

Greg Rutherford discovers whether he could make it as a rower

Submitted by: Revolution Sports

Tuesday, 27 November 2018

Olympic, World, Commonwealth and European long jump champion Greg Rutherford wowed British Rowing coaches recently when the 32-year-old tackled assessments that make up one of the most successful talent identification programmes in the country, World Class Start. He even broke a record for one of the tests.

World Class Start was responsible for 50 per cent of the rowing medallists at the London 2012 Olympic Games, and there was at least one graduate of the pathway programme in every medal-winning GB Rowing Team crew at Rio 2016. Now, British Rowing is working with its Official Analytics Partner, SAS, to enhance the world-renowned programme as part of a new data-driven project called Athlete Longitudinal Profiling.

Recently retired Rutherford, 32, and World Junior high jump and heptathlon champion, Morgan Lake, were invited to British Rowing's state-of-the-art training venue in Caversham, Berkshire, to find out first-hand what it takes to experience some of the tests involved in World Class Start.

With British Rowing's Moe Sbihi, Holly Hill and Sam Courty – all alumni of World Class Start – on hand to guide the jumpers through their tests, Greg and Morgan had a variety of measurements taken before getting into the more strenuous and grueling physical challenges.

No stranger to stepping outside of his comfort zone after appearing on BBC's Strictly Come Dancing in 2016, Rutherford said: "I've found that rowing – a sport that I've never in my life considered – is a sport I'm actually not bad at, which is a fascinating thing for me to find out.

"Before we did anything else, we measured height and arm span and the first thing that was said was that I was 2cm shorter than what British Rowing would accept as the minimum for a rower, so from the first moment I started those dreams were dashed slightly.

"What was fascinating, as we went into the actual testing, was that I set a new record on the leg press machine, which shows that actually you can make it up in slightly different ways."

The British long jump record holder (8.51m (+1.7 m/s)) was effusive in his support of British Rowing's data-driven approach to enhancing its talent ID programme with Athlete Longitudinal Profiling aided by SAS. He said: "The approach British Rowing is taking is fantastic and I think it will open up a sport that predominantly people would assume is not for everybody, and I think that's a wonderful thing.

"I think SAS' data analytics could be used across all sports. As we modernise and actually get into the 21st century – because some sports really are stuck in the past – we'll find that stat-driven training and development is something that could be really useful."

Indoor Rowing

After the initial testing, Rutherford took to the rowing machine. A short film of his activity that he shared on Twitter caught