

Interview with Jayant Mistry

Interviewer Klara Janicki, February 2013

What brought you to sport, Jayant?

Well for me sport has been a big part of my life ever since I was at school. I enjoyed it; I went to what they call a special school, so all the people that I was with were all disabled children anyway. As I was growing up, I played football, cricket, table tennis, swimming, lots and lots of other sports. I loved it, because it meant that you mixed in with everybody else. We then went to Stoke-Mandeville as a team. We were one of the junior teams down there, and from there it really grew to a kind of competition. As I got older I then started to play wheelchair basketball, and then after playing wheelchair basketball I then saw a demonstration of wheelchair tennis. And then I thought well, this would be a fantastic sport to play in the summertime. So in the wintertime I played basketball and in the summertime I played tennis, and as the sport grew bigger, I then started playing wheelchair tennis all year round, and had a fantastic career after that.

How did it happen that you decided to do tennis professionally?

Within tennis I just kind of took it up, because when I was actually growing up the sport was quite young and there were only probably 10-12 tournaments a year and then as I got better the sport got bigger, so the two things kind of went hand in hand. I remember when I went to my first competition, my first international one in Israel, and I saw all the top players playing there, that was really an inspiration for me, I was just a new person, a beginner, and it was just "How did they do that, how can they do that?" And just to get to know the sport. In the old days when I was actually first starting playing there, you only ever played in one wheelchair. So to then go from that, to when in early 90s people started having two wheelchairs and then started having more camber on the chair, and then having a wheel on the back...I feel very fortunate in that that I was kind of part of the evolution of the sport as well, I got dragged up as the sport got bigger and bigger, and now as you see it on the Wheelchair Tennis Tour or Paralympics or any Grand Slam event, the sport now is a lot different to how it was when I got involved; and again for me I was just brought up with the sport and all the people around me kind of inspired me. People like Randy Snow, unfortunately he has passed away now, the people like that you just think, "Wow, these guys are amazing, how on earth can they do what they are doing?" And the great thing was that because it is quite a small circuit you got to know these people as people, there won't be just somebody you would never speak to, or they won't be just great superstars, they were

people you would get to the same hotel with, you go out to dinner with and so that for me was really inspiring, just to be able to be on the same level, playing field as them.

Have you ever become friends with your counter players?

Yes, that's one of the great things, that over the years you become, because it's the same tours, the same people that you see, whether you are playing in Australia, in Europe or in America. And you know, the two last two or three years two or three of my friends got married, so I have been to their weddings in the south of France (Michael Jeremiasz who I won Wimbledon with [in] 2005, got married last year), so I was very fortunate to get to his wedding. We are still very good friends now, and that is the thing with sport and friendship, two kind of things just go hand in hand because you spend so much time with these people they become your friends, they become your family. When we had a tournaments here in England they would come to me and stay in my house, both Michael stayed and Robin and Ysegay Griffion - and these are people that I kind of grew up with and you know, I still keep in contact now. I don't play on the tour nowadays because I have retired but I still keep in contact with them, if I see them at tournament or at events it's great, because, you know, time kind of passes by, but we are still the same people so we will have the same kind of conversation. You can talk about all the adventures that you've had, yes it's really good.

When did you start to play tennis? You said you have retired, so what is the period of time we are talking about?

I first took up wheelchair basketball when I was 12 or 13, then I saw the exhibition when I was 19, so it wasn't until I left the school that tennis became part of my life. As I grew up I first turned kind of professional, went in the open division in my mid-twenties, so 24-25, then I stayed there. I was in the top ten of the world for about 10-12 years, and then I retired in 2007 after injuries to my elbow and my wrist and my shoulder (everything started going wrong at the same time), so I retired in 2007, I was 41, but I had had nearly 20 years of playing tennis around the world. I also had a career in the early days when also I was involved in sport administration and in coaching and mentoring and tutoring which are all the things that I went into after I retired anyway. But I had 20 years of playing a sport that I love, and for me the last seven years especially, when I was playing it full-time, I was funded through the National Lottery Programme, and so I was playing 20 weeks a year, I was travelling and it was a really wonderful period of my life.

Very busy... indeed

Very busy, but also it's a choice. I don't really think about it as a sacrifice, you know, what would I rather be doing? And that for me was, I was so involved in my sports and everything else, and as well as actually playing I was involved with the Silver Funds I was helping to develop the sport in different countries. I went out to Romania, Lithuania and a big project in India as well. I spent ten years helping to set up a programme over there. For me it was just a natural part of a not only the competition side of it but I wanted to give back to the sport as well. So, very, very happy with that.

