

Meet Miriam Kwasny – Runner & Triathlete

Name: Miriam Kwasny

Sport: Running (Hamburger Laufladen) & Triathlon (Triathlon Team Hamburg)

Born: 11.09.1965

Education: Study of free Arts

Professional Occupation: Working as an Assistant and Controller

| PB on Distances | Time | Pace (min/km) | Race | Date |
|-----------------|---------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| 10 K | 41:37 | 4:10 | 25. Internationaler Alsterlauf | 7 Sep 2014 |
| Half-marathon | 1:32:26 | 4:23 | DM Halbmarathon Hannover | 9 Apr 2017 |
| Marathon | 3:14:55 | 4:35 | DM Mainova Marathon Frankfurt | 29 Okt 2017 |

- 1) *At what age did you start running and competing? What is driving you? What other sports did you try in life? I have seen a video with you – owning the floor – on rollerblades ;-).*

My first run was 2011 by chance, at the age of 46. As you mentioned, at that time I did since several years back competitive freestyle skating - a sport where you do acrobatic tricks around a line of small cones. One day, a friend asked me to take part in the "Sportcheck Nachtlaufr" -7,5 km around the Hamburger lake Alster. At this time I was not even running a few meters so I was not sure if I would manage the distance. My goal was to run below one hour. To my own surprise I passed a lot of runners including my friend and finished in 42 minutes. I enjoyed it more than I could ever imagined. So my running journey started...

- 2) *Recently you managed a personal best with 3.14.55 on the Mainova Frankfurt Marathon. What is your next big challenge? What is your main goal for next year?*

For 2018, I have several goals. In triathlon my focus 2018 will be the German and European Masterships. I will take part and compete in my age group women 50 with the German Triathlon Union. In 2016, I became German Master at the middle distance, and finished fifth at the European Mastership. In 2018, I definitely want to be on the podium internationally! *(MS Comment: Wow those are challenging goals! Good luck! ☺)*

For 2017, I had planned to take part in my first **Long Distance Challenge**. But since I had a serious bike accident in April, I missed the most important triathlon competitions. Fortunately I got a start for the Long Distance Challenge in Roth 2018. I am very excited and are looking forward to what I can achieve.

Also our ladies team within the Triathlon Team Hamburg went up to the regional league this year. So besides my own goals, I will support my team at regional competitions as well.

This year I will skip many running competitions in favor for triathlon competitions. However, I will take part in the German Halfmarathon Championships in March in Hannover where I this year had a personal best with 1.32.26.

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3) *How often do you train? When do you preferably train? Do you train two times per day?*

Even if I do not earn money from my sport, the competition in my age group is very high. Sometimes there are more starters in my group than in the main field. So I need to play internationally for the top places - training like the Pro's. Beside my fulltime job of course.

That means indeed two, at the weekend, sometimes three training sessions each day. For example, I start running at five o'clock in the morning or swimming at six – even for me not my favorite in the winter! In the afternoon or evening, core and weight training, fast runs or rides on the bike trainer, or outdoor at the weekend, etc.

4) *Do you have a trainer? Do you follow a training program?*

The last two years I followed a running plan and put the workouts for swimming and biking on top. The result was, that I often skipped the workouts that are really not my favorites, like swimming for example. So this upcoming season, since four weeks now, I train and work with a professional Triathlon Coach. He writes my program and tunes it to my competition plan and how I perform in regular performance tests. The plan is really different from before so I am very much looking forward to the results!

5) *How are your training week planned? Do you follow a hard day by an easy one?*

The advantage of having a coach is, that you do not have to worry about the planning. At the moment I focus on improving my swimming. Right now I am in a Swimming Block with 10 workouts per week! New is also (compared to my own planning from last year) that I have sometimes two hard workouts (bike and run for example) at one day. But of course there are also slow parts for the regeneration.

6) *How do you keep track on your training and your progression? Do you keep a training-diary?*

I use mainly the Garmin Multisport Watch to track my training. I upload all my sessions to the online platform which builds my training diary. I use the diagnostic tool within the platform to analyze my training.

For my biking, I use a watt system which I find very useful.

