

» Count down to the Olympics with the Reporter — **393 days to go**

Shaun wants to give it his best shot and fulfil an Olympic dream

Reporter Joshua Richards meets an inspirational character who won his fight for life and now wants to complete a remarkable turnaround



» In 2007, septicaemia and a year's stay in hospital did not just rob Shaun Sewell of his Beijing Paralympics dream, it almost took his life. Fast-forward four years and the 36-year-old T54 shot-putt thrower has made a full recovery, yet the turnaround over this short period of his life is only part of the remarkable story that has helped shape this fascinating character.

Sewell has endured a topsy-turvy past 12 years and recalls his remarkable tale, as I interrupt a morning's training session at the Lea Valley Athletics Centre.

"I've faced so much adversity," begins the former St Bonaventures School pupil.

"I had a motorbike accident in 1999 that left me a wheelchair user.

"I'd always been in to training, so soon after my accident I was back in the gym lifting weights, because that was my first love and I naturally progressed to competitive sport and I'm really enjoying it.

"Sport is always a focus for

me. It's definitely a big stress-relief to get in the gym and train and practice."

Successful stints as a rower and javelin thrower followed, but were disrupted by his time in hospital battling the life-threatening septicaemia. "It was tough and go," he said.

Ordeal

But now, with his ordeal finally behind him, Sewell is back in top condition, training six times a week and no longer thinking about what might have been in China, but fully focused on finally attaining his dream at London 2012 with the help of former Olympic Champion and mentor Tessa Sanderson.

"Tessa has been with me since 2006 when I joined the Academy. She's my coach, it's going really well and we're really hopeful for London," said Sewell, who lives in Manor Park, less than three miles from the Olympic Stadium.

"I don't go into competitions to make up the numbers. Obviously I'm realistic, but I know me, I don't set myself unrealistic goals. I'm really driven and I believe I can achieve great things in the sport.

"I believe every British athlete should work really hard, just get your head down and focus and try and be at that Games, because it's going to be a memorable thing, it's definitely something I'm trying to push towards.



■ Shaun Sewell (centre) is pictured with Tessa Sanderson (left) and representatives from the 'Bag4Sport' charity

"Tessa's always telling me that I need to slow down a bit – "because sport's his life," she chips in – If I could sleep here, I'd sleep here, I love it, I love training.

"Obviously Tessa's achieved what she's achieved and as well as being a coach she's a massive inspiration – and she believes in me. That in itself says to me that I can reach any goal. We work well together."

Sanderson, who won Olympic gold in Los Angeles in 1984, dedicates three mornings each week to train with Sewell.

With the support of the Tessa Sanderson Academy, the Canning Town-born athlete has secured a sponsorship deal with charity 'Bag4Sport'.

They collect and recycle countless bags of clothes, which helps provide affordable clothing in Eastern Europe and Africa and the money recouped is pumped into projects around the UK to help those in need achieve their full potential.

Their support for Sewell helps provide him with specialist equipment as well as funding to help travel to competitions.

Sewell, who has a psychol-

ogy degree from the University of East London, is relatively inexperienced when it comes to the shot-putt, but is certainly no stranger to international competition.

Having won a bronze medal at the World Rowing Championships in 2006 on Downey Lake, Eton, Sewell became disillusioned with the sport, which grew in popularity and forced him to compete against far more able competitors.

It was Sanderson who convinced him to try the javelin and in 2007, just three months after he began the new discipline, Sewell travelled to the World Games in Taipei, China and showed enough promise on the way towards his eighth-place finish to be taken on by the British Paralympics Association as a development athlete.

Sewell's excellent progress made him a strong contender for a spot in the GB squad at the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing, until his hopes were dashed by illness.

However, since his recovery and subsequent discovery of the shot-putt, Sewell may be set to finally fulfil that dream of becoming a Paralympics athlete, al-

though he knows there's plenty of work to be done first.

"My personal best is around 7.50metres, I think in order to qualify for the B standard with BPA they want 8.50m and the A standard is nine something," he said.

"But, no excuses, as a seated thrower there are always amendments that need to be made to my frame, at the moment it seems like I'm just using my throwing arm.

Picture

"When you take a picture and see the set up of my frame, you actually see that because I've got no core balance I use a pole to act as a trunk and a support. The pole is there to just hold me steady, but that's not its usage, its usage is to help me get forward and drive the shot out.

"I'm not even doing that yet, so I believe there's so much more to come when I learn to utilise the bar.

"I'm relatively new in the game as a shot-putt. There's so much more to learn and I think with what I've been doing recently and the distances I'm getting, when everything mirrors up and all the technical aspects fall into place I have no doubt that I will be very competitive on a

world stage."

When Sewell takes a break from training and competing, he writes and recites poetry as a method of relaxation. He won a UK Unsigned Variety competition in 2005 and together with girlfriend Francesca-Marie, set up their company W.O.R.D.S Inclusive Arts.

The pair visit local schools putting on workshops and giving inspirational talks, with the aim of showing the next generation a positive way in which to express themselves.

Sewell's dedication to sport and commitments away from it are indicative of a man determined to make the most of a life he almost lost.

Through the difficult times, aided by the support of his family, giving up was simply never on the agenda and should Sewell achieve his ultimate goal of a place with Team GB at next year's Games, you'd be hard-pushed to find anyone more deserving.

It's a fact

- Name: Shaun Sewell
- Age: 36
- Achievements include: Won a bronze medal at the 2006 World Rowing Championships in Eton
- Finished eighth in the javelin at the 2007 World Games in Taipei, China
- Education: Has a Psychology degree from the University of East London
- Sporting heroes include: Tessa Sanderson CBE, Sir Steve Redgrave

Athletes warned about Twitter

■ The International Olympic Committee has set out strict guidelines warning athletes about the way they use Twitter at next year's Olympic Games.

The move comes after recent controversy which saw triple jumper Phillips Idowu withdraw from the European Team Championships, seemingly via the social networking site, which sparked a war of words between UK Athletics head coach Charles van Commenee and the Olympic silver medalist.

Athletes at the 2012 Games are encouraged to use social media to give an account of their experience of the Games, but risk expulsion should they breach the IOC's guidelines.

Twitter users, including high profile GB athletes Jes-

sica Ennis and Mo Farah, will be allowed to write 'first-person, diary-type' entries, but should not act as reporters and postings must 'be dignified and in good taste' and 'not contain vulgar or obscene words or images.'

Athletes are also free to upload still photographs taken at venues, but the broadcast of video and audio taken inside Olympic venues will be banned, although athletes may post videos taken elsewhere.

Use of the official Olympics symbol is not permitted and any reference to the word Olympic must be factual and 'not associated with any third party or any third party's products or services'.

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