What were your beginnings like with tennis?

My beginnings of tennis, when I remember back in late 80's when I was playing, the sport was still growing, still developing, people using one chair, the sport wasn't as developed as it was now. The circuit was quite small. There were only probably around 8 or 10 tournaments, there was maybe only two in America, so therefore actually travelling to America was in first place a big adventure for me, because I had never done it before. And probably without sport I am not sure if I would have ever done it. So it was small, it was compact and... for me it was a journey, in terms of not only myself as a tennis player, but actually seeing the sport evolve as well. It was a new adventure, I had gone from a club environment where I played the basketball with my club to an international environment where you are actually travelling around to different places, and it was new. And I am not sure people even then knew how big the sport was gonna be, even in the old days there wasn't anything like prize money - which we kind of take for granted nowadays - so you were doing it for the love of the sport because you wanted to actually be the best that you could be. You know, where it has got to now, is a massive sport, there is 140 tournaments, it is integrated into all four of the Grand Slam events, and it's one of the biggest sports of the Paralympics. So to actually see where it was then - a small group of people who were doing it because they loved it - to a professional tour that people are doing because they are actually making a living out of it - it has really been a big transformation. And that has happened because of the dedication of the people in the sport and the adaptations to the rules. It's a very simple way, the only difference is that you need to have two bounces, that is the only adaptation to the rule, but it's great because you see people coming up through the camps now, to then play on national, to then play on international level, there is a real pathway for them, if they want to progress and to play all the way to the very top.

9,17 Did you face any difficulties with the sport? You mentioned you played only 7 years professionally...

When I first started playing one of the biggest barrier was the finance, because it does cost money to be able to go to a tournament: not only the air fare but the hotel, the entry fee, and then when prize money came into it, there was kind of an incentive, to actually be able to do all the things, because it was not just going to a tournament, that's a kind of an end product, you've then got to have the right equipment like the wheelchair – not cheap, rackets, coaching, court time, you know, all those kind of things. Especially in the early days it's not the cheapest of sports to actually play, because you need to have all those things in place to be able to let you do it, and the tournament as I have said is a kind of end result. So when I first started playing it wasn't easy, but then I was very lucky, because of the job I was doing, I was working full time, but it was flexible, so I used to do shifts, I used to do 7.00 till 3.00 or 2.00 till 10.00, and that enabled me to then train in the time when I wasn't actually working. Plus the sport of wheelchair tennis is actually very integrated, so I didn't necessarily have to have a tennis coach with me, I could go out and play with friends and family. So I could spend ten-fifteen hours on a tennis court, just playing tennis with able-bodied friends of mine, so that made it cheaper for me and I didn't have to go to a tennis club, I could go just play on a public courts. So from my house here in Leicester I used to push up to the local park, Victoria Park up in Leicester, and to go to play with a friend of mine; we would just spend the whole afternoon just playing tennis. So for me, it was a kind of like – if you want to play the top end now, there is a lot of investment that you have to do to get the right equipment, the right coaches and turn up at the right tournaments, but in order to actually play the game on a basic level you don't need to have everything else in place - you need a racket, you need a chair, you need a court. Once you start getting better, than you need to be able to invest in different things and to travel around, but those were one of the barriers. Because I worked, that allowed me to then have some money to do the training plus there was various grants available once you actually start progressing, and you are at the national team and you can access different funding, so it just kind of grew, it is a lot different now to how it was in the old days.

What does sport mean to you?

Well, sport has been massive part of my life, even from the very early days, when you are playing in the playground with your fellow peers, whether it is a football, cricket. Sport for me is a self-progression kind of thing. So it's a very interesting way of looking at yourself, about goal setting and setting where do you want to be, how do you want to get there. And I think that as an athlete these are the things you do naturally, you set yourself short-term, medium-term and long-term goals, and you can transfer that into your everyday life in terms of work and the other things you

want to accomplish as well. Sport has been a massive thing, it has allowed me to travel the world, it has allowed me to meet people, and it has also allowed me to challenge myself as well. It has allowed me to get fit.. so I have been very fortunate in that that sport's played massive part of my life, and now with the work that I do, with the National Federation of Disability Sport and also with my basketball club, [it] has allowed me then to have a life after sports but still involved in sports. So now my role is to help other people develop within the sporting context that allow them to get the skills and get out and achieve what they want to do, so it has been a massive part of my life.