7) *How often do you run in a week? How often do you run intervals, and tempo runs?*

So far, I used to run 5 to 6 times a week, including a long run (over 30 km) and two fast workouts, for example short tracks, and a longer tempo run.

Now with the new plan, I run 5 times a week, but shorter and more often in the GA2 zone (near the anaerobic threshold). And once a week intervals, not many, but really as fast as I can.

8) *I am interested to know more about how you plan the cycling- and swimming training. I find it rather easy to pace oneself when running and especially when running on the track. As the running pace is more or less equivalent to the intensity and the heart frequency, it is rather easy to estimate the training effect. But how do you select your intensities and your paces as you are cycling and swimming?*

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I am completely with you. I find it also much easier to pace the running. And because the heart rate is not really meaningful on the bike, I use the watt measurement. In combination with the performance tests and the personal coach - there is no better way to improve performance.

To keep track on my swimming distances I use a timer for counting the lanes. Here I do tests over 500 or 1000 meters and based on my results, my coach plan my next workouts accordingly.

- 9) *How many times per week do you ride your bike? What is the duration of a typical cycling workout? Do you go by muscle feel when cycling? Do you care about your cadence?*

Now in winter I do outdoor rides only at the weekend. I do not care too much about the weather except if the streets are really icy. So I do a long ride over 100 km in a nice and easy pace one day and a shorter, faster ride in combination with a run afterwards at the other.

Intervals and sprints I perform in winter on my bike trainer. Here I use Zwift, an online training and racing community tool, to make the training less boring ;-). I tend to ride too heavy gears in a too slow cadence. That is really counterproductive if you want to run fast afterwards, so I really take care about my cadence and try to pedal faster!

- 10) *How does a typical swimming workout look like? Do you mix the techniques, or are you just focusing on crawling? Do you break the swimming workout into intervals?*

Swimming is my weakest discipline and swim training is for me the hardest mentally. I learned it only two years ago. I was so upset about my not existing performance that I took private lessons last winter. This helped me to improve my performance to under two minutes per 100 meters. But that is still far away from my goals, so I am really working hard at the moment. Funnily enough, I have the same speed on 100, 200, and 500 meters – indicating that my endurance is sufficient. At the moment, I swim fast intervals and sprints to bring me up to more speed. Two times a week we also have training with our team where we do a lot of technique and special swim training aimed for triathlon.

- 11) *Your running has improved remarkably with the triathlon training. Can you describe your feeling while running? What is different? Do you have more endurance, or more strength?*

Yes indeed, I was really surprised myself. In March, I run a new personal best at the German Mastership in Halfmarathon, two weeks after a heavy training camp on Lanzarote with over 100 km running and 700 km biking in the mountains per week. And in October, I run another PB at the Marathon distance as well. I do not really know why it works so well, but I have heard about this phenomenon from other athletes too. I think it is the better strength, especially in the abs and the core. I guess I might also be less prone for injuries because of the better balanced muscles. The brain may play a part as well. Just focusing on running feels like holiday compared to a whole triathlon ;-)

- 12) *My own dilemma is that once I have a running competition on the agenda, I tend to only run and run the weeks before. It is like I am afraid of getting ill from swimming, and injured from cycling. Do you mind share some more details about the training you performed before the Mainova*

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Frankfurt Marathon? Did you just focus on running, or did you also follow on with your triathlon training?

Oh –my training preparation for Frankfurt this year is not a good example for the combination of biking, swimming, and running.

Because of my accident in April, I was not allowed to run until the end of June. I started running after a break of 10 weeks and had only a few weeks to the next triathlon competition, a middle distance. I focused on building an acceptable level with tempo and strength. Therefore I started with the first long runs for the marathon only 6 weeks before the start and that is really late. Normally I do 30 km runs and longer the whole year around and with 10 weeks to go before the marathon I progress the distance and speed of these long runs. This year my marathon plan was rather tough in the middle of September. At the same time I changed my job two times. With this stress I was not really in the mood for more than running each day and maybe some regenerative swimming.

In March, however, I did the whole triathlon training program - including hundreds of bike kilometers and a few hours of swimming a week - and it worked very well ☺!

