

## WILL 2012 BROADEN OUR HORIZONS?

Consider Stockholm 1912 - The Games which are best remembered for the exploits of Jim Thorpe (USA), arguably the best all-round athlete of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He took golds in what were then two multi-event competitions up for grabs, namely the pentathlon followed by the decathlon.

Now, what of the 2012 Games in our capital city, London? At the time of formulating ideas for this article to be circulated with the Autumn issue of SCAN I became aware of the relevance of Thorpe's outstanding achievements 100 years ago. As I sat comfortably in front of the TV, on the occasion of the Diamond League meeting - yes, you guessed it - STOCKHOLM, 29<sup>th</sup> July!!.... the emergence of our new boy on the block became apparent (not, however, before co-presenters Jonathan Edwards and Colin Jackson made the observation that never in the history of the Games had our country produced a gold medal winner in the men's Discus). At last we had such a prospect in the form of a giant teenager - Lawrence Okoye!

Let's backtrack to the McCain "UK JumpsFest and ThrowsFest" on the 9<sup>th</sup> July at Barnet Copthall. Even then a sports reporter from the *Mail on Sunday*, commenting on the men's Discus, made the following observation:-

"Hopes for a hometown triumph in the London Olympics were given an extraordinary boost in an event few thought could yield a medal prospect."

It is understandable that a sports correspondent sums up the general consensus, long held, concerning our prospects at the highest level in Field competition! In the context of the above meeting, however, look at the marks posted by the top three throwers (all from Surrey):- Lawrence Okoye 67.63m, Abdul Buhari 65.44m, Chris Scott 63.00m. The only Discus exponent who could have spoiled the party was Welshman Brett Morse.

I should like to make a point that the state of throwing in this particular event is as good as it has ever been in this country and in the county of Surrey. If I may be so bold as to point out a similar ONE-TWO-THREE in the Under 17 Age Group occurred at this year's County and County Schools Championships involving Nathan Carty, Faraz Rafi and Omar Reid (a clean sweep for Croydon athletes on both occasions but with a different order).

In the Summer of 2010, when Lawrence Okoye was taking his A levels, he was also coming to the end of a five-year spell with my coaching group at Croydon Sports Arena. He was already something of a role model to the three boys mentioned above and now, twelve months on, they still hold him in high regard. In like manner, my under 17 girls aspire to follow in the footsteps of Surrey and GB International, Jade Nicholls, the country's leading woman Discus thrower.

I consider myself privileged to be part of the process by which young athletes in our country render service to their team at club and regional levels of competition in a discipline long regarded as the Cinderella of Track and Field.

*Ian Briggs*

Postscript:

When compiling the data which would enable me to put together the preceding composition centring on the emergence of a highly talented Track and Field athlete, little did I realise that a postscript would be necessary, Sadly, however, the *Daily Mail* reporter, Jim Brookes, brought to our attention in the sports columns of that paper that a Discus coach with a dubious history had

been invited by no less than UK Athletics to oversee an event at Sutton Arena at which those invited to attend included our own rising star, Lawrence Okoye.

As his one-time coach in the latter part of his senior school education my reaction to the news was, frankly, one of despair and disbelief. Furthermore, why do the spokespersons pressed to give answers on behalf of UKA come up with feeble reasons as to why the Iclander is right for the job? Is this just another way of saying that well-trying and proven coaches residing in this country are not up to doing it? Do we accept that, and I quote, "Mr Hafsteinsson is used in a technical capacity to distil technical expertise in this event"?

I should like to extend my good wishes to Lawrence Okoye in the firm belief that he will represent Team GB in the not too distant future. This, in spite of his failure to make the team for the World Championships both at the trials in Birmingham and at the Crystal Palace Grand Prix. There is no short cut in the pursuit of excellence, Lawrence, but this said, you could still be there for your country in 2012 - the nation is behind you, young man.

*Ian Briggs*