

# Otium



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# Issue 11

Editor's letter

## Welcome to the 11th edition of Otium, a special issue dedicated to the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris.

As we dive into the excitement, preparation, and passion that define Paris 2024, we're thrilled to bring you an array of compelling stories and expert insights from those at the forefront of international sport.

This edition is particularly special as it highlights the inspiring journeys of athletes and coaches, delves into the intricacies of event planning, and underscores the vital role of insurance in the world of sports.

We are thrilled to showcase an interview with Stuart Robinson, a gold medallist in Wheelchair Rugby. Stuart's story is one of resilience, dedication, and triumph. His anticipation of competing in Paris and the drive to medal once again offers a powerful reminder of the relentless pursuit of excellence. We also have an in-depth interview with Liam Briddon, the esteemed GB Climbing coach, who provides a unique perspective on the preparation and strategy involved in guiding athletes to the top of their game.

Running a summer sports event, whether it be the Olympic and Paralympic Games or a local fundraiser at your sport club, involves meticulous planning and comprehensive insurance coverage. We talk through the requirements for such events to help you understand the various types of coverage, to protect everyone from athletes, to organisers, to spectators.

Our Q&As with competitors in this year's Games offer a personal glimpse into their preparations, hopes, and challenges. These conversations highlight the diverse paths athletes take to reach the pinnacle of their sports and the universal themes of dedication, perseverance and passion that drive them.

At the core of this edition is our commitment to supporting the organisations and individuals who make sports possible. We recognise the pivotal role that national governing bodies and sports clubs play in nurturing talent, from someone's first taster session in a new sport to an Olympic or Paralympic gold medallist. The journey to the Olympics and Paralympics is a collective effort, and we are proud to be part of this vibrant community.

Let's celebrate the spirit of competition and the power of perseverance.

Best wishes,

**Emma Tildesley**  
Head of Sport & Entertainment, Regions



**Andy Goulbourne**  
Head of Client Service



Disclaimer:  
The content in this edition of Otium is Howden's own and not affiliated with the International Olympic Committee.



# Meet

# the team

**Andy Goulbourne**

Head of Client Service

**Amanda Wynne-Jones**

Account Executive

**Mike Farrell**

Account Executive

**James DeFroand**

Divisional Director

The team members featured in this edition are just a handful of our sport insurance experts.

→ [Visit our website](#) to discover the areas of insurance we can offer.



“  
No two days are  
the same and  
I get to meet  
different  
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what they need  
to achieve.”



# Andy Goulbourne

## What areas do you look after?

I'm responsible for all aspects of client service throughout the Sport & Entertainment team, but with a particular emphasis on how we work with National Governing and Representative Bodies.

## How long have you worked for Howden?

I've been with Howden for over 16 years, having previously worked as part of the Perkins Slade business, which was acquired by Howden.

## What's your favourite part of your job?

No two days are the same and I get to meet different people and have interesting discussions with them about what they need to achieve. My daughter tells me I just chat to people for a living, but the best part of the job is being able to find discuss the challenges that our clients face and help them with solutions.

## What's your favourite sport?

I'll watch any sport and particularly love rugby and football, although I support Rochdale AFC, which brings its challenges! The Olympics will be a highlight this year, of course. In terms of playing sport, I'm trying to improve my golf game (and it definitely needs improving).

## Tell us a bit about yourself

I have two daughters who have grown up now. They have busy lives, one of them is a World Champion Irish dancer, but I like to spend time with them when I can.

“

I really enjoy meeting and working with sports and recreation clients as they have a passion and enthusiasm for their sector which is infectious.

Amanda  
Wynne-Jones

#### What areas do you look after?

I am based in the Howden Birmingham office and my focus as an Account Executive is on insurance and risk management solutions for some of the largest Governing and Representative bodies of sports in the UK. This includes maintaining and supporting relationships with both customers and insurers.

#### How long have you worked for Howden?

Starting on a trainee programme, I have been with Howden (previously Perkins Slade) for nearly 35 years developing my knowledge within various teams. For the last 20 years, I've operated within the Sport & Entertainment team.

#### What's your favourite part of your job?

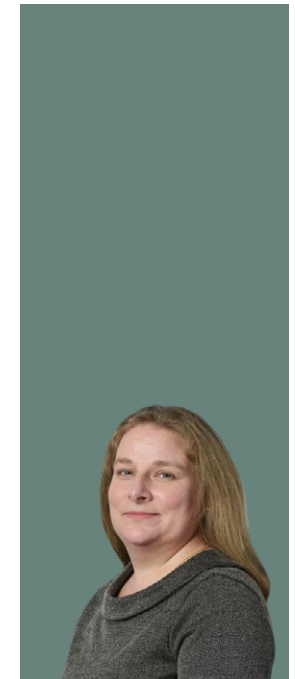
I really enjoy meeting and working with sports and recreation clients as they have a passion and enthusiasm for their sector which is infectious.

