

# Glasgow 2014: Walker ready to put best foot forward

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Sam Walker is all smiles after winning the Heritage Oil Open. Picture by Michael

Loveder

Sam Walker believes the appliance of science can give England a winning edge when the Commonwealth Games get under way in Glasgow this month.

The Worksop teenager has absorbed lessons in sports science at the pre-Games camp at Lilleshall – though he admits some aspects of the approach took him by surprise.

“We’ve been testing urine samples for hydration, so that’s a bit strange,” he said. “It’s not something I’d have expected to be doing on the camp but it’s good to make sure we’re keeping ourselves hydrated with all the hard work that we’re doing on a daily basis.”

While the likes of injury prevention, psychology and nutrition are not totally new to Walker and his team-mates, he still appreciates the input of the support team lead by David Hemborough of Sheffield Hallam University.

“It’s something we’ve not had much exposure to before on a regular basis, so it’s nice to get here and use them,” said the 19-year-old.

“We’ve got a lot from it. It’s good to get as much info as we can. Anything that can help us in training or in competition is great and we all appreciate the work that everyone’s been putting in. They’re all working hard and we like to work with the guys.

“It’s a luxury I suppose to be able to have people like that working for us and helping us so we’re all learning and trying to take in everything they say and use it the best we can.

“We’ve been having ice baths after sessions too, which is not a nice experience while you’re in there but it definitely helps the recovery.

“It means we can push every session as hard as we can and still feel confident that we’ll be fresh or ready for the next day to do the same again.”

Walker is the only member of the men’s squad not to have played at the Commonwealths – though he has big-match experience as part of the team which clinched promotion back to the top division at the World Team Championships in May. He then had a further huge lift by winning the Heritage Oil Open in front of the BT Sport cameras last Monday.

And while he is relishing his chance to shine in Glasgow, he knows it will be all business once the action gets under way.

“It’s my first multi-sport event and a new experience,” he said. “I’m really excited but obviously we’ve got a job to do. We’re not there for a holiday. We all believe we can do well and we can win the medals.

“We all believe that we can get the gold which is something that would be really special. However, getting any medal is not an easy achievement, especially with Singapore and India there.

“We do believe that we can get gold but our main target is a medal.”

Walker does not have a singles berth so, in addition to the team event, his chances of medals come in the men’s doubles alongside Danny Reed and in the mixed doubles, where he partners Karina Le Fevre.

He believes he and Reed are building up a good understanding as a pair.

"We think we're a good team, we work together, there's communication there which is really important," he said.

"We've been playing together for a while now, six to eight months. We've been practising hard together in the practice hall, a lot of doubles-specific things and we feel like our game's really coming along as a pair.

"We're both professional, we both have positive mindsets and believe we can do well. We've got confidence in each other, which is very important in doubles."

On his Heritage Oil Open victory, beating Portugal's Enio Mendes in the final, Walker said: "I'm overwhelmed. I always believed I could do it but I never expected to win.

"I went out really relaxed and tried to take the pressure off myself, without thinking about where it was or that it was in front of the cameras or for a trophy.

"When I was out there I was really focused on what I wanted to do and my tactics. I did what I know I can do and it's a really unbelievable feeling after the hard work."

**By Paul Stimpson (July 11th, 2014)**

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