

Gareth Rees

Skill: Welding

From: Camarthenshire, Wales
Competed in: WorldSkills 2005, Helsinki
Result: Medallion for Excellence

Qualifications

- 9 GCSE's
- Modern Apprenticeship in Welding



Gareth Rees became interested in Welding when he was on a work experience placement at 15 years old. He knew from then on that welding would be a big part of his future and applied to do a Modern Apprenticeship with Whitland Engineering as soon as he left school. Says Gareth: "Before my work experience I had no real idea what welding involved, but as soon as I had a go I realised that this was the industry for me. There is a real variety of work and I get to travel around a lot which I also enjoy."

When did Gareth discover competing in Welding?

Gareth entered his first competition when he was 16 after being introduced to competitions by his local college, Prestige Training. Says Gareth: "I loved the feeling of playing off my skills against others and winning gave me such a buzz. I guess it was that feeling of winning which really got me hooked."

How did he get selected to represent the UK in WorldSkills 2005?

Gareth went from regional to national competition success and in 2004 he became the UK welding champion. "After winning the UK competition, I then went through a play off event with the runner up where we were tested on not only our technical skills but also how we coped under pressure. It goes without saying that at I was delighted to get through but at this point I don't think I had any real idea of what was ahead of me and how much work was involved. "

How did he prepare for WorldSkills?

As part of Gareth's training and preparation for WorldSkills he took part in an international competition in Dallas, Texas in the USA. It was during this experience that Gareth realised how many other skills were needed to win a competition at this level and some of the team training he had undertaken in the UK began to make sense. As Gareth explains:

"As well as our skill specific training we also undertook team training at the Brathay Hall Trust which involved learning how to cope when things go wrong, how to stay calm under pressure, and how to stay focused when lots of other things are going on around you. I have to admit that when we first learnt these skills I couldn't see the relevance and didn't think they would apply to me. However I got a taste of what WorldSkills would be like when I competed in Texas and I realised that I was relying on these mindset techniques to help me stay focused and calm."

What was WorldSkills like?

"It was mind boggling it was so big! I was really thankful to have had the experience of competing in Texas so I knew what to expect more than others in the UK team but I still wasn't prepared for the enormity of a WorldSkills competition. It was amazing to see so many competitors in so many different competitions and I had never experienced anything like it in my life."

So was all the preparation worth it?

"Definitely. I planned each of my days out so that at the start of every day I knew where I wanted to be by the end of the day and I found this really helpful as it stopped me from wandering off the task in hand. Having competed internationally previously I also found it easier to block out what others around me were doing and concentrate on my own work. It was a fantastic experience and one which I would love to do again but I'm too old now!"

What benefits does Gareth feel the experience has given him?

Gareth is convinced that taking part in WorldSkills has brought him many more benefits than simply improving his technical skills. "Entering WorldSkills has changed my way of looking at things and doing things. I think I am much more open-minded now and I think things through a lot more. I am able to stand back from situations and keep control which is really useful if things don't seem to be going the right way whether that is in or out of a work situation. "

What does Gareth remember most from WorldSkills?

For Gareth the group camaraderie and being part of team sticks most in his mind.

"Every morning before the competition we would meet as a group and do a team chant. I loved this moment and it's something I'll always remember because it gave me such a powerful feeling to be part of this amazing team."

And since WorldSkills?

"Entering the competition really opened my eyes to opportunities and gave me the feeling that anything is possible. Since competing in Finland, I have started my own business and drawn on many of the life skills I learnt. I am from a farming background and I've had the chance to move my welding into the agricultural area which is great. I love the feeling of being my own boss and choosing which work I take on and I am now directly involved with my clients which is another area I really enjoy. If I hadn't had the WorldSkills experience I don't think I would have had the confidence or skill set to enable me to do this so quickly so I've got a lot to be thankful for."

So does Gareth have any words of wisdom for future competitors?

Gareth's message is a simple one: "Put the work in then stay calm, keep focused and everything will fall into place. If you want something enough you can get it."

And finally, with WorldSkills coming to London in 2011 what does Gareth feel will be the benefits to the UK?

"A WorldSkills competition is a huge showcase for the skills on display and the talents of the people taking part. WorldSkills London 2011 is a chance for people to see the wide range of skills on offer in today's world as well as what you can achieve if you really put your mind to something. To sum up – a real inspiration."

For more information, please contact the PR Team, UK Skills: 020 7612 9260