

all by himself, carrying the Mexican flag.

The technician from Monterrey is the country's only competitor at this year's competition, and the CNC turning competitor admits he was anxious about walking on stage for the parade of nations. "At first I was nervous and quite shy about being by myself with just the Mexican flag and the woman with the Mexico sign," he says. "But when I stepped on to the stage there was a small group of supporters here with me and so I didn't feel so alone. And then I started to realise people were applauding me."

A way to progress at work

"It all started as a project at work," he tells Tes at the start of his third of four days at the international skills contest. "The company I work for, Denso Mexico (<https://www.denso.com/global/en/>), was asking people to participate in this competition, and the only requirement was that you had to be able to measure." Until that point, Juarez had never heard of WorldSkills. "I was looking at it as a way to progress within the company I was working for, no more than that." This was a mere eight months ago – a relatively short preparation time (<https://www.tes.com/news/further-education/breaking-views/hard-work-fun-and-a-few-tears-road-worldskills-2017>) for a WorldSkills competitor.

After an intense selection process, Juarez managed to come out on top, and embarked on a gruelling training process, which included a three and a half months spent at a training centre in Japan with members of the Japanese WorldSkills squad, as well as a month in Thailand. "Every day, I trained about 12 to 13 hours," he says.

His family, who he has not seen in the four months since he left for Japan, was surprised at the intensity of the experience, he says. "They are very proud that I was chosen to represent Mexico, but they didn't realise the all the skills needed to be able to do this. They didn't expect all these opportunities."

With no prior knowledge of skills competitions or WorldSkills, the months of intense training were a steep learning curve: "I realised how important the competition was when I arrived at Denso in Japan, and I saw all the preparation that had been ongoing there – and the fact they were already preparing for [WorldSkills] Kazan 2019."

'A lot of pressure'

Being the only competitor in Team Mexico – which had 15 members at the competition in Sao Paolo two years ago – is not easy, he admits. "There is a lot of pressure, because everything comes down to just one person. I put a lot of pressure on myself, too, to be the best here I can be. My goal is the gold medal."

With no team mates to keep him company, Juarez is entirely focused on the competition: "I learned Japanese to be able to go to Japan, so I made friends in the Japanese and the Thai squad, but here, I am just concentrating on the competition and not really speaking to my competitors."

The first two days of competition have been hard, he says: "On the first day I realised the piece in the mass production task was not difficult, but the task was kind of not possible, because of the number of pieces we had to make. I was a bit shocked, but so were the other competitors. On the second day, I felt more comfortable and I am getting more confident."

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