

COMENIUS PROJECT

WE INTERVIEW...



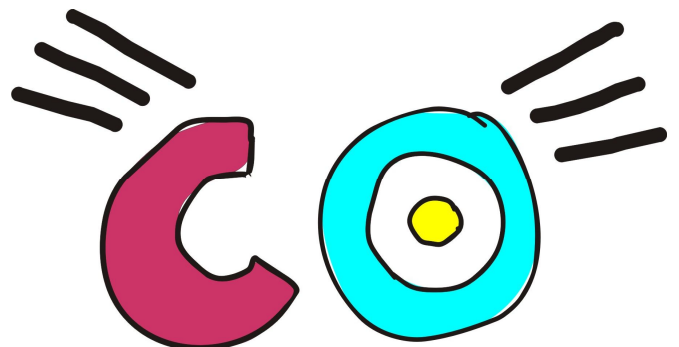
IVÁN RAÑA

- triathlon world champion -

IES MARUXA MALLO
ORDES



Education and Culture
Lifelong learning programme
COMENIUS



Iván Raña

We interview

Iván Raña Fuentes was born on June 10th, 1979, in Ordes, A Coruña, Spain. When he was 10, he joined the Santiago Swimming Club and when he was 15, he left home and moved to Santiago where he started a serious sports career.

During these years he discovered Triathlon and since his first years in the Junior category he formed part of the Spanish Triathlon National Team, and took part in all the world championships. He managed an amazing achievement, making history in Spanish sport, when he became the first Spanish athlete who won a Triathlon World Championship, in Cancun, México, in 2002.

Iván Raña's progress was consolidated in the Olympic Games in Athens, where he had a discreet position due to various injuries. He also got an Olympic Diploma in Sydney and, in the Olympic Games in Pekin (Beijing) 2008, he was 5th.

All his efforts made him deserve the Silver Medal of Galicia in 2003 awarded by the Xunta de Galicia.



IVÁN RAÑA:
triathlon world champion

Date of interview: May 13th

Questions and interviewers:
Daniel Núñez Sánchez
Andrea Ariño Vilariño

Advice on questions:
Anxo Fernández Otero

Questions supervision:
Xosé Manuel Fernández Castro
M^a Isabel Mato Torres
Ana M^a Calvo Mariño

Audiovisual recording and editing:
Xosé Manuel Fernández Castro
Raquel Rendo Martínez

Photos:
M^a Isabel Mato Torres

Galician transcription:
Daniel Núñez Sánchez
Andrea Ariño Vilariño

Galician transcription supervision:
M^a Isabel Mato Torres
Antonio Sayáns Gómez

English translation:
M^a Isabel Mato Torres

English translation supervision:
Marisol Liste Noya

Contact with interviewee:
Anxo Fernández

Graphic design:
Rosa M^a Maceiras Miñán

The first time you took part in a competition must have been very exciting for you. What crossed your mind during those moments? Do you remember your first victory?

Yes, it was in a swimming course in Ordes when I was a little boy. Then I took it more seriously, I was fourteen or fifteen, and it was a triathlon race in Celeiro. It was very exciting, but really hard. I could hardly finish. It's funny, a sport which now I control quite well, and in my first race I crossed the line walking. What I remember from that day is how hard it was, how difficult it is at first, when you don't control it.



We imagine that winning a competition is something unique and unrepeatable, until you win again, and again, as in your case, but, is there a race which makes you feel especially proud of?

Yes, there are a few I keep in my memory. The World Championship is the one I remember most dearly because when I started triathlon at the age of 14 I used to dream of being the world champion and initially it was really hard. It took me eight years to make my dream come true and so, that day in Cancun, when I won the championship, was very important for me, not only at a professional level, but for my personal life. It's a day I will always remember. Then there are other races, like in Cancun in 1999, where I qualified for the Sydney Olympic Games. I have very nice memories of that race, too.

