

Where 'r' They Now? – Ben White

It's been a long time since the Old Russellians of the school last reflected on their sporting lives in my article. But now that that we are back a new year brings a new era to the 'r' newspaper, as well as the return of many old faces.

The 'r's return to this academic year brings with it the return of a familiar face to the school and some of our teachers. Ben White.

Ben was a student at the school from 1992, when he joined in Year 7, to 1997 when he left Royal Russell at the age of 16. He was both partially blind and deaf, but despite these struggles he had in life, Ben took them in his stride and in my recent interview with Ben he couldn't speak highly enough of the school and what it enabled him to do later in life (which I will come to shortly). I believe this spirit and determination from Ben, to work hard and to the best of his abilities whilst carrying his struggles from day-to-day, highlights the true passion of our OR's towards Royal Russell and how the school has become a strong starting block in our pupils achieving their goals in life. In particular, Ben found the support from our then Head of Sport (Mr O'Brien) and Cambridge housemaster (Mr Piggins) extremely helpful told me that: "they both knew that I loved sport and were always making sure that despite my disabilities I never gave up on sport or the enjoyment of being involved in sport." Here Here Ben!

Whilst at school Ben trained hard for a variety of sports teams, including: Football, Basketball, Tennis, Table-Tennis, Cricket, Athletics and Hockey all whilst carrying his disabilities, making his ability to develop his skills in sport two times harder. Ben always knew that because of this he was never a "star or one of the best in the teams", but as a true lover of sport, he never backed down from a challenge and in his words: "I just loved being active". His desire towards sport paid off though, as Ben's hard work enabled him to get picked for most of the school teams to play against other schools in games and tournaments! Despite some doubt in his mind that his involvement in the school teams was going to be an impossible task for Ben to achieve, the support he gained from his teachers installed some self belief into Ben's mind and was able to go on and grow from there. This is a great example of passion and commitment that everyone should aim to achieve in any aspect of life.

Sport was clearly a hugely important part of Ben's life and this can be seen by his love for Crystal Palace FC. Growing up, his idols in life were "Ian Wright and John Solako" two players that I am sure every Palace fan would agree are legends of the club and the multiple seasons that Ben spent watching Palace as a season ticket holder affected his career decisions later in life. Before this, Ben left Royal Russell to go to college where he continued to aspire for a career in the football industry. When he left college, Ben completed his football coaching course and went on to become a voluntary coach for adult teams in both the UK and USA, which he has been doing for the last 6 years. Quite a change seeing as Ben worked in Sainsbury's for his first job!

Recently Ben left his role in coaching to work as a P.E Teaching Assistant at a senior school in Redhill, for the past 3 years. Now Ben works in what can only be described as a dream job. After teaching in Redhill, Ben received an offer from Crystal Palace to work as a Youth Solutions Officer, within the club's Foundation.

From watching them every week as a young boy, to working for the club's foundation, Ben's love for both Crystal Palace FC and sport as a whole (both at Royal Russell and when he left) allowed him to break through his barrier of being partially deaf and blind to have an amazing life, which any pupil at the school who loves sport can admire and wish to follow Ben in his moral footsteps.