How big a part has success played in all that?

Well I think that being successful in sport is a great motivation on a personal level and also for people around you. But I also think it is important to actually lose at times as well. Because when you lose, that is when then you can then re-evaluate your goals and what you are doing. It's great to be going on an upward thing, to challenge yourself to get better and win tournaments and win events, and get further and beat people that you haven't beaten and then you can look at it. But it's also important sometimes, just to have that stop gap, to actually lose to people – “How could I have lost that? What am I doing?” - that actually motivates you to then go back and re-evaluate what you are doing, whether it is by yourself or with your coach, with people around you. “Why did I lose to that person? Is it because they are playing better than me? Is it because I had an off day, is it because am I changing things?” So sometimes it is good to have a loss, because that actually makes you want to work on things and not to be complacent about where you are going.

What about the connection between sport and your disability? You haven't mentioned that part...

I don't even think about it. For me it is just part of who I am. *For me having a tennis wheelchair is like a cyclist having a cycle, it is just a piece of equipment that you use. And once you are actually in the chair, you've got the right setting and your right strapping and everything else that just becomes a natural part of it. So when you are teaching people, whether it's in basketball, tennis or anything else, you have to be able to learn to control the chair and things like that. I don't see a disability, but that's mainly because I was born disabled, so it has always been a part of me. And all you do is you adapt the world to you. Yes there is always gonna be challenges around that and peoples' attitude and perceptions and everything else, but that is something that you can't control anyway. All you can control is the way you look at life and the way that you approach life. I think it is up to people themselves to go out and to achieve what they want to do. There's always gonna be barriers in the way, but how do you actually get around it, it's a personal*

journey. For me I was born this way, so this is the way the world is, I can't change everything else around it but what I can change is my attitude towards what I'm doing and how I'm doing it, you know, you are not always going to achieve what you want to, but it's about the journey that you are taking rather than the actual end goal sometimes.

You have participated in four Paralympics – how do you see the whole movement developing?

I was very lucky that I participated in four Paralympics Games. My first one was in Barcelona in 1992, and then Atlanta, Sydney and then Athens. I was going to go to Beijing but then I had all my injuries the year before, so I knew for me that was the end point, when I knew I couldn't compete with the top players in the world. I think I could have got to Beijing, but just to go there, just to get another track suit, just wasn't good enough for me, if I'm not there to actually win it, that was a thing for me. It grew massively. When I first remember Barcelona, playing on the clay courts out there, my first Paralympic games, that was just amazing, to see the crowds to see the people, to see everybody coming together, to be involved in the Paralympics movement, and I think every games there has been a step forward, in terms of the level of participants, in terms of the crowds, in terms of the overall exposure, I think each games have moved forward. I think with London though it has been taken to a completely different level. Never before have we had sell-out venues, never before have we had that much media interest, never before have we had people who were at the highest level, and wanting to be at that level. Going back to Sydney, which was only four Paralympics game ago, you know, you had to bus school children in to actually fill the stands, so that's a massive change. Being involved, actually running the Paralympics event, you actually see the things from a different angle as well. As an athlete all you are focusing on - which is what you should be focusing on – is what you are doing, who are you playing against, have you done the right training... When you are actually involved with the organization and managing of it, you are looking at slightly different things, so that was a real eye-opener. As an athlete what you want is, when you actually go to the venue or the court, have you got the best things prepared for you, to give it your maximum. So hopefully, when I was involved in running of the Paralympics in London, I looked at it from an athlete's point of view. So I want to take away all the kind of the distractions: have I got the right food?, are there the right things in place, have I got enough training? So I tried to put all these questions away so that when the people came along all they focused in on was actually the tennis side of things. Massive changes and let's hope that Rio learn the lessons from London, because I think London has taken it to a different level and let's hope that it carries on the movement and the progression, because the bar's been set very, very high now.

20,33 Do you see a reason behind that, why exactly London achieved that?

