

## Graduation 2007

### Acceptance Speech by Honorary Graduate Karen Pickering

Thank you very much. Well, that was some build up! I have to say that despite what has just been said about me and the list of achievements, I didn't have the best start in my sport. When I was learning to swim when I was about five years old, the instructor took off my armbands and I sank and had to be rescued. Which, I think, goes to prove that you don't have to have talent to succeed! And somebody smart once said that you should start at the bottom in everything you do except swimming! But I thought I would do it the hard way.

Somebody said you don't have to talent to succeed, and I truly believe that, but what you do have to do is work hard and I believe that hard work beats talent every time and I think that my career has been an example of that. I was never the most talented, but I was always prepared to work harder, dig a little deeper than anyone else and that's the reason I was able to get the results that I have. And yes, swimming is tough and the training is hard but there have been such amazing moments, and such amazing highs that that is what it's all about. We go through the lows, the hard training, the crying in training because it's hurting so much, being carried out of races because I'm so tired, when it goes wrong, when you don't reach your goals, when you don't do the times you want to do, you go through all the difficult times for those moments when you get to stand on the podium and have a medal put round your neck or you break a record, or the goal that you set you achieve, you achieve a personal best time, those moments just when you might hear the national anthem, you crave those moments, those highs and as an athlete you are prepared to go through tremendous lows just to get to those highs – that's really what it's all about.

And yes I had a difficult time when I broke my back. That was probably one of the hardest. But also while I was at school it was difficult, fitting in training and school work and dealing with having to do training and school work and everything that goes on and one of the hardest things for me was the nickname I had to go through school with. Because I went to swimming in the morning, and straight from swimming I went to school. I'd get up and put my swim suit on and go to the pool and train and then have to go straight to school and nine times out of ten I used to forget to pack my underwear so I went through school with the nickname 'no knickers Pickers'! If you can get through that, you can get through anything!

So it is hard work and I don't need to tell you guys about hard work, you know, you wouldn't be here today if you hadn't put in the work and put in the effort. And one of the things for me is that I chose to swim. I chose to do my A-levels – I managed two in a year – so that I could continue and carry on full-time as a swimmer and I chose to put university behind me and try my luck as a full-time athlete and see, knowing that I had my A-levels and I had that to fall back on and once I had finished swimming and I could go back to university but it never happened, I just carried on, just decided I quite liked it and I was doing ok so I just carried on. So I never got round to going to university and that's why it really is an absolute honour and I am so proud to be able to receive this degree today. It means so much because I made the decision not to go through the studies but yet I am still here today receiving one and it really is a great honour.

Finally, I know at this University that the sports facilities and sport are just so great and you are proud of what you have got and rightly so. Sport opened so many doors for me. I retired from international competition coming up for two years ago but sport has opened up the doors and allowed me to have a career and work after that. And I hope for all of you who are here doing some sport or other, it has opened doors for you and continues to open doors for you in whatever you choose to do. And for everybody I wish you all the best in whatever path you take next.

Thank you.