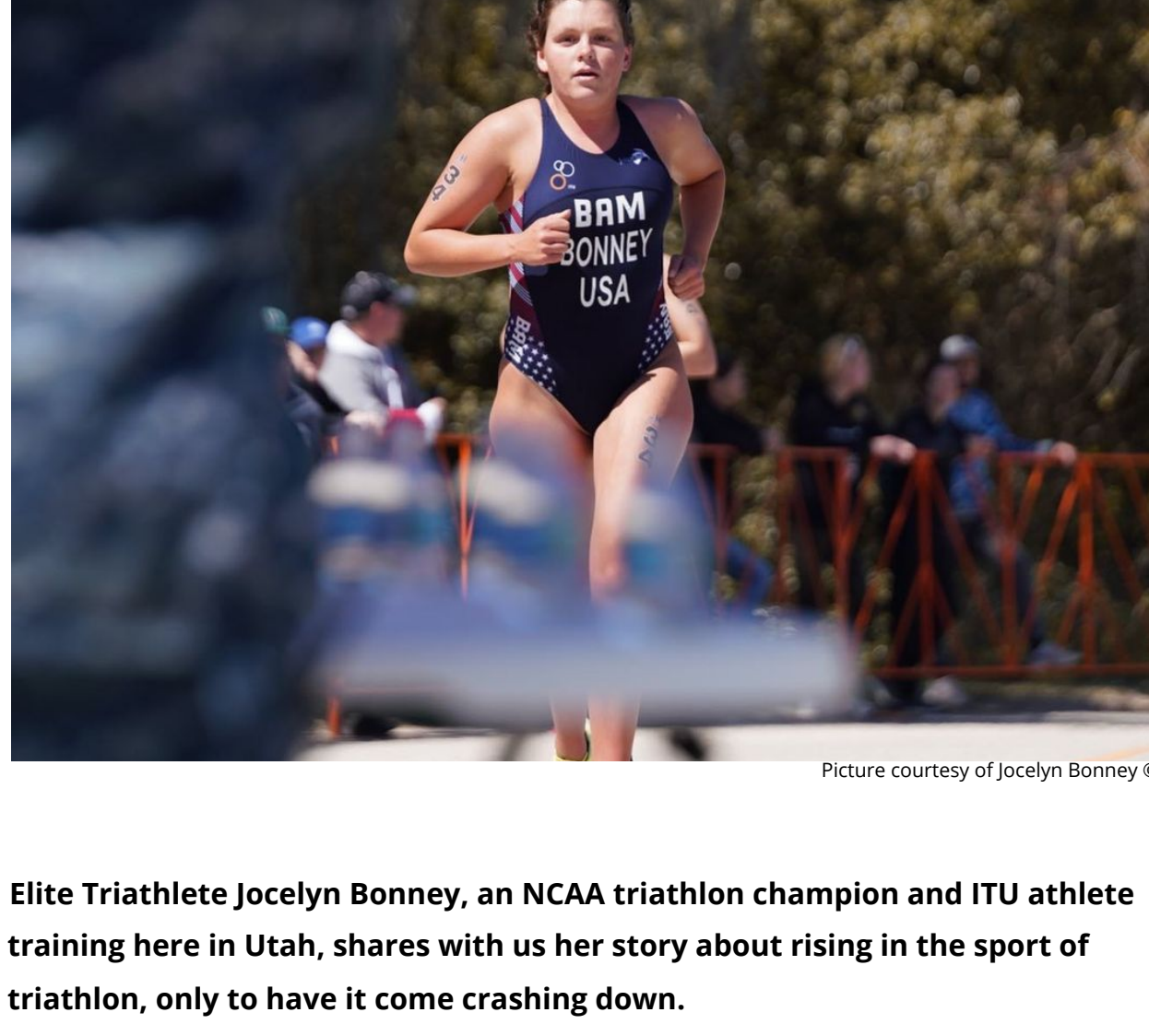


# Jocelyn Bonney - Elite Triathlete (U23)

## A Triathletes of Utah Interview



Picture courtesy of Jocelyn Bonney ©

**Elite Triathlete Jocelyn Bonney, an NCAA triathlon champion and ITU athlete training here in Utah, shares with us her story about rising in the sport of triathlon, only to have it come crashing down.**

Jossi, thanks for taking some time and talking with us. Will you tell us a little bit about yourself, where you grew up, school, hobbies etc?

