

A man in a blue jacket and cap stands on a dark rock, holding a road bicycle. The background shows a vast ocean under a cloudy sky. The man is looking towards the camera.

A hard road well-travelled

Simon Whitfield's
rewarding
Olympic journey

Kai Jansson
Photos by Scott Yavis

Simon Whitfield has come a long way since winning the gold medal for men's triathlon at the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia. Now older and wiser but still a big kid at heart, Whitfield's passions extend into organic foods and sustainable living.

Triathlon, a race combining swimming, cycling, and running, appealed to Whitfield's competitive nature as a child. "I actually did triathlon on a bet," he said, explaining how, at his first triathlon when he was 11, his best friend bet him he couldn't finish. "He crushed me, but I finished the race. I'm now in my 20th year of triathlon and loving every minute of it."

Starting out

Whitfield's parents actively supported his goals. "At 17, I wanted to go to school in Australia and learn how to win at triathlon. My parents said, 'We'll organize it.' So off I went. At 22, I wanted to win Olympic gold, and my parents said, 'That's fantastic. You can do it.' So I went—and won a gold medal."

"I use disappointment as positive motivation."

His wife, Jennie, is no less supportive. "In itself, sport is a very selfish thing to do. I'm very focused on me right now, and my better half has been incredibly supportive. She's the first to say I can do it, and she's the first to say I did a great job."

Finding his stride

Whitfield's life is vastly different since winning Olympic gold. "I was a wide-eyed kid who loved sport and stood on the starting line with a big grin. At that time I ate, slept, and trained in sport. I

loved it. But now, at 31, other things have come along: I have a wonderful relationship and I have other responsibilities that I didn't have then."

While he still eats, sleeps, and trains during certain hours, the rest of the day is for business, life, and relationships—and sometimes taking leaves in his backyard. "The journey over the

last six years has been interesting for me, because I went from living in a crazy small apartment with a mattress on the floor to, four years ago, living in a big house—because I thought I was supposed to have that—to living in a beautiful character home with a small organic garden."

Living organically

On his interest in organic farming, Whitfield explained, "I have to admit it's been somewhat exaggerated. I'd joked that I'd love to own an organic farm. The next thing I knew, some commentator at a race or on TV said I

Thoughts about drugs in sport

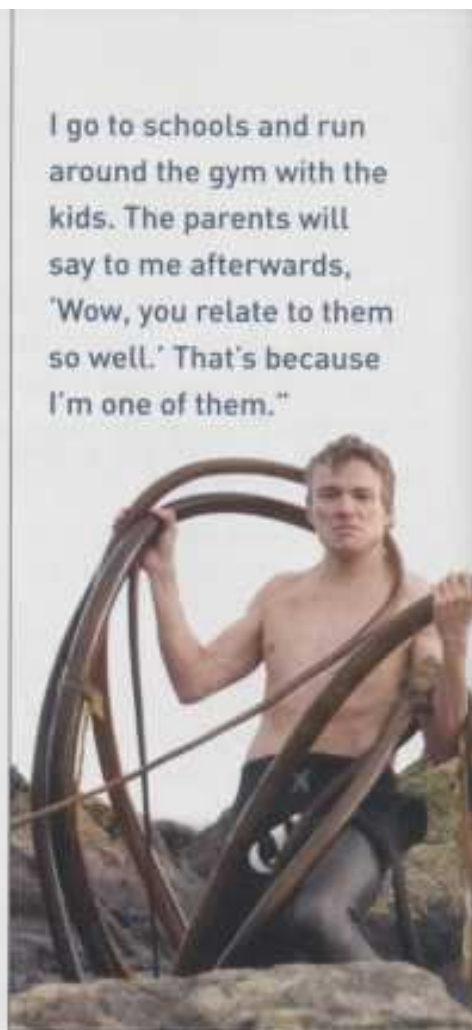
It's a sad reality of sport for so many reasons. Certain sports have a problem with their culture, where the use of performance-enhancing drugs becomes accepted as a necessary evil.

