



## **UK SPORTS ASSOCIATION**

### **For People with Learning Disability**

#### **The Full Story – Meet Verona Elder MBE, Chef de Mission, 2011 Global Games**

Verona Elder (MBE) is the British, Commonwealth and European multi medal winning athlete who will lead Team GB as Chef de Mission to the 2011 INAS Global Games in Italy on 24th September – 4<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

Verona's interest in athletics developed from a young age and she quickly became a full time devotee when she started to become successful and represent Great Britain at international level, as she reveals now *'To compete at the highest level any athlete has to be 100 percent committed to their events with no time for other pursuits'*.

Retired from performance sport means now Verona has that valuable added time to indulge in her other passion – golf, which she plays at her local club and is the lady captain.

Never far away are thoughts of Team GB and what they will face at the Global Games. To get into the mindset of the professional athlete and to overcome nerves Verona's main advice is that "preparation is key".

She says "preparation is all important as is getting into a solid routine. To get into the position of competing at international tournaments of this calibre an athlete has to have qualified successfully and therefore knows that their ability and performances are good enough to be there. This in itself gives the athlete the confidence to deal with the situation and to block out the crowd in the build up to a race".

Verona admits she is generally pretty competitive and likes to win, so no surprises that she is already looking at how to motivate Team GB through the gruelling training regime over the next few months in order that they can compete at the highest level.

"Its not enough to think you have done enough" says Verona 'Striving for the next target, for example the next tournament, provides motivation. Support from the athlete's coaching staff is crucial and we have a great staff team for the Global Games across the sports. For me, my husband was a huge support as he coached me from a young age. My first coach, Charles Taylor who has now unfortunately past away was also a great support'.

Talking about her involvement with the squad for the Global Games she says 'the Chef de Mission role is great for me as I have been able to involve myself with athletes with learning disability in my role at Thurrock College where I taught sport to people with learning disability. I was also a Community Sports tutor, where I have seen first hand the struggle that athletes with learning disability have and I think this allows me to more

easily support the athletes. I hope my years of experience performing at an elite level will also lend itself to help these talented British athletes in their quest for that gold medal too!”

Looking ahead to the Global Games and beyond Verona says ‘The Global Games in Italy will provide a vital opportunity for the athletes to gain experience of a high pressure competition in the lead up to the London 2012 Paralympic Games. From being away from home in the unfamiliar environment, keeping to the right diet, and competing with other learning disability athletes from around the world the Global Games is excellent preparation for the challenges ahead’.

She goes on to say ‘In my role as Chef De Mission along with the other support staff I can offer support to athletes for example who may have to cope with huge disappointment if they fall short of what they were hoping to achieve. In this situation the key for athletes, after the tournament is finished, is to analyse the performance along with the coach and see what areas can be improved, to forget about the disappointment and move on to the next challenge. Equally I may have athletes to deal with who have achieved much more than was expected, who in turn will be absolutely elated and who may need to refocus their efforts’.

Beyond the Global Games and Paralympic Games next year in London Verona hopes that learning disability sport will benefit from increased publicity and being in the public conscience, saying ‘In my opinion learning disability sport is massively under funded by Government and sports governing bodies. After these major tournaments athletes of all ages, particularly younger athletes, will benefit greatly from having the opportunity to showcase their talents on the world stage. This will work wonders for their confidence and self – esteem and will hopefully help the development of learning disability sport, so overall I see a bright future for sport in Great Britain!’.

Verona’s impressive medal haul includes the following

**Gold:**

1973 European Indoor Championships 400m  
1974 Commonwealth Games 4 x 400m relay  
1975 European Indoor Championships 400m  
1978 Commonwealth Games 4 x 400m relay  
1979 European Indoor Championships 400m

**Silver:**

1974 Commonwealth Games 400m  
1977 European Indoor Championships 400m  
1978 Commonwealth Games 400m

**Bronze:**

1981 European Indoor Championships 400m

To find out more about Team GB including how you can support them get to the Global Games, contact UKSA on 0207 490 3057



(Verona Elder on her way to an event at the Global Games)