I think one of the big things is that England, London, is the home of the Paralympic movement so it kind of brought things home as well, but also it is in Europe so it's accessible. But then to me, two of the biggest factors, were: one – the spectators, you know you had people wanted to come to actually view sport; there was a slightly knock on effect from the Olympics, because you had the Olympics before and people couldn't get tickets to it so we actually want to go along and actually see sport at the highest level, and then they saw the Paralympic. And after a while, they forget that it is Paralympic sport and they just see sport - which is where we always wanted to take it to anyway. Secondly the people you had involved in terms of the organizing committee (and I feel very honoured to be part of that), they are all from a sports background, so they know what it's like to be involved in sport and to actually bring it out, so that was great. And the third thing for me were the games makers – so the people who actually made the games: all the volunteers that we had, the dedication, and the enthusiasm is just infectious, these people turned up day after day, they had not been paid to be there, and they loved being there, we had to turn people away who were not on shift that day, sorry, "But can we come to watch?" It was like well, officially no, but unofficially it's great because you actually built enthusiasm and that builds on. And then the fourth factor is the dedication of the athletes as well, once you've got a show to actually sell you need to have the right products in the show, to have people wanting to come back, day in day out, looks good on TV, people actually talking about the sport side of the things, so all these four factors for me really blended in at the right time, and for me the Paralympics - this is England! - the weather turned out really nice for us, especially for tennis. It's the biggest factor, we had miserable year last year in terms of weather, we ran the test event in May; it was cold, it was wet, it was horrible, there was lots of rain breaks. For the Paralympics we had ten days of unbelievable weather, sunshine every day. I remember the referee said at the start you know "We've got the heat rub, but we don't think we will be using it, ha-ha!" In the end it was nearly 30 degrees on court, so people were using shades and stuff and people had to get umbrellas out to protect themselves from the sun. So we were lucky in terms of the weather but everything else you know, we had the right ingredients to be able to bake a pretty good cake.

What is the most memorable moment in your sport career?

That's an easy one - winning Wimbledon in 2005, it was with Michael Jeremiasz, my doubles partner, a great friend of mine. To be able to share it with him was quite special as well. It was the first time that they had an event at

Wimbledon for wheelchair tennis, so you know, to actually win the event, your name will always be at the top of the list so... and then also it was such an emotional rollercoaster of a match as well. We had to qualify to get in in the first place, I think we were seeded two at the event, the semi-final wasn't a great match but the final itself kind of went up and down, we were ahead in every single set, but then they kept coming back, then we were ahead and then in the final set itself - it was two hours and 20 minutes long, but then was a tiebreaker – that's never happened at Wimbledon before, because the final set of a tennis match at Wimbledon is always a long set, but that was a first to have a tiebreaker. And again we went ahead in the tie break, they came back, and then they went ahead and they actually had a couple of championship points; so at 6-4 they had 2 championship points. The first one I think David hit it long, the second one I remember I came in for a volley, hit a backhand overhead smash and hit the net corner and it just went over, so we were that close to actually losing it; changed round and we won the match 8:6 in the tiebreaker, in the final set. And after we won them the match point, I threw my racket in the air, gave Michael a great big hug, tried to pull him out of his chair, but he's heavier than me, so I actually ended up coming out of my chair. And then that was it, that was just emotional, the biggest high I have ever had. And then we went to the champions' ball and everything else, I shan't talk about what happened at the end of the day, it was just a complete mess, there was a blur, but the highlight of my career, for sure.

26,00 What about the biggest achievement in your life?

I don't really have anything else to compare that with in terms of my achievement in life, you know for me... I think there are many of different achievements that you can actually look at. For me sport has always been the biggest part of my life and I can't really think of anything else out of my life that I have actually achieved. I feel very fortunate that I have three nephews and a niece. It's great, I've always wanted a niece so to actually have her, to help them to grow up back home in Leicester... I've helped my oldest nephew from university to help him build his own house. So there is a lot of thing going in and around, and now with my basketball club I see them as my next kind of project and to help the basketball club to be the best club that it can be so I think there are some challenges still lying ahead. For me sport has been such a big part of my life that I've just been more than happy to be involved in that and to have achieved what I have done.

You have mentioned that sport helped you to keep fit, on the other hand you also mentioned you had to stop because of the injuries, so is sport healthy for us?

For the vast majority of time, yes, I am kind of coming towards my 50's now and I am feeling in a very good state of health and that's because of sport. However on the flip side injuries do occur, but that is one of the things when you are overusing muscles and joints that aren't supposed to be doing that, then they do occur, so overall I think I am very healthy and fit, you know I can get up early for work, I can still go out, and I can still train at the reasonable level, but injuries are a natural part of most sportsmen life anyway, but I think it's a way that your body's telling you that maybe you need to slow down, you cannot compete at the same level forever. I think when you are growing up, in your 20's and 30's that is when you are at your fittest and naturally your body kind of slows down anyway. But for me I try to maintain my - I won't call it fitness now - but I try to maintain a level of fitness so I don't get overly tired with the rest of the things I do in my life nowadays.

