



## Get Set Hangout with Max Whitlock

**CHRIS:** Hello and welcome to the latest in our series of Get Set hangouts, and today we are in a celebratory mood as we discuss the highlights from Rio. Our Google Hangouts give the Get Set community the chance to meet brilliant athletes and sport teams on team GB and Paralympics GB and other special guests to find out more about the real world of sports. It is our first hangout after the Rio games, and schools from across the UK have been rushing to send their questions to today's special guest.

Our special guest is double Olympic champion Max Whitlock. After competing for [last: 00:45] at Tokyo World Championships in 2011, Max has gone from strength to strength, making headline with his incredible bending skills in Rio. Max won gold in both the individual floor and pommel horse finals, as well as bronze in men's all-round event. This is team GB's first medal in this event, for 108 years. Fantastic results! So hi Max and a very warm welcome to our hangouts.

**MAX:** Thank you very much.

**CHRIS:** Great to have you with us. Let's get started, we've asked our schools to think about their highlights from Rio and life as an athlete, and send their questions to Max. Without further ado let's have a question from Year 3 pupils from [spelling: 01:35] Thameside Primary School in Caversham. The question goes like this; how did you feel when you returned to do your routines at the Olympic Games, how did you feel when you won the gold medals?

**MAX:** That's a good question. For me, I'm always nervous every competition I do, it doesn't matter if it's a small competition of 10 or 15 people or the Olympic Games in front of millions of people, I always feel nervous. Definitely I was excited, it was my second Olympic games and I had done a good preparation and all I had to think was going there and doing my very best and that was it. Sport is sport at the end of the day, I make mistakes and I just try to pick it up and go ahead with the rest of the competition. But it went really well.

Standing on that podium was one of the best feelings that you could ever imagine, very hard to explain. When you train for that many years (I've been in gymnastics since I was seven years old), an Olympic gold medal is the absolute pinnacle of any athlete's career. So standing there, the national anthem being played with a gold medal around your neck is a crazy feeling.

**CHRIS:** Great answer, thanks Max. Our next question comes from Year 10 students at School 21 in Stratford in London, and it's this' what do you consider to be your weaknesses?



**MAX:** My weaknesses; I'm quite specific. In a way this is a weakness and a strength, so I'm quite specific in routine, I don't like to go outside that routine. Obviously as an athlete you have to learn to adapt, to you have to go to countries where you have never been before, be away for a long time (that's one thing that I don't like). So these two things that I struggle with are my weaknesses. Over the years I've had to learn to adapt like I said, and become flexible, deal with being away a lot because that comes with the job and basic of all work on a weekly basis to try and build and master it to become one of your strengths to help you be a success.

**CHRIS:** Thank you. We go straight now to a question from Form 7c at the Hurlingham Academy in London, and they won the whole school competition. Question is this; when you were at school how did you balance training with friends and schoolwork and family? It must have been difficult I imagine

**MAX:** Yeah, really difficult because basically at that time I was training five days a week when I was in school. I was quite lucky because my school was very supportive of me, I used to come out of school three days a week; Tuesday, Thursday and Friday at 12 o'clock to travel around to gymnastics, and then I would be training until 8 o'clock. So it was very very tough. I had to fit in what I could to make sure I was organised on time for everything when I could. So on the way to gym obviously in that hour journey I'd be doing homework, I'd be doing things to catch up with school and because I had the school's support I'd have three lessons to catch up with anything I needed to, mainly the core subjects.

But it wasn't just me, so many worked around me to help me do what I need to do, and that's why I'm here today. There's been a lot of people in my support that worked to get me here. It's been hard but I can definitely sit back now and say it's been worth it.

**CHRIS:** Thank you. Moving on to question 5, it's from the Year 10 students at Kingsdale Foundation School in London, and it is this; what advice would you give to young boys who are looking to get into gymnastics but they may feel a little bit reluctant because of peer pressure?

**MAX:** I wouldn't mind about any type of peer pressure from anyone. I'd say if you want to do it, go do it. You never know what gymnastic or any sport is like unlike you try obviously, so you may absolutely love it. For me that's the whole reason I'm doing it now, I've been doing it for 16 years and I'm here because I love the sport, that's all I've ever done before. I wouldn't change if I wasn't involved in gymnastics, so I would always recommend you join it, if you like it continue and if you don't try something else. But you never know until you try so get involved.

**CHRIS:** Fantastic. This next question also comes from a whole school competition witness to get the opportunity to ask a question, and it's from Basildon Academies in Essex. And it says this; if you were to become anything else other than a gold medal winning athlete, what would it be and why?



**MAX:** For me, one of my other hobbies outside of gymnastics is designing, so I like drawing, photography and things like that. So my dream is to become some kind of designer to design something, especially in clothes. In training, I spend a lot of my time doing that and that's one thing that helps me relax and chill before and after training. So it's good to have something outside of a very intense sport, and that's one of my passions. So I'd like to think something along those lines.

**CHRIS:** Thank you. The next question, question 7, comes from Pristine School which is in Yardville in Sussex, and I think you started to answer already. It is; what are your aspirations for the future?

