

From Birmingham to Beijing

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Three talented university graduates will be flying the flag for team GB and Birmingham when they compete in the international area at the Beijing Olympics.

Simon Mantell (hockey) Naomi Folkard (archery) and Paul Manning (cycling) will all be going for gold at the games, after successfully completing their studies at the University of Birmingham.

Simon Mantell, aged 24, who graduated with a degree in Commerce last year, will compete at his first Olympics as part of the Great Britain Men's Hockey Team.

Simon, whose hockey playing brother Richard will also represent Team GB at the Olympics, said his goal is to: "Come back with a medal, and to score some goals while we're out there."

Simon competed at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne where he scored with his first touch. He first picked up a hockey stick when he was four and he played for his local club Taunton Vale HC. He was the top goal-scorer in the 2006 World Cup, when he competed for England. He has had 40 England Caps and 18 GB Caps.

Naomi Folkard has two strings to her bow. As well as archery the music graduate is an accomplished violin player. This will be her second Olympic games – and still at the tender age of 24.

She said: "I'm really looking forward to the atmosphere in the competition venue, it will be amazing. Just being involved in the greatest sporting event of them all will be fantastic."

Naomi Folkard is currently ranked first in the UK in women's archery. In Athens 2004 Naomi was the youngest member of the Great Britain Olympic Archery Squad, where she finished 11th.

Since her Olympic debut, Naomi has continued to target success with pinpoint accuracy. In 2007 she won individual bronze at the World Field Archery Championships and individual silver at the European Indoor Target Championships. Taking gold as part of the women's recurve team at the European Outdoor Target Championships made her the first British recurve archer to win medals in all three disciplines at European or World level in one year.

Geology graduate Paul Manning, aged 33, won University Sport Birmingham's first Sports Achievement Award in 2007. Now the Olympic 'veteran' is hoping to win gold in cycling at Beijing.

"To go with the ambition of winning and then coming second is a massive disappointment, that is the way we think and feel about our competitions within British cycling," he said.

Paul's cycling achievements include two World Track Championship Gold Medals, a Commonwealth Gold and Olympic Bronze and Silver medals for Team Pursuit cycling. He also won a Gold medal for individual pursuit cycling at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

Meanwhile current University of Birmingham students, Hannah England and Sue Gilbert are set to take part in Britain's Olympic Ambition 2012 programme, announced last week by the British Olympic Association (BOA).

Middle distance hope Hannah, who is studying Biosciences and Hockey playing Geography student Sue Gilbert are among the young hopefuls who will all have their very own Olympic Experience.

The programme, designed to enhance athlete medal success at the London 2012 Olympic Games by providing talented potential team members with an opportunity to experience the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, will see approximately 150 athletes and coaches from 33 disciplines spend seven days in Macau and Beijing during the 2008 Olympic Games.

Athletes will visit the Team GB preparation camp in Macau, the Olympic Village and the Athletes' Lodge. In addition participants will be given the opportunity to watch two competition sessions for their specific discipline. The programme will be split into five phases during August.

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Notes to Editor:

Images of all three graduates are available. Please contact Anna Dingley or Lucy Hood for further information.

University Sport Birmingham (USB):

- University Sport Birmingham at the University of Birmingham aims to enhance the sporting experience of the University and its wider community by providing opportunities at all levels.
- The University is a Centre for Excellence for many sports including athletics, squash, hockey, gymnastics and triathlon.
- The University offers Sports Scholarships to support students who compete at international level of their sport. Past recipients of a Scholarship include Allison Curbishley (Athletics 400m Olympic finalist); Shelley Newman (nee Drew, Athletics discus Commonwealth Games medalist); Tom Bertram (Olympic Hockey team) and Melanie Easter (Paralympic Swimming Champion).