#### What's your favourite sport?

I don't have one specific favourite and enjoy watching various sports. There is often sport on the TV at home. I have more recently been a convert to cricket following the launch of The Hundred and never thought I would be following the test matches! Years ago, I enjoyed playing netball and running / athletics, primarily 100 and 200 metre sprints – injuries to ankles put an end to that!

#### Tell us a bit about yourself

Over the years, I've been involved with a Cub Scout group supporting at camps come rain or shine (usually rain), and volunteering with athletics, dance, and netball clubs where my family have been or are still involved. Growing up in a village in the Midlands gave me a love of the outdoors, I still feel most at peace outside and spend any free time in my garden.



# Mike Farrell

“ My favourite sport – where do I start? Football, rugby, american football, golf, cricket – you name it!



## What areas do you look after?

My role involves the account management of our Governing Body clients in Sport & Entertainment based out of our Birmingham office.

## How long have you worked for Howden?

I have been with Howden since April 2018. I had previously worked in the Sport team at Perkins Slade before Howden acquired them in 2015. Returning in 2018 allowed me to reconnect with a number of colleagues and clients. Since then, the sports team at Howden has grown exponentially.

## What's your favourite part of your job?

Working in the sports sector is incredibly rewarding. I am a sport enthusiast by my very nature, so the opportunity to work in the sector is fantastic. The clients I work with are so passionate and dedicated to their sport, it's a pleasure to work alongside them. This has allowed me to build some great relationships with clients in supporting them, and ensuring we provide them with a robust insurance and risk management programme.

## What's your favourite sport?

Where do I start? Football, rugby, american football, golf, cricket – you name it!

## Tell us a bit about yourself

In terms of playing sport, golf is my big passion. I try to get out as often as I can and hack around 18 holes for a few hours! I'm yet to make a hole-in-one, but I am sure that is just around the corner...

Alongside this, I also co-host a weekly american football podcast about my favourite team, the Pittsburgh Steelers.

I recently became a father for the first time. Little Conor is now 12 weeks old and is keeping us busy and entertained at home! Having him and a 2-year-old Cockapoo means there's never a dull moment.



“ My brother went to Cambridge and Yale Universities, my sister was a professional athlete for the GB Women’s Hockey team and I got to work for Howden – you decide who did best.



# James DeFroand

## What areas do you look after?

I work in the Sport team supporting our clients across the sports industry with their insurance programmes (both in the UK and worldwide) and helping to develop new client relationships.

## How long have you worked for Howden?

I've worked at Howden since November 2022, so coming up two years now, however I've worked in insurance for 13 years!

## What’s your favourite part of your job?

The people that I work with and on behalf of – I am very lucky to work with and for some amazing people.

## What’s your favourite sport?

As my wife works for England Netball, I probably should say netball as she will be reading this... genuinely, it is a great sport to watch!

## Tell us a bit about yourself

I am from Essex, my wife is expecting twins (who may be here when this is published). I am from a family of five. I'm the eldest of three children. My brother went to Cambridge and Yale Universities (he got the brains), my sister was a professional athlete for the GB Women's Hockey team (she got the sports genes) and I got to work for Howden – you decide who did best.

# Game plan

Essential steps  
for your sports  
club fundraisers



While your summer fundraiser might not be the Olympics, effective planning and management are essential for a successful event. Sports clubs can significantly benefit from detailed preparation and this guide outlines the critical steps in planning and managing your event, whether it's a summer barbeque or fireworks night.

# for success



Step 1.

# The importance of good management and planning

Successful events that run seamlessly do not happen by accident.

Whether it's a major international event, a school netball tournament, a charity football match, or a social event, they all start with a well-crafted plan. Planning helps identify and manage key risks, ensuring the successful delivery of your event.



Step 2.

# Construct your event plan

An event plan is your foundation – it includes key information on the individuals responsible for various tasks, specific areas of responsibility, and detailed logistical planning. When constructing an event plan, consider the following things:

1

## Event vision

Define what your event will look like. Clarify the purpose and goals – are you raising funds, celebrating an anniversary, or hosting a community event?

2

## Logistics

Plan entrance and exit to the venue, crowd movement, pinch points, and transportation to and from the venue. These details feed into the security plan and risk register.

3

## Team roles

Assign responsibilities, including the recruitment of event staff, volunteers, first aiders, and security personnel. Clear roles ensure accountability and smooth operations.

4

## Budgeting

Set a budget early on, considering costs like extra insurance, contractors, and contingency plans. Early financial planning helps avoid unexpected expenses and keeps the event on track.



