

INSIDE GRASSROOTS SPORT

JONNIE'S PLEA FOR A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Peacock leading demands for disabled athletes to be given equal opportunities. **By Matthew Nash**

JONNIE PEACOCK has warned disabled people cannot be treated as an 'after-thought' and insists the government must be held to account over its promises of equality as sport returns this spring.

Prime minister Boris Johnson announced on Monday outdoor sport can return in England from March 29 with a phased resumption of indoor sport, but the fear for organisations such as Activity Alliance is disability sport will be left behind.

And Metro columnist Peacock, who aims to complete a hat-trick of Paralympic gold medals in Tokyo this year, is leading the calls for disabled people to be taken into consideration when leisure centres, gyms and sports facilities reopen.

He has given his support to Metro's campaign to help and celebrate grassroots sport, which continues today with a special supplement focusing on disability sport. Peacock writes: 'I hope that, because disability sport has extra barriers, it is not an after-thought in the government's return to sport plans.'

'That would be heartbreaking. All we want is to be treated as equals - no judge-

ment on appearance, no preconceived notion of anything. Just the same access to sport for disabled people as for everyone else. The government has made statements about equality and where disability sits in that. Now they have to stand by their words and help everyone, not just a few.'

Activity Alliance, which works with sporting governing bodies to ensure disabled people are included in leisure activities, has painted a stark picture of the issues facing inclusive sport.

Asked whether disabled people could be forgotten as sport comes back, chief executive Barry Horne said: 'It is a real fear. It's about immediacy, it's not rocket science as to what people have to do.'

'It's about having a different attitude to disabled people. If you can't use this evidence from day one of the return, the consequences could be so severe we may well never recover.'

Horne stressed the need for action, not just words. Activity Alliance's annual survey found twice as many disabled people felt coronavirus greatly reduced their

Continued on **Page 18** »

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



YOUR NUMBERS
MAKE AMAZING
HAPPEN

DISABILITY SPORT SPECIAL

Exclusive
JONNIE PEACOCK COLUMN

Pages 18-19

+
HANNAH COCKROFT: WE MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN

Page 18

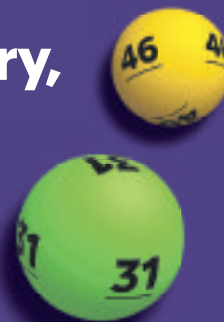
+
BASKETBALL TO NET NEXT GENERATION

Page 20

PICTURE: OLLY BURN

By playing The National Lottery, you help raise £30m every week for good causes, including grassroots sport

Based on figures from April 2019 - March 2020.



YOUR NUMBERS
MAKE AMAZING
HAPPEN

INSIDE GRASSROOTS SPORT

LENGTHY RECOVERY FOR DISABLED SPORT

» Continued from Page 17

ability to do sport or physical activity compared to non-disabled people (27 per cent to 13 per cent).

'We can't just intend it to happen,' added Horne. 'We have to prioritise this from day one. Sport and activity is good for your physical and mental health and is a preventative measure for a whole range of things.'

'Disabled people are the least active group in society, so why are we not saying more that this group should be included, not excluded, from activity?'

The pandemic has made more disabled people feel they do not have the

opportunity to be as active as they want to, compared to non-disabled people (29 per cent versus 44 per cent), according to the figures.

Horne believes it could be a long road back. 'I think it's a three-year strategy to get back and start making positive progress again,' he said.

'It's a generation before the existence of this report and of an organisation like mine become irrelevant because everybody has got the fact that of course you would just include disabled people and here's how we do it, and it works. It's a long-term project but if we don't start on day one, we have very little chance.'

Its survey found a lack of activity

during the pandemic has led to respondents finding physical and mental health harder to manage, plus loneliness and social isolation.

Horne continued: 'We were making good progress (before the virus) - numbers and confidence levels were going up, so it's a slap in the face.'

'We must include disabled people as we return to provision and given that level of need it would be particularly disappointing if we didn't.'

