but definitely need to work out a few kinks.



The opening ceremony was on August 24th. It was a different atmosphere than usual without people in the stands but the volunteers and performers all did an incredible job in helping to still make it a fun and special experience. It was a tremendous honor to have been able to be the flag bearer for Bermuda for a 3rd time on the world stage of para-sport. It was also a cool experience for Coach Curtis to be a part of as when he was competing he never attended the opening ceremony because his competition usually started the day after and it can be an extremely late night. Albeit behind a different flag! To minimize our contact with large groups we walked through the stadium in the parade of nations and then

left right away to head back to the village.

I had 5 days after the opening ceremony until my first race, which was the 800m. The time was spent training, hydrating, resting and playing a few hands of Gin Rummy. One of the days we had the official starters practice on the stadium track. It's always nice to have that little bit of time on the track to get a feel for it and I find it helps a lot with the mental prep. Can start visualizing competing there.



I was really pleased that I had the race schedule that I did - 800m first, 100m second and 400m third. The 800m race is always going to be my bonus race as I know I will never be as competitive over that distance as I am in the 100m. Having the 800m first gave me the chance to get the nerves out and give myself the chance to get my mindset right. As for the race itself I am extremely happy with how it went. I had a fast start and was able to get into the draft for the first lap and then maintained a higher pace than usual when I was dropped for the last 300m to come away with a personal best time of 1:57.77. This was a big achievement for me, not only because it was a PB but because I haven't been under 2 minutes in the 800m since Rio in 2016 when I did a 1:58.24.

Stay tuned for Tokyo part two!

Jessica