Thanks so much for the interview! I grew up mostly in Long Beach, California, a beach city just south of LA. Growing up my family also had a ski condo in Park City that we would spend about 100 nights a year at. So I still consider myself part Utahn!

I'm also a full time student at Arizona State University's online school where I'm three quarters away from getting my BS in nutritional sciences with a concentration in food studies. I did traditional college for my first two years at Queens University of Charlotte, but now do my school 100% online which allows me to have a lot of flexibility with my travel and training schedule.

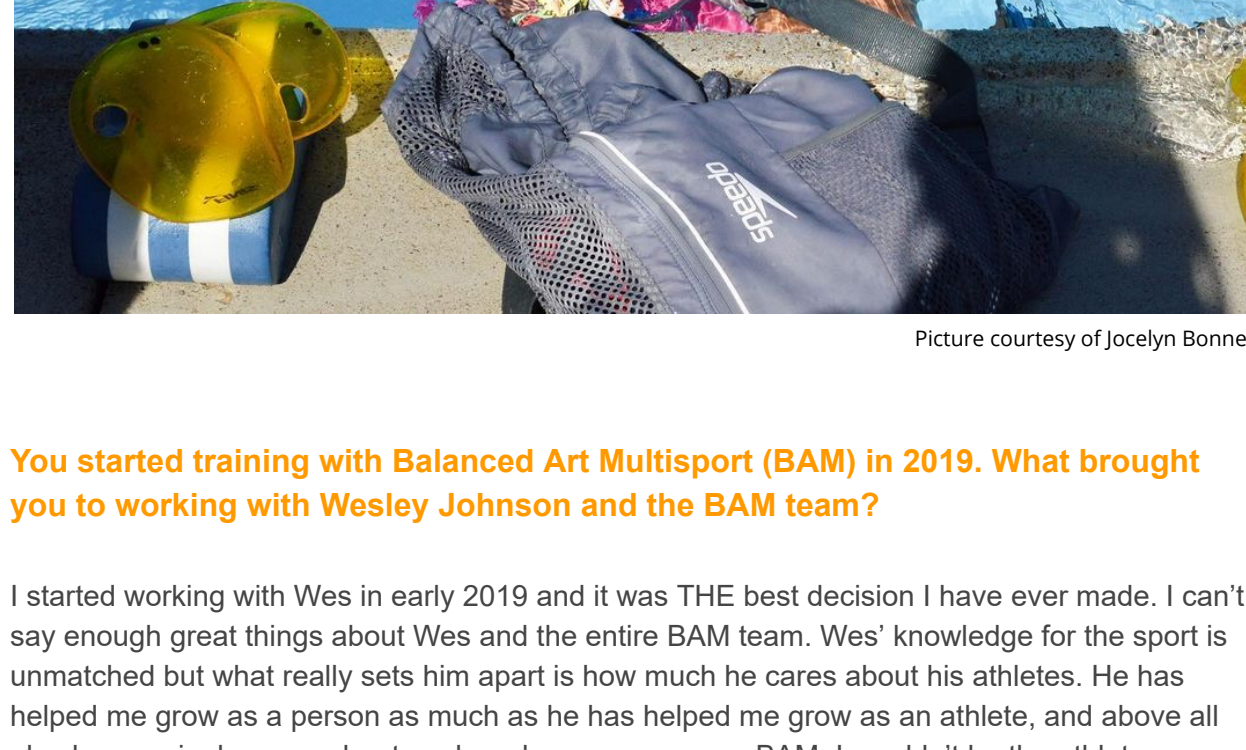
Between being a full time student and full time professional Triathlete I don't have much spare time for hobbies, but I love to bake and to do anything outside.

**You started triathlon from a pretty young age, what drew you to the sport and what has kept you going?**

For as long as I can remember triathlon has been a part of my life! My mom started doing tri's when I was 3 and my dad was super into running marathons, so I was exposed to endurance sports from a young age. But I was super into water polo all growing up, and actually won a Junior Olympic National title in water polo when I was 10. When I was 12 I broke my arm playing soccer and my parents convinced me to try out our local kids tri team just to stay in shape for water polo season. I instantly fell in love with the sport and never looked back! That broken arm was one of the best things that's happened to me!