Coming to what you are doing recently. You work as a East Midlands Inclusive Sports Development Officer for the English Federation of Disability Sports. Can you summarize the biggest achievements of this organization?

Within my working life now, I work for the English Federation for Disability Sports and we've gone from being a regional association to a national one now. So what we do is we work with a variety of sports to support them to become more inclusive to disabled people. So my achievement within what I've done is that the model that we used in the East Midlands - so my job was to work with the sports to make them inclusive, my line manager Ray, his job was to support the delivery of the infrastructure, to actually have more people on the ground to be able to support the sports, so the way we two kind of match together that is very much replicated in the work we do now, in terms of we have what's called an engagement team who actually go out there and work on the ground to work with the regions and the county sports partnership to develop the infrastructure to be able to support the disability sport, to the sports team who go out and work with the sports to support them to become more inclusive. And my job now is to kind of help to bond those two teams together, so I work on templates and models and to support the two teams, because within a national framework people work all over the place, so my job is to bring them two together and - what we are doing, where we are doing it? - how do we link those two together, so it's very much a supportive kind of level. There are still challenges ahead obviously in terms of funding, in terms of infrastructure, but our role, our remit is very much around getting more disabled people playing sport at the level of their choice. Not everybody wants to play sport to become an elite athlete; people want to play sport just because they enjoy it. That kind of ties

with the stuff that I do with my basketball club here in Leicester, so that allows me to then support the people, because sport really happens at a local level. Not everybody can travel around or wants to travel around, but can people take up sport at the level of their enjoyment and that is the thing that for me is the only thing, because we've got people in the club who do want to go and play at the Paralympics, and want to go off and do that stuff, which is fine, but then we've got people that want to turn up once a week, and just train and be involved in the social aspect, just get a bit fitter, and that is fine as well. And as a club we have to cater for all those levels, so it is about trying to find the right balance between those. We are not perfect, we're still searching. A lot of things around us are sometimes challenges. For example over the last year or so in terms of local authority cuts and changing the leisure centre opening times and with the club that we've got – we've got 38 members now - so trying to support and bring everybody along their own personal journey, simple things like each person will have their own sports chair, so where do you actually keep the sport chair, do we take it home, we have a container which is very useful for us, but then if you want to change your training base or you have an away match, how do you physically transport all the chairs around, so there is a lot of logistics around it, but it's a continuous thing, there is no kind of end date with this, it's just maintaining, challenging, moving forward, looking at the next steps, so it's interesting.

You have mentioned your involvement in spreading wheelchair tennis around Europe and the world actually. I know you help to introduce it in India, Romania and Lithuania. So tell me something about your experiences.

I've been involved in developing the sport internationally for a good few years mainly when I was competing, you know, when we had a break in a December time I'd go away, I'd run a camp in Lithuania, Romania, or Hungary, wherever, but my biggest project was working with the All-India Tennis Association to help them to start the wheelchair tennis programme over there. It has been something that wheelchair tennis because of the 25th anniversary set up something called the Silver Fund. There has been great, there was a programme out there, but how do we actually start a wheelchair tennis in countries that haven't actually got it. So what they normally do is they send out a coach and a player ambassador to go and run clinics to go and help to set up the infrastructure and the emphasis on it is very much around setting up the programme within the countries. So what you normally do is you go in for few weeks, so two weeks one year, two weeks another year and then you help them set up whether it is a coach's conference, or a disability or rehab centre, so you are actually going there and you help them to set up the programme, show them what can be done, leave them with the development plan and then you can support them from outside. With India it was a slightly different, because it's such a big country, we went to 4 different cities over

