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Young Olympic Hopefuls Set the Pace for 2012

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As the Beijing Games come to a close, a number of talented young athletes in Birmingham are already poised for London 2012.

A boxer, a pole vaulter and a cyclist are among the budding future Olympians with sports scholarships at the University of Birmingham. Not only will the gifted students be studying for their degrees, but they will also be focussed on realising their dream of competing and winning medals in London in 2012.

And they will be following in some famous footsteps (or cycle tracks) as Zena Wooldridge, Director of Sport at the University of Birmingham, explains: “Our sports scholars are exceptional young people; they are multi-talented in sport and academic excellence. Birmingham graduates such as Olympic Champion cyclist Paul Manning is an inspiration to young people everywhere. This next generation of athletes will be inspires by Team GB’s fantastic performances in Beijing; and will also inspire other young people to see how sport can change people’s lives, and inspire the nation.”

Among the 36 sports scholars at Birmingham are:

Nick Cruchley: Having finished 4th at the 2007 IAAF World Youth Championships, Stourbridge Pole Vaulter Nick, who trains at Halesowen Club, is one of the UK’s most promising athletes. Currently ranked no 3 U20 (with one year remaining in the age group), Nick has recently been selected for the GB team for the 2008 Commonwealth Youth Games. Also a keen swimmer, Nick has won National age group medals.

Alison Leonard: Is one of Britain’s most outstanding young middle distance runners. The 800m athlete is one of numerous ‘On Camp with Kelly’ athletes at the university, Alison recently finished 4th at the 2008 IAAF World Junior Championships, where she showed great maturity in running a new personal best of 2:02.15, which not only makes her the top ranked junior in the country, but also places her among the best seniors.

Stacey Johnson: The middle distance and cross country runner from Lichfield. Stacey had a break through year in 2008, winning team gold with the Great Britain team at the World University Cross Country Championships, where she finished 7th. In 2008, Stacey also helped the University of Birmingham to their 3rd consecutive British Universities title, won the National U23 1500m title and the British Universities Indoor 3000m title. She was the university’s 2007-2008 Sports Personality of the Year.

Hannah England: The 1500m runner achieved a super Olympic qualifying time of 4:06.19 but the UK number 3 was unlucky to miss out on Olympic selection, though did get a trip to Beijing as one of Britain’s outstanding 2012 prospects. Hannah is one of the original ‘On Camp with Kelly’ athletes and during her year abroad at Florida State University won American Collegiate (NCAA) titles at the Mile (indoors) and 1500m.

Tom Langford: A native of Devon, boxer Tom now trains under Thomas Chaney at Hall Green Boxing club. The former British U16 (2005) and U17 Champion (2006), finished runner-up in the British 2008 U19 Championships and won the English University title.

Helen Scott: Track cyclist Helen trains at Halesowen Athletics and Cycling Club. Helen has been a regular medallist at national age group track cycling championships since 2004. She has competed for the England Junior sprint team and in 2007 won bronze in the Kerin at the Senior National Track Championships.

Victoria Hawkins: Hailing from Cheltenham, Victoria is a regular in the GB Waterpolo team and over the past few years has played in International tournaments around Europe. Everything that the squad are doing now is in preparation for those Games, and Victoria will be doing everything she can to maintain her place in that tea.

Ends

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Notes to Editor:

The university offers Sports Scholarships to support students who compete at international level of their sport. Individuals receive an individualised support package, tailored to meet their student-athlete needs. In addition to funding that can be put towards competition, training and equipment expenses, athletes receive strength and conditioning support, free gym access, sports psychology, nutrition and physiology support, access to physiotherapy and massage, are invited to workshops on various performance lifestyle topics, and are assigned a personal mentor who helps them strike a balance between their sporting, academic and personal demands. Past recipients of a Scholarship include Allison Curbishley (Athletics 400m Olympic finalist); Shelley Newman (nee Drew, Athletics discus Commonwealth Games medallist); Tom Bertram (Olympic Hockey team) and Melanie Easter (Paralympic Swimming Champion).

This year’s other scholars are:

Athletics:

Lauren Howarth, IAAF World Junior Championship 3,000 finalist

Katie Knowles, Multiple national middle distance medals

James Wilkinson Selected for Commonwealth Youth Games

Ed Aston European Junior Champs 800m Competitor

Dean Miller International Para Athletics 800m Athlete

Julian Adeniran World & European 110m hurdles semi-finalist

Hannah Brooks European Junior Champs 800m Finalist

Jon Pepper European Junior Cross Country Competitor

Chris Smith World Junior Champs 800m Competitor

Sara Treacy Competed at World Junior Champs, WorldCross Country champs (x2) and European Cross Country Champs

Sarah Waldron, GB Junior Cross Country International

Boxing:

Alfie Sackey England Junior International

Cycling:

Rachael Turner British University 10km Time Trial Champion

Golf:

Sian James England Ladies Performance Squad

Andy Smedley Represented England Schoolboys; HC:+1

Lucy Williams England Ladies Performance Squad

Hockey:

Sarah Page England U21 Team

Ashlie Caddick England U21 Training squad

Alys Brooks Welsh U21 Team; Welsh Senior Squad

Rowing:

Emily Carter Represented England at 2007 Home Internat's

Nichola Bartlett European Universities Silver Medal

Rugby:

Laura Keates England U20 Team and Captain

Sailing:

Anna McKenzie 2007 Mirror World Champion

Squash:

Lotte Eriksen Norwegian International

Alistair Mutch Welsh International

Swimming:

Garry-Thomas Aspell Cypriot International

Triathlon:

Victoria Graves Bronze medallist at 2008European Junior

Duathlon Championships

Rebecca Milnes (TBC)2007 World Age Group Champion

Oliver Ziff 2008 World Age Group Silver Medallist

In addition, the university will welcome about 60 students on the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) - a Government funded programme that represents a unique partnership between sport and higher and further education.

On Camp with Kelly (OCWK) - Started in 2004 with the support and sponsorship from Norwich Union and has grown from strength to strength. Double Olympic Champion Dame Kelly Holmes set up OCWK because she wanted to help the future of female middle distance athletes. Her vision of OCWK was that it should be an educational development programme so that those attending gain life experiences as well as the knowledge of what it takes to become a world-class athlete. Further initiatives are planned to help support and mentor the next generation of British medal hopefuls. (Eight current Birmingham students are members, or have been members of the programme).

University of Birmingham: A sporting profile

• Top 3 sporting university

• A range of current and former internationals including Paul Manning (cyclist), Naomi Folkard (archery), Adam Pengelli (skeleton bob), Allison Curbishley (400m), Tom Bertram (hockey), Victor Ubogu (rugby union), Julie Crane (high jump), Shelley Newman (discus)

• University of Birmingham Sport is the brand name for all non-academic sport at Birmingham, including the Athletic Union. UB Sport employs 70 staff + 80 coaches and has an annual turnover of £3.4m. www.sport.bham.ac.uk

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