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School sport: chasing inspiration

On the occasion of our 50th edition we asked the most powerful woman, and one of the most influential people of any gender, Baroness Sue Campbell, to offer her take on the state of the sporting nation. As chair of the Youth Sport Trust she looks ahead to what lies in store for school sport in 2012 and beyond.

After seven years of waiting we are now just a few months away from the world's greatest sporting event, the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. For many of us the wait has felt like a marathon but we are now entering the stadium with just the final 400 metres to go. The party has nearly started.

It will be a magnificent celebration of sport that will grip the nation and I have every confidence we will put on a show for the world that will make us all proud. Our role, in school sport, is to ensure the great sporting achievements that will be witnessed this summer capture the imagination of a whole generation of young people and inspire them to take part in sport.

It is well documented that school sport has been through a difficult period in recent times and while recognising that we are still in a period of transition we can also look forward with excitement and anticipation. 2012 itself promises to be a very special sporting year for schools. The Sainsbury's School Games, which the Youth Sport Trust has been commissioned by Sport England to deliver, will see thousands of schools up and down the country holding local sports competitions and regional festivals as well as around 1,600 young people competing in the flagship national event at the Olympic Park in May.

Lloyds TSB National School Sport Week is set to be bigger than ever this year with schools getting the chance to stage their own games and capture the excitement of London 2012. A new addition this year is London 2012 World Sport Day, taking place on 25 June, the first day of National School Sport Week. World Sport Day is a celebration where schools can welcome the world to the UK with young people learning about the teams, athletes and culture of the 205 competing nations.

The Youth Sport Strategy announced by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in January brings welcome investment to an area of sport where there is a need to tackle participation rates – when young people leave school. It is clearly designed to create strong links between community sports providers and schools and it is important that views from both sides are considered as it moves forward. The Youth Sport Trust would welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with Sport England to help shape the implementation of the strategy where it impacts on schools to ensure the investment is maximised.

Only recently I spoke at our latest Youth Sport Trust National Conference in Telford. This was an excellent opportunity to meet with school leaders and update them on some the progress that is being made in school sport. One such highlight is the Change4life sports clubs initiative which is funded by the Department of Health. Working with the Youth Sport Trust, the initiative is designed to increase the number of school-based sports clubs and it is proving very successful. The latest research shows the initiative has led more than 10,800 'non-sporty' young people to now choose sport which is an extremely positive step. The Department of Health has confirmed extended funding for this that will see even greater opportunities to engage young people in sport.

We have undoubtedly been through some challenging times in school sport but it is very important that we focus on the opportunities there are now and in the future. London 2012 in particular should be a catalyst for inspiring a generation to take up sport and schools have an absolutely critical role to play in maximising this opportunity and inspiring their pupils through sport.

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