Another problem is false positives. My training partner Kelly Guest lost his career to a false positive—he had no desire to risk his health or cheat his competitors—yet he was dragged out of the Commonwealth Games' opening ceremonies because the system has glitches. I don't know the answer to getting rid of false positives.

I believe [World Anti-Doping Agency chairman] Dick Pound has the right attitude. He gets in [sports] federations' faces, makes them uncomfortable, and in turn forces them to raise their standards—he shocks their culture.

Sport doesn't matter enough to me to cheat. My number-one goal in life is to be a great father, husband, and friend. Drugs can't help me with any of these goals. —Simon Whitfield





I go to schools and run around the gym with the kids. The parents will say to me afterwards, 'Wow, you relate to them so well.' That's because I'm one of them."

owned an 18-acre organic farm. That's not true—our backyard has four rows in a little veggie patch and four big, beautiful trees."

Whitfield has nevertheless met incredible people through this interest, including Fairview Gardens founder and authority on sustainable living Michael Ableman, environmentalist David Suzuki, and several locals. "I just admire that these people are able to look at things from a common sense approach. They look outside the box for solutions, such as chucking goldfish in pools of rainwater so mosquitoes don't grow on the still water."

Eating sensibly

Whitfield thinks outside the box when it comes to nutrition. "Early on I had stomach cramps after every workout because I'd chug back a protein shake, thinking that was what I was supposed

to do for recovery, but I was quite allergic to it.

"Make hay while the sun shines."

"I now eat a lot of flaxseed and hempseed oil and a lot of essential fatty acids; I'm very conscious about what I put into myself." A lack of proper nutrition during the Triathlon World Championships at Lausanne in September 2006 cost him. "I struggled there, partly due to injury but mostly through not eating well and seeing my fatigue levels rise."

Dealing with disappointment

Ironically, Whitfield finds motivation in disappointment. "There was a hiatus in my career, after winning Commonwealth gold in 2002; I wasn't

all that disappointed when I didn't win races, because it didn't mean that much to me."

He experienced bitter disappointment, though, after coming in 12th at the 2006 Life Time Fitness Triathlon in Minnesota. "Afterwards I called Jennie. She said, 'You're disappointed—it must mean something to you again.' She was right. So I use that disappointment as positive motivation."

Providing inspiration

Motivating children is easy for Whitfield. "I'm very comfortable around kids—I'm a big kid myself. I go to schools and run around the gym with the kids. The parents will say to me afterwards, 'Wow, you relate to them so well.' That's because I'm one of them."

When speaking to kids, Whitfield always recalls a key speech delivered

by his friend Rob at his school in Australia. One of his messages was, "You can either take the hard road, or you can take the well-travelled, easy road. The hard road has its obstacles and its difficulties, but at the end, it holds the greatest reward."

Whitfield confessed, "I stole that message, and I've put my own twist on it. There are a lot of easy roads and a lot of bad choices to make, and it's very easy to fall into mediocrity or get distracted."


Planning for the future

Asked about his own goals, Whitfield grinned and said, "I want my medal back; I went through a few years where I became complacent—I just wasn't as driven as I was when I won. That's changed, because over the last two years I've had an epiphany: Make hay while the sun shines."

"When I'm older I don't want to look back and think about all those years I was searching for myself, when

I could have embraced this incredible opportunity and raced. What stirs my passion now is finding that competitive desire, leaving behind the complacency, and taking the opportunity while I have it—the hard road." **▣**

Kai Jansson is a freelance writer who runs rarely and swims terribly but cycles regularly.

A person wearing a dark wetsuit stands on a large, mossy rock in the foreground. They are looking out over a vast, calm ocean under a pale, overcast sky. The rocks are dark and jagged, with some green moss or algae growing on them. The water is still, reflecting the light from the sky.

"I just admire that these people are able to look at things from a common sense approach. They look outside the box for solutions such as chucking goldfish in pools of rainwater so mosquitoes don't grow on the still water."