

University of Birmingham Sport podcast - episode 1

Hello and thanks for listening to the University of Birmingham Sport podcast for the autumn term.

We will catch you up on what's been happening at UBSport as we look at the return of Premier Squash to the University, as well as also looking back at all the fireworks from this year's Xplosion, plus all the happenings in campus sport.

We are also delighted to speak to Olympic steeplechase hopeful Luke Gunn about his attempt to make team GB and finally we chat to the University's director of sport Zena Wooldridge about bringing the Jamaican Olympic team to Birmingham and the very exciting changes ahead for the University of Birmingham Sport.

But first we start with squash and the long anticipated return of the Premier Squash league to the Munrow Centre Courts. The prospect of some of the world's best known squash players has already drawn in the crowds twice this term and Birmingham's home opener at the end of October saw world number one Nick Matthews bring his star studded Duffield team to town.

Duffield made their experience show and eventually prevailed but when we caught up with the commonwealth champion Matthews, he had some words of encouragement for Birmingham and said he was taken aback by the atmosphere as he prepared for the World Open in Rotterdam the following week.

Nick Matthews: 'That was the biggest crowd I have ever played against in PSL match so it's fantastic everyone you know, unfortunately I heard a few people couldn't get in because it was so rammed, so that bodes well and hopefully everyone will get behind the university team for the rest of the season. I think that we are the reigning champion of the North group so on paper we are the number one seeds if you like. So hopefully people will still get behind them and support the team.'

'I'm a lot happier with the preparation going in to the Worlds. You're never quite sure where you are at until you get on the court in the first round but you know this is as close as to replicate that as close as you can with a big crowd, you can train at home at your club and play games but until you play in front of a crowd you don't know where you are at. So I was pleased with it today.'

World number one Nick Matthew there and we are delighted to say that Nick was successful in his defence of his World open title. The next home tie for Birmingham came in the form of Oxford who had their own superstars to boast about. While Oxford went on to win the tie, Birmingham held their own against some of the most experienced pros in the league.

Birmingham number one Chris Ryder pushed world number 18, the hard hitting Cameron Pilley all the way in a mammoth five game thriller and when we chatted to Chris at the end of the evening he could only see the positives from playing some of the best in the World week in, week out.

Chris Ryder: 'Yeh but it's fantastic for me, I'm not one of the highest ranked players at number one but it's a great opportunity for me to play these guys, I feel like I'm getting a lot of this. So it's just exposure to these guys for me and I'm going to get closer and closer.'

Alasdair Cresswell: 'The same applies to your team do you think, certainly what I saw from the youngsters, they look like they are improving as well'

Chris Ryder: 'Yeh I think so, we've got James Earls at four, and he's a very attacking player, very quick and you're just going to learn against these steady professionals how much you can get away with really. It's good to be positive and attacking but you know there are times when you have got to steady the ship a little bit and that's what he could have done better today and he'll learn from that.'

Alasdair Cresswell: 'Does it feel like the team has settled into the standard of play as well required for your win against Pontefract and how key has that been?'

Chris Ryder: 'That was a good confidence boost to get off the bottom of the table and record our first win as you are nervous until then about it. We can relax now and enjoy the season and we are going to be underdogs in most matches, but that's fine, you know we are happy to host these really good teams and you know we will do better and better.'

Alasdair Cresswell: 'Well every time you seem to host these teams you get another big crowd has this been really encouraging to see how many people have been turning out to watch you guys?'

Chris Ryder: 'It's nice for squash in the West Midlands you know, to see that people really want to come and support. You've got five or six clubs all sending 20 people here and they are keen. They are all knowledgeable crowds and the students are keen here as well it seems. They are always interested and in chatting to the players and that's nice to see. It's really nice for the players as well.'

Now every year around Bonfire night the Bournebrook pitch hosts one of the biggest nights in University sport, not only just here at Birmingham but in the entire Country. Xplosion returned with an extravaganza of fireworks, cheerleaders and American Football. With the University of Birmingham Lions hosting the Nottingham Trent Renegades for their British Universities American Football league curtain raiser. Cruising to a comfortable 25-6 victory and cheered on by over 3,000 fellow students and alumni.

Head coach Wayne Hill gave us his thoughts after the game.

