

Wednesday 14 November 2007

TONY BLAIR SPORTS FOUNDATION TO GIVE GOLD MEDAL HOPEFULS A CHANCE TO SHINE

Children in the North East will have new opportunities to take part and be coached in competitive sport, thanks to a new foundation being launched today.

The Tony Blair Sports Foundation will increase participation in sport by young people, particularly those who are currently socially excluded, by inspiring more adults to become trained coaches; by providing access to high quality nationally-accredited training for those we recruit; and by helping to match coaches with the schools and sports clubs which need them.

The four sports the foundation will initially focus on are indoor rowing, tennis, athletics and football. Tony Blair was joined at the launch by inspirational sporting figures including Olympic athlete Steve Cram, Great Run supremo Brendan Foster, Lawn Tennis Association Chief Roger Draper, triple world rowing champion Tom Kay world rowing and champion double Olympic rowing champion James Cracknell.

At the launch the first wave of projects for schools in the North East were launched covering tennis and indoor rowing.

James Cracknell unveiled the first project that will be delivered by the Tony Blair Sports Foundation in partnership with Concept2: a new indoor rowing challenge for the 31 School Sport Partnerships in the North East, starting in Sedgfield.

If fully subscribed, the indoor rowing programme will involve 250 schools, and 70,000 children in its first year alone.

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Concept 2, the world's biggest distributors of rowing machines, will provide the equipment and link with local business to train volunteers to coach within schools. Indoor rowing is a modern sport that offers people of all ages and abilities the chance to adopt a healthy, active, lifestyle.

Double Olympic champion James Cracknell said: "The partnership between the Tony Blair Sports Foundation and Concept2 has the potential to make a real impact on the lives of young people. As far as I am concerned, the more children we can introduce to indoor rowing, the better. It will give them the chance to have fun, get fit, and find out what they can achieve when they put their minds to it."

Secondly, the foundation will work closely with the LTA team in the North East to develop tennis in the area and in particular inspire more juniors to pick up a racket and play competitively.

One of its main focuses will be to run an annual competition, "The Tony Blair Challenge Cup", for school children in the region to encourage more youngsters to take up the sport and play regularly. Providing more opportunities for juniors to compete is key to developing British tennis and there is the potential for hundreds of children in the area to take part.

Roger Draper announced the news of the competition at the launch. He said: "Next year will see the first annual Tony Blair Challenge Cup and we hope it will be the start of something that continues to grow.

"Increasing the number of competitions for young players is so important if we are going to develop tennis in this country and find more stars of the future. Having the support of the foundation will be a huge boost and will create a great buzz around tennis in the area."

Tony Blair said: "The North East gave me the chance to get on and make a contribution to our country. I want to continue to repay that confidence by giving kids the chance to be inspired by competitive sport; to give adults the chance to feel that unmistakable pride that comes from seeing their hard work turned into a child's winning smile."

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