Step 3.

# Identify and manage key risks

Conducting a risk assessment is crucial, regardless of your event size. This process ensures the safety of event staff, volunteers, players, and spectators, allowing them to enjoy the day worry-free.



- 1 Legal requirements**  
Ensure compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and related regulations. Even if you are not an employer, certain legal aspects may apply, such as obtaining licenses from local authorities.
- 2 Contingency planning**  
Plan for potential cancellations or unforeseen changes. Weather conditions, for example, can significantly impact outdoor events.
- 3 Safety measures**  
Address safety for all participants, spectators, and volunteers. This includes first aid availability, emergency access, and welfare facilities.
- 4 Financial protection**  
Plan for potential loss of revenue and irrecoverable costs. Proper insurance coverage is essential to mitigate financial risks.
- 5 Reputational risks**  
Protect the reputation of your club by ensuring the event is safe and well-managed.

For more detailed information, visit the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) at [HSE Event Safety](https://www.hse.gov.uk/event-safety).



## Specific risks to consider

Safety and success aren't achieved by chance – preparedness for weather conditions, the presence of first aid and clear emergency access routes, and considering intricacies around money handling, and volunteer training should be considered. Here are a few of our recommendations to consider:

1

### Weather

Prepare for sun protection or a waterlogged pitch. Have backup plans for different weather scenarios.

2

### First aid and emergencies

Ensure first aiders are present and emergency access routes are clear.

3

### Welfare and hygiene

Provide adequate toilets and changing rooms, ensuring cleanliness and hygiene.

4

### Money handling

Implement secure methods for handling cash, especially if collecting donations or selling tickets.

5

### Volunteer training

Train volunteers thoroughly to handle their responsibilities effectively and safely.

6

### Venue suitability

Consider the venue's safety and whether it is fit for purpose.

7

### Temporary structures

Check the stability and safety of any temporary structures.

8

### Contractor insurance

Verify that contractors have adequate insurance coverage.



“ Safety and success  
aren't achieved  
by chance.

## Put your plan into action

Executing your plan effectively requires flexibility and communication. Sometimes, unforeseen circumstances necessitate changes, and being able to adapt is crucial.

To maintain smooth communication, keep participants, spectators, and volunteers well-informed. Utilise social media, email, or messaging apps to relay any changes or important information promptly.

Documentation is also essential; record your planning, risk assessments, and management procedures. This thorough documentation is crucial for accountability and future reference.

Team coordination is another key aspect. Ensure all team members understand their roles and responsibilities. Regular meetings and clear communication channels help maintain coordination and efficiency.

On the day of the event, have a detailed schedule and checklist to guide operations. From setup to closing down after, make sure each part of your event is considered to ensure a seamless event.

“Thorough documentation is crucial for accountability and future reference.”





# Key areas where insurance can help

It is important to consider how your existing insurance policy will be affected by your event. Ask yourself or your broker – are you already covered? Are there any specific exclusions you should be aware of?

If you already have liability insurance, ensure your public liability and employers' liability policies cover the event. Consider the size and nature of the event when determining indemnity limits and also make sure that you check that third party contractors have their own liability insurance specifically covering them at your event.

You may be hiring in equipment specifically for the event. Make sure you understand any contractual requirements related to hired in equipment and ensure that the equipment is stored in accordance with any applicable security conditions within the contract, or your policy. You can also purchase Event Equipment insurance to protect you whilst you are hiring or borrowing equipment.

Finally, time, effort and expense go into planning an event so purchasing Event Cancellation insurance in advance of the event covers expenses or loss of revenue if the event is cancelled due unforeseen circumstances. Policies may also support costs associated with delays or rescheduling. Having a cancellation policy in place can ensure that your club is not left with a financial deficit due to circumstances out of your control.

Ask the Howden Sport & Entertainment team for their advice and help in keeping your event safe – whatever its size. Email our Risk and Relationship manager, [Louise Clark](#), to find out more.





GB Climbing's  
ascent to Paris 2024

# pinnacle new

# A

We spoke to GB Climbing performance coach Liam Briddon about the GB team's journey to the Paris Olympics, highlighting the sport's strides in inclusivity and support for future athletes. Briddon's path to coaching is as unique as climbing itself. Unlike many climbers who start young, Briddon began his climbing career at 21 during university. A shared interest with a friend ignited his passion, and combining his sports coaching course with climbing experiences set the stage for his future.

Over the past 12 years, Briddon's career has significantly progressed, culminating in his current role with GB Climbing. His transition from youth to senior coaching has allowed him to continue working with athletes he started with, such as Toby Roberts, Erin McNeice, and Dayan Akhtar, who now compete on the senior circuit and Olympic stages.



