Harriers race ahead with athletic achievements

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Looking back over its phenomenal success, Birchfield Harriers, which dates from 1877, will be creating a record of its achievements thanks to a grant of nearly £35,000 from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The Perry Barr-based club has been represented in every summer Olympic Games except one since 1908*. At London 2012 it supplied ten athletes, including three yet to compete at the Paralympics.

Among those seen in action in London's Olympic Stadium were 4x100 metres runner Mark Lewis-Francis (who was also a gold medallist in Athens in 2004), and Louise Hazel, Commonwealth heptathlon champion in 2010. In the Paralympic squad, wheelchair racer Mickey Bushell is seen as a hot prospect for a medal.

A former Gold-medal winning heptathlete, Denise Lewis [1], who was one of the BBC athletics commentators for London 2012 remembers the club fondly. She says: "I've always enjoyed athletics since school and my club Birchfield Harriers, as well as my mum, has always encouraged me."

In previous years, Birchfield can count Kelly Southerton [2], Judy Simpson [3], Daniel Caines [4], and Ian Stewart [5] among its members. No wonder the club refers to itself as the UK's premier athletics club.

Working in partnership with the Beth Johnson Foundation, Birchfield Residents Action Group, local schools, Age UK, Midland Heart, and Birmingham Archives, the club will be asking residents, supporters and former athletes to share their memories of its activities and success stories over the years.

Reyahn King, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: "This project brings together the local community and people of all ages to celebrate the fine athletic achievements of this remarkable club whose members have contributed so much to the UK's sporting history over the past century."

Referring to the ten Birchfield Harriers athletes taking part in London 2012, the club's vice-chair Stuart Paul said: "This is a significant addition to the 100 Birchfield Athletes who became Olympians in the last 100 years. The project will allow us to highlight both excellence of our athletes and the other members of the club who have contributed to establishing the Birchfield Harriers as one of Birmingham's iconic sporting institutions."

For the Beth Johnson Foundation, Judy Crabb, said: "This is a great opportunity not just to capture and re-tell important local history but to break down barriers between younger and older people, develop new partnerships and create imaginative materials that will have a life beyond the project."

Volunteers will be trained to interview and record the memories of those associated with the club over the past 60 years and, together with artefacts and information held in the club's archives, a DVD and exhibition will be created alongside a range of educational materials.

Notes to editors

*The only Summer Olympics in which Birchfield Harriers has not been represented since 1908 was in 1952.

[1] Denise Lewis – Heptathlete – Gold Medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympics and one of BBC's athletics commentators for London 2012.

[2] Kelly Southerton – Heptathlete – Bronze medallist at the 2004 Athens Olympics, Gold medallist at the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

[3] Judy Simpson – Heptathlete – Gold medallist in Commonwealth Games 1986, silver medallist in 1962 and bronze medal in 1990.

[4] Daniel Caines – Runner – World 4x400 metres European Champion in 2002 and World Indoor 400 metres Champion in 2001.

[5] Ian Stewart – Runner – Bronze medallist in 5,000 metres in the 1972 Munich Olympics and a former European, Commonwealth and European Indoor 5,000 metres Champion.

Further information

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