

The day my life turned upside down-

On the 12th of July, I was called to the Swimming Australia head coach's room; I had just been out shopping with my teammate. Unaware of what I was walking into, I was happy and bubbly as always. That all changed when I walked through the door to be told ASADA had called. My brain instantly went into frantic thoughts, something was wrong, I had never missed a test, it wasn't my time slot, so why would they want me? I sat down, waiting for ASADA to answer my call and then a woman's voice said those haunting words for any athlete: "we have tested your sample and it has come back positive to a prohibited substance". I felt my heart break instantaneously. I couldn't breathe to answer her next couple of questions. There was nothing I could do at that moment, nothing the people around me could do to help me. I was in complete shock, asking myself how and why is this happening to me. My brain repeated over and over: "I have always checked my substances", "I didn't do this", "why is this happening to me?", "I've done nothing wrong". I could still hear the woman in the background on the phone, talking more about what will go on and that I have to leave the camp and return home, as I was placed on immediate provisional suspension until the 'B sample' is tested. She also went on to explain what was found in my system, I had never heard of it before, let alone know how to pronounce it; she said it was "Ligandrol". I now know that this can be found in contaminated supplements.

After many hours of crying and feeling so helpless, I managed to pack my bags and went for an 8km walk with my coach, Dean Boxall, while the team was informed of my departure, without any indication of what for. I wanted to open up to them and discuss with them what had happened. I felt so vulnerable. But I knew that they had to focus on themselves and continue to represent Australia without me on the team.

I respect my teammates and my sport too much to take away their moment, so I returned home and said nothing. Upon returning home, I felt more heartache than I have ever felt in my 20 years of living. Seeing my parents, brothers, boyfriend and grandma made me break down into a million pieces as this was so hard for me to cope with. I didn't intentionally take this substance; I didn't even know it was in my system. It just didn't make any sense, and still doesn't to this day.

On Friday the 19th of July my 'B sample' results were in. I had felt a sense of hope knowing I didn't take this substance and that it was all a mistake during the testing and that I could return to compete for my country and with the team, however, that wasn't the case. As I read the results, my brain couldn't even comprehend what I was seeing. I had to reread it several times before I felt that same pain and heartache all over again. I instantly turned to my grandma, who was with me at the time and wailed. With my legs no longer holding me up, I fell to the ground.

I haven't slept much since, and I feel a sense of emptiness. I think of what I have worked so hard for all being taken away from me, and I had done nothing wrong. Ever since I was 10 years old, I have wanted to be on the Australian swim team, to represent my country. I never swam for the medals; they were always an added bonus. I swam for the feeling you get when you stand behind the blocks in a gold cap. The feeling you get when you race in a relay with a group of amazing women and feel a sense of purpose and success. I pride myself on being the woman that young girls look up to and want to be like, not for the medals I win, but for the way I present myself day in, day out around the pool and in everyday life. Now I feel like that can all be taken away because of some sort of contamination; no athlete is safe from the risks of contamination.

Reminding myself of why I swim and why I want to be in the Australian team is what has kept me fighting. The day I found out was the day I began my fight to prove my innocence. Myself, along with my lawyer, management team, doctor and family have been working continuously to not only prove my innocence but to try to find out how this substance has come into contact with me, to ensure it doesn't happen to anyone else, as I wouldn't wish this experience on my worst enemy. Every day I wake up and have a rollercoaster of a day. Some days I am okay and others I am not. This will be an ongoing challenge, not only with trying to prove my innocence to ensure I can get back to training for the dream I have had since I was a little girl, but also the challenge of facing judgement from people who don't know me; people who will just assume the worst.

I watched and supported every member of the Australian swim team during the World Championships. I was inconsolable as I watched my teammate, Ariane Titmus, win the 400 freestyle, and my teammates do an outstanding job in the 4x100 and 4x200 freestyle relays, as they were both relays I had hoped to be a part of during my time at Worlds. I trained hard to be over there racing and to support the team, but I understood the rules of ASADA, and I have followed all their processes. Deep down, I feel I shouldn't have to defend my reputation as I know that I didn't do this. I have never missed a random drug test, and I always have my whereabouts up to date. In Australia, in a sport like swimming, I feel there is no possible way for an athlete to intentionally take a banned substance and not get caught. I get tested approximately every four to six weeks, so why would I take anything banned and do this to myself? Especially leading up to competition where I could be tested daily. Why would I put myself through this anguish and risk jeopardising my career and my character? I did not and would not cheat and will continue to fight to clear my name.