©Sam Pratt



Climbing is set to make its second Olympic appearance at Paris 2024 following its Tokyo debut – and GB Climbing team are getting ready to scale the leaderboard.

# The evolution of Olympic climbing



Teenage climbing sensation Toby Roberts and Yorkshire-born Hamish McArthur (who became the youngest member of the GB junior climbing squad at just 11) will become Britain's first male competitors at an Olympic Games, following in the footsteps of female athlete Shauna Coxsey, who made history in Tokyo as Britain's first Olympic climbing competitor in 2020.


Alongside the two men, Team GB is thrilled to announce two female climbers who will also be competing in Boulder and Lead, with Erin McNeice and Molly Thompson Smith filling the quota for GB's spots at this year's Games<sup>1</sup>.

As Toby's trainer, alongside Toby's dad Tristan, Liam has been preparing Toby for the new set up of the Olympic sport due to its evolution since the last Summer Olympics.

Climbing made its Olympic debut at the Tokyo 2020 Games, held in 2021 due to the pandemic. The format was a combined event featuring three disciplines: speed climbing, bouldering, and lead climbing. Speed climbing, a vertical race, is the most straightforward discipline and the fastest Olympic sport, though GB Climbing still has room to develop in this area. Boulder and Lead climbing, where the UK excels, focus on difficulty and endurance, respectively.

In Tokyo, the combined format required climbers to compete in all three disciplines, presenting unique challenges. Briddon explained that the format has since been modified for the Paris 2024 Games. Now, there are separate medals for Speed Climbing and a combined Boulder and Lead event, making it easier for athletes and the public to follow.





## Reaching new peaks: The climb to Olympic glory

The path to the Olympics is fraught with challenges. A huge part is managing the physical and mental load as the extensive competition schedule can lead to burnout if not carefully monitored. "It's all about getting to the Olympics in one piece," says Briddon. "It's really hard, but with the right support, our athletes are more than capable. There is also significant uncertainty surrounding the qualification process. You never know exactly how many points you need or who might be dropping in and out of competitions," he explains. "This unpredictability requires climbers to stay at their best throughout a long and tough season."

**“ Every climber’s training is unique. It’s about finding what works best for them, balancing intense workouts with the necessary recovery.**

Nonetheless, training for the Olympics is an arduous journey, characterised by long and demanding days in the climbing gym. The training sessions are gruelling, with a mix of technical climbing, strength conditioning and specific Boulder and Lead exercises. The winter months focus on building capacity and addressing any weaknesses identified in the previous season, whilst summer training adapts to the demands of upcoming competitions.

"Every climber's training is unique," says Briddon. "It's about finding what works best for them, balancing intense workouts with the necessary recovery." This tailored approach is crucial for maintaining peak performance levels and avoiding injuries.



# Rock-solid prevention: mitigating risks on the wall

With all the intense training comes risk of injury – the prevention of which is a critical aspect of any training regime. One strategy used to manage training load and mitigate injury is to use a periodised model, accounting for a heavy pre-season base phase. “We front-load a lot of training in the winter,” Briddon explains. “We functionally overreach, yes, it makes the athletes tired and their performance dips temporarily, but it’s all part of building the capacity they need for the season ahead.”

“It’s all part of building capacity.”

In-season, the focus shifts to maintaining this peak condition without overtraining. Flexibility in the training plan allows adjustments based on the athletes’ needs, ensuring they remain healthy and competitive.



A key advantage of the GB Climbing approach is that it enables coaches to travel through the ranks with their athletes. So often in athletics, as competitors move from junior to senior status, they have to leave their trusted coaches and mentors behind. In Briddon's case, it was while working at a commercial climbing gym that he helped four athletes qualify for GB Climbing's youth programme, later joining the GB Junior Coaching team and then transitioning to coaching senior athletes up to elite level.



# Ascend together: climbing's gender inclusive journey

The inclusion of climbing in the Olympics has already had a transformative impact on the sport. Visibility from the previous games has driven a surge in interest and participation. Climbing gyms across the UK are bustling with activity, providing a unique alternative to traditional fitness routines. "Climbing is more than a sport; it's a lifestyle," says Briddon. "It's about community, adventure and personal growth."

“ The sport's nature allows genders to compete on an equal footing.

Climbing is also a truly inclusive sport. Unlike many activities struggling with gender disparity, climbing presents a well-balanced arena. "If you walk into any local climbing gym, you'll see a reasonably good split between men and women," says Briddon. And this balance is evident at all levels, from youth participation to the elite squads.



©Sam Pratt

Climbing is also a truly inclusive sport. Unlike many activities struggling with gender disparity, climbing presents a well-balanced arena. "If you walk into any local climbing gym, you'll see a reasonably good split between men and women," says Briddon. "And this balance is evident at all levels, from youth participation to the elite squads.