■ Activity Alliance, the leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity, has released the findings of their Annual Disability and Activity Survey. The new research highlights the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people's activity. To read the full report, visit activityalliance.org.uk

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

COMMUNITY SPORT MATTERS

Community sports are making a comeback – and it's all thanks to The National Lottery



Every week, The National Lottery players raise £30 million for good causes.

In doing so, they are playing a unique role in helping support grassroots sport during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The National Lottery has responded to the pandemic by investing £800 million into a range of good causes to support organisations in the arts, community and charity, heritage, education, environment and sport.

If you are a community sports club in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, the following help is available.

ENGLAND

■ Thanks to The National Lottery, Sport England is investing £186.5 million to support grassroots community sport in the Covid-19 pandemic.

■ The following funds are open now to support grassroots clubs:

- The Return to Play Fund aims to help organisations get

back on their feet when restrictions are lifted to allow grassroots sport to return. sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/our-funds

- The Tackling Inequalities Fund aims to help community groups working with underrepresented groups to maintain the work of their projects and organisations. sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/our-funds/tackling-inequalities-fund

WALES

■ The total given to grassroots sport via the Sport Wales Be Active Wales Fund, thanks to The National Lottery and Welsh Government, is currently £2.1 million. For more information on help available, visit sport.wales/beactivewalesfund

■ Since the pandemic began, more than 800 sports clubs and organisations have benefited from National Lottery and government funds.

SCOTLAND

■ Since the start of the

pandemic, sportscotland, supported by The National Lottery, has accelerated £32.4 million of funding to support Scottish Governing Bodies and local partners. ■ sportscotland has recently launched a £1.5 million SGB Covid-19 support fund, funded by The National Lottery. sportscotland.org.uk/covid-19

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Sport NI has invested £25 million in the Sports Sustainability Fund and more than £2 million in the Covid Safe Sport Packs and the Sports Hardship Fund. ■ Sport NI has launched Supporting Sport to Build Back Better Programme investing £5 million of National Lottery funding to help sports emerge from the pandemic. sportni.net

Please keep viewing the Sport England, sportscotland, Sport Wales and Sport NI websites for updated information.



YOUR NUMBERS MAKE AMAZING HAPPEN



PICTURE: AFP

Golden summer: Peacock races at the 2012 Paralympics



PARA-ATHLETICS

HANNAH'S FEAR: THIS COULD SET US BACK YEARS

BY MATTHEW NASH

HANNAH COCKROFT has laid bare the damage done to para-athletics over the past 12 months, claiming athletes are leaving the sport behind after a year of inactivity.

The five-time Paralympic wheelchair racing champion says she knows of disabled athletes who will not return after an extended break due to the pandemic.

Cockroft has been able to continue to train ahead of this year's Paralympics, although it is a 200-mile round-trip from her Chester home to the Loughborough high-performance centre.

She fears disabled people may miss out in the return to sport as a vaccine kicks in and leisure centres, gyms and sports facilities begin to reopen.

'I hope disability sport won't be left out on a limb but I don't think it has been considered at all,' the 28-year-old told Metro.

'All we hear about is, "Everyone can work out at home" but what if you can't? What if you struggle to even get out of bed without help? A lot of disabled people are shielding and haven't had a date for their vaccine.'

'There are so many factors not considered. The government has said disability sports groups can continue but faci-

ties are closed. It's a minefield. Even if things do open up, disabled people can't just get up and go.'

Disability sport could potentially have been set back years by a year of inactivity and Cockroft regularly sees the damage that has been done across the UK.

'I would say Covid has put disabled people off if anything. We began to see it when meets resumed last year - entry numbers are down and that's upsetting,' she said.

'People are thinking "what's the point?". I know athletes who have been on a "break" for a year and not showing any signs of coming back. I know people, disabled people and disabled athletes, who haven't really gone out for almost a year. I couldn't do that. People are losing their independence and starting to get cocooned in their houses.'