**MAX:** For me it doesn't stop, I'm going to keep going with gymnastics for as long as possible. As long as my body holds out I'll be there. But right now I'm taking a short break, then I'll go to start fulltime training properly next year, so as soon as January hits then it's all go again. You've got competitions coming up, so every year you've got European World Championships, other games in between there and obviously Tokyo. Tokyo is my massive aim, to make to that Olympic Games, to go there. Obviously with the results from Rio it can give me a lot of confidence. If I can get any type of medal results, medal tallies like I've done, for me I'd just want to continue what I'm doing and continue bringing results.

**CHRIS:** Brilliant. We've got time for some more questions so we're going to keep you on the hot spot for a little longer. Question number 8 comes from Class 7A1 from Towers School and Sixth Form Centre in Kent. What age were you when you were inspired to compete in the Olympic Games?

**MAX:** For me it was quite late, and it wasn't really nice feelings. Because of what we've done now, I see gymnasts in kids in my gym that are five years or there and their dream is to win gold medal. It's because they've seen it so they believe it's possible. But for me it was so different, there was no one ahead of us with medals showing away, so for me it wasn't until I was about 17 years old. Like I said, I've spent my whole life at gymnastics because I love it, and that's why I kept going. When I was 17 I moved up to senior and did my first Commonwealth Games and that's what really inspired me on to be involved in multiple things like the Commonwealth Games which is the closest you'll ever get to Olympics, therefore if this is what Olympics slightly could be like then I'd like to go. And obviously at that stage I wanted to become the best I could possibly be, and to do that (the best you can be) the best event is to be at the Olympics. So that was my dream from there.

**CHRIS:** Thank you. This question comes from students from School 21 and also from students at Basildon Academies. It's this; have you ever encountered problems or challenges that might have affected you becoming a champion, and how did you overcome these challenges?



**MAX:** There have been a lot of challenges, yeah. I'm sure every athlete would say the same thing as well, but that is just part of the journey. One example, at the beginning of last year, it was quite recently, which is also when the Rio games were coming around, I got a kind of fever. It wasn't great obviously and at first I was quite stressful because I didn't know what it was, and I remember saying at the beginning of the year that was the sickest I've ever been. So doing routines, getting ready for competitions coming up, ready to start the year well and then for about a week my energy levels and routines just deteriorated, and I couldn't make one routine.

It was quite a challenge for me because I've never been in that position before. I had a blood test done and found out what it was, so for me it was a relief because I had a reason and then it was about sort of stepping back so I might get a chance to rest. Now when I look at it I think that was a blessing in disguise, I think that's what you have to do, you have to take the positive look of everything. I can see the positive side was maybe when I got back I had to train as hard as I possibly could because I had a competition coming up at the end of the year and I needed to be ready. So I can look back and look at that struggle, that challenge, and where I am now it's made it sound more rewarding knowing what you've done to get here.

**CHRIS:** That's really interesting and great advice to face challenges and get through, thank you. We're going to go to question 10, it's from Lenham Primary School. Just so you know, the school has just renamed two of their houses Whitlock and Peacock, I have no idea where they got that inspiration from!

**MAX:** Thank you!

**CHRIS:** The question is this; what advice would you give to members of your houses to ensure that they're truly representing the Olympic values that mostly can inspire you?

**MAX:** Respecting everybody is very important to me. There's obviously the commitment and dedication you need, self-motivation is one thing that is huge for me, it's very hard to get anywhere is you're not self-motivated, and teamwork – those are three things that can be applied to anyone of any age. Those three things are the core and the main thing that you need to focus on. If you do that you'll enjoy the journey and obviously you'll be a success in the future.

**CHRIS:** Thank you. One final question, it's a two part question from Year 10 students at School 21 in London. If you were an animal what would you be and how would you describe yourself in one word?

**MAX:** I think making it similar to gymnastics, I'm relating it back to gymnastics as much as possible, I think it has to be probably a monkey. That would probably help me the most as a gymnast. Describing myself in one word is a tricky one.



**CHRIS:** We'll let you think about that one.

**MAX:** I need to think about that one, it's a tough one.

**CHRIS:** Brilliant. I would describe you as a champion.

**MAX:** Thank you very much.

**CHRIS:** Thank you very much Max. That's just about all that we've got time for today, so I just want to say a really big thank you to all our schools who were submitting those fantastic questions, and also of course to Max for those brilliant answers.

If you're watching this hangout back at our website at [www.getset.co.uk](http://www.getset.co.uk), you can find out how you live the Olympic and Paralympic values by taking part in our values awards. These awards reward and recognise young people for understanding and enacting values, and you can get started today by checking out our new interactive values quiz. I'll give you a head start, the Olympic values are excellence, friendship and respect. The Paralympic values are determination, inspiration, courage and equality. You can also take part in our 'road to Rio' challenge, and get active by virtually travelling the distance from London to Rio.

If you'd like to be involved in our next hangout, email us at [getset@getset.co.uk](mailto:getset@getset.co.uk). I'm afraid that's all that we've got time for today, so once more a massive thank you to you Max, brilliant answers! And thank you everyone for those questions and we look forward to seeing you again next time. Thank you!