



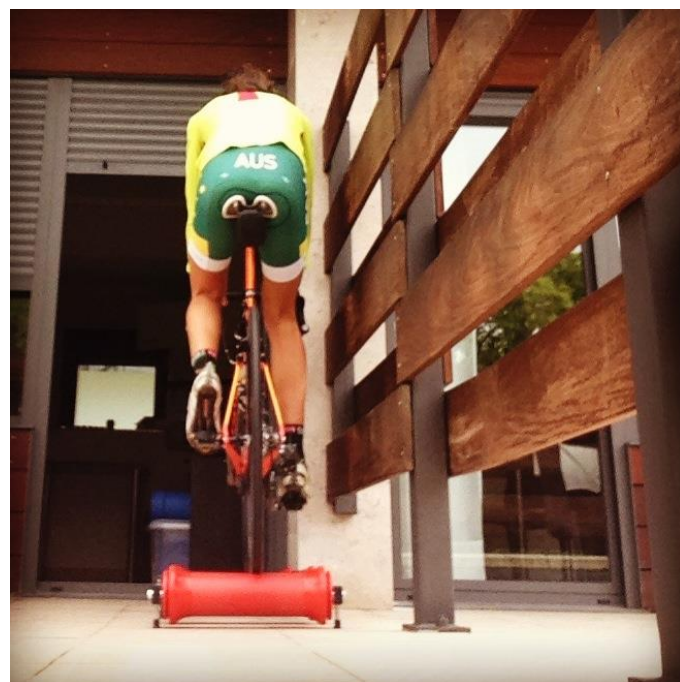
### **Patience...**

If only the ground was a trampoline and when you fall you bounded back up. If only things heeled with a click of the fingers. If only patience was so easy. Even the last few weeks of getting out of bed in below 5 minutes was a record. Life would be a breeze.

Medical May, I am going to call it. I learnt I have 24 ribs, intercostal cartilage inbetween and when you fall off your bike on land of these it's quite painful. Travelling from Yokohama to Vitoria, I was excited as I couldn't wait to start training in our second home and get all settled in. Diving into the pool Tuesday morning, I couldn't do one arm stroke without a shot of pain due to the extension of the rib cage that happens during swimming.

This was a reality check that it was time for an xray. Riding home all blurry eyed, I can barely see as it and telling if the lights were red or green was becoming one more battle for the day. To be honest I don't know that many words in Spanish, but hearing the words "perfecto" after X-ray, I was hoping she meant no brake in my ribs, not a perfect break of the bone. Thanks to Jamie and Victor for helping me getting the X-ray so quick, translating and watching me shed enough tears to last me a year.

I am probably the worst person to tell to go lay in bed all day, chill, recover, online shop, watch movies when I would happily be outside. I had a forced recovery from all training for a few days as it was hard enough to figure out how to get myself up. "Should I roll this way, nope hurts to much, bend this way, just lay back down Natalie". Baby steps were going to be the way back to training as when the intercostal muscles between my ribs extended it was extremely painful. From rollers, to walking, to walk/runs, to runs and the day I was able to swim. I have never been so scared to walk into a pool as I didn't know if I would be able to. Building up the swim km's day by day and finally being able to get out of my bike saddle were all steps that could not be rushed. You don't realise how much you need something until you cannot use them. Breathing, laughing, sneezing, coughing, bending over, lifting my arm to wash my hair, are all simple tasks that were a struggle.



I made the decision to pull out of Dunkerque as I was not mentally or physically ready for the task that was ahead of me. Heading into Madrid, I finally got a few solid sessions in during the week and knew I was coming into this race not as well prepared as I wanted to be. Madrid was one of my favourite courses last year with the heat and hills and a non-wetsuit swim providing ideal conditions. My ribs felt fine prior to the race and I wanted them to be off the back of my mind. Having a perfect start position next to Sarah Groff and Nicky Samuels, I had an ideal start getting to the first buoy with no troubles. The swim was on from the start and I knew you would be rewarded for the hard work in the front end of the race. After 750m, I had good position within the main front group of girls leading most of the second lap. It still amazes me though, the fighting that occurs up the front. Just swim!

Coming out of the swim in 10<sup>th</sup> place and in good position with the leaders, I had a perfect T1 and headed out onto the bike up the first hill. From then on, I knew my ribs weren't going to be my best friend. I struggled getting up the hill at such a high intensity and realised after 3 laps of getting continuously dropped at every hill it wasn't going to be my day. I hate having a DNF next to my name but not being able to breathe or do the race to 100% was not the way I wanted it. On a positive note after having a lot of time out of the water, I gained confidence in my swim and my ability to be up there in a WTS race.

So what now? More patience. I have realised now that it will take time to get back to "normal" and my body will decide when its time. All you can do is try.

