

Your sport your views, your tips, your stories

Olympic dreams Looking ahead to the London 2012 Games, with wheelchair basketball player

Former University of Lincoln student Tom Mallon is a BT Storyteller, he'll be sharing his London 2012 stories throughout the year

This column got off the ground with a meeting with Paralympian Lee Pearson at his stables. The next time I stepped out in my role as a BT Storyteller I bumped into Ade Adepitan. When you travel around London these days it is impossible not to notice all the advertising promoting the Olympics.



I was on my way to the BT British Olympic Ball. The event saw past and present Team GB legends grace the red carpet (which was actually gold) and show their support for next year's summer games. The event was hosted by Stephen Fry and Miranda Hart. This was my first experience of this type of filming so I got there early but already it was tight to fit my tripod in. There was an air of anticipation as I and around 50 other assorted press awaited the first arrivals. The organisers quickly came down the line of crews and asked if they wanted to speak to Sir Clive Woodward, to which everyone responded "yes"...and then soon enough the first car to turn up containing Sir Clive, who was whisked around the various national broadcasters, then posed for his photo, then was moved onto the various sports-related outlets including myself, before the final part of call was the press interviews. This was a routine which all athletes and celebrities patiently endured. As the sun set, the intense camera flashes seemed to get

Rest of the world are scared

North Hykeham's London Games hopeful Richard Sargent talks about next year's showpiece, a potentially lucrative deal abroad and his broken toe

The London Olympics is huge without a doubt. Everyone is talking about it and it will be a brilliant showpiece. But there is so much going on for me in wheelchair basketball at the moment that I find myself thinking about so many things. It is a really exciting time and yet, at 19, there is so much more to come. The new Super League season starts this weekend and after my club (Wolverhampton Rhinos) became the first team ever to win the title after going the season undefeated earlier this year, we are gunning for the treble this time around.



Talent: Richard Sargent

In many respects the World Championships is bigger than the Paralympics and we are going all out to win that competition. There is also the prospect of me moving to either Spain or Italy for six months next year to experience club basketball outside of this country. This is an important period in my career. Wheelchair basketball players are mini celebrities in Europe and unlike over here they are paid to play as well - so it makes sense. There is so much more media coverage given to it out there and the sport features on television quite a bit. I haven't confirmed which team I will be joining yet but that is the plan. Australia were the gold medalists in Beijing and Canada got the silver. There is no reason why we can't be better than them and win the tournament. But I have to be realistic and,

because of my age, I am probably fourth in line. I play at point guard and the country has many talented players in this position - none more so than our captain John Pollock. He is a brilliant player and a top character. Wolverhampton Rhinos have just signed him for this Super League season and I am set to learn so much from him. He will definitely help my career. He is for the country and not for himself. I found out in February whether I have been selected or not and all I can do is work as hard as I possibly can. But at 19, I have many years in front of me and Rio 2016 is the best bet for me. Whether I am selected or not, Team GB have a great chance of winning on home soil, I'm certain of that. A lot of pressure has been heaped on us because we have won bronze at the last two Paralympics and UK Sport want an improvement. A place in the final is the bare minimum and with it a silver medal. But the team is very strong and we have beaten some good sides lately. The world is fast becoming scared of us and a lot of the best players in the world are coming from these shores. Australia were the gold medalists in Beijing and Canada got the silver. There is no reason why we can't be better than them and win the tournament.



On the ball: Richard Sargent aims to play a big role for Great Britain's Wheelchair Basketball team in 2012

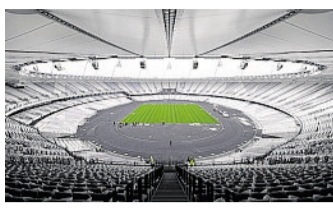
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Richard Sargent, Lincolnshire Sports Partnership's Hayley Cook and Tom Mannion

of Team GB

Hayley Cook is the communications officer at the Lincolnshire Sports Partnership

With less than 300 days until the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, it's no wonder that everyone, well, almost everyone, seems to be getting excited about the Games next year. But, how excited are we in Lincolnshire? Do people think that the Olympics in London will have an impact on our county? I'm admittedly not a very sporty person. Before working at Lincolnshire Sports Partnership, my idea of sport was watching it on TV. I've grown up around sport and I'm an avid fan of Boston United, but I never really thought I was that good at it; and neither did my PE teachers. I was always the academic sibling. The 2012 Games are a huge part of my role as a Communications Officer at Lincolnshire Sports Partnership and first hand I have experienced how the Games can affect one person - I eat, salad, play sport three times per week, volunteer at a local club and can't wait for the Games next year - my PE teacher would be proud. I've spoken to many people across the county who are yet to be inspired by the Games. After the announcement last month that the Egyptian Paralympic Team will be using facilities in Boston and Lincoln, a colleague commented that it didn't affect him and he couldn't see the point; a student at the University of Lincoln didn't



Centre of attention: But can the people of Lincolnshire really relate to the London Olympics?

All this is possible through Quest for Gold, a programme to encourage individuals to try Olympic and Paralympic sports for free in the run up to the 2012 Games. Working with sports clubs across the county who are generously offering free taster sessions to participants, people can sign up for £5.00 and try 33 sports between now and July 2012. So if you fancy sitting volleyball, tennis, equestrian or any of the Olympic and Paralympic sports, Quest for Gold could be for you.

