

## Adam Pengilly interview

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The University of Birmingham has been unmistakably linked to the London 2012 Olympics, from the campus being used for the Jamaican track and field teams pre-Olympic camp to having a number of alumni set to compete in the games, and one former student who is heavily involved is Adam Pengilly.

The 2000 Sport and Exercise Science graduate has competed for Great Britain at Skeleton, a sport in which the athlete adopts a face down, head first riding position on a sled, and flies down man-made ice tracks of up to 1.5km at speeds approaching 135 km/hr, in two Winter Olympics in 2006 and 2010. Previously at the 2002 Winter Olympics he helped coach the women's GB Bobsleigh team giving him the unlike honour of coaching at an Olympic games before competing in one.

The 34-year old now has a less precarious role in the Olympics as in 2010 he was elected by his fellow athletes to be part of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Athletes Commission.

The IOC is the supreme authority of the Olympic Movement, so it is a mark of prestige for Pengilly to have been elected into the exclusive body of members, and an indication of his esteemed status within winter sport.

He said of being elected to the role: 'I campaigned a lot in at the Winter Olympics in 2010, but there were nine other athletes going for the position, including some who had medalled at Olympic Games and were better known, so I wasn't expecting to get elected.

'It was a real privilege to be elected by my fellow athletes, and it's now a big responsibility to represent them.' Pengilly is one of elected 12 athletes on the Athletes Commission who see that the needs and interests of the athletes are considered when organising Olympic Games. As well as the IOC, Pengilly works with a number of other organisations such as the British Olympic Association (BOA), International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation (FIBT) and World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), which have broadened his experience and perception of the Olympics. 'It's interesting to see how an Olympic Games really works, as from an athlete's perspective you see from quite a narrow lens', he said.

Pengilly's first taste of the Olympics was in Salt Lake City in 2002, where he coached the Great Britain women's bobsleigh team, but hard work and dedication led to him competing individually at Skeleton in Turin in 2006 and Vancouver two years ago.

As Adam reflected on his experiences he explained the difference of coaching and competing at Olympic Games. 'It's very different. With coaching, there's not a lot you can do once you get to the start line but it was a good education about how the Olympics work and helped me understand more about sport from an overarching perspective. But nothing compares to competing as an athlete, it's fantastic. All three Olympic Games were different experiences.'

Pengilly will also be involved with London 2012 by hosting fellow IOC members and spending time with his constituency, as well as going to the Olympic Village to get athletes views on different issues.

He is extremely positive about the benefits of hosting this summer's Games. 'The investment into underprivileged areas is a huge benefit of hosting the Olympics. There'll be improvements in infrastructure in terms of transport links and a development of the community with a new school, shopping centre and NHS facilities, which will leave a great legacy.

'Also 98% of contracts from the organising committee and Olympic Delivery Authority have gone to British companies which will help the economy. I think the Olympic spirit will really capture the imagination of the public. It's a fantastic project, which will benefit many people in London, the UK and around the world.'

Pengilly looks back upon his time at Birmingham with similar pride. 'I had a wonderful time at Birmingham, I enjoyed my degree and made a lot of friends. From a sporting perspective, I perhaps had a bit too much fun and didn't develop as much as I should have. Had I worked harder in my first two years I might have competed at Bobsleigh in the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City, but then I wouldn't have ended up doing Skeleton, so I have no regrets.'

He added 'There are choices to make when you're at University, and some choose the path of an elite athlete. It really is a big opportunity for athletes to train and take advantage of the coaching on offer.'

The University of Birmingham is clearly proud of helping to produce such an influential sporting figure. At the annual Sports Awards Evening he was honoured for his contribution to sport in both in competitive and ambassadorial roles when he was presented prestigious Sporting Achievement Award.

Pengilly, a silver medallist at the FIBT World Championships in 2009, retired from Skeleton earlier this year to focus on his role with the IOC as well as to spend more time with his family. 'Winter sports are very difficult. There is a lot of time away from home, sometimes you could be away from October until March, and the conditions can be tough.'

Will retirement diminish Pengilly's involvement with sport? It certainly doesn't seem to be. 'I'm an IOC member until 2018, and I have a lot more work to do and ideas I'd love to try and implement. It's a complex environment to be involved in with so many sports and countries to represent, and there are often different views. It can be a little slow but we're making good progress.'