

Women's Running

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WR speaks to Sarah King, founder of The Gauntlet Games

Sarah talks about her endeavour to create an obstacle course race that is accessible and appealing for women



Fire, electricity and gruff, bare-chested men, this tends to be the common theme running across many of the UK's obstacle course races. Not The Gauntlet Games. This week we spoke to Sarah King about the obstacle course race involving foam, gladiators and inflatables, which she brought to the UK last year, in a quest to create an obstacle race that is no longer 'testosterone-fuelled.'



Sarah King is the UK's first, independent obstacle course race director. After starting out in the events industry working in corporate events, Sarah joined British Military Fitness following her passion for outdoors and fitness. Whilst at British Military Fitness, Sarah identified a gap in the market. She noticed that a huge number of obstacle races were focused at men and at runners looking to take on the 'toughest' of challenges. Sarah was eager to create an event that was not only accessible for women but for runners of all abilities and so created The Gauntlet Games.

We caught up with Sarah about the event, the obstacles involved and her hopes for achieving what she describes as 'an adventure playground for adults'.

What inspired you to start up The Gauntlet Games?

Whilst working at British Military Fitness, it came to my attention that a lot of the branding around the UK's obstacle races was all about fire and electricity and bare-chested men. I personally felt that there were a huge number of women out there that saw them and thought they were potentially interested but felt too intimidated to sign up.

These races do have a friendly atmosphere but for somebody who has never done anything like this before, they can be very intimidating. A lot of them brand themselves as a complete testosterone-fuelled experience and I wanted to create something different to that.

I really wanted to create something that was really welcoming and opening and saying 'you know what, regardless of your gender or fitness levels, you can still have fun and come and do this crazy adult playground experience' and not feel like you're out of place there.

How long have The Gauntlet Games been running?

We ran our first event in September last year. At our last event we had 560 people so we're hoping to have between 500-1000 participants at each event this year.

How many events do you run and what obstacles are involved in each race?

Currently we have four races and we have another that we are about to launch. All of the races are similar in a way that the obstacles are quite similar, but because all of our obstacles have gladiators at them, that's how we've got something a little bit unique.

What it means is that every time you go to a race you have a totally different experience; each gladiator is given the brief to make that obstacle their own, so whatever their personality is like, whatever skills they have, they can bring them to that obstacle. The obstacles involve everything from a giant hay bale stack, to a beam over a bog, to a rope swing. The gladiator is given that obstacle and told to have some fun with it. They'll be given some form of inflatable weapon or paint gun or foam gun or something to interact with the participants.



What was your motivation for involving the gladiators and making the obstacles interactive?

We didn't want the obstacles to be daunting as they are at other events, with obstacles like fire or electric or ice, that would put people off giving an obstacle course a go. We wanted to create something much more tongue-in-cheek and a bit more fun. So we've got a giant slippery slide and a big foam pit and a giant ball pool with big inflatable balls. It just makes the course a lot more fun so that each obstacle is a bit of a giggle. What we are really trying to create is an adventure playground for adults!

The races are aimed at both men and women. Does participation tend to be an equal split or do you have a higher percentage of women signing up?

It's not an equal split. Currently we have just under 75% women, so it's definitely female-orientated. We're not saying it's a specifically female-focused event but because of the nature of it, and because of the fun branding, it does automatically appeal to women. They quite like the appeal of having all of these big rugby players at each obstacle too – a bit of eye-candy around the course!

Do you have a lot of group sign ups?

Yes, about 70% of people who sign up are in teams. It does somehow appeal a little more to groups of friends who are female; they can have a real giggle. It really is much more fun when you can run around with a group of friends.

But then if you are signing up as an individual, because there is all of this interaction going on at all of the obstacles, it means that, actually, you naturally start chatting to people as you go round. So we'll have people who have signed up on their own but they'll find some buddies on the way around and take on the challenges together.



In terms of ability, do you have to be an experienced runner to take part?

Definitely not. We have a 5K and a 10K option and the 5K is accessible for everybody. As you're only running around 300 – 400 metres between each obstacle, we say that it is not essential to have done any training. However, we would say that you'll probably enjoy it more if you have a base level of fitness – a level of fitness you are confident with, so that you're not worrying about the event.

However, if you're up for a more physical challenge and are perhaps in training for a longer distance event, the 10K is a great option. It's an additional 5K of trail running and will be quite muddy and hilly – it is the tougher part of the race.



Do you have a charity partner?

We run in association with the British Red Cross. We'd love everybody to raise as much as they can for the British Red Cross, but you've got the option of donating just a couple of pounds as part of your entry fee, or otherwise you can sign up with Just Giving as part of the entry and ramp up the fundraising.

So, if you fancy a trail run with a few gladiators, a giant ball pit and a load of fun thrown in, this could be for you! The next event is taking place at Woodhall Park on Saturday 18th April. For more details visit: <http://thegauntletgames.co.uk/pages/location/>



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