

European Youth Olympic Festival Sarajevo, February 2019

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Following a late evening WhatsApp message, I found myself at very short notice heading for Sarajevo in Bosnia Herzegovina for the 2019 European Olympic Youth Festival – athletes from across Europe getting together for a week of competitions across Alpine and Nordic Skiing, Snowboarding, Skating and Curling.

The EYOF happens every two years and entry is restricted to specific years of birth: if you miss it once, you miss it forever. The 2019 event was being held jointly in Sarajevo and Istočno Sarajevo (East Sarajevo) – the city was partitioned after the wars in the 1990s and this is part of the reconciliation effort

I first realized the size of the event when arriving for kit issue by Team GB near Heathrow which saw 27 UK competitors and about 6 officials given just about every bit of clothing they'd need to the week – mostly provided by TeamGB's sponsors Adidas – including an enormous duffle bag to carry it all in.

The following day saw a 3am departure from the hotel flying via Munich to Sarajevo where we transferred to the Athletes Village and were issued with our accreditation for the week – without this we'd not be able to get anywhere! Sunday evening's opening ceremony was impressive, with all the teams parading into the stadium one at a time to great applause from the massive crowd, following by the lighting of the Olympic Flame and lots and lots of fireworks.



The skiing team



Ed, Ollie, Owen and Charles suitably attired (spot the odd one out)

Monday saw the first events of the week – for us Alpine skiers this meant the Ladies Slalom at Jahorina, about an hour south of Sarajevo. Despite the rather damp conditions, all four UK competitors completed the first run in good times to make the cut for the second run. At the finish, Sarah was 8th, Daisy 25th, Olivia 26th, and Vicky DNF.

Tuesday and it's the Mens Slalom on the same slope. It had turned a lot colder overnight with lots of fresh snow which made even getting to the ski area a challenge: but they'd worked hard on the slope and we were greeted with a tough 64-gate course down a pretty steep piste.

My run one wasn't too bad considering the conditions - I was a late bib so the course was a bit cut up. It wasn't my cleanest run, but I was fighting the whole way. Second run the course held up a lot better, so you could actually attack it a lot more on the flat. I made a little mistake coming into the flat and lost a bit of speed there, but I'm happy with it and I'll look to push more towards that thirty-mark next time out. I ended up 33rd – a great improvement on my start number of 59 in a field of 105.

Unfortunately Owen and Charles both skied out on the first run, and Ed DNF the second.

Wednesday saw the Ladies back on the same slope – starting somewhat higher for the Giant Slalom. Weather conditions hadn't improved much, still overcast with slight snow with low temperatures.

Sarah was really pleased with her first run, ranked in fourth position and was only 0.22s off second place. She went hard on the 2nd run but unfortunately the pressure got to her and she ended up finishing 15th. Victoria, Olivia, and Daisy finished 21st, 30th and 34th respectively.

Thursday and the mens' turn as Slalom. Ed and I both skied out on the first run, but Owen finished 20th and Charles 35th. That evening we were all invited to a reception at the British Embassy in Sarajevo, where the Ambassador, Matt Field, welcomed us to the country and reminded us it was **35 years ago** when Torvill & Dean won gold in the 1984 Olympics and hoped some of us would do similar one day.

The final day, Friday, saw Sarah, Victoria, Charles and Owen race the final alpine event: the Mixed Team Parallel Dual Slalom at Bjelašnica – a relatively new competition at this level in which teams compete down parallel courses – something we've done in the UK for many years. Despite a 2-2 result in the first run, they lost out on time as so didn't progress further.

The closing ceremony on Friday evening was held in East Sarajevo in a different stadium from the opening ceremony, but we were a bit tired to take it all in.

The experience has been a massive eye-opener for us all: we've all competed in ski-racing internationals as children, but not within a multi-sport experience like this. It's really inspiring to see such a large group of young athletes aspiring for and wanting to do so well within their sport.

And so Saturday morning saw us up at 4am for the long drive to Bormio in Italy for another week of Ski Racing at the English Alpine Championships.