Wayne Hill: 'It was a steady start and lots of mistakes but it's a big occasion and I think nerves are there for everyone. It's also the opportunity to blood some of the new players that we have picked up this year, so but we know we have got a lot of work on if we want to develop this season.'

Alasdair Cresswell: 'Was that one of the major challenges this season, to get that rotation in the line-ups?'

Wayne Hill: 'Yeah, yeah we have got a squad this year of 92 and there is obviously only 11 on the field at any one time. We wanted to stick with our starters for a while, but we wanted to try out our new guys. They have done a lot of work in getting prepared and a hell of a lot of work in the promotion for Xplosion, so they deserved to be on the field. So those guys are going to contribute to us throughout the season and we are going to need them in the play offs. So let's blood them early so we can get them developed.'

Alasdair Cresswell: 'Particularly a strong defensive performance, so obviously a bit of a shame to concede that last touchdown at the end. Is that a frustration?'

Wayne Hill: 'Yeah, I'm a defensive coach at heart so that is a frustration for me but that came from mental mistakes. So we need to cut those mental mistakes out and it wasn't really due to play in the field. So we cut those mental mistakes out and we shouldn't be in that position.'

Alasdair Cresswell: 'How much does it mean to have that kind of atmosphere at American Football, because no other sport in this University gets treatment like this, and how much does it mean to you as a coach for your sport to be appreciated by so many people?'

Wayne Hill: 'It's tremendous. It's a relationship that when I first started here 14 years ago, it was a commitment from us to build a strong relationship with the athletic union and that was developed over my first term as head coach, and now in my second term it's something that I really wanted to develop. The equipment the athletic union provide for us is tremendous, but I think you see the work that goes into it from the players and recruitment, and obviously with sky sports here, we were on BBC WM during the week, we were flying at Wembley regarding Xplosion, and I think this is the biggest crowd we have ever had here at Xplosion to date. I think the feeling is

that we are contributing to the partnership.

Also in attendance was sky sports and their NFL on Sunday's analyst, former Arizona Cardinals full back Cecil Martin. When we caught up with Cecil he told us just how impressed he was with the evenings entertainment.

Cecil Martin: 'It was more people that I thought there was going to be, and I think that everyone was really enjoying not just the game, but everything that surrounding the game. The performances, the fireworks, the atmosphere was really great. I think that's the word I was trying to get, the atmosphere. You see when you are talking about an American Football game or any sporting event in America. Like the NFL, it's all about the atmosphere and I think the people here, whether they like American football or not they had a really positive experience. I really feel like these guys are working harder and harder, and getting better and better and the main thing is that the coaches are passionate and the players are passionate. And you know the Birmingham team that won, they have been really successful over the last few years and I think they take a lot of pride in representing their University and I think they take pride in being a good football team, So that's what we saw today!

'This is a University team, you know, these are the purest students athletes and I take a lot of pride in having gotten the chance to be a student-athlete and represent my university and so when you talk about standard of play, you are talking about guys that are really here because they love playing the game. They also have to go to class and try to do other things so this is a higher standard as you'll get from the stand point of a University type setting. That's how the game is going to grow. Guys like this may end up being coaches or going in to the business world and do other things but the end of the day they will always get back to the game and young people will get chance to experience that. When I talk to the guys here, they love this university and they talk about Birmingham with pride and that's an important piece of it. when you are wearing your helmet and your wearing that jersey and you've got the name of school on it you are representing something that I think a lot of these guys feel, and that's a deeper appreciation'

You're listening to the University of Birmingham Sport podcast next we turn to a brief roundup of how the rest of our teams are getting on this year.

Week one of the BUCS Championships saw a strong start for the Rugby Union men's first team as they saw Worcester 38-0'

Here is Joe Townsend with some of the games highlights.

A lovely kick from Thomas and he is being chased by Palmer.

And a fabulous tackle and it should be a try and it is! And that should be game over.

Number 9, Guliford, with a real poacher's effort going past two to Wood. Wood to number 11 Montgomery and it's all over.

It's an excellent score in the corner by Matthews the outside centre, and it was all down to the quick ball down on the other side of the pitch by Guliford. One missed pass and Thomas fed the number 8 and then Matthews was there to touch down in the corner.'

It's been an overall impressive season so far for the women's lacrosse firsts. With only one defeat to date and they overcame that disappointment with a comfortable 13-6 victory over Edinburgh a week later.