"The sport's inherent nature allows both men and women to compete on an equal footing. This is highlighted by the phenomenal success of athletes like Slovenian climber Janja Garnbret, whose prowess could easily see her competing alongside men."

As Paris 2024 approaches, the anticipation continues to build. The GB Climbing team are not just aiming for medals; they're ambassadors for a sport that embodies commitment, resilience, and equality. Whether they bring home gold or simply inspire a new generation of climbers, their impact will be felt long after the games are over.

For those inspired by GB Climbing team's journey, more information and updates can be found on the [British Mountaineering Council's](#) website.



# Going for

## Wheelchair Rugby's road to Paris



As the world eagerly anticipates the Paris Paralympics 2024, starting at the end of August, the GB Wheelchair Rugby team stands poised for another thrilling chapter.

For Stuart Robinson, a gold medallist from the Tokyo Paralympics, the journey to Paris represents both a personal milestone and a testament to the sport's growing prominence. Reflecting on his experiences in Tokyo, Robinson shares insights into the unique challenges, mental resilience, and transformative power of wheelchair rugby.

# gold



## Triumph in Tokyo:



## overcoming adversity

Tokyo 2020 marked Robinson's debut at the Paralympic Games. The British squad, which had missed out on medals ever since wheelchair rugby was first introduced to the games in 1996, faced additional hurdles leading up to the event. "We found out we weren't going to get any UK Sport funding," Robinson recalls. "We wanted to be optimistic about getting a medal, but on the flip side we knew we didn't have the funding to pay athletes or improve training facilities. We just had to go out there, play, and perform."

The squad's journey was further complicated by the global pandemic. Training in garages, streets, and one-on-one sessions became the new norm. Yet, these makeshift training environments forged a resilient team spirit. "When Tokyo came around, I'd been working towards this since I was injured in Afghanistan in 2013, so to get on the court and play our first game against Canada was incredible," says Robinson. The absence of a live audience added another layer of intensity. "With no crowd due to COVID, I could hear the coaches loud and clear, which made it impossible to hide. I was on the floor, and I could hear the coaches shouting – and I just thought 'you've got to get up and get on with it – it's a gold medal match'. I'd gone from eight years earlier wondering what my life was going to look like, to achieving a gold medal."

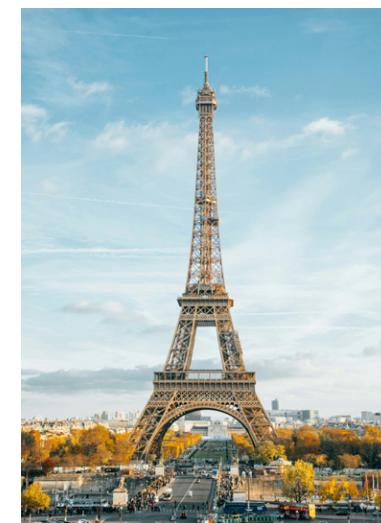
Despite these challenges, Robinson and his team triumphed, clinching gold, and marking a significant turning point in their careers.



## From Tokyo to Paris: a new chapter

Winning gold has significantly changed the dynamics of preparation for the British Wheelchair Rugby team and for this Olympics, the sport has received funding. Previously, athletes had to juggle training with secondary employment, but the funding agreed as Tokyo came to a close has allowed the team to focus entirely on their sport. "The approach is still the same – winning the competition should always be the priority," Robinson emphasises. "But now we can solely focus on training rather than something we're doing alongside full-time jobs."

As the Paralympics draw closer, the training intensity remains consistent, though the magnitude of the event is ever-present. "You treat it like any other tournament, but of course, at the back of your mind, you know it's a huge deal because it's the Paralympics," Robinson explains. Maintaining a balanced approach is crucial to avoid overexertion and potential injuries.



# The mental game: building resilience

Mental fortitude plays a critical role in Robinson's strategy. Reflecting on his experiences, he highlights the importance of staying focused despite setbacks. "If I had a bad decision that went against me, I can't then fold," he says. Drawing inspiration from the All-Blacks' captain's centring technique, Robinson has developed his own methods for mental resilience.

“ My strategy is to get on with it – I've built that mental resilience.

The team also works closely with sports psychologists to enhance their mental preparedness. This holistic approach ensures they are ready to face any challenge that comes their way in Paris.



## Navigating team dynamics and challenges

The lead-up to Paris has not been without its challenges. The Tokyo squad saw several key players retire, requiring a swift and effective integration of new members. "We had a big nucleus in the squad leave, and because the Games were delayed, our four-year cycle has been condensed into three years," Robinson notes.

