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Gareth Sheppard

Gareth Sheppard, Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences alumnus, talks about his time at the University of Birmingham and his career path to becoming Paralympic Performance Manager for British Cycling.

Transcript of the video

Title: Sport and Exercise Sciences alumnus Gareth Sheppard

Duration: 5.46 mins

Speaker Names (if given): **S1** Gareth Sheppard - Paralympic Performance Manager, British Cycling

My name's Gareth Sheppard. I'm the Paralympic Performance Manager for British Cycling. I've been with them since then end of 2008 and my role with British Cycling is very much everything that's off the field of play. So, it's managing the support team around the athletes, working with coaches on a day-to-day basis, managing the team at major events and looking after some of the logistical elements of it as well.

I graduated in 1999 and for a couple of years after that I just basically trained as a full-time cyclist. I was on the GB and Welsh cycling team at the time and just getting the opportunity to be able to compete in some major races. I retired I suppose, in a word, in 2002 and basically moved into the leisure management field and did my masters than alongside full-time work and then some coaching qualifications which opened the doors for British Cycling and then the opportunity just happened to come up at the right time.

A couple of the keys things I wanted to highlight is firstly, my role very much is leading a team of experts who have far more knowledge than I do

You know, when you are working with a team of experts they obviously know a lot more about their sport-specific field than you do and you are very reliant on them to a degree to be able to provide the right advice. What my university degree gave, and my coaching qualifications gave, is the ability to ask the right questions and to be able to do have that base level of knowledge that allows you to challenge them to be able to make sure that you come to the right conclusions and I think that's where it's given me a really good grounding in the role than I'm currently doing.

When I was deciding to come to university it was a simple choice and one the reasons that I chose Birmingham was because actually it had a higher level of teaching expertise and was renowned for doing so and ultimately it didn't have that kind of elitist feel and actually as an athlete you're surrounded by that 24/7 and it's actually nice to be surrounded by people where they weren't aspiring athletes, to be able to feel a little more relaxed in your surroundings and Birmingham gave a really good balance between the academic and the city itself. I really enjoyed my time here.

My main thing was obviously my cycling and that's pretty much what I did 24/7 outside of studying while I was here. To be honest if you dedicated to one sport and the focus is really with them and actually you spend most of the time with the cycling club and the experts that were here at Birmingham university both from a physiological testing perspective and out training on the roads whenever I got spare time between lectures.

My impression now coming back is very much that the facilities have moved on no end since I was at university here and it's really great to see the world-class facilities that the students now have access to. It's come a long way since being in some small portacabins, going away and doing your research project to actually having these fantastic labs around you and all this top end kit that I was very jealous of having walked back in. I think that I would have loved to have been able to access some of these facilities during my time at university.

The highlight for me was when I was awarded the Sporting Blue at the end of my tenure here at Birmingham University. I think that recognition for your sporting achievement is something that you're always going to carry with you. What I did in my dissertation in the final year I did a sport-specific one focussing on cycling and that was where you really got to be able to sink your teeth into something that was relevant to you. I did a piece of research on the difference between mountain bikers and road riders physiologically, and that was something that I've got to say I really enjoyed and probably for me was the highlight and culmination of three years hard work.

My aspirations are very much at the moment short-term. We have this big event called London 2012 looming on the horizon and very much all the energy and the focus is into achieving the best possible result we can there. Longer term than that we've got to look forward to Rio in 2016 and obviously in terms of what the sporting landscape is going to look like post the Olympic and Paralympic games. Hopefully we will deliver the level of success we're planning and aspiring to achieve at London and then be able to keep building from there towards Rio.

I think the top tip I could give is that you've really got to set yourself apart from the crowd. I think that while you're at university it's very easy to just go through the motions, to attend the lectures and do the basics to be able to get a degree but the workplace now is so so competitive that actually if you really want to go out there and secure the right job opportunity you've got set yourself apart from your other students here at Birmingham University and obviously the other sport sciences students across the country. And that is really only going to be done by gaining relevant work experience, putting the time down during the summer to be able to link into something that you are passionate about and being able to go out there and gain real life experience alongside your academic qualifications. And that really can set you one step ahead when you come to look for jobs post your time at the University of Birmingham.

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