The speeds there another strong run from Alice Brushaw, can she get a shot away, she looks like she can, she does. Brilliant work from Alice Brushaw, using her superior speed in all the ways to cut and weave past two Edinburgh defenders and finally get a strong shot away and it's 8-2 to Birmingham.

Lafferty makes, brushes of a tackle and gets a shot away. That's a captain's goal from Kirsten Lafferty, and makes it 13-6. Stems the tide for Birmingham as she brushes off a couple of Edinburgh tackles and flies past the Edinburgh keeper who is starting to look a bit helpless.

The men's hockey firsts secured their biggest win of the season with an awe inspiring 3-0 victory against bitter rivals Loughborough. As Louis Atkinson explains.

The instructions being barked by the Birmingham keeper and Birmingham can want it here in an advanced position it's a cross into the box for a chance and it must go in, and it is, it is in for Birmingham.

A really, really entertaining second half. The first half was a bit drab, a bit niggly at times but they really livened up with those two goals early on in the second half and then the eventual third came and Birmingham were cruising. A very good result for Birmingham today.

The women's Rugby firsts are well poised in the in the Premier North Division, with an assured home win over Manchester, the pick of their four wins so far.

Rook set up just about five metres off the line, here's Mackinder. She will spin it wide.

Great pass from Mackinder and that finds Jay Stevens on the far side who runs it in for the try.

Brilliant passing from Aston and then to Mackinder, and Stevens cutting a good line. She went in without a finger being laid on her.

Katie-Jo Read, here's Mackinder now breaking through and Mackinder, she has broken her tackle and she'll look to stroll under the post here, but she is under a bit of pressure from the Manchester.

But Mackinder makes sure she goes under the posts. Good work from Garnet Mackinder. The score is now 17-0 and Mackinder you definitely fancy to stick this one over to make it 19-0 as Birmingham look like they might just run away with it from here.

She could have just run straight to the line, but instead she took on the fight, ran for underneath the post and gave her an extra ten yards or so to run but did it in style.

A somewhat mixed season for the Men's Football first team has included some hard fought victories including this one 2-nil win over Manchester.

Frankie Conway with all the goals

Siddons gets the ball clear for Manchester, only as far as the on rushing Birmingham left back who does well to find Phillips. He has stayed on the right flank after the corner. Phillips plays the cross in Truleavens looking to claim it. Truleavens in there and the ball to score. There is a kerfuffle inside the Manchester six yard box and the balls been turned in. It's 1-0.

The balls broken to Phillips on the right flank, Phillips has found the captain Wordell. Wordells crossed it in and the balls fell to Truleaven and it's in again. Truleavens turned it in for what we believe is his second goal of the game. Phillips did good work on the right flank. The ball was turned in and Truleaven was waiting eight yards out to steer the ball into the bottom left hand corner. 2-0, thirty minutes into the the second half, 15 minutes to go. Surely that is the final nail in the Manchester coffin.

Now we're nearly half a year away from the London 2012 Olympic games, and as the rush to complete the Olympic Park continues in London, some of the University of Birmingham's top athletes are beginning their final preparations ahead a crucial period to gain selection to Team GB in the coming months. UBSport caught up with one of those athletes UK Steeplechase champion and University of Birmingham Sport's Scholarship Manager Luke Gunn. Luke set off on a year's sabbatical at the start of November first heading to Kenya to begin his preparation. Before he jetted off, Luke talked to us about his Olympic

dream and what he needs to do to be in London come August.

Luke Gunn: Yeah, well obviously we are in a figures based society today, so I need 8.23.1, that's the time I need to hit. My previous time is 8.28 so I need to find 5 seconds from somewhere. The qualifying period is from the first of April until pretty much the end of June. So it's quite a tight, small window. So my plan is, basically from as early as possible in April to start racing.

Really I need to have the time before our Olympic trials which are the end of June, so I've got probably about seven weeks. It's a real fine window. Seven week to get the time, then if I get the time in the bag, the end of June if I finish in the first two at the trials in Birmingham here, then I've done almost everything I can to fulfil the criteria, then obviously the games are about five weeks after that.

