

Wow what a great experience the Commonwealth Games was. Birmingham was a great host city and the organisation, and all the staff and volunteers were fantastic.

My big aim for the year was to qualify for the European Junior Championships in Bucharest, I had no idea that I would also qualify for the Commonwealth Games. The summer was really busy, after finishing up with school it was straight on to London and then out to Romania with the British Junior team. This in itself was a fantastic experience. Making the final of the 200m Back final and coming fourth was great, a slight tinge of disappointment of not getting a medal but looking back I performed as best as I could on the night. We did not get to see much of Bucharest as we were still under Covid protocols and were not to mix outside the bubble too much. We did see some beautiful fields of sunflowers on our daily walk. Only downside was the food, I basically ate dry cereal for a week. Mum, Dad and Rowan came out to watch and that was great, didn't get to meet them though, but certainly heard the support they gave. Seeing David Popovici in action at the Juniors was amazing, world senior record holder at 17 is stunning.

Talking of Covid when I got home from Romania, I spent much of my time on my own in my bedroom avoiding contact with anyone apart from going swimming. A big shout out to big sis for driving me to swimming as Mum was ill and Dad was working.

I just had a week at home before heading off to pre-Games swim camp up in Aberdeen for a week. I am sure Mum (and Dad) had a tear in their eyes waving me off on the bus. In Aberdeen we got our Team Scotland swim kit. T-shirts, shorts, training swimsuits and four race suits. We also got a load of Team Scotland kit including the swanky kilt.



Aberdeen was pretty chill, on taper for the upcoming competition. Two easy swim sessions a day. The hotel was nice, food was good and my room mate Evie Davis was great. Again, we had pretty strict covid protocols to follow; two weeks before Aberdeen we needed a PCR test and then another a week before and pretty much staying in the swim team bubble.



On the Sunday before the Start of the Commonwealth Games, which was starting on the Thursday, we flew down to Birmingham from Aberdeen. We had so much kit some of it went down by van. Once in Birmingham we needed more Covid testing. It was straight forward, we got results in 90 minutes and then we were allowed into the athletes' village. No sharing rooms this time. The Scotland team got some of the best rooms, ensuite bathroom and nice big bed (which I would take plenty of naps on).

The pool was The Sandwell Aquatics Centre which was about a 20 minute bus ride there (and a 60 minute ride back). There was a training pool at the athletes' village too that we could use. Security at the village was pretty tight, security guards and police with big guns. Only accredited people were allowed in. The food was great, lots of different types and great there was a really good selection for us vegetarians.

Unfortunately, the swimmers were not able to attend the opening ceremony as the swimming competition started the next morning. We watch some of it on TV and cheered the rest of Team Scotland on.

The atmosphere at the Aquatics Centre was amazing. My first race was on the Saturday, so I got to experience some of the show on the Friday and try and settle my nerves. Team Scotland got off to a great start with Ross and Katie medalling.

I was so nervous for my race, a few big breaths and I tried to relax. I knew that if I swam really well I could make the semi-finals. I managed to execute my race plan well and got a PB and qualified for the semi-final in the evening. The race was fantastic experience, and the support was unbelievable.

The Team Scotland support in their Scotland Blue t shirts and the Team Holly McGill draped in saltires was great.

Getting to the semi was a bit unexpected and this caused my parents a bit of a panic as they did not have tickets for the semi-finals. Lucky tickets for family members of competing swimmers were available. In the semi-final I again swam well but it was a big ask with the great field I was up against to make the Final. Katie had good race though and made the final. I also got to have a quick catchup with my family for a few minutes which was great, I hadn't seen them since leaving for Aberdeen.



I had the Sunday off from competition and had plenty of sleep and food (and more sleep). Monday was the 200m Backstroke and I had a chance of making the final if I paced myself well in the heats. Team Scotland did well with three of us making the final. Again, my support was amazing Team Holly being joined by Rowan Saunders and Laura Frizzel.





There were a few more days of swim competition, with some great Team Scotland performances with the gorgeous Duncan Scott leading the way. Once competition was over we all got to relax and watch some of the other events going on. We went to the diving to support our Aquatics team mates. We also saw some beach volleyball and netball.

After missing out on the opening ceremony we all went along to the closing ceremony. It was a great experience and we all ended up in the bar afterwards for a few "Irn-Brus". Needless to say the bus home the next day was spent sleeping.

It was great to meet up for the Hearts barbeque at Portobello beach, even with the spooky scooby-doo mist rolling in. Meeting some of the younger club members was so nice. I remember watching Keanna at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games as a young 12-year-old, cheering her on never imagining just 4 short years later I too would be there. Hopefully at the 2026 games in Victoria Hearts will have swimmers there too.

This journey has been the most mind-blowing thing ever and I need to thank my coaches, Phil and Michal, all of Hearts for the support I have received and of course my parents Rab and Jennifer, the

best parents you could ask for. And finally, Rowan my sister who has inspired me and driven me on with my swimming.

Holly



Above - Holly with her specially commissioned Club Award to recognise her fantastic achievements