Cockroft and wheelchair racer boyfriend Nathan Maguire train a group of amateur athletes but that has also fallen foul of Covid regulations. 'The last session we did was before Christmas. Before that, it was September,' Cockroft added.

'These kids have no access to anything at the moment. Even though Nathan and I are elite athletes we can't get them onto that track. And we can't just run round the park or break in to use the track somewhere else, as some have suggested I should.'



Jonnie Peacock

It's crucial the next generation have a chance to compete



The double Paralympic 100m champion writes exclusively for Metro

@JonniePeacock

I'VE been lucky as a professional athlete to continue training amid coronavirus with the goal of racing at the Tokyo Paralympics later this year.

But it is always in my mind that I am one of the privileged few currently because so many people are unable to be active or do sport currently – specifically those with disabilities.

With sport all but decimated in this country, I worry that the losers will be those who have had to go a year without sport and will simply walk away from it.

It's almost 12 months since young athletes will have been able to get out and hone their skills. In that situation, it is a real test of someone's desire to want to do it and achieve their dreams

at the Paralympics one day. For young athletes and young people with disability who want to emulate the sort of things me, Hannah Cockcroft, David Weir and many, many others have done in recent years, there is a problem and that is that they simply can't train, let alone compete.

Life can take over and we don't want our future Paralympic stars to be reliant on tech because they have been indoors for so long lately, forgetting what it's like to be outside and competing or training.

This is because only the 'elite' athletes (myself included) get to use the track. That's understandable during a pandemic but this has gone on for a year now.

This will affect Paralympic sport in

this country but I think there will be a lag. You won't see the effects instantly, until we're reliant on these guys in five to ten years' time.

They will be the ones leading the charge for medals but who right now aren't even able to participate.

We are blocking pathways for these people. There are many more opportunities out there for able-bodied people at the moment.

I remember as a youngster spending literally days Googling somewhere I could participate in disability sport and this has more barriers than able-bodied sport.

I just hope because disability sport has these extra barriers it is not an after-thought in the government's return to sport plans. That would be

heartbreaking. Thankfully now there is the Parasport.org.uk website, where 3,350 accessible opportunities across the UK are listed. There were none at launch in 2019.

My hope is that things have shifted over ten, 20, 50 years and that we are part of the equation now. In another 50 years' time, I wouldn't want these conversations to still be happening.

All we want is to be treated as equals – no judgement on appearance, no preconceived notion of anything. Just the same access to sport for disabled people as for everyone else.

This needs to happen now and the government has to make a conscious effort to ensure it does happen.

In the back of my mind, I have the way things have been done in the past but we have to be optimistic about the future. The opportunity is there to do this right. We have to take it – and that means including disabled people as well.

The government has made statements about equality and where disability sits in that, and now it has to stand by those words and help everyone, not just a few.

We cannot afford to let disability sport go backwards in this country.

■ Jonnie Peacock is Toyota ambassador for Parasport; a new digital hub to empower disabled people to become more active. It will create a vibrant online community for participants, coaches and parents to seek out new opportunities and share their experiences of the benefits of taking part in physical activity. Register your club or find activities near you at [Parasport.org.uk](https://parasport.org.uk)

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

KEEP ON MOVING!

Every time you play the lottery, you are supporting grassroots sports and helping people across the country stay fit and healthy

The National Lottery has provided more than £800 million to support organisations as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic – many of these in community sport. One organisation that's doing remarkable work to support disabled people is Disability Sports Coach.



Sam, an Active at Home programme participant

EMPOWERING OTHERS
Disability Sports Coach is a grassroots sport charity that empowers disabled people to lead active lives.

The charity has received more than £500,000 from The National Lottery since 2013, and runs 14 pan-disability community clubs across London, which had to close because of lockdown.

However, thanks to supporters such as Sport England, it created its Active at Home programme with free online sessions, enabling disabled people to keep active safely at home. By the end of 2020, it had 4,000 participants.

Due to his Down's syndrome, Sam, 20, has had to shield at home since last March – but he has rarely missed a Disability Sports Coach online session.