My training is roughly about 14-15 hours a week anyway, and that's actual physically out the door running or in the gym, lifting weights or doing foot drills, technique work. Then on top of that I have massage, physio, obviously getting the food in, getting rest. Believe it or not, running for like two hours a day knocks your legs about, so I spend about another two hours a day trying to put myself back in order by stretching and everything like that.

Also the mental side to be able to actually focus on what I'm doing not just in a race but every day, rather than just fit it at the end of a day's work before I get home. So it's going to be the focus of the day, not just an added on activity.

Alasdair Cresswell: You were a student here, an undergraduate student here and now you are part of the team at UBSport. What has the Uni got in terms of facilities and things like support that has really benefited you?

Luke Gunn: I chose here because of the Athletics club itself. The athletics club is still the biggest club on campus. It's what we are really good at, especially distance running and that's still true today. I came nearly 9 years ago. I'm still coached by the same coach as when I came here, Bud Baldaro, and he has been the guiding influence for the last 9 years. He has been one of the reasons the athletes chose here. But recently in the last three of four years, the support team we have got here in terms of strength and conditioning, coaching, sports psychologist, sports science. I was literally on the treadmill this morning doing testing to make sure that I knew exactly the right paces I should be running at in Kenya. It's a real, real professional set up and one you probably see in National governing bodies more so than Universities but it's basically, just as my motto for this year, no stone left unturned.

Alasdair Cresswell: Turning now towards the mental side, we are very privileged to have some past Olympians from this University, both as Alumni and even working in the team here at UBSport. How important and how much of a support have they been, have you talked to them much about their experiences?

Luke Gunn: Yeah, I mean, we've got plenty that aren't based around here that have done their graduate degrees here and it's still a network when you go to these events and meet people like Chrissie Wellington, Paul Manning. I've had the privilege of meeting both of them. You mention Birmingham and their eyes light up and they want to talk to you. Obviously we have Christina Boxer on our own staff and every time we pass each other in the corridor she is always asking how is it going, have you made sure you thought of this before you go up to Kenya. But also on the flip side people that you won't have heard of yet that I train with day to day are still an inspiration to me, whether they are older or younger, having such a positive group of people around you at the University and you are checking that you have done everything you can, because the undergrads that you are meant to be mentoring are doing a bit more than you, you need to check yourself.

Alasdair Cresswell: Perhaps the most important thing to mention is your fiancée Hannah England. Are you really looking forward to just training with her and getting prepared for this with her. How important is she going to be, I can't imagine she won't be.

Luke Gunn: She would love that question, it's more of the point of how excited is she to train with me. Obviously Hannah had an amazing year last year in terms of professionalism and there is not many more do it more thoroughly. I missed the Olympics in summer, as did Hannah, three years ago and we were a couple then, both of us sitting at home watching Beijing was agonizing. For her she then just exploded within two years with frustration, mine hasn't quite gone that way. I'm very much part of her support team and she constitutes most of my support team. We can go through the journey together. There are going to be ups and downs for both of us and hopefully we can both be in the Olympic park together. In terms of actually running with her and training with her, she's not quick enough, she can't keep up!

Alasdair Cresswell: Just one final question, there's much been made about the impact of a local Olympic Games will have on our athletes. Is this the Olympics you want to be at more than any?

Luke Gunn: Absolutely. I remember when it was broadcast and I jumped up and down like England had won the World Cup. The chance to be able to walk out in a GB vest and they announce your name over the tannoy and the crowd cheer for you louder than anybody else in that field, whether it's an Olympic Champion in the field or not. That is just, for me, is the soul image I am focusing on. To get on that line and hear my name called out

And you'll no doubt be able to keep up to date with Luke's progress by following him @gunnyluke on Twitter, and while you're there why not follow @UBSport for the most up to date news of goings on at UB Sport

Now, some of you may have been forgiven for missing a big piece of news from UB Sport over the summer, that of a changing face of sport here at the University of Birmingham and indeed a changing face of the campus as well. When we caught up with Director of Sport Zena Wooldridge the other week, she explained the proposed development of a new Sports centre in the South East Corner of the University and what it would mean for Sport here at Birmingham

Zena Wooldridge: Well it's evident that we need to replace what we have and we can't replace it here. We need something that is bigger and much better quality, because we need to look forward in terms of serving, satisfying the students growing expectations.

So what we are going to do is build a big, new indoor centre down in the south east corner. It looks a huge site when you look at it and it's going to be a big building.

