

Behind the scenes

A VITAL MEMBER OF TEAM JENNIS, TONI MINICHELLO

(LLB Law 1996, Hon LittD 2013) enjoyed a golden year in 2012 – first, Jessica Ennis CBE (BA Psychology 2007, Hon LittD 2010) was crowned Olympic champion in the heptathlon and, second, he was named UK Coach of the Year. He commented, “People said I did a great job considering all the pressure that went with the Olympics but as a coach I’m just as competitive – in some cases more competitive – than the athlete, so you do what needs to be done to win. I never really noticed the pressure in myself till after it was over. It’s only then that you reflect back.

“I started coaching when I was 19. I played basketball in the winter and did athletics – the decathlon – mainly in the summer. I’m not sure what attracted me to coaching in the first place, but my old coach left after his degree so someone had to take on the basketball group. I was just lucky it became a career. I developed my coaching by just doing. I’d always ask a lot of questions – this came from my time studying at the University. Law teaches you that, to understand all aspects of things.”

Following his graduation, Toni worked in leisure centres for the City Council. He first came across the nine-year-old Jessica Ennis at a summer camp at Don Valley Stadium; he became her coach when she was 12. He explained, “People forget it wasn’t just Jessica’s ambition to win a gold but also my ambition to coach one. So the question now is ‘What next?’ Coach and athlete feed off each other’s energy to be motivated to succeed, so if that’s not there it is always going to be difficult. But with time you get your motivation back, new athletes join the group bringing new ambitions, and eventually you start to move towards new targets. It’s a fresh challenge – that’s why I coach.”

Toni has another challenge as well. He has parted from UK Athletics and is self-employed for the first time: “The next 12 months is about making a living for the first time for myself, and we’re losing our track at Don Valley, so there are a lot of changes to deal with. You have to plan for your athletes to succeed – this time round, I need a plan for myself as well.”

https://twitter.com/Coach_Toni

Toni Minichiello



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Professor Angie Hobbs



Talking changes

WOULD WE LIVE BETTER IF WE HAD A GREATER

understanding of philosophy? Angie Hobbs, Professor of the Public Understanding of Philosophy – the first such appointment in the UK, would undoubtedly say ‘Yes!’ She has joined a department with a long-standing commitment to public engagement, through initiatives such as Philosophy in the City, a student-led outreach programme. Her first taste of the University’s community involvement was as a speaker at last September’s Festival of the Mind, the celebration of ideas and creativity designed to engage visitors in exciting and challenging thinking.

“One of the things that attracted me to Sheffield was the whole history of the way the University is embedded in the community,” she explained. “There is a receptive audience here, a vibrant culture of discussing ideas, a real ‘can do’ atmosphere. I think philosophy should be huge fun as well as provide intellectual stimulation. Concepts and arguments can help people think about how they want to live their lives, think through ethical challenges.

“Philosophy has a lot to offer to immediate issues such as banking, the environment, spending cuts and fairness, inaccurate and dangerous talk of a ‘feral underclass’, discourse between faith and secularism. Knowing how to argue effectively can help. There is a rich tradition of teaching and studying philosophy in Europe, rather less so in Britain. Philosophy should play a part in education from at least age six or seven. Children are unafraid of the big questions. I’m an Honorary Patron of the Philosophy Foundation and we are finding that classes in philosophy and critical thinking can add so much value – to academic attainment and behaviour.”

An authority on Ancient Greek philosophy, Angie combines traditional research and teaching activities with media work, festivals, podcasts and articles. She is a regular contributor to *In Our Time* on Radio 4, where her expertise is endorsed by presenter Melvyn Bragg: “Her ability to explain philosophy is remarkable. She can explain it to the lay person both succinctly and comprehensively while never letting go of the complexity and weight of the issue involved. It’s quite an extraordinary gift.” She is also a keen tweeter and blogger – “a wonderful way for everyone to enter the debate, on a local, national and global level.”

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