13) Did you ever reach a plateau in your running where you had to find new ways and methods to improve your running?

Not really. I was never bored or stagnating. But in my new all-in-one triathlon plan, I can see a change between my former, which was more tailored to running. The new plan does not put so much focus to basal preparation and there is no longer regenerative phase during the winter months. The new plan is more divided into blocks. The sessions are shorter and faster. I cannot remember that I ever did 400 meter intervals and so many long GA2 runs in winter before! However, I like it. I am excited to see the results in the upcoming competitions!

14) What are the most frequent injuries that you get from running (for example knee-pains, back pain, hip problems, etc.)?

As I started, I did right from the beginning too much. The first years, I was often stopped by several injuries. I had a stress fracture in my shinbone, and several times I had different muscle inflammations. Last two years, luckily I am symptom free – if it is because I learned to take care of my body, or if my body just capitulated and gave up to complain about the hard work – who knows ;-)

15) How do you prevent injuries and over-training?

To avoid injuries, the best way is to do a lot of cross training. Like ABC-training - muscle building with and without weights, and other endurance sports like biking, skating, or swimming. That builds a muscularly balanced body.

Regarding over-training - even if it sounds unconventional – I do not think it is really such a big theme as it is made in the media. In my opinion, the terminology for normal tiredness after a bunch of hard training days or weeks, which will go away after a few days of regeneration, is

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mixed up with the really dangerous pathological syndrome of over-training, which can take months to be cured.

In any case, the best way to avoid both, is to listen to your body. *Is the body just really only tired, or is the tiredness due to the beginning of an infection or an injury?* If you are not sure, the best choice is of course to stop for a while. But at the other side: you will not reach new levels if you avoid each kind of physical exertions.

I hear often from other athletes, or even non-athletes, that I am so talented. But, I do not think so. I often joke that I compensate a lack of talent through hard work, but it has a true core, I really work as hard as I can :-).

16) *How do you recover from your hard training and competitions?*

Laugh – I try to get as much sleep as possible, eat great food, and then relax with a glass of wine in the evening! Sounds simple, but indeed that is the main part. Additionally I often use the Sauna in my gym, and at home a black-roller. If something tweaks more than normal, I have a very good masseur who cares for me since years and knows my muscles for sure better than me.

17) *Do you keep a strict diet to be at your fastest competition weight?*

Yes. I do not talk often about it, because most people think something is wrong with me if I tell them that I really pay attention to my diet and my caloric intake. But in fact I prefer to have a very low body fat percentage during the competition season, and this is not given by nature. The paradox is that we train our metabolic system to get as far as possible with as little food as possible, then we complain that it works and we do not lose weight as easily as the “normal” people! Fortunately, I really love salad, vegetables, and fruits. On the other hand I love chocolate, ice cream, and cheese too. So I leave out or reduce things like noodles and bread and potatoes and I nearly never eat sausages, fried things, or other industrially produced foods. But I am also privileged – my partner is a chef by profession and he prepares our dinner each day.

18) *So, food wise - how does a general day look for you?*

a. What do you eat for breakfast?

My first training in the morning is sober. After training I have some crisp bread with cheese, or salmon, or eggs or something – I don't like sweets in the morning and I hate cereals, no matter how healthy they might be!

b. What do you preferably eat for lunch and dinner?

At lunch I have something light, like a salad or a soup at work. Our main meal is in the evening after the last training. This is very important for us, sitting together, resting, and talking. And I do not care that it might be unhealthy to eat late and go to bed quite soon afterwards :-).

c. What do you snack on?

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In my ideal world – nothing. But in my real world I love chocolate, liquorice, ice cream. But also nuts, fruits, and yogurt. (*MS Comment: Well, you have to fuel the training with something more energy-rich than salad....*)

19) *Do you have eating habits that you know is not so “healthy” in the long run, but that you seem not to be able to change?*

I think that it is important to keep a healthy balance between body, mind, and soul. At the end we are not pros'. We should still have fun and enjoy what we do. Beside all ambitions there must be place enough for joy and wellness. And for me, sweets and wine are not negotiable. Though, not all the time and not in masses of course!