



Catching up with...

DAME SARAH STOREY

The cycling star talks about making sporting history, mentoring young athletes and breaking down gender barriers

How does it feel to become Britain's most successful Paralympian?

'At the time, it was quite surreal. I knew it was a mathematical possibility, but when I crossed the finish lines at Tokyo there were very few people there to celebrate with. It was a slow dawning process over the following six months, but when I stood on the stage at the BBC Sports Personality of the Year 2021 awards, I finally realised the enormity of having a Paralympian up there alongside some of the greatest sports people in the UK.'

Is retirement looming?

'Not at all. I went almost a full three-seconds quicker than I'd anticipated in the C5 3,000m Individual Pursuit event and smashed my own world record in qualifying. But, Tokyo was a very empty games and a challenging environment: certainly not the same place to enjoy the sport. I didn't feel I could hang up my race wheels in that situation, especially as my little boy was desperate to go but not allowed. Seeing as Tokyo had already been delayed a year, I realised I might as well carry on and aim to compete in Paris 2024.'

What do you do when you're not training?

'I've always worked alongside younger athletes to give back to whichever sport I've been doing. For the past few years, I've been working with the ŠKODA DSI Cycling Academy to support young female cyclists. I get a huge buzz from seeing their success and the smiles on their faces when something clicks or they've learnt to use a skill effectively.'

How does the ŠKODA DSI Cycling Academy work?

'It's a mentoring academy that helps young female riders navigate the next stage of their careers, on and off the bike. It provides them with support and access to unique opportunities, such as seeing some of the biggest international cycling events on the calendar, including the Tour De France, and it takes a holistic approach to building strong, capable sportswomen who can make good decisions. They get to work with a sport psychologist to learn skills such as managing nerves, and they learn other practical skills like how to manage their social media profiles – all things I can help them implement and take forwards.'

Do gender imbalances still exist in cycling?

'Yes, in the sense that the opportunities for women at the age group we're targeting are few and far between. Male cyclists have an under-23 programme, whereas women have no choice but to move from Junior events directly into the Senior peloton. We already know we lose girls in their teenage years: we don't want to lose women at the end of their teenage years because they are overwhelmed. The academy helps those women who haven't been able to make it in the professional peloton immediately, and many of the riders from the academy have graduated into race teams, including Morgan Newberry who has joined my Storey Racing team. It's a privilege to be given an opportunity to positively influence somebody's pathway.'



Dame Sarah Storey is the principal of the ŠKODA DSI Cycling Academy, which was set up to support aspiring female cyclists and address the gender imbalance in cycling. For more information, visit skoda.co.uk/discover/cycling-academy