For me it really helped to fall in love with the sport first and then have the results come later. The love for the sport and not just a love for the results and accolades is what has kept me going through some really tough times. I absolutely love what I do, I don't just love the results. I'm living my childhood dream every single day, and I try to approach each day with a sense of gratitude for that!

Throughout the years my why for triathlon and what keeps me going has evolved as I've gone through different phases of life. At this point in my career my why has become very clear. I want to use triathlon as a platform to help athletes struggling with eating disorders. When I was sick I didn't know anyone who had gone through what I was going through, and made it back to professional sports. It would have helped me tremendously just to know that it was possible, that you can overcome survivor eating disorders and become a professional athlete again. I want to be that person that shows a kid who's struggling that it IS possible. Just to help one person would make this whole journey worth it to me a million times over.



Picture courtesy of Jocelyn Bonney

**You started training with Balanced Art Multisport (BAM) in 2019. What brought you to working with Wesley Johnson and the BAM team?**

I started working with Wes in early 2019 and it was THE best decision I have ever made. I can't say enough great things about Wes and the entire BAM team. Wes' knowledge for the sport is unmatched but what really sets him apart is how much he cares about his athletes. He has helped me grow as a person as much as he has helped me grow as an athlete, and above all else he genuinely cares about each and every person on BAM. I wouldn't be the athlete or person that I am today without all of Wes' guidance and patience.

Wes has also created a world class team of coaches at BAM. While he is most definitely the man with a plan for me and is my head coach I have a village of amazing coaches who help me in different aspects of the sport. I currently work with Matt Pendola and Andrew Stassinis for my strength training, Jeff Sherrod for all things cycling, have Bobby McGee as a consultant for my run training, and Marius Aleska and Michael Dauphnie for my mental skills. It takes a village to create a professional Triathlete and I'm extremely confident in the team Wes has created!

**You recently started having conversations about weight, diets and eating disorders in endurance athletes. Can you share some of your personal experiences in this area?**

Ya of course! My struggle with weight and body image started in 2015. That year I had a breakthrough season getting a podium at sprint world championships, winning the first ever NCAA Varsity Triathlon National Championship, and turning pro while I was 17. But that year I also started meticulously counting calories, only eating foods that I deemed "safe & healthy" and pretty much just eating as little as possible. I attributed all my newfound success to losing weight and that really created an environment for my eating disorder to develop. I had developed an extremely firm belief not only that lighter = faster but also that lighter = successful. When in reality I had a breakthrough 2015 due to YEARS of hard and calculated training leading up to that point. Those results were in spite of my nutrition, not because of it.

I was able to get away with disordered eating, until I wasn't. In 2016 I quite literally crashed and burned. I was injured, depressed, and having all sorts of health issues from malnutrition. From the outside it looked like I had another breakthrough year; I finished second in the US Junior Elite series that year with a couple of podiums at Junior Elite Cups, I started college on one of the first ever NCAA Triathlon scholarships, and got another podium at NCAA Championships. I had everything I had ever dreamed of, but it wasn't how I imagined it. It was actually one of the worst years of my life. I couldn't think about anything except for calories, I ate less and less until every day became a battle for how little I could eat, and I pushed away anyone and anything that stood between me and losing weight. Including triathlon. The need to eat to sustain proper training drove me to the point of wanting to quit the sport. That's when I realized I had a big problem.

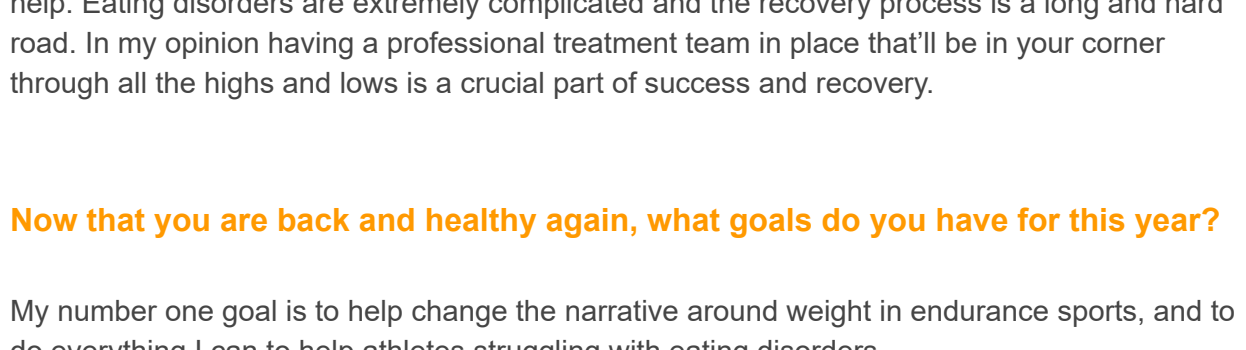
My parents came to watch me race NCAA's that year and I hadn't seen them since they dropped me off at college a few months earlier. They ended up taking me straight from that race back home and into intensive eating disorder treatment. I found out that due to starving myself for the last two years, that I had compromised kidney and liver function as well as deteriorated heart muscle from my body cannibalizing itself for survival. At the level of body fat that I had at that time, it was a medical miracle that I was able to be somewhat functional. But due to my new health issues every doctor and specialist that I saw told me I would never be an athlete again, and I would be lucky just to live a normal life. In less than a year I went from NCAA National Champion to thinking I'd never be an athlete again all because I thought lighter = faster.