a period of time, then with my involvement with my Community association here in England we then set up a fund over here to actually them buy 40 wheelchairs. One of the biggest things they were actually missing was the actual sports wheelchairs, so we set up a fund, the community raised the money, we bought the chairs, and the last time I went over to India was part of the Commonwealth games in Delhi three years ago, and we did an exhibition to say what's happening, and then we actually gave them the chairs. And now there's four different cities, that've got the infrastructure, the wheelchairs, the coaches and that is you know very much what we wanted to do. All what we are actually doing is building and helping develop; how they actually do it and where they take it forward, that's really on each country do decide. Is it going to be a tennis association, is it going to be the disability association, or is it going to be run by a bunch of volunteers? We don't dictate how they do it, all we do is show them how they can do it, and then we kind of support them from the outside. We want them to be part of the tennis family, so if they want to then when they decide to have their own satellites or international tournaments, if they join other tournaments, the main thing is that people are playing on a regular basis within the set up that they have got in that country. It is very heartening you know, because I have friends at Facebook, and they are messaging me every now then, it's great to see how they are now taking their own journey, about their sport and what they are doing and where they are actually going. It's great to see that they are actually involved in events, tournaments and competitions now, because I hope they will get something out of it as much as I did with my sport.

One of my favourite stories from the tour is that I actually have a child named after me, in Geneva in Switzerland. Basically I played a tournament in 2000, one of my favourite tournaments, I think I got it to semi-final of the singles and the final of doubles and the mixed doubles and I beat the world number in the singles in the quarter-finals. I met a reporter, Isabel, she was seven months pregnant, and she says "I really love your name Jayant, and you know if I have a boy, I'm gonna call him Jayant". And I was like, OK, nice lady, I will see you maybe next year or something. And I met her the year after and she had a boy, and she actually named him Jayant and it was like wow. To have actually have the influence on somebody else... so we become really good friends from then and I know the rest of the family, she's got six children all together, she had another one after that and just to be part of that family now, you know, they call themselves my Swiss family, so I go over there I see them once a year, we have been skiing, last year they were in London, and the children came out to see me, go out for a dinner, so to me it's more than just sport, you're actually communication and making connections with people that you might never ever seen before. And for their point of view as well I suppose they have made a connection with a wheelchair tennis world and they have actually

got somebody within their family now that has an association, some of their friends of the family now because the family is now spreading wider and they are more involved within the tournament now, and they help out and stuff. That for me is one of the biggest things, it is great, you would have never had thought that you'd influence somebody to actually have a child named after you, it is very strange.

Are you aware of yourself being an inspiration for another wheelchair player?

See, I don't really see myself as an inspiration to other people, if I can help somebody else along the line whether it's involved in sport, whether it's tennis or basketball, I just see this as a part of what I do anyway, I really enjoy that side of things, I have been involved in many tennis camps, many basketball things. I think for me sport has been such a massive part of my life, and if I can help to ignite a flame in other people then that's great and I know that Gordon Reed who is a current British number one he still keeps contact with me, when he was growing up he was in late teens he used to call me his mentor, and you know, it's great, but then he has got so many other people around him as well. But if I was one of the people that kind of helped him you know, so it's absolutely fantastic. And again with the club now we you know with the basketball club we bring people through but I don't expect to be part of their life. If I got to help them along the journey I show them the way, that's what I really want to do, we have got another local tennis coach, I got to know through the centre I used to play at, I set up the Wheelchair Tennis Club in Leicester and he was looking for an opportunity to actually be more involved in coaching, so I actually brought him into the fold and enabled him to find the grants to then become a tennis coach and then he would run sessions for us. And then he kind of writes to me every so often as well saying you kind of helped me with that thing. But then I think, I look back to all the people that have helped and inspired me, you know, my first teacher Mr. Moore, I still call him Mr. Moore. Two years ago I got him some tickets for the final at Wimbledon and it's great to be able to give something back to people that have helped you out. My coaches that've helped me and inspired me over the years as well, these are people that help you along the journey so I feel my role now is to help on other people on their journey as well and it is great, but then you help people along, but then you have to let them go as well to find out where they want to go. And it's great if they keep in contact with you, and if they don't it's not the end of the world either, it's just one of those things in life, you just try to keep moving, keep the opportunities there, because you know what it meant to you by having these people there, but you also know that they've got their own journey to take as well.

What would your advice be to someone who is disabled, would like to take up a sport but is still hesitating for any kind of reasons?