Building team chemistry is paramount and Robinson also believes that international exposure is essential for new players to gain experience. "The easiest and best way is to give our new team members more exposure to not only training, but also that international exposure to show how we play against other teams."



## Growing the sport: increased participation and diversity

The Tokyo triumph has also spurred greater interest and participation in wheelchair rugby. "The more people we get in, the more people who play, and the more gems that'll pick it up quickly and potentially get into the GB squad," Robinson says. This surge in participation is vital for the sport's growth and success on the international stage.

Additionally, efforts to promote female participation in wheelchair rugby are showing promising results. The sport, being mixed gender, offers unique opportunities. "We do have a number of females in the development squad and we're getting more and more females playing the sport," Robinson shares. "Kylie Grimes was a part of our winning squad in 2020 and we have Faye West as part of our current squad – more and it's great to see women becoming involved". This inclusive approach not only broadens the talent pool but also aligns with the Paralympic movement's values of diversity and inclusion.

## Looking ahead: the Paris Paralympics

Robinson is particularly excited about one aspect of the upcoming Paris Paralympics: having a live audience. "At Tokyo, we only had a few members of the Olympic staff there. Going to Paris, playing in front of friends and family, is going to be incredible. I visited the stadium recently and you could even see the Eiffel Tower in the background from the stadium – it's going to be amazing" he says.

The rivalry with the French team, buoyed by their home crowd, adds an extra layer of excitement. "There's quite a tension between us and France at the moment, they're playing fantastically and of course they'll have the home crowd there – but I kind of like that, I'm looking forward to seeing what we can do."

## A personal journey: from injury to gold



Robinson's journey to wheelchair rugby began during his rehabilitation after a life-changing injury. "I played rugby before my accident, obviously nothing like wheelchair rugby but it aligned" he recounts. His initial foray into the sport was almost accidental, leading to his selection for the Invictus Games. "I just saw a poster in rehab after a gym session about wheelchair rugby. I won't lie, I thought it was for a taster session, so I went along, only to find it was the selection process for the Invictus Games... so I had to learn the sport and try to get selected for the squad all in one hit. Somehow, I got in, and that started my journey!"

From those early days to a gold medal podium finish in Tokyo, Robinson's story is one of perseverance and passion. As he prepares for Paris, he remains focused on the ultimate goal: defending their title and inspiring the next generation of wheelchair rugby athletes.

The road to the Paris Paralympics 2024 for Stuart Robinson and his team is a testament to resilience, teamwork, and the relentless pursuit of excellence. With the lessons learned from Tokyo and a renewed sense of purpose, they are ready to take on the world stage once again, showcasing the incredible spirit of wheelchair rugby.



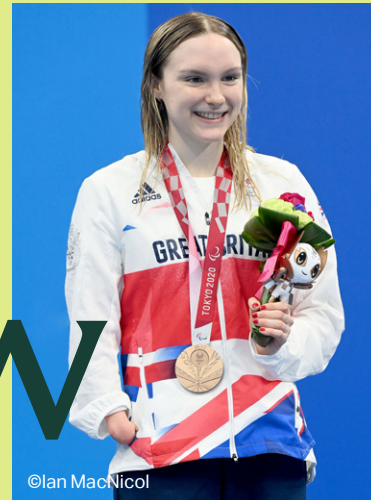
# Athlete

Q&As



Toni Shaw is a British Paralympic swimmer known for her remarkable achievements in the world of para-swimming. Following her breakthrough year in 2018, Shaw secured six medals at her debut World Para Swimming Championships in London in 2019.

# Toni Shaw



©Ian MacNicol

The University of Aberdeen athlete was part of the gold-winning British teams in the Women's 34pt 4x100m Freestyle Relay and 34pt 4x100m Medley Relay events, while she also secured individual S9 400m Freestyle and S9 100m Butterfly silvers, as well as bronze in the S9 100m Freestyle and S9 200m Individual Medley.

Her prowess was further demonstrated at the 2020 Summer Paralympics, where she secured a bronze medal in the women's 400 metre freestyle S9 event. Shaw's impressive performances continued, and in 2022, she clinched gold at the World Para Swimming Championships, earning the title of World Champion.

Toni Shaw's career is decorated with numerous accolades, including being a three-time World Champion and a two-time European Champion, underscoring her status as one of the leading figures in para swimming. We spoke to her about how she got into swimming, her training schedule, and some of her proudest moments too.



©Ian MacNicol

How long have you been involved in swimming? How did you get started and what inspired you to pursue your sport at a Paralympic level?

I have been involved in swimming since I was very young, having started swimming lessons when I was around 6 with my older sister. I was inspired after watching Ellie Simmonds compete at the London 2012 Paralympics and was motivated to keep at my passion in the hope to compete in the Paralympics myself... and now I have, and even won a medal!