His mother, Ros, says: 'The sessions are the highlight of

Sam's week, and they keep him physically and mentally fit.'
Ifeoma is autistic, largely non-verbal and loves sport, but finds it challenging to take part in group activity.

She joined Disability Sports Coach in 2019, and by November 2020 she was able to take part in the virtual Vitality 10,000 to raise money for the organisation.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Your lottery ticket helps charities such as Disability Sports Coach reach out to those in need.

Its CEO, Peter Ackred, says: 'We know how powerful community sport can be in improving the overall health of disabled people, and we're determined to keep people connected and active with our range of online activities.'

Meanwhile, Mike Diaper, executive director of Children,



Ifeoma took part in the virtual Vitality 10,000

Young People and Tackling Inactivity at Sport England, which has funded a £220 million package for the nation's sport groups, hopes its support will continue to help charities such as Disability Sports Coach mitigate some of the negative effects of the pandemic on disabled people.

He says: 'By understanding its community, Disability Sports Coach has been able

to adapt its offer to include new ways to keep people engaged and active at a time when it is needed the most.'

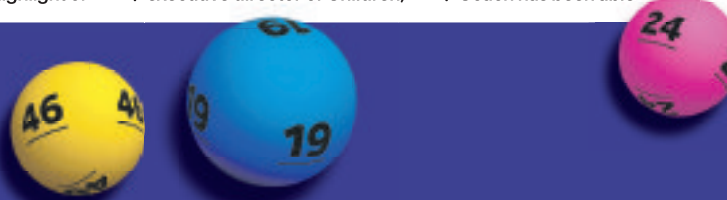
Keep active through many of the inspirational online coaching sessions from our brilliant grassroots clubs, and we will all be back together to play sport again soon.

The National Lottery is proud to support grassroots sport in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

For information, please visit:
sportengland.org
sportscotland.org.uk
sport.wales
sportni.net



YOUR NUMBERS
MAKE AMAZING
HAPPEN



BRITISH Wheelchair Basketball is rebuilding itself in a bid to beat the effects of the pandemic as it looks to a brighter future.

The organisation, whose men's team are world and European champions and whose women's team are world and European medalists, has seen play suspended for most of the past 12 months as the world battles coronavirus.

But its proactive chief executive Lisa Pearce has been busy preparing for a return to action in 2021 and recently unveiled a new Inspire a Generation campaign in the hope new players will be attracted to the sport in the UK when doors open again.

It has been a tough time for most sports but particularly so for disabled people who want to remain active but are aware of the dangers of the virus, missing out on the sporting - and social - outlet they are used to.

Pearce told Metro: 'With this new initiative, people will have the opportunity to come to a truly inclusive environment and I truly mean that. If you could bottle the community of wheelchair basketball and circulate that to everybody, we'd have a pretty impressive nation and equality, fairness and opportunity would be there for everyone.'

'We're in full suspension at the moment but what we've been doing is supporting people in the virtual environment with things like the BWB Virtual Club that's running every week, seminars, sessions to keep everybody socially connected.'

Britain's Sophie Carrigill, a 2016 Paralympian, admits it has been a hard year for athletes with disabilities. The 27-year-old, who was paralysed from the waist down in a car accident in the US 11 years ago, said: 'I see the inequality every day, disabled people just don't have the access their able-bodied counterparts do to sport. It's crucial that changes - it's about time.'

'I'm so happy we're out there encouraging people. It's great we have this programme in place and also that able-bodied people can play the sport

too, it's fully inclusive. I want more players coming through, pushing me for my place, but that doesn't come from nowhere - they have to come through the grassroots and come from somewhere.'

