

News in brief

Staccato reports from the cultural typeface

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Bleak mid-winter results for community clubs

Results from the biggest survey of community sports clubs ever undertaken in the UK and release as the year turned showed a gloomy outlook for this country's 150,000 clubs. The poll of 2,000 clubs covering 40 different sports showed that financial health, membership levels and facility access are all challenges faced by clubs up and down the UK. The key findings were that the average club has seen its surplus falling by almost half (45%) since 2008 to just over £1,000; more than 1 in 4 clubs are running at a loss and a further 23% are only just breaking even; that adult membership has fallen by 11% since 2008; and that with volunteer retention an issue for 53% of sports clubs, 2 out of 3 clubs are also concerned about recruiting new members and cite generating sufficient income as a concern. Tim Lamb, chief executive of the Sport and Recreation Alliance, who released the bad news, said: "It seems that many clubs are witnessing a worrying vicious circle. As membership levels fall, club incomes drop. Clubs then reduce their spending and investment in the club infrastructure is reduced. If economic conditions worsen we will lose many clubs that are a vital part of the fabric of our communities, and with them, their facilities, expertise and a generation of volunteers."

STA launch revolutionary package

An affordable online management tool that promises to revolutionise the way leisure operators and swim schools manage their pools and staff has been launched by STA. Called STA Admin, the simple-to-use, one-stop site will allow leisure organisations to keep account of staff training, qualifications, assessments, health and safety, and pool management. It is already in trials with a major international leisure and hotel chain. Leading swim schools and other organisations have shown great interest and are also looking to implement it. Alan Siddons, STA business development director, said: "We are very excited to be launching this innovative system as we believe it will radically change the way that leisure organisations and companies manage key areas of their business. It will transform efficiencies and enable the promotion of best and safe practice, particularly in relation to health and safety, staff training and qualifications. Without doubt, this is one of our most exciting technological advancements to date."

Foundation funds for future flyers

Talented young sports men and women across the south of England have until 20 February to apply for more than £400,000 of funding from the GLL Sport Foundation. The foundation, established to support and develop athletes in order to help them achieve their Olympic and Paralympic dreams at London 2012, Rio 2016 and beyond, already supports a number of world-class



FRESH-LAID OUTRAGE: The turning of the year marked a major change in the way UK eggs are produced with the banning in this country of battery farming. The growth of one of the more idiosyncratic leisure pursuits covered by The Leisure Review will be affected with the keeping of backyard hens no longer fuelled by the re-homing of the 15,000 battery hens which the British Hen Welfare Trust have saved from slaughter last year alone. This major victory for the campaigning organisation and their partners in the farming industry will, however, be seriously undermined by the British government's pusillanimous refusal to ban the import of battery produced eggs from Poland, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Latvia, and Greece. Egg consumers are being asked to boycott any foodstuffs from these countries which may contain eggs and so are the readers of The Leisure Review. The picture above is of some the chickens re-homed by our accounts department and her family. These sorry specimens are the real product of battery farming, not the cheap mass-produced fairy cakes being banged out by the major supermarkets.

athletes including European bronze medallist Perri Shakes-Drayton (pictured). To be eligible for a grant, young sportsmen and women must live, be in education or affiliated to a sports club in a part of London or the south of England in which GLL or its partners operate. Find out more at <http://www.gllsportfoundation.org>

New year, new business model

Grassroots sports coaching company District Sports has seen in the new year by launching a new business concept designed to help individuals take the required steps in operating their own sports coaching company. The District Sports Business Box is a simple, affordable option for sports enthusiasts or trained sports coaches to take the next steps in achieving a career doing something they are passionate about. Consultant Neil Bond explained it as “a great new way for coaches to get into business for themselves by buying into our company brand, philosophy, marketing and operational know-how for a one-off fee. We offer up-front training and advice but because we are not a franchising company our associates have freedom to adapt and build their own business, putting their personal stamp on an already very effective business model.”

Different perspectives on the licensed trade

There were two very different takes available on the recent parliamentary debate in which MPs unanimously passed a motion “requiring the government to commission an independent review of self-regulation in the pub sector”. From CAMRA, great delight that pubcos are being shackled but from the British Beer & Pub Association (their ampersand) the complaint that “we are disappointed that MPs have supported calls for further red tape for pubs”. Red tape, that is which stops pubcos, essentially overheated property companies, treating tenants like serfs and driving perfectly viable pubs out of business so they can be sold as “development sites”.

Former PM’s home town snags leisure investment

Gordon Brown may no longer be prime minister but his influence must still be being felt in the cash-strapped Kingdom of Fife where the county council has broken ground on the second of three new-build leisure centres. The first was in Dunfermline just up the road from The Broon’s Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath constituency, with the second one slap bang in K.D.Y. as the locals call the home of Raith Rovers.

GLL dip toe in budget market

GLL, the social enterprise that runs over 100 leisure centres across the south of England, has branched out into the budget gym market by opening a 92-station fitness centre in a London suburb. Named with the same lack of ostentation which characterises the budget gym concept in general, Gym Bexleyheath will “offer a ‘no frills’ approach to fitness, but without compromising on standards”, according to GLL’s operations director Andy McCabe.

Her Maj: 60 years of unofficial portraits

One of The Leisure Review’s favourite galleries, the Cartoon Museum in London, is celebrating the Diamond Jubilee with a humorous history of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. Running from 1 February to 8 April, Her Maj follows the Queen as she emerges from near invisibility into cartoons. Originally respectfully echoing her official image on coins, stamps and banknotes, often portraying her in profile or from behind, cartoonists adopted different attitudes to the Queen as the embodiment of monarchy and the state as her reign progressed. The exhibition includes 80 works by over thirty cartoonists including Steve Bell, Peter

Brookes, Dave Brown, Michael Cummings, Fluck and Law, Stanley Franklin, Nicholas Garland, Carl Giles, Martin Honeysett, Nicola Jennings, John Jensen, Richard Jolley, MAC, Ken Pyne, Martin Rowson, E. H. Shepard, Ralph Steadman and Trog.

Inspired coaching in Highlands and Islands

The reach of the London Olympic Games may be wider than some people think with Argyll and Bute Council's fifth annual Coaching Champions programme being awarded the 2012 Inspire Mark, which, given that the two month programme boasts 56 coaching courses from mountain navigation and netball to triathlon and table tennis, should be no surprise. The event has evolved from its first year, which saw 150 participants doing football, rugby, netball and orienteering, to this expanded event for 450 participants, which community sport lead manager Willie Young describes as "the largest in Scotland if not farther afield. We work with clubs, Active Schools, schools and communities in Argyll and Bute to identify needs within sports for succession training of foundation-level coaches in regular sports such as football and rugby, then identify other sports with potential for growth or introduction to the area." The numbers involved are remarkable given the unique geographical challenges. "Due to our rural and island geography," explained Young, "we have difficulty in getting minimum numbers for some sports, so with the first weekend in February, now established as our sports coaching weekend, we offer free transport from across our area, with people travelling up to 200 miles in a day to attend a course."

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