Triathlon was an unknown sport for most people until the late nineties when you made it known in the whole country. But your career as a triathlete had started earlier. What age did you jump into this Olympic discipline?

I started triathlon in a serious way when I was fourteen, but before that I used to swim and take part in popular footraces all over Galicia, sometimes with my classmates. I remember when I was nine and I was one year too young to run in the popular footrace, I borrowed someone else's shirt number and I finished that race. So at first, I used to do a bit of this and a bit of that, but when I was 14 I moved to Santiago to train as a triathlete with a coach. At the same time I used to study. Not very much, I must admit, although I shouldn't say that, I was a bad student...he, he, he...At a certain time I had to decide either to give up my studies or not, or to find a job, or to train more seriously...And I made up my mind: to train. It was 1999 and I wanted to qualify for the Sydney Olympic Games, where I felt encouraged due to my results, I was 5th. Then I had some grants and sponsorships which have allowed me to be professional since that day.



After the Olympic Games in Athens (where you started as one of the favourite candidates to win the gold medal) you had some physical problems which prevented you from being at a desirable level. What does a sportsman and competitor like you feel when he gets injured and can't see light at the end of the tunnel?



Getting injured and going through bad moments is something you have to experience. Everybody does. A worker, a welder, a cook... any person in all the fields has bad moments. That's something a sportsperson must learn because the bad moments outnumber the good ones. But when you feel down you dream of being in perfect condition for the competition and this way you can forget about the real hardship you are suffering. When you have a bad day in a race you have prepared so heartedly, like it happened to me in Athens, that I thought I could win, but I finished 23rd, you feel really disappointed, but it teaches you a lot. It shows you how to face future races. Nowadays I don't feel so stressed and under so much pressure as I used to during a race. I feel more relaxed and this way I do much better. I may not win, I can be 5th or 10th, but I enjoy it as if I had won.

What do you do in your free time? Do you keep some time for reading? What kind of books do you prefer?

Yes, I keep some time for reading. As I told you before, I was a bad student, but now I like reading and learning things, because I see it in a different way. When I was a student, especially at High School, I found it difficult to concentrate. I was a person who needed movement and exercise, and sitting there for so many hours was unbearable. Now I am thirty years old and I am starting to value things much more: to be able to read a book on the plane, for

example. I love novels, action and historical novels. I take advantage of my trips and I learn things about the countries and places I visit by reading about them, Seoul last weekend or Sydney a month ago. I read about the population, the city, employment, what they are famous for. Travelling has taught me all this, because I used to be very narrow-minded.

You have been in the cycling elite, what did this mean for you as originally your sport is triathlon?

For me there is something very important in life: to have challenges, which encourage you every day. You get up with hopes. When I was a child I wanted to be a cyclist. Whenever I saw a cyclist on television or when the Tour of Spain passed through Ordes, during those 10 or 15 seconds I was very attentive and I didn't miss a single detail of what was happening with the pack. I remember doing that in the years 1989-90 with Alvaro Pino, Perico Delgado, Miguel Indurain... Since those days I've always wanted to be a cyclist. Twenty years later I could fulfil my wish and become a professional cyclist. My dream came true.



Out of the three triathlon's disciplines, which one do you prefer? In which one do you feel stronger?

I think I have very good conditions for running, but at this very moment I am getting better results on the bike because I spent my last year

only cycling. And I am not as good at swimming because I haven't swum or run for one year. The bike is what transmits me more feelings because there is not just a physical component, like when you run, that you only need to train and get fit. There is a risk factor because you can fall off the bike at a high speed – 50 or 60 Km/h - and under great stress, and the way you stay in the pack counts, apart from the wind, if you go behind another cyclist the wind doesn't push you and you go faster. Being a bit crafty, a bit cunning, can help you ride faster.

You have also made some incursions in motor sports, are you thinking of taking part in a rally?