AC: what kind of timeline are we looking at for this

ZW: because it's such a large building it will take two years to build, or something like that. we haven't gone for planning permission yet, that will be in the new year. We are looking to start building the building in the late summer and hopefully, if everything were to go perfectly to plan, to try to get it open for the beginning of 2015.

AC: what are the new facilities going to have that we don't have already?

ZW: to some extent, a larger and more modern version of what we have. What's really important for us to is to look at where the gaps are in student provision and know where students struggle in terms of getting in and having space. It's going to have a bigger swimming pool, and it will be Birmingham's 50m swimming pool, it will have a much larger gym so it won't be as crowded. It'll get more people in but won't be as crowded. A bigger sports hall, it will have six squash courts, two activity rooms rather than one so we can do more classes, it will have a larger martial arts room, it will have a climbing wall. I think that is most of what it will have, and that takes up a lot of space.

The university has recognised that sport is a distinctive feature of what Birmingham life is about, and that's academically as well as the playing of sport. Hence the very significant investment.

AC: How are they going to benefit, particularly looking at the sport teams and the elite athletes we have?

ZW: A small amount of this extra space will be allocated a bit towards sports clubs, but actually most of the extra space will allocated towards more students being able to have more recreational space. There will be more classes, more intramural sport, alot more casual space for students to take part in sport and a little bit more for performance. What's really going to help with the performance, near in mind we have a really good infrastructure here for supporting student experience including scholarships and performance sport, because we wouldn't be at number two in BUCS with the limited facilities we've got if that wasn't a good infrastructure. What the new facilities will do will attract a higher proportion of the talented students to choose Birmingham as their first choice University, I think we are going to be a big magnet. A big,

big magnet, and that will help us then to raise our standard.

Exciting news indeed! Perhaps just as exciting is the much anticipated arrival of the Jamaican Olympic team and Olympic fever to the campus. Yet to get them here was only as a result of considerable effort from the team here at UB Sport. Zena explained what made Birmingham so attractive to the Jamaicans

ZW: Number 1 because the city of Birmingham has a very long and very good reputation for athletics, it's an international athletics city, so both the USA and Jamaica as track and field nations are used to coming to Birmingham. They feel comfortable with it, they have a good relationship with the city council that hosts this major event and we have got a good partnership with the city council as well in sport. So we worked hard together to lobby USA and once USA had signed up Jamaica were more interested.

Jamaica is much smaller team than the USA, for the Jamaicans the University is an absolutely ideal venue because they fit very nicely into Conference Park. They can walk to the track, the track is quite private, they have a weights room downstairs. Everything that they want really that satisfy's their needs for training facilities, rest and relaxation and the right food obviously as well. They are the really important factors that when the Jamaicans came here they felt that this venue could provide all of that.

AC: What potential benefit is going to come out of it from UBSport, is it really just going to be the further enhancement of the reputation?

ZW: Yeah it is really, to that extent it's saying that you know you have the blue ribbon event of the Olympics track and field, Jamaica, one of those leading teams has chosen the University of Birmingham, to be a first choice in terms of the environment that we can create at the University of Birmingham is a great for our reputation, and it's good for our marketing. It's likely that the media profile in the week or so before the Olympics, will be right across the middle of the Country, and it will be in three venues. It will be at Loughborough because the GB team, or some of the GB team will based at Loughborough, it will be at Alexandra Stadium because that's where the USA team is and it will be here because the Jamaicans are here.

AC: Final questions, a bit of a side, but still tied in with the Olympics preparations, we have spoken to Luke Gunn who is obviously one of our top athletes here. What's UBSport doing to help the top athletes in this University achieve their Olympic dreams for 2012?

ZW: I think it's providing that performance environment for them, and that performance environment means that we are providing them with all of the right services and the right kind of support such that if they are students, they can actually juggle their academic studies and their training, and their competition and we support them as best as we can. For many of them when they have graduated they have stayed here as their training base, which is great for us because it reflects the fact we are doing something right and they have chosen to train here. For the whole University it's a really tangible link and something to watch something to connect us directly in to the Olympics and to be really excited about

Well I'm afraid that's all we have time for in this term's edition, keep up to date with the team on our various social networking pages, or visit the website. Until next time, I've been Alasdair Cresswell and this has been the University of Birmingham Sports podcast.

