

Gary Collier

Skill: Stonemasonry

From: Huddersfield
Competed in: WorldSkills 2005, Helsinki
Employer: Lloyd & Smith Ltd
Result: Silver

Qualifications

- 7 GCSE's grades
- Apprenticeship in Stonemasonry
- LCGI Diploma



Gary Collier knew very little about Stonemasonry when he applied for an Apprenticeship when he was 16. Less than five years later, after a huge amount of dedication, determination and training Gary became a World Champion in Stonemasonry winning the silver medal in WorldSkills 2005.

So how did Gary get involved in competitions?

Gary says "Since starting my Apprenticeship I was always aware of my elders entering skills competitions. Having a competitive streak I wanted to do better than those around me and prove I could be the best. When I was at college one of my trainers, Kevin Calpin, was involved with WorldSkills and he was a big influence on me believing I could aim for the top."

How did you get selected for WorldSkills?

"I began competing in several Inter-City competitions at first and then the three national SkillBuild competitions. It was only after I had won this competition and gone through a selection process by UK Skills - testing other skills like stamina and endurance - that I won my place on the UK team. "

And what did you find the training like for the WorldSkills competition?

"It was brilliant, second to none. Don't get me wrong it was a lot of hard work but I had tremendous support from my college tutor and my employers and this helped me enormously. The only thing I would add is that you can't start training early enough for an event like WorldSkills and this is advice I would pass onto any potential competitor.

The team training we received from UK Skills also proved invaluable. I was always very driven and aware of what I wanted to achieve, but I was slightly sceptical about the physiological techniques we learnt about how to cope under pressure. However once I was actually competing at that level I realised I was relying on some of the techniques we had learnt like visualisation to stay focused and in control. Towards the end of the competition I felt as though I was losing it and it was then that I used these coping techniques. It was only after the competition that I realised how important these techniques were and I really feel as though I could have easily slipped and got say sixth place if I hadn't have had this training."

What support did you get from your employers?

Gary was fortunate to have great support from his employers Lloyd & Smith Ltd who backed him all the way to Helsinki, both financially and with extra time off to undertake the specific training needed to take him to World Class levels. "My bosses were great in helping me to achieve my success, as taking part in WorldSkills takes a huge commitment. It really helps to work in such a supportive team and this is something I hope to be able to pass on to other competitors as they pass through the ranks. I am currently working with one of my Apprentices whose aim is to outdo me and get gold in the WorldSkills competition when it comes to London in 2011!"

What was WorldSkills like?

"It was totally amazing. I had asked lots of questions to previous competitors and heard loads of stories about the competition so I had a fair idea of what to expect but it was still an incredible experience actually being there. There was a real buzz around the whole place which was different to anything I had known before."

So what has Gary been up to since winning the silver in 2005?

Gary has been progressing quickly though the ranks at Lloyd & Smith and is now a Contracts Manager overseeing many of the company's most important projects. His sights don't end there however as he aims to buy a share in the business within the next five years. As to the impact of his experience at WorldSkills, Gary is clear:

"There is no doubt that winning a silver medal and taking part in WorldSkills has helped me get to where I am today. The additional training I received for taking part in an international competition in some of the best places has really put me ahead."

Does Gary have any advice for future competitors?

"Get involved in competitions as early as possible to reap the maximum rewards. Learn as much as possible from previous competitors about the competition and the experience and go with the attitude to win. It's also really important to get your employer on board so sell them the benefits of being involved. I know my bosses were keen to get the most they could from a marketing and PR perspective and I have been happy to oblige as my WorldSkills story has led to new business for the company and I feel like I have given something back for all the investment which has been put in me."

WorldSkills is coming to London in 2011. Any thoughts on the advantages for young people?

"WorldSkills London 2011 will provide a fantastic opportunity for young people; those taking part in skills competitions in the UK will have something to aim for; something everyone will hear about. It will also be a chance for school kids to see first hand all the different skills on display and what they involve which will be really helpful when they come to make decisions about their future careers."

So what's the story from Gary's employer's perspective?

Garry Lloyd, Director of Lloyd & Smith has this to add.

Why get involved in supporting WorldSkills?

"Having one of your employees compete in WorldSkills is a great marketing tool. We take the view that anything which promotes the trade has to be good for business and WorldSkills has certainly done this for Lloyd & Smith. Also, Gary received a wad of publicity for taking part in the competition which has been great for marketing purposes."

What impact does the training have on the business?

"There's no doubt that there was a substantial cost to the business of Gary's training and preparation for WorldSkills but that said the investment has been worth every penny. The advantages for us of from a marketing perspective paid dividends as so many of our customers have heard about us from reading about him in the paper."

Are there any other benefits to the employer?

"As well as the marketing benefits, our reputation has been boosted enormously, which in some cases has directly led to us winning new contracts. Before Gary took part in WorldSkills we'd only ever worked in the North West. We've since won a million pound contract in Luton on the basis of the customer knowing about Gary's success, so in our view it really does pay to invest in your best people."

What advice do you have for potential employers considering getting involved?

"Go for it. Gary has given us great PR and we use him as a yardstick for our new apprentices. Competitions improve young people's skills and help build their confidence which can only benefit your business."

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