Yes, I've taken part in a couple of them. It's also something which I've got into my head. The day I participated in a rally was another dream which came true. I'd also like to try again this year by the end of season, when I finish all my races, because at this moment if I tried to participate in a rally all my sponsors and the Federation would say, 'Hey, you, boy, what are you doing? Driving at 180Km/h on a goat track? You must be crazy!' It isn't compatible, but at the end of season, in a more relaxed way, I'll do it, but as a way of just to enjoy myself more than to compete.



Does the training of an elite athlete like you keep you busy all year long? Do you train every day? How many hours? Do you



increase your training pace when an important event gets near?

Lately, what I do is give my body a rest by not training one day a week. I used to train every day, and I used to rest only once in two months. But now I try to look after my body and so, once a week, I don't train. Training means swimming one hour and a half, cycling three hours and running one hour, as an average. Then three days a week I go to the gym. When there are many races I don't go to the gym so much and I do less kilometres cycling and running because the races themselves are training. As for intensity, when you are younger you don't need to train so intensely because you have your 'natural explosion', you are young and you are anxious, but as you get older you have to train in a more aggressive way, with shorter series, more strength series, more race-pace series.

We guess that competing in a sport with three disciplines will make you plan your training in a special or, at least, different way. How do you divide your training sessions? Aren't you afraid of being unfit or overloaded for a competition?

That is exactly the essence of triathlon. You need to check the scales constantly because if you swim too much, you may not run enough; if you run too much, you may have problems with cycling, because by running fast your legs get strongly muscled and you need a different muscle tone for cycling. So you seek ways to work properly and to be fit for the races. As you

have said, sometimes I am unfit. Triathletes are quite obsessed with training, the more we do, the more we want, until the sack breaks and you break down, which was what happened to me in Athens. Over the years you have to learn to slow down so that the very day of the race you are in the best form. That is difficult.



What role does food play in an athlete's life? Do you keep a strict diet?

Food is essential. When you are young, it seems that anything is OK, training, food... You can eat four hamburgers and then run and nothing happens. But as you get older and you take part in competitions of a higher level, you must watch your diet, you must be very careful with food. You don't have to starve, but you have to learn to eat. In this country we eat a lot. When I am home I eat pies, lentils, stew, Spanish omelette with 'chorizo'... a big feast every day. So much food is not needed. We eat much more than our body needs. If we give our body too much food, it gets accumulated. We spoil our body. We don't have to eat more than we need. I try to avoid fried food, saturated fat and I hardly ever eat dessert, although I do sometimes, when I get exhausted on my bike and I feel sick. Then I need to have something sweet. We should be taught how to eat. There are a lot of health problems, not only in sport, due to the fact that we don't know what we are eating.

Have you ever thought of giving up sport and doing something else?

Yes, after Athens. I thought, 'Oh my God, if I can only be 23rd...' In another sport I could have been professional but, triathlon, and in Spain, that was very difficult. But not only that race, the following year I couldn't get started because I suffered from mononucleosis, I broke my nose, I twisted one of my ankles... I was injured for a long time and I couldn't see light at the end of the tunnel, and then I started to consider other options, although never in a very serious way. I just thought about it. Now I am seriously thinking about it because it's not the same as when you are twenty and you have fifteen or twenty years of a sport career ahead, now I only have four or five years ahead and I need to think about what I'm going to do next.

The World cup triathlon races (ITU) this year 2010 take place from Australia to USA, including Mexico, Japan, Holland, Hungary, Switzerland and Korea. Are you going to take part, if injuries respect you, in all the races during this season?

Not in all of them, because if I do, I will probably get injured. But I will take part in all the seven races of the World Championship. Then I will participate in the Spanish Championship, and also in a couple of races in Galicia with my club 'Arcade Inforhouse' and some others, for example one in the USA which offers a huge prize, I think \$200,000 for the first prize. So it's like a World Championship, everybody goes and everybody tries their best. Nobody misses that race! I am really looking forward to that one. And it is a



week after the race in Madrid. So, let's say I'm taking part in about twelve or fifteen races.