My personal Olympics

officially launched a legacy programme - four projects to continue the work of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Lincolnshire; long after 2012. So whether you want to play sport, run an event, volunteer and give something back to the community, or encourage your friends and family to be active - there's something for everyone. I chose to try more sports and in the past three months I've played badminton, beach volleyball and wheelchair basketball. I went sailing in North Hykeham, and I'm attempting archery shooting and horse-riding in the next few weeks; I've never been so active, and I'm learning a lot about Olympic and Paralympic sports I had never had the chance to try before.

So whether you are actively taking part or not, it is hoped that Lincolnshire will benefit as a result of the Olympic and Paralympic Games; whether businesses are winning contracts, volunteers are thriving or communities are inspired; the 2012 Games will affect our county. There will always be individuals who are disinterested in sport or uninspired by the Games but Lincolnshire Sports Partnership's main aim for the London 2012 Games is clear: more people being active, more people playing sport, more people being healthy.

Racism will never be solved quickly, but we are making big progress in England

My view with Matt Alexander, Lincoln-based chief scout for Notts County

Sadly the issue of racism has been brought up following the alleged incident between John Terry and Anton Ferdinand. Whatever happens from the subsequent enquiries, I believe England and the rest of Britain are making brilliant headway in tackling such issues. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for the rest of Europe. My different roles in football has taken me all over the continent and some of the scenes I've witnessed have made me very uncomfortable. I'm a big guy, but I've been to games in Italy and Russia where I have felt intimidated. This is why I believe the



Big guy: Matt Alexander

then we have to set the best example when dealing with issues like discrimination. As I said, there is no quick solution to this, but the work done by organisations such as Kick It Out and the Voice with its Black List of influential black figures in football has raised awareness. Kick It Out have been running since 1983, and I believe they have made significant progress in English football and I hope they can be a positive influence on the rest of the game. Now, if people across the footballing community are looking at us in that respect

different organisations working in our country are so crucial. England is the home of football. I talk to players from across the world, and they all want to play in England because they see it as the spiritual home of the game. We all need role models in life and for me, my greatest role model was my dad Keith Alexander. My dad sadly died just over a year ago, but he instilled in me a determination and crucially a hard working mentality which I will never forget. I have always looked on him with respect and so when he was inducted into the Black List I could not put into words how proud I was of him. For me, it was fantastic that people looked on him as a positive role model as well. It was good to see his graft and success in the game was being recognised along with the likes of Premier League stars like Rio Ferdinand. This week I've joined him on the list for my work in football at such a young age, I'm only 30. I've recently been

appointed chief scout for League One side Notts County and that along with working with people like Dennis at Arsenal on his new boot deal. When I was told about it I could not believe it. I could not quite fathom it out because I did not see how I was a role model, especially compared to what my dad did. It took a good few chats with my partner and family to make me reflect on it. They made me realise that I had been successful, but also with it comes the responsibility. I hope I can make a difference like my dad did, even if it is just at the very least making sure my own daughter has the same determination and work ethic that he passed down to me.

My sport bowls with Billy Jackson

Billy Jackson is a member of Perry Sports Bowling Club and Lincoln Indoor Bowls Club. He is also a former World Indoor Singles champion in the sport.



me. My eldest son is playing the sport now too, and I even met my wife through the game. Why do you play bowls? I think many of it's the camaraderie, but you also get the opportunity to meet a lot of people. You obviously have to enjoy a sport too, which I do. To be honest I hate the need to practice your game, but it does need to be done. And, as with most sports, the ability to improve is something enticing. How did you start? In 1984 my neighbour was starting up a coaching school for bowls down Hall Drive at the bowling centre. I was only 17 at the time, but he asked if my brother and I would like to head down with him on the Sunday morning to play. We went along and absolutely loved it. My brother is still playing too, like

not fall at the same hurdle the following year. My self-belief then improved and the following year I went the whole way. Which is your favourite venue to play at? My favourite green is probably up at Stanley in Durham. It's actually situated above an Asda superstore, but they have a lovely quick surface up there. It is very rare for us to actually get up there to play so when we do it is a special occasion. We last got up there in March of this year, and it was superb; so much better than anywhere else we play. Who is your hero? Richard Corrie would have to be my favourite, he retired in 2003 due to business and family commitments, but was without doubt the most talented player to play the game. He was a triple world singles champion and won numerous medals at the Commonwealth

Games. He was a lovely fella too, which makes a difference. He had this exceptional ability to go months without playing any matches and then swoop in and defeat all before him. A massive, massive talent. Why should our readers try bowls? There is an old saying that it is an old man's game, and it simply isn't true. We have an enormous group of under-18s at the Lincoln Indoor Bowls Club, and in addition to that, the club is taking the sport into schools and PE lessons. Attitudes to the sport are changing and it is accepted now that anyone can play this sport. It is a sport which does not limit you if you aren't totally fit or if you carry any disabilities. It's a friendly and welcoming atmosphere for people to come and play their sport. Billy Jackson was talking to Ben Cross

My kit with Steve Swinburn

Steve Swinburn is an undefeated professional lightweight boxer from Lincoln. The 25-year-old's most crucial piece of kit is his Reebok Silver 10 oz gloves. I had always thought the Lonsdale gloves I had previously worn were spot on but I couldn't believe how much better the Reebok gloves were. There is a massive difference and hopefully I will continue to use them. Obviously the Nesbitt fight last time in Sheffield, I've worn them in and they made a huge difference for his durability and experience but I took him apart and floored him in the second round. I ended up winning on points and I won every one of the four rounds easily. Steve Swinburn was talking to Mark Williams



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