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## This Girl Can: Women in Sport Profile

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### **Emily Villiers**

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#### **What sport and fitness activity do you get involved in?**

I have been riding horses for nearly 16 years now and it's a huge passion of mine. I am lucky enough to be this year's Chair for the DMU Equestrian Team, and despite the challenges that this year has thrown at us, I am having the best time working with the club. This is my third year with DMU Equestrian and I have loved getting to ride and compete for them during my time at DMU, fingers crossed that we'll be able to get out and do a bit more of that soon! In the meantime, regular training with the club and going about the general day to day organisation of DMU Equestrian have been the highlights of my weeks since being back at university. When I'm not riding, I like to keep myself active – I'm a big fan of the gym and try to go a few times a week, and if the weather isn't too bad, I love to go for a run to clear my head and get out and about.



#### **What made you want to get involved in sport whilst studying at University?**

I think it is so important to keep up with the things you love doing. Having an activity or hobby that excites you, motivates you and makes you feel good is so important in life. I wanted to get involved in sport because I knew I loved the sport that I did. Horses and riding for me was an outlet; therapy almost, and genuinely just made me feel happy. I didn't want to lose that feeling or love of a sport just because life was a little different than before after starting uni. The selection of sports clubs and societies at DMU is so vast, there's literally something for everyone, and so no reason to give up something you love and no excuse not to try something new and find the thing you love. Not to mention the amount of people you meet along the way, a great way of making friends and really making the most out of the university experience.

#### **How do you feel sport and fitness activity helps you to look after your wellbeing whilst studying?**

I think being involved in any type of sport or fitness activity can create a space for you as an individual to allow yourself to feel better and make a conscious decision about how

something makes you feel. Sometimes studying at university can feel draining and hard work, it's tiring and stressful at times. Having that time to get out of that stressed out headspace that uni can create sometimes and focusing yourself on feeling something else can really help with managing yourself mentally. Whether that's something like going to the gym and feeling really motivated to beat a PB, or going to a match or competition with your team and getting in that super competitive and driven mindset, whatever it is you're doing, you have the chance to completely switch off and focus your mind somewhere else, feel something else, give yourself a break and ultimately improve your state of mind. Sport and fitness for me has been a huge help throughout uni, it made me realise it's okay to take a step back for a minute and look after myself if I feel I need to, putting yourself first is absolutely okay, especially when it comes to looking after your wellbeing.

### **What advice do you have for any other females looking to get involved in sport or fitness activity?**

Absolutely go for it girl!

- We all start somewhere - go and try that new thing you've been wanting to have a go at for years, you'll probably make a tonne of new friends, fall in love with sport, and it'll be the best decision you've ever made
- Don't be afraid – waltz straight into that bit of the gym where the weights are and it looks all scary and “male dominated”, you have just as much right to be there as them, don't be intimidated and certainly do not let that get in the way of you doing your thing!
- Don't give up on yourself – find the thing you love. If you're just starting out, it might take a while to find the thing you “click” with. Not everyone trains in the same way, some people love running, some people hate it. It's okay to take the time to find what you like, and it might not always be the first thing you try, so keep going and if it doesn't feel right, try something else, but don't give up just because you tried one thing that didn't turn out so well. Sport and fitness is so varied, there's something out there for you!
- Put yourself first – look after yourself, if you're not feeling 100%, that's okay! Don't push yourself because you feel like you have to, or you feel like you'd feel guilty if you skipped one workout or training session. It's perfectly normal to go through stages of being super motivated and super not. Listen to your body, feed it when it needs feeding, let it sleep when it's tired, push it to the max when you feel 100%. The way your body feels and the way your mind feels is the most important thing, as long as you feel like you're looking after yourself, whether that's smashing a goal, winning a match with the team, or just giving yourself that extra 10 minutes in bed, it doesn't matter, you look after you!

### **Have any females in sport inspired you and if yes, how have they inspired you?**

Yes absolutely!

Antionette “Toni” Harris – American College Football player. She was the first woman to receive a full college football scholarship as a non-specialist, and the second woman ever to play American football on a scholarship. I have been a fan of American Football since I was younger, I’ve always watched NFL and NCAA with my dad growing up. He also coaches the sport at universities that compete in the BUCS league, so it’s always been in the picture really and it’s obviously very male dominated. Toni Harris was the first woman I’d heard of that had been competing in the sport at such a high level. I got curious, started following her on social media etc, when the hashtag #FutureFemaleNFLPlayer caught my eye. I just thought it was so unbelievably cool that this was finally happening and when I learned a bit more about her and started watching her play online, I couldn’t help but notice just how strong she was. That’s when I started to get interested in the gym, lifting heavier weights, and pushing myself a bit harder. I wasn’t scared of “getting bulky”, I just wanted to be strong and I wanted those muscles! I love that she shows herself as such a physically strong woman with so much body confidence. It’s lovely to see and so inspiring, she’s truly making waves in the sport but also for women in sport in general and regularly uses her platform to motivate and inspire other young girls and women to excel in areas they never thought was possible.

Pippa Funnell – I wouldn’t be a true equestrian if I didn’t mention this lady! Pippa Funnell became the first person (not even the first female, first person!) to win the Rolex Grand Slam of Eventing (consecutive wins at Rolex Kentucky, Badminton and Burghley), as well as being a three-time Olympic medallist. Pippa Funnell was, and still probably is, every young girl that’s into horse’s role model. She’s an exceptional rider with a great outlook on the sport and equestrian industry. She said, “Anything is possible in life, if you can somehow hold on to your dream”, and that has always resonated with me when it comes to my riding. Horses were the dream and always have been for me since a young age, but it definitely didn’t come easy. Quite a few falls, injuries and near misses over the last 16 years I’ve been riding to say the least! But there was never a time I didn’t get back on the horse and never a time I said no to jumping that next fence. Horses are still the dream, and so I’ll keep holding on to them best I can!

### **Favourite personal sporting moment?**

Bringing on a young horse I used to have, we faced lots of challenges together and there were times where I thought he would be too unsafe to ride or be used, but after a few years of hard work, we created the most incredible bond and built so much trust, and got to the point where we were out competing in cross country events regularly. It was a proud moment of realisation that all the hard work and training had paid off. The success I had

with that horse has motivated me ever since to work hard at what I do whenever I ride, and has also opened my eyes to the unique way in which equestrian works – sometimes you have to give yourself time to learn as well as the horse. Patience is everything.