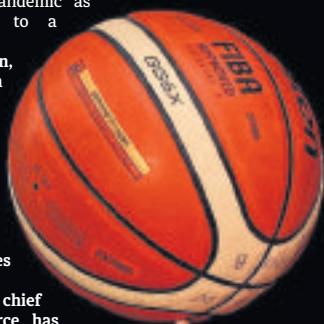
While sport is just part of the solution to a return to activity for disabled people in the long term, Pearce says she has been shocked by the numbers around disability and Covid-19. 'What we've seen is the disproportionate effect of Covid on disabled people - the figures are absolutely devastating,' she added. 'Almost 60 per cent of people who had died by last July were disabled.'

'We have to be better and we all know how important our physical and mental health is. We need to get people physically and socially connected. Covid has shown we need to find ways to engage young people.' With the rearranged Paral-

THE MAJOR PLAYERS AIMING TO NET A NEW GENERATION OF STARS

After a tough year wheelchair basketball is looking to bounce back and it has a whole new audience in its sights

by Matthew Nash



PICTURE: WIL JOHNSTON

Having a ball: Carrigill is backing the new campaign launched by the sport's chief executive Pearce [above]

ympic Games later this summer and wheelchair basketball included on the programme for next year's Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, there is plenty for Carrigill and her team-mates to look forward to once they can get playing again.

However, many challenges lie ahead and she just wants future stars to be able to find their nearest club through the Inspire a Generation programme and enjoy the fun of the sport first.

'I was lucky I found a club just down the road from me and I don't know what I'd have done if that hadn't been there,' she said.

'We need that to get more women, more girls, playing and to grow our fanbase. I want more people coming through the grassroots to play internationally and compete for my position.'

■ British Wheelchair Basketball has launched its Inspire a Generation programme, a hugely exciting development for the sport which will give thousands of people across England the opportunity to try wheelchair basketball for the first time. To find out more, or to become a Community Activator, visit inspireageneration.com

SHONA HUDSON

Q&A



Shona is a cycling enthusiast from Warwickshire who is deaf and has seen her activity levels greatly reduced

You're a keen amateur cyclist but how frustrating has this period been for you?

I've been out cycling myself but I haven't been able to do other things like pilates or dance classes, so cycling has kept me going to be honest. I had a group of ladies, some of whom are deaf, that I took out cycling. If I hadn't got involved with various activities before the pandemic, and got involved with British Cycling before the pandemic, I'd have been lost.

You lost your husband a year ago, did your cycling group

take on even more significance as a support network for you?

Exercise became even more important for me. Everybody's been going through different things but I have had a network of people, which has been great. I'm lucky I had that and have been able to maintain some of that. It's been life-saving.

What have the challenges been for deaf people this past year?

Zoom classes have not been any good for me. Deaf people do tend to lose confidence and I really miss that physical dance or pilates class. I know some profoundly deaf ladies who have not been out cycling on their own because of worries about traffic, not hearing noise. I really feel for them.

Virtual classes have caught on but what's that like for someone hard of hearing?

I haven't felt comfortable doing it and

I know ladies who haven't either. Zoom and that sort of thing do not work for deaf people very well so we've been left a bit without sport and activity in that respect.

Generally, is there enough provision around sport-wise for deaf people?

It's difficult enough in some environments to not feel like you're in the way, and this has just put extra blocks on deaf people participating. It's very isolating to not be able to go out and exercise. There are things out there but how do you find out about them? You do feel cut off from people as a deaf person sometimes in situations like this.

Do you have faith that the government will not overlook people with disabilities in the return to sport?

I'm not aware that they're doing anything, personally. I'm not aware

the government has taken any kind of lead. It's great if things are there that you're already part of, like me with British Cycling, but if I'd been working full-time and been in lockdown without that, that would have been very hard. Where do you regain your confidence to join in with something?

When do you hope you'll be back doing classes in person?

I'd love it if it was tomorrow. You can only go on so long like this. Last year was a huge learning curve for me and what I really hope is something like the support from Activity Alliance will spur people on and encourage everyone to get out and get fit. Having something like my cycling group has helped me so much, even when we've not been able to get out and cycle. I rely so much on that group and that support network. Meeting other people like me with a hearing problem really helped me.

INTERVIEW BY MATTHEW NASH