After a year and a half in the dry dock at international level you have participated in several races valid for the World cup, from Mooloolaba race in Australia, where you came 7th, to Seoul, where you finished in the 14th place. What does going back to high competition mean?

I wouldn't say 'dry dock', I'd rather say 'be away from triathlon' because I was cycling and it was the year I worked the most, trained the most and suffered the most on the bike. Then, when I went back to competitions, I felt a bit strange at first. I had to go back to the normal routine of training, but once I was at the race I found it really familiar, it's like being at home. I've been doing this for fifteen years, you know. I knew most of the participants, although there were some new ones, but let's say that I knew 80% of the athletes from the past. So I really felt at home. And this didn't happen when I was just cycling. There, I didn't know most of the cyclists and I felt a bit isolated.



According to what you have said to the media, you are looking forward to participating in the next race in Madrid. What does this race mean to you?

In Madrid I feel at home and when you compete at home you are happier. You know



that your family, your friends, the colleagues you trained with every day, all of them will be there. That is the kind of support you do not have in other races. I went to Seoul last week and I travelled by myself, I was in a hotel by myself. Then I met Gómez Noya there, but there weren't any Spanish people, only my colleagues from the World Cup, who are always the same. We are always the same circus. It's not like when you are at home, surrounded by all 'your people'. And I think that a lot of people from my town, Ordes, are going to Madrid to support me, and that gives me strength of spirit and more vigour during the race.

What are your short-term and long-term objectives?

My short-term objective is to be on the same level I was before. This is my main objective. I think in a couple of months' time, maybe in Madrid, I can be close to the podium. My long-term objective is the Olympic Games. Although there are still two years to go I've already started to think about it. I need to start motivating myself.

Taking part in the Olympic Games must be something very especial for an athlete. What did it mean to you?

Sydney meant a lot to me. Those Olympic Games made me well-known worldwide and that had an impact in my career because since then I started to have sponsors and I didn't



have to buy bikes. I was given the bikes, I was given the wheels and that was a relief: I could use different material I didn't have to pay for. That was the main thing. Then the illusion I faced my first race under. I was 21 at that time and when you arrive there and see the great atmosphere...when you enter the Olympic dining-room full of athletes, those two-metre tall black athletes who run the 100-metre race finals...the Chinese or the German...that was like a party, speaking broken English, even Russian!...People are in a very good mood because it's like a local festival where everybody enjoys the moment. And then, after the races, better not to tell, it didn't seem sport life, that was real fun, going out at night until...only God knows! Athletes are very stressed before the races and, after the races they need to let off steam.

What's the "Olympic Town" like? Are relationships among athletes good?

Relationships? We get on well, although sometimes there is some friction. Some athletes only think of winning and have problems with the rest. For some others,

winning or losing makes no difference. But some athletes are very competitive and they get annoyed very easily. But most of them get along well, although keeping their distance.

Are you going to take part in the London Olympic Games in 2012?

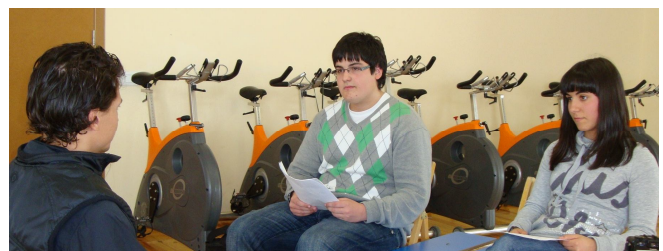
Yes, it is one of the objectives we were talking about before. I'll try to be there and to be at the front.

How does Ivan Raña define himself? Is he the same person as when he started his sports career?

No, I don't think so. I used to be quite a disaster. Now I try to be more organized, I train harder and I look after myself in a more careful way. At first I was quite rebellious and I did very well in some races, but sometimes I didn't even turn up and I stayed with some friends training. Now I am more responsible and professional and I don't skip my planning. It's not that I didn't use to train, but if there was a duathlon championship I wasn't very interested in, but I had been selected for, sometimes I didn't go and I went to a Galician timed race instead. I used to go with my friends and I had a better time. In that sense I have really changed.

