

## **International Children Games in Reykjavik 2007, Maruša Černjul Jonas**

I'm Maruša Černjul Jonas, and my journey as a high jumper representing Slovenia started at the International Children Games in Reykjavik. It was a moment that not only impacted my life as an athlete but also deepened my appreciation for the essence of sports.

In 2007, I was a young athlete that just started my journey as a high jumper, only competing at school competitions, just learning about what athletics is all about. I was too young to understand my true potential, but my dreams couldn't have been bigger. I still remember the excitement I felt when we were loading the bus with my friends and fellow athletes: "We are going to Iceland!"

Reykjavik provided the backdrop for my first significant competition and my first gold medal. I still remember using my flip phone to call my mom " Mom, I won!" It was a remarkable achievement for me, but it was more than just a win. Meeting new people, forging friendships and witnessing everyone's passion for sports and team spirit left a lasting impression on me. It made me appreciate the importance of teamwork and the pride that comes with representing one's nation. It wasn't just about me; it was about my country and the countless individuals who supported me along the way. It gave me motivation to train hard and a passion for high jump that grew stronger every day. The mascot on my dresser was a constant reminder of what I was capable of achieving.

Throughout my journey, I faced challenges and celebrated victories. I proudly represented Slovenia on the global stage, competing at the Olympic Games in Rio, World Championships, European Championships and many other international competitions. Additionally, my journey in sports led me to an incredible opportunity to study in the United States at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), where I completed my undergraduate and master's degrees, found my love and made it my second home.

To all the young athletes out there, "Never underestimate the power of belief in yourself. With hard work, determination, and unwavering self-belief, you can achieve your dreams and soar to great heights in your chosen sport. Embrace the journey and learn from every experience. And remember, in sports, as in life, it's not just about the destination; it's about the journey and the people you meet along the way. Stay humble, stay dedicated, and let your passion guide you as you embark on your own remarkable journey in the world of sports.