If you could compete in any other Paralympic sport, which one would you choose and why?

I would love to do gymnastics, but I have absolutely zero talent at it, so I'll stick to swimming!

Could you describe what a typical pre-competition evening meal looks like for you? And what's your favourite cheat meal?

Spaghetti Bolognese is my classic pre-race meal. My favourite meal is fajitas and I LOVE a bit of chocolate too.

What's been the most memorable moment in your career so far?

Winning bronze in Tokyo. I made my Paralympic debut there and came home with a medal for the 400m freestyle. This was a huge moment for me, and I'm looking forward to Paris later this summer to hopefully come home with another medal.

Can you describe a typical day in your training schedule as you train in ambition for the Paralympics?

I train in the pool for 2 hours, 8 times a week and have 3 gym sessions – it's a lot of work, but I love what I do.

Who has been your biggest supporter throughout your journey?

All of my friends and family are so supportive, and I couldn't have done any of this without them.

What advice would you give to young athletes who aspire to compete in the Paralympics one day?

To enjoy every minute and take in every experience that you get.

## Swimming

“  
Enjoy  
every minute and  
take in every experience  
that you get.

Toni Shaw



Tom is a full-time athlete since graduating Warwick University where he earned his PhD in Chemistry. Originally from Croydon, he now lives in Kenilworth. Tom took up archery for the first time during his time at university.



# Tom Hall

Post-Covid and recovering from injury, Tom wanted to be competitive at a national/international level. It took a huge amount of work at rehab, as well as building his confidence and trust with his training. As a result, he made his Olympic debut at the Tokyo 2020 Games where he finished 33rd individually and fifth in the men's team.

In 2023, he won the National Tour Finals and the UK Masters. He earned a mixed team silver with Penny Healey at the European Grand Prix, and a mixed team bronze at the European Field Championships with Bryony Pitman. To cap his season, he won silver at the GT Open World Indoor Series stage in Luxembourg.

How long have you been involved in archery? How did you get started and what inspired you to pursue your sport at an Olympic level?

I'm coming up on 14 years in the sport now; I picked it up by accident at university, I'd been looking to try shooting again after doing that when I was younger in the air cadets and archery was next to the shooting stand at our sports fair! I had no thoughts about the Olympics to start with, but things escalated quickly as I picked up the sport and enjoyed being competitive, and after the first 6 years of working through club, student and national competitions I started to realise that bigger things could open up for me.

Do you have any pre-competition rituals or superstitions that you follow before a big event like the Olympics?

I'm not too superstitious, but I do have a written-out checklist of things to make sure I have with me to make sure I don't miss anything. There's a big asterisk next to "Water Bottle" that says FULL, you can guess how I learned to add that one on there!

What's been the most memorable moment in your career so far?

Picking my teammate Alex Wise up from the floor after I shot the final arrow to seal qualifying the team for Paris 2024. It's very recent but I think our focus, determination, and absolute trust in each other that day, will stay with me for a very long time.

## Archery





A typical training day at Lilleshall starts with me getting breakfast at the accommodation, before coming down to the range to shoot 2-3 hours in the morning. Often, we do some scoring or drills in this session, and I'll often shoot about 100 to 150 arrows. I'll have lunch that I've prepped for the week from home, then start another training session in the afternoon, this time often doing some more physical drills like shooting a heavier weight bow or incorporating balance exercises, this can take another 2-3 hours for another 80-120 arrows. Then it's over to the gym for a strength training or cardio session, we do quite a lot of full body training as archery is actually quite demanding on the whole body, not just the arms and shoulders!

Often at some point I've squeezed in a meeting with one of our psychologists, physios or PL (performance lifestyle) advisers during the day as well. After dinner I often chill out in my room, but sometimes I'll come back down for a few extra arrows in the evening, these are often more relaxed sessions by myself or with a few other athletes, and are best enjoyed with some decent tunes blaring on the speaker!

Can you describe a typical day in your training schedule as you train in ambition for the Olympics?

Who has been your biggest supporter throughout your journey?

My wife Emma, who shoots for the Irish team. We've been together since before I started archery, but she's always believed in me at every single stage. In the last selection trials for this year's team I was struggling to be consistent and threatening to fall behind, but it was Emma who gave me the talk I needed to hear and told me I had to believe in myself.

How do you stay motivated during tough times or setbacks in your training?

To be honest at this point I've had enough setbacks that half of the time I just have to remember I've come through everything else before and I probably will again! But there are things that help, I find trying to keep focused on what I can control vs what I can't – that makes a big difference.

What advice would you give to young athletes who aspire to compete in the Olympics one day?

Focus on being the absolute best you can be first. Then things like the Olympics will take care of themselves.

