

Rebecca's Story

Shifting Gears Towards Paralympic Cycling

At 18 years old, Rebecca had her sights firmly set on a professional cricketing career, that was until running, walking, and even standing for any period of time became increasingly painful. Rebecca was born with talipes (commonly known as club foot) but after a successful corrective surgery and subsequent orthotic treatment, she had next to no issues with her foot and ankle growing up. Little did she know, her ankle was slowly deteriorating. The prospect of rerouting her entire life plan shook Rebecca, but sporting success has always been her destiny. With the help of her Biomechanic Specialist and Specialist Orthotist Kate Chauhan at Steeper Clinic, an exciting next chapter would begin.



Case Study Rebecca Newark



Rebecca has always had a love for sports. In high school, she played netball and cricket among other things, and despite developing a slightly thinner calf muscle after corrective surgery for her talipes as a baby, she was never limited in any way. In fact, she was often known as the fastest in her team and she was well on her way to playing professional cricket as an able-bodied individual. However, her ankle bone was gradually deteriorating and would eventually rear its painful head, bringing her cricketing dreams to a halt. Rebecca said, *"It was quite a shock hearing I wouldn't be able to play cricket again. I'd always had a thinner calf, but I didn't think a weakened ankle joint would ever be an issue for me, it isn't something that happens to everyone with talipes. It took a while for me to come to terms with the fact that everything I had perceived about my future had now changed."*

Rebecca was prescribed a ToeOFF 2.0 Ankle-Foot Orthosis (AFO) to help support her ankle and ease her pain while walking. Her Biomechanic Specialist also recommended a talent ID program where Rebecca could trial different para sports and meet representatives of each team. She said, *"It was a great experience because they did all these tests to see which sport might suit me and my abilities best, and from there I could join a team. Cycling was one option that came up and it piqued my interest, but I didn't push it straight away. I went away and gave it a go on my own just to see if I was going to enjoy it."* It wouldn't be long before she would discover her new passion for competitive cycling.

Things were beginning to look up for Rebecca, but less than a year into her cycling journey, she noticed the pain in her ankle returning yet again. Her walking AFO provided tolerable temporary support while riding but the device was never designed to absorb such force or to operate at the angles required for cycling. By this time, Rebecca had graduated from university and had taken up cycling seriously as her full-time job, so she knew she had to act fast. She had a rough idea of the service she needed, and a quick Google search led her to Kate Chauhan at Steeper Clinic. Kate said, *"Rebecca came to Steeper Clinic with pain that was limiting her bike time which was impacting her training. She has the ability to aim high in para-sport and I wanted to help her achieve her goals."*

Rebecca's first made-to-measure AFO featured an adjustable joint so the pair could work together to find the optimal angle for her foot. Because every condition is different, there was some trial and error involved in crafting

the perfect AFO but the constant improvement in Rebecca's cycling proves it was well worth it. She said, *"I'm still pretty new to cycling compared to other people who have been doing it for years but I'm getting faster all the time. I couldn't be doing what I'm doing now with the walking AFO, it doesn't operate the same. My made-to-measure AFO has a strong panel at the front that you can push against with lots of force, it lets me get the most possible power out of every rotation. I'm not worried about damaging my foot or the AFO anymore. Kate's support, expertise, and care have been instrumental in enabling me to ride my bike."*

Rebecca's talents haven't gone unnoticed; she recently joined the Paralympic Foundation Squad under coach Helen Scott MBE, and she couldn't be more excited. Rebecca said, *"I'm so happy to be in her squad and learning from the best. She's an amazing, decorated Paralympian."* With a spot on the Team GB development track now secured, Rebecca has a busy season ahead! Her first large-scale Velodrome race is set to take place in just a few weeks, and after that, it's straight into World Cup road racing among the many local and national competitions in between. It's no surprise that her intense training schedule consists of 2-4 hours a day, 6 days a week!

With the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games only a few more months away, Rebecca has big Paralympic dreams of her own. She says, *"One of my goals is to progress into the World Class Performance Squad within the next couple of years. My ultimate dream is to be selected for Team GB's 2028 Paralympic team, so I've got a lot of hard work to put in between now and then!"* Rebecca is also working alongside Kate and the Steeper team trialling and refining new treatment technology and the initial results are exciting! Her Orthotist Kate said, *"I was able to use my previous experience to understand the mechanisms behind Rebecca's pain and design an orthosis that reduced her ankle pain whilst allowing her more time on the bike. We are now on AFO mark 3 with an optimised alignment and fit. We are already working on mark 4 to further improve her comfort and function. I am proud to have helped Rebecca in a small way towards her Paralympic dream. We will be cheering her on, fingers crossed for 2028!"*

To find out more about Rebecca visit
www.steeperclinic.com