Those words lit a fire in me that my eating disorder had taken away for so long. I decided to fight to get both my life and sport back. I alone wouldn't trade 18 months of my life to recovery. Recovery was the hardest thing I had ever done but I wouldn't trade it for the world. It gave me my life back, taught me my true values as a person, and gave me an entirely new and better perspective on life. I was extremely fortunate that as I recovered and gained weight back that my health also came back. I didn't think that I would ever be able to race again, but almost exactly two years later with insane amounts of help from my family, friends, therapist, dietitians, coaches and teammates, I was back on the start line of elite races. But this time realizing that lighter isn't faster, lighter doesn't equal success, less food isn't better, and weight isn't a determining factor in speed.

Unfortunately that wasn't the fairytale ending. I rushed the process of my comeback to sport after taking over a year with really minimal training. And with my health in a good place for the first time in years I hit puberty at 20 years old and grew 5 inches over the course of my 2018 & 2019 seasons. Trying to train at and compete at an elite level during that growth spurt left me with four stress fractures, a sports hernia and a torn hip flexor, as well as serious doubts if all the doctors who told me I'd never be an elite athlete again were right. I was once again facing the harsh reality that my past mindset of lighter = faster could be ending my career before it had even started.

I started working with Wes and joined BAM part way through this struggle with injury. And it was one of the best decisions I have ever made. Wes's approach to the sport I full heartedly believe saved my career. When we started working together we essentially just started over. I trained like I had never swam, cycled or ran before. It was a bold move, but it worked. I don't know where I'd be without all of Wes's guidance, support, and patience with me through that time of injury and comeback. The entire team at BAM really made me believe for the first time that I could get to the other side of this!

It took about two years to get to the other side of my injury problems and almost six years to get to the point where I believe my body is over the effects of my eating disorder. I couldn't be happier to say that I've now been running for about a year injury free and am running better than I ever was when I was lighter, I've added close to 100 watts to my FTP since recovering (and 0.9 w/ kg), and I've dropped close to a minute off my 500 swim time. Most importantly though I no longer believe that lighter = faster, I now am a firm believer that health = success and that fueling your body is the best way to have a long and successful career!



Picture courtesy of Jocelyn Bonney

**What advice would you give to someone that is suffering from an eating disorder?**

The most important things I'd stress to someone struggling would be to get professional help. Eating disorders are extremely complicated and the recovery process is a long and hard road. In my opinion having a professional treatment team in place that'll be in your corner through all the highs and lows is a crucial part of success and recovery.

**Now that you are back and healthy again, what goals do you have for this year?**

My number one goal is to help change the narrative around weight in endurance sports, and to do everything I can to help athletes struggling with eating disorders.

From a results perspective, this is my last year as an under 23 elite US (U23 category), so most of my focus is on those races. I'd love to get podiums at U23 elite US (U23 category) and U23 elite Pan-American Championships as well as making the U23 World Championships team for the US. But I'm still really young for a pro so the only thing that really matters for the next few years is to stay healthy, stay present, and keep progressing in the three sports.

**Thanks again for sharing Jossi. We appreciate your willingness to be open about your past issues and how they have affected you as an athlete. We look forward to watching you continue as an Elite triathlete and where the sport might take you!**

Thank you!

**For more information on eating disorders, help and support or getting involved, please visit the National Eating Disorders Association website at [www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)**

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