If you could only listen to one song to get pumped up before a competition, what would it be?

That's tough, I've got quite a few! But to get the job done in one track, I'd have to go with No Respect by The Qemists.

“ There are things that help, I find trying to keep focused on what I can control vs what I can't – that makes a big difference.



It's an enormous improvement. Being able to access the indoor range at any time has made it so much easier to make sure my bow is set up right, to check that my shot process is working well if we've been training out in bad weather, or just to get a quick extra session done in the evening.

And having an outdoor range with proper permanent facilities behind it makes it so much easier to use for regular training. It's also brought all the staff and athletes closer together so I can see the physios and psychologists much more often instead of them having to split themselves between us and the Paralympic program every day.

What difference has having a performance archery centre made to your training?

To find a club near you and start your own archery journey visit [startarchery.co.uk](http://startarchery.co.uk)

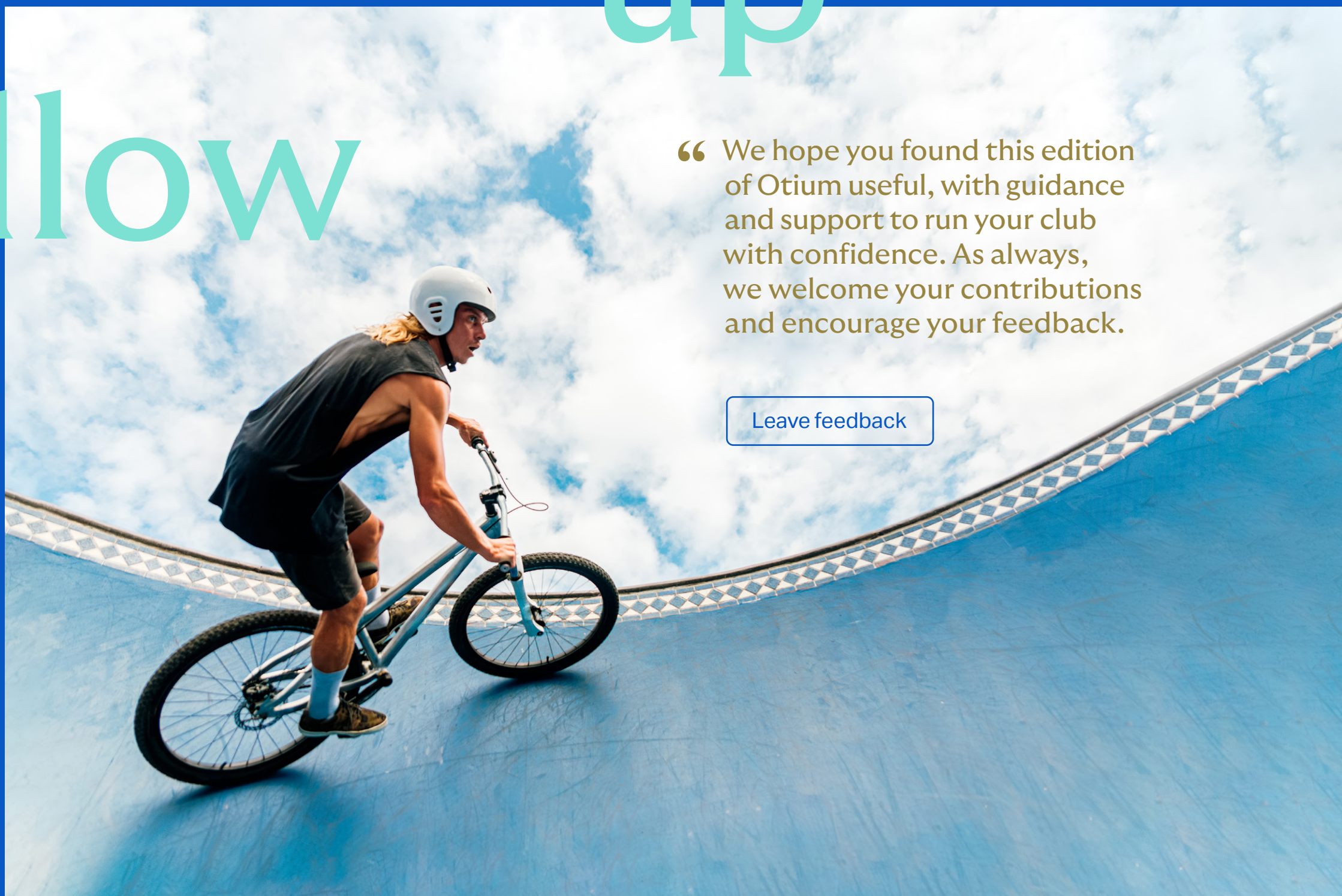


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