Which sort of relation do you have with the new technologies?

So-so. I can hardly understand my new mobile phone. I am trying to get up-to-date because it is very useful. Now I have a web page where, once or twice a week, I write an article so that people who are interested can read information about me, and also for my





sponsors and my friends. So I have to get familiar with it. When I travel, I take my laptop with me and I need to get up to date. Otherwise I am lost.

When you were a secondary student, what foreign languages were studied? Do you speak any? Do you think that English is necessary in high competition?

Yes, communication is very important. If you don't communicate, you won't get any results. Nowadays triathlon seems to be controlled by Anglo-Saxon athletes, even the International Federation seems to have an outline of the triathlete-type: English, American or Australian, who speak perfect English and that speak as much as they want in interviews. Then when we get there, speaking broken English, they don't pay much attention to us. That's true. So we try to speak English, although we'll never speak as native speakers, if we can communicate well, we have more support from the media and from sponsors. So I think it is very important. In other sports, like cycling, some people speak five languages and some others can only speak Spanish, but they have a translator. But that doesn't work with us. We usually travel by ourselves, so we have

to learn a foreign language, and English is the best, of course.

Our school is taking part in a "Comenius" project together with Poland and Lithuania. Were there any projects of the kind when you were a teenager?

I don't know. I suppose there were, but not many, I think. There was the end-of-year trip to Madrid. I remember that trip where we were taken to some museums. We visited Toledo, Madrid...But for a teenager who thought that the trip was just fun and then he found himself in a museum...I got a bit bored. But I think yours is a good project. Getting to know people from abroad is very important, it makes you grow up. Otherwise you come to a standstill. For 16-18-year-old students it is really important because their character is being educated and if you are able to communicate, to have friends from abroad, not to be afraid of being with people, that will open doors for you in the future.

Do you think that these projects are a good way of improving students' level of English?

Do you think that they can also help in some other ways?



They help with the language but they also help because you can travel and you can communicate. I have friends with a university career and when they travel...my God...they are unable to find their way home, if they have a problem, they can't solve it, they get all confused...However, if you are taken abroad when you are young and you see different things, and you make new



friends, and you have to get understood in a language which is not yours, that gives you a social ability which you can't get just out of reading.

Have you ever been to Poland or Lithuania for sports reasons or for leisure? Do you intend to go?

I think I've been to Poland, but I am not sure. I know that there are triathlon races in Poland because some of the athletes who take part in the World Cup are from there. I think it is a beautiful place. Nowadays World Cup races take place in very emblematic cities, such as Sydney, Seoul, Madrid, Hamburg...and I think there aren't any in Poland, so...I won't be able to go.

If you could make a wish knowing that it would come true, how far would you wish your sports career to go?

Until I am 38 or 40 years old I would like to be an elite athlete and get good results. It's very difficult. Each year you must look after yourself more, train harder and in the end you are up to your eyes and you leave elite sport.

Let us ask you the last question, as

inexperienced interviewers, is there a question you would like to answer but nobody has asked you?

I don't know. You are always asked: 'Do you train a lot? How often do you train?' But people are wrong. The important thing is motivation and to be willing to work. Of course you need a good planning but, sometimes, what an athlete needs, although you may think that I am crazy, is going for a walk with his girlfriend rather than training. But coaches and people from the Federation find it difficult to assume because they think that it gives a bad image. They can't assume that not everything can be part of perfect squared planning. This should be changed. You can't cheat people. People must learn to enjoy themselves because going out and enjoying yourself can help you to do better in a race. And in most interviews you have to say that you are training hard, that you are looking after yourself properly... but the truth is that you are winning because you are highly motivated and you have your family's support or your girlfriend's support which makes you feel good. But you never say it. Athletes must feel happy and motivated.