We have people coming down to our basketball club the whole time and they think wow, maybe it's not for me, and these guys are pushing around, there are so many opportunities to get involved in sport. The internet is a wonderful place to start, you can have a search for a sport or an activity, and what I would say is just give it a go. You don't have to be aiming for the Paralympics or stuff, sport is a way to get involved, it's a way to get fit, it's a way to interact, it's a way to have all the social benefits that people in mainstream life take for granted anyway. We've had quite a few people come up right after the Paralympics, who said, oh we never thought that sport was for us, but they've been inspired themselves by watching it on TV, and they've seen it and said oh we want to have a go now. And you know trying to take up sport on the local level, it doesn't have to be with a club, it can be with friends and family. But just if sport is what you want to do, these days there shouldn't be barriers around like there were in terms of the equipment in terms of the opportunity; it's a lot easier to access now, the only question you have to ask yourself is do you really want to take a part in it.

Keep it low key?

Sport has many different levels that you can actually access whether it's from a participation point of view, you just want to take part in sport because is something to want to do for fun; a rehabilitation point of view if you had something happened to you, when you end up being disabled you want to find a way to actually use sport to actually get back in to fitness and stuff; and then you've got the competition point of view as well, so once you've actually got involved in sport, you finally wanna have a go, then you want to challenge yourself and challenge the other people. All levels of sport are open to everybody, and you don't have to reach for the highest level if you don't want to, but if you do, then there should be a pathway there for you.

How do you see the future of Paralympics and disability sport, where is it heading to?

The future of Paralympic sport is an interesting question, because there is a lot of conversation around whether the Olympics and Paralympics is going to be integrated. For me a step before that needs to happen, I think. We should go down the sports for sports route. So say for example with tennis, I think the reason why the wheelchair tennis has got so far that involved in the circuit and Grand Slam event, there is two things. One, wheelchair tennis is actually run

by tennis, so it's under the umbrella of the ITF (International Tennis Federation) so it's a sport for sport's sake. The other thing about wheelchair tennis is that it's a very simple sport in terms of – there's only two categories, so you've got the open category, so that anybody, male or female, can actually take part and then you've got the "quad" classification and that is for the ones with more severely disabled impairment, so they have got problems with their hands as well as with their legs. And I think sport needs to in a way to, if you look at some other sport for example with swimming or table tennis, there is a lot of classifications out there which can get very, very difficult to understand what they are, but then it also puts people, people then take up sport occasionally for the wrong reason, they take up sport because they think they can achieve something, and if they don't fit into a category where they can feel they can actually achieve, then they will pull out the sport all together. So I think there needs to be fewer classifications and also the other thing that needs to happen is that sports themselves needs to take governance and ownership of whether disabled participants are actually taking part in those sports. I can give you an example for that: I think that the International Paralympic Committee still runs the athletics and swimming, whereas I think they need to be more pushed so that the international bodies of those sports then take the ownership and the responsibility for that as well. Once it starts developing those pathways they can start integrating into more of their own events, so that you don't have a disability event sitting on the side of somewhere, you actually have a sporting event where disabled people actually take part in that event. So you wouldn't have a national swimming championships for able-bodied people and then a separate one for disabilities, it would be an integrated event where your disability event actually sits as part of that.

How big a role has the Paralympic movement and its raising popularity generally played in changing the general attitude of people towards disabled people in the society?

I think the way the disabled people are perceived and looked at, especially when you have the media exposure from the Paralympics, changes each time. I think people are more interested in sport in general when it's Olympics or Paralympics, but it's up to everybody else to kind of keep the momentum and keep it building forwards. At the same time I think it's also the responsibility of the disabled participants themselves to then go out and be the best that they can be to actually ensure that what they are actually showcasing is purely sport. So I think the two things work kind of hand in hand. There needs to be more events, there needs to be more structure, for example with cycling they don't have that many events that are actually going on, so there just needs to be more competitions, more events, but also for me sport happens really at a local level so there needs to be within the club's structure that already sit around.

England has many sports club, has got many people taking part in sport on a daily basis, I would question how many people there are actually actively going out looking for disabled people and actually, on the flipside of that, are they aware how accessible and how inclusive their clubs actually are for people to actually take part if they are disabled. A big barrier when you are disabled is, you go down to your local whatever it is – badminton or athletics or whatever club, do you actually feel welcome when you're actually at the club, do they have the right coaches in place, are they aware of your limitations, I'm not saying that everybody will have an awareness, but for me it is about – it is a teaching method, it's called a differentiation. So can you actually handle a group of twenty people where one or two might not fit in into your mould? Is the coach, is the person there, can they actually look after everybody, have they got the skill? Do they actually want to feel included because that could be a barrier to stop people from taking part in first place?