



In our latest spotlight on the work of the Youth Sport Trust, Katie Smith reports from its showpiece Youth Sport Games

Young high flyers

Since London successfully won the bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, the focus on competitive sport in the UK is greater than ever.

Last month, some of the country's most promising young athletes across eight sports had the opportunity to experience a major multi-sport event at the second UK School Games in Coventry. The best school-aged competitors, each selected by their sport's national governing body, competed in athletics, fencing, gymnastics, swimming, judo, volleyball, badminton and table-tennis, with disability events in table-tennis, athletics and swimming.

The four-day competition was opened by Olympic legend, Daley Thompson, at the city's Sky Dome Arena. Other special guests attending the ice spectacular included Kevin

Brennan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families, and local stars of the *Britain's Got Talent* TV programme, the Kombat Breakers.

There were 1,300 competitors battling for honours at five venues across the city. The fierce competition saw both a world junior record and a national junior record broken in athletics and a national junior record beaten in swimming, along with a total of 797 medals given out.

Aled Davies threw a world junior record in the men's ambulant shot put on day two of the athletics at Warwick University. The Welshman, whose 10.35m effort was easily enough to take gold, said: 'I've been trying all year for the world record so I'm delighted to finally get it. It's been a great week here: great team, great support staff and a great event.'

The Games are aimed at giving these talented young people a taste of a major adult competition, which includes staying in an athletes' village. For many of the aspiring young athletes, it's the first time they have stayed on site with athletes from different sporting disciplines. The event organisers work closely with the British Olympic Foundation, which provides first-hand experience of the Olympics to help ensure the competitors get a realistic experience of the lifestyle and atmosphere that exists within an Olympic or Paralympic Village.

The athletes' village is also at the heart of the Games' education programme. This is designed to help support and develop the young athletes into future sporting stars. A number of athlete mentors, either professional or ex-professional athletes in the UK School Games sports, lived alongside



the young athletes, sharing mealtimes and travelling with them to and from events, passing on their experiences and advice.

These mentors included Adam Whitehead, (swimming), Giles Long (para-swimming), Jared Deacon and Sue Gilroy (table-tennis); Kate Howey (judo); James Williams (fencing), Ben Pipes (volleyball); and Craig Heap (gymnastics). The young athletes also had the opportunity to find out what it takes to be the very best, after quizzing some of Great Britain's most successful Olympians and Paralympians, including Dame Kelly Holmes and Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson, at a special question and answer session.

Dame Kelly said: 'The UK School Games are a great opportunity and I'm sure all the competitors gained valuable experience at this event while having fun and making lots of new friends. As a double Olympic champion and now national school sport champion, I am passionate about ensuring support for young elite performers and providing them with high-quality competitive opportunities.'

It is hoped this support will further develop these sporting hopefuls and instil in them the principles that will be needed for success in the Olympic and Paralympic Games at London 2012.

Fourteen regional competition managers also attended the Games. Their work involves improving competitive sporting opportunities at

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all levels through intra-school competitions. Attending the games was a great way for them to build links with governing bodies of sport, as well as take experiences back to their local area. Rachel Redmond, competition manager for Cheshire, explained: 'The opportunity to be closely involved in the running of a top-class event gave me ideas to replicate elements on a smaller scale in my local competitions.'

To coincide with the Games, a sport and physical activity roadshow was organised in Coventry to inspire people in the area by demonstrating the range of activities and facilities available. Tickets to a number of the events were also distributed free of charge to young people who have demonstrated a commitment or achievement within sport, so they were able to see top-level competition in action.

Helen Kelly, sports development manager for Coventry City Council, said the council was working hard to build on the enthusiasm generated through the Games. 'We recognise that inspiration is a critical factor in helping people to venture into sport, or progress to achieve their personal best. We hope to have inspired our young people to go on and achieve their own aims and dreams, by enabling them to watch this high-level event right on their doorstep.'

A longer term legacy of the Games is the development of databases to help the expertise of the games live on. One such initiative is Coventry Active (www.coventry.gov.uk/coventryactive), which is a one-stop online database of sport and leisure activities in the city. More than 160 different providers are

represented and seven of the UK School Games sports are included.

Like many sporting events, the UK School Games would not have taken place without the army of volunteers working behind the scenes. This year, 72 of them were young people who helped with an array of tasks – from dealing with media and supporting the athletes, to helping with scoring.

Funding is already in place to support the Games until 2011 with other host locations identified as The West of England (Bath and Bristol), Wales, Tyne and Wear and Sheffield. A total of £2.3 million in National Lottery funding has been awarded to the Youth Sport Trust through the Big Lottery Fund, to develop the UK School Games until 2011 and for the 2007 Games. Visa was the presenting sponsor of the 2007 Games, which were also supported by Coventry City Council.

Steve Grainger, chief executive of the Youth Sport Trust, said: 'The second successful UK School Games in Coventry have demonstrated just how much young sporting talent there is in the UK, exemplified by the quality of the competition we've witnessed.'

'This year's event has also been greatly enhanced by the contribution of the young volunteers, technical officials and ambassadors. Together with the competitors, they have all made this an inspirational weekend. We look forward to next year when Bath and Bristol host the third UK School Games, which will help us give even more young people the experience of a major sporting event, so they can enjoy the benefits that competitive sport can offer.'



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