

Following the success of Devon's athletes at the Beijing Olympics, Devon County Council is continuing to give grant support to budding sporting stars who have their eyes set firmly on London 2012. Here, *DevonTalk* focuses on one such contender – Joe Parker, aged 15, of Newton Abbot, who goes to Teign School...



Joe Parker is making waves in the swimming world

What sport do you do, and what age did you start?

I've been swimming since a very young age but swimming competitively since about nine years old.

What have you achieved so far in terms of sporting success?

I've been five times Devon Champion in my age group and am currently ranked second in the country for 100m and 200m Breaststroke at U16. I've just won two gold medals and a bronze at the National School Games and am part of the England Talent Development Squad.

What do you think makes a successful sportsperson?

A bit of natural talent and a lot of dedication, effort and determination – plus having a supportive family.

Who are your sporting heroes?

Obviously Michael Phelps – winning so

many gold medals was an amazing achievement. Fortunately he doesn't swim breaststroke!

Tell us a bit about your training programme.

I swim nine times a week both before school and in the evenings plus a weights programme. I do about 6,000 meters in an average two hour session – that's over 50,000 metres a week. As I swim at top club Plymouth Leander that means getting up at about 4.15am four times a week to get to a 5.30am session which is hard. Fortunately I've learned to sleep in the car.

How do you fit school work around your training?

With some difficulty, especially as I'm about to sit my GCSEs. Fortunately my school has been very understanding.

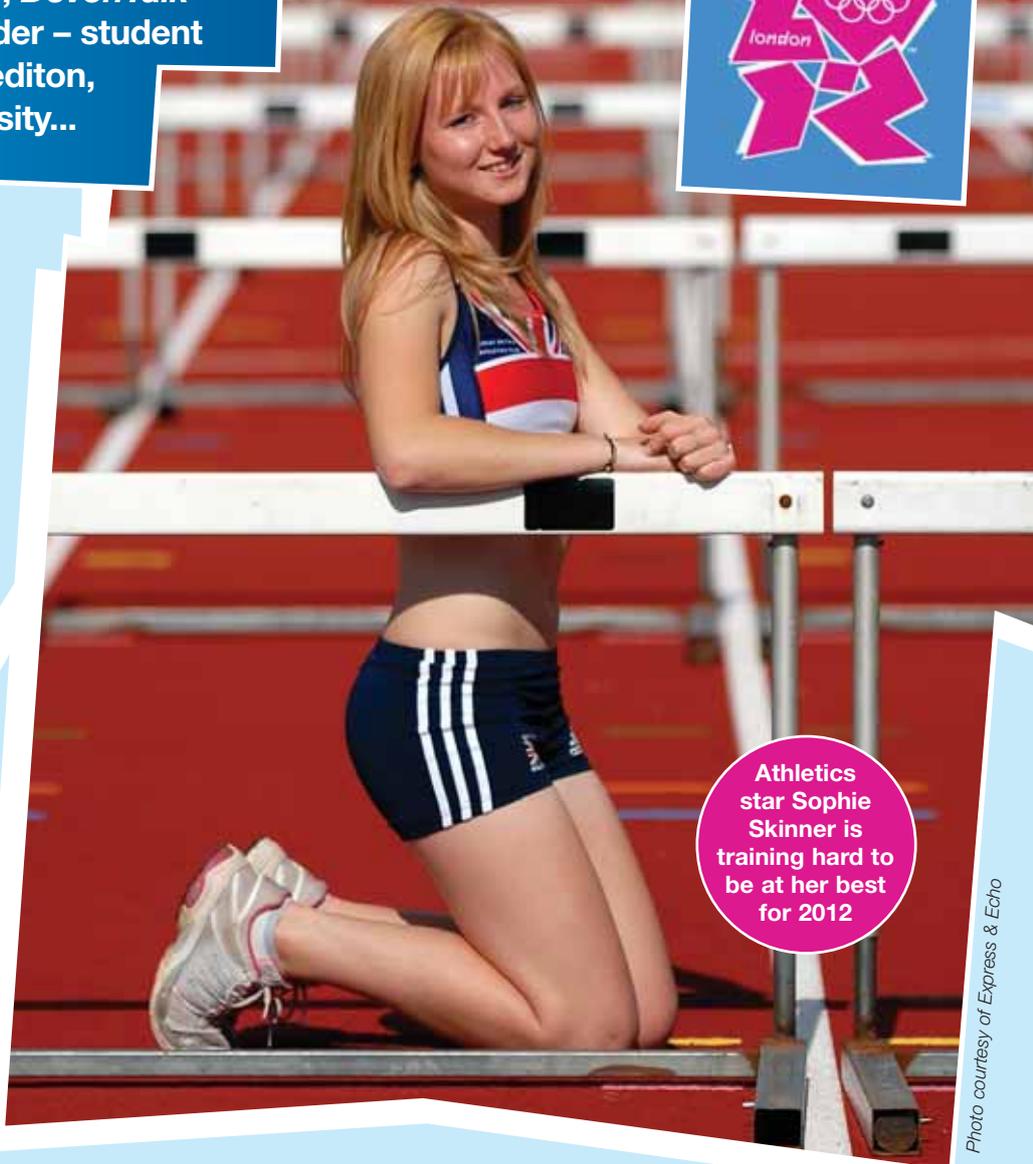
How important to your development is funding?

Obviously coaching fees, travel, equipment and competitions all cost a fortune. My dad added it up once and nearly choked on his cornflakes! And I can't get a Saturday job or work in the holidays. Only elite swimmers get funding from British Swimming so finding sponsorship, grants or other funding is really important to help offset some of the costs and keep me in the sport.

Where do you see yourself in 2012?

As number one! My aim is to make Team GB, make a final and then win a medal in London. Whatever happens in 2012, I hope to be swimming fast and representing my country for several years afterwards.

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Athletics star Sophie Skinner is training hard to be at her best for 2012

Photo courtesy of Express & Echo

What sport do you do, and what age did you start?

My sport is athletics, and I started at about 13 after a school teacher suggested I try the local club.

What have you achieved so far in terms of sporting success?

So far I have achieved international status through representing both England and Great Britain in the Heptathlon. I was junior national champion in the Pentathlon and recently won a silver medal at the English Schools' Heptathlon. The Heptathlon is a two-day event consisting of 100m hurdles, high jump, long jump, javelin, shot putt, 200m and 800m.

What do you think makes a successful sportsperson?

Ideally a successful sportsperson needs to be dedicated, determined and able to bounce back when things don't go so well. Injuries and disappointment are a big part of sport these days and being able to cope with them and coming back stronger is very important.

Who are your sporting heroes?

I admire Kelly Sotherton for what she does. She's an amazing athlete and even though she has her weak events (javelin!), she always comes back strong and never gives up, despite criticism. Also Carolina Klüft is inspiring as she is at the pinnacle of the Heptathlon and always looks like she is having so much fun! Tasha Danvers (the 400m hurdler) is another who has come back from a poor run and won Olympic Bronze – it can't be easy.

Tell us a bit about your training programme.

I have just begun studying at the University of Bath and my training involves three track and three gym sessions a week – so one day of rest! The gym sessions involve free weights for strength and conditioning as well as circuits and core stability work. The track sessions are speed endurance and aim to improve

general strength and endurance for the 400m hurdles, which I'm now training for. I opted not to train for the Heptathlon for at least a year because it causes many niggling injuries and I've had success over the 400m hurdles this year with no specific training – I was fifth at the nationals.

How did you fit school work around your training?

Exams were a time when I had to cut back from training a little, as I was very busy studying. But otherwise I love training as it is time away from studying and is a nice break! At uni it's a bit more hectic as the workload is quite heavy and training is taking up about three to four hours for each session, six sessions a week. Sometimes you have to miss a session to get work done, but once you have found the balance it's easy to keep it going because it's something you enjoy.

How important to your development is funding?

Funding is quite important. Small injuries may only need a few physio sessions, but as a student I find it very difficult to afford them. Travelling also costs a lot, as a Heptathlon happens over two days and you need two nights in a hotel.

Where do you see yourself in 2012?

People often mention 2012 when talking to me, and it is definitely something I see as a possibility.

My personal goal in athletics is to be the best I can be, and if that means being at the Olympics then it would be amazing.

But, if not, I will be happy knowing I have achieved my potential. It's the feeling of knowing I can run faster which drives me to train, and the feeling of running a personal best can't be beaten.

Following the success of Devon's athletes at the Beijing Olympics, Devon County Council is continuing to give grant support to budding sporting stars. Here, *DevonTalk* focuses on one such talented schoolboy – David Jones, aged 11, of Horrabridge who goes to Horrabridge Community Primary School...

What sport do you do, and what age did you start?

My sport is roller hockey. I started in 2006 when I was eight. I went along to a taster session at the club in Plymouth one night and loved it, so joined straight away. I've been going every week since then, and started playing the game as soon as I learnt to skate. I started in goal soon after because the club goalkeeper didn't turn up for a tournament one weekend. Our coach knew I was a football goalkeeper and asked if I'd give it a go. I guess I did OK as I'm still playing there.

What have you achieved so far in terms of sporting success?

I was selected last year for the National Roller Hockey Association Development Squad and played for England for the first time this year in an under-11 trip to Portugal. I've just been again for a second trip and am looking forward to being selected again next year.

What do you think makes a successful sports person?

You must believe in yourself and, no matter what the difficulties, always try your best.

Who are your sporting heroes?

Ian Morrison – The England Roller Hockey Goalkeeper. Ian lives in Spain and plays professionally. He came over to this year's summer camp to give the goalkeepers some goalie-specific training and gave us lots of tips and new drills to practise.

Tell us a bit about your training programme.

I train twice a week in Plymouth and when I'm at home I have to practise my stretching most days. Every month I have an evening training session and an all-day national training session in Peterborough. I also have to attend a four-day training camp once a year, which this summer was in Cambridgeshire. I play for the under-11 and under-13 team of Plymouth Tamar RHC and also for the under-13 team of Peterborough RHC, which means at least two matches a month away from home. Recently we were in Manchester



Roller hockey goalkeeper David Jones pictured in Portugal where he played for the England under-11 team

and last weekend we played a tournament in Halifax. The travelling can be tiring but I don't mind it at all.

How do you fit school work around your training?

I train in the evenings and I get one Friday afternoon a month off school to travel to Peterborough. I'm in Year Six so I don't get too much homework at the moment. My headteacher is very supportive as I've had to have a few days off school for the Portugal trips and I catch up on what I've missed when I get back.

How important to your development is funding?

I couldn't even get to training without mum and dad as they take me everywhere. It costs lots of money and,

being a goalkeeper, I have to have special kit. Mum's grateful for the money she had, and the club got a grant to pay for some of my kit as well.

Where do you see yourself in 2012?

In 2012 I hope to be in the England under-15 squad and playing lots of roller hockey. Roller hockey isn't an Olympic sport but our men's and women's squads have just achieved their best-ever results in the recent European and World championships so I'm hoping it will be in the Games one day. It's a very fast, physical and skilful sport and I hope more young people get the chance to try it out as everyone who tries it loves it.

David won his hockey club's Outstanding Achievement award this year.