

2012 Day 2009 – Young people from the North Herts School Sports Partnership meet Olympic athlete Mark Richardson.

On Sunday 20th December, North Herts Leisure Centre in Letchworth was paid a visit by Olympic athlete Mark Richardson as part of Hertfordshire's 2012 Day celebrations to mark the forthcoming Games in 2012. Mark Richardson is a British former athlete who competed mainly in the 400 metres. One of his many accomplishments that is always well remembered is the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, United States. Mark competed for Great Britain in the 4 x 400 metres relay, alongside Roger Black, Iwan Thomas and Jamie Boulch. The team won a silver medal and set a UK record of 2:56:60 in the process.

A year later Mark was competing in the World Championships in Athens, running the anchor leg in the 4x400metre relay, winning the silver medal, and achieving an unofficial split time of 43.5 seconds. Overall the team ended up being awarded the gold medal as the US team were disqualified for doping violations.

Four young athletes from the North Herts School Sport Partnership, all successful competitors in sports including athletics, rugby and hockey, were lucky enough to be able to interview Mark. Kristian Fox, Nikki Alcock, Amy Wareing and Emily Wareing chatted to Mark about his training, the media, his diet and some other interesting issues.

Below is a summary of the interview:

1. Nikki – When and how did you get into athletics?

When I was eleven I was watching the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, watching Carl Lewis who was my role model, and I knew there and then I wanted to be an athlete, so I joined a local athletics club when I was 13 years old.

2. Nikki – What made you choose the 400metres?

Originally I did not want to do the 400metres I wanted to be like Carl Lewis and compete in the 100 and 200metres, but the event did not really suit me, it was too explosive which made me break down with injury. My dad persuaded me to try out for the 400metres, and I found that it really suited me, it was a fun kind of hurt.

It took me a season for my body to change, I semi-trained for 400metres at a reasonable standard, and a year later I became the quickest 15 year old in the United Kingdom.

3. Kristian – How often did you train?

I trained according to the different phase of the year. Winter I trained for 10 sessions a week, which is about 2 a day, which should include massage and physio and of course got plenty of sleep.

The physical training which was included in my weekly regime included sprinting, technical training, circuit training, weights in the gym, aerobic sessions and anaerobic sessions just to mention a few.

4. Kristian – What kind of diet were you on?

My diet was always sensible, I would always take on a fuel source so focusing on the carbohydrates. My diet also always included some type of fruit and vegetables because they were good for my immune system which could sometimes become depressed as I was training so hard, so eating these rejuvenated it.

5. Kristian – Did the media ever effect your career?

Yes it did, obviously in terms of making people aware of our successes but it also played a particularly big part for me when I failed a random drugs test. I had been and seen a sports doctor and asked whether the supplements I was going to take which were amino acids were ok to take, I wanted him to check all the labels, the doctor said they were fine so I took them, but unfortunately the product was contaminated. I ended up being suspended as my drugs test came back positive, it took me 18 months to prove I was a victim of circumstance, but I was very proud of myself to prove that I was innocent. I look back on it now and it has shaped the person I am today.

6. Emily/Amy – What do you do now?

Now I am a Performance Consultant, working for a company which travels round visiting other businesses that are not sport related, using sport psychology to motivate work teams and transform people into something better.

7. Emily/Amy – If you did not do athletics what sport would you do?

When I was at school I loved football, and I support Liverpool. I also played rugby, cricket and basketball whilst I was at school and enjoyed all of them, but when I got to sixth form I focused on the athletics and went on from there. I was very serious about sport, my mind was set on doing athletics and nothing was going to change it.

I went to Loughborough University and achieved a Sports Science degree, after university I became very pro-active and became professional at athletics.

8. Nikki – Are you going to be involved in 2012?

I am going to be an enthusiastic spectator at the Olympics in 2012, I will taking my daughter along to watch it with me as it is a very exciting time.

9. Emily/Amy – If you were a car, what car would you be?

I'd have to be a car that had a high performance, was robust and very dependable, so I would have to choose a Porsche Cayenne.

10. Nikki – Which celebrity show would you enter? Strictly, X Factor, Big Brother?

None of them! They are not my scene at all, they would be my worst nightmare. The thought of it brings me out in a cold sweat.

11. Nikki – Do you still see/speak to Roger, Iwan and Jamie?

Yes I do, I see Roger very frequently, and I still see Jamie and Iwan. I am also very close to Marlon Devonish who is known for running in the 4x100metres

relay. I also speak to Mark Hilton who also runs the 400metres and Tim Benjamin who also does the same event.

12. Nikki – Who should we keep our eye on for 2012?

You should look out for Jessica Ennis, she is super talented.