

# THOUGHT LEADERS

Industry experts share their views on the current issues affecting sport

## ARE WE READY FOR THE OLYMPIC BOOM?

JOHN GOODBODY



Will the clarion call of Jennie Price that the Olympics will generate a unique opportunity for people to embrace physical exercise be answered? When Sport England's chief executive officer told Sporta at the House of Commons in January that the members of the sports trust association needed to be ready for the boom in interest after the Games, there was much self-questioning.

After all, the experience from previous Olympics is that there is no rise in sporting participation in the country hosting the Games. But because legacy has always been at the forefront of London getting the Olympics, more preparations have been made this time.

Take Rochdale. An £11m leisure centre is being opened this summer, just as the Olympic torch goes through the Lancashire town. Craig McAteer, the

managing director at Rochdale Borough-wide Cultural Trust, explains: "A new centre was needed and had been part of the development programme. But the Olympics will hopefully provide the catalyst for an increase in participation."

The trust, which has a 15-year contract to administer leisure and arts facilities in Rochdale, has been touring round schools to generate interest in the new site, which is being put up alongside the 1930s swimming pool complex, which eventually will be demolished. This will include an eight-lane 25m pool; a teaching pool with moveable floor; gymnasiums, including one for children; and a sports hall. McAteer says: "We are optimistic that there will be an explosion of interest off the back of the Games."

In London, Greenwich Leisure, which runs half the leisure facilities in the London boroughs, is equally hopeful that

there will be a boom in the numbers of people taking exercise. Mark Sesnan, its managing director, says: "We've been struggling against the timetable to get everything ready but comprehensive web portals will be up to tell people where they can go and we are constantly looking at better pricing and convenient opening hours. Gone are the days when most borough facilities were run-down. Now they're like private clubs."

The target for the annual users for the Olympic Aquatic Centre (re-opening in 2014) and Multi-use Arena (re-opening next year) is 800,000. The Games will certainly have left a tangible legacy in the capital if that figure is reached.

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## A THINK TANK FOR EFFECTIVE SPORT POLICY

NICK KING



It was with great pride, enormous excitement and a modicum of trepidation that the Sports Think Tank was formally launched at the end of January by myself and my fellow director, Andy Reed.

The think tank is the first in the UK that is wholly devoted to sport and to sports policy making and it aims to fulfil a unique role – sitting in the middle of academics, practitioners, policy-makers, the media and the wider sports world and helping develop the most effective policies possible.

Research and evidence are central to all successful policy-making and sport should not regard itself as a special case. The think tank will therefore be working to ensure that the best and most up to date evidence from the UK and beyond is central to the policy solutions it recommends.

Much of that evidence will come from sport itself, of course – which is why we are keen to hear from as many people within sport as possible. Dialogue and debate are a key part of our vision for the Sports Think Tank and we anticipate that the website will become a central hub for criticism, comment and a constructive exchange of views.

So far the comments have been entirely positive and we have been delighted with the reception we have received from the world of sport, which has universally welcomed this new venture.

Without this backing our job would be far harder, and we are therefore delighted to have had early pledges of support from high profile figures including Lord Sebastian Coe, Sir Keith Mills and Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson as well as financial backing from a number of committed partners.

The challenge now is to turn support and enthusiasm into action and our plans are designed to do just that. Some of our early research topics include 'Local Authorities and Sport Provision' and 'The Future Funding of Sport' and we plan to kick off our event series before long.

A regular programme of research reports, roundtables and other events aims to produce ground-breaking thinking, to provide opportunities for debate and to put sport centre-stage politically. Beyond that, we want you to contribute to our vision and our strategy. Ultimately we know our success will always be dependent on sport's input and sport's voice being heard which is why Andy and I are keen to hear from you.

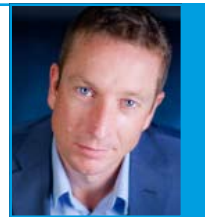
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Chief executives are encouraging partners to create innovative, integrated services

## WHAT CHIEF EXECUTIVES WANT

DUNCAN WOOD-ALLUM



**W**hat do chief executives and top council politicians want from sport and leisure?

There are a number of emerging themes we've encountered on our travels as strategic advisers. These themes should provide leaders of sport and leisure and their operating partners with a challenge and I hope, a degree of optimism looking ahead.

Targeted, cost-effective interventions that deliver outcomes will continue to be positively encouraged. "Give us bang for our buck," is the chief's battle cry with a challenge to redirect funding to high-value, high-impact activities. You'll be expected to dump the high cost, low impact services if you've not done so already.

Innovation gets you to the top table and keeps you there. Using examples like Birmingham City Council's Be Active programme, you can "lead the cross-cutting

revolution," where sport and leisure has the potential to act as a pathfinder for other larger directorates in achieving outcomes through integrated services.

A big headache for chiefs is the rising cost of social care and health. For many "public health and well-being is the greatest opportunity" for the sector – our role in acting as a catalyst for enabling behaviour change is key to unlocking longer-term savings in spiralling costs of an ageing and unhealthy nation.

The chiefs also want partners who can deliver outside their facilities as well as operate them. "Don't just run our leisure centres" is a key challenge I'm hearing. To create an active borough you'll be expected to animate parks and open spaces, make mass participation events happen, enable schools to open up to the community, engage with citizens in care homes and vulnerable young

people, support sports clubs and inspire major stakeholders to play their part in an holistic approach to sport and physical activity. This is likely to be linked to your wider cultural portfolio of children's play, libraries, parks, museums, tourism and heritage. I'm predicting that those operators that step up to this challenge and innovate, will secure the high value contracts of the future.

Summing up, there will be differences in style and politics, but the savvy service heads and operators are taking a steer from the chief – those that do will be seen as part of the future solution, rather than becoming a sitting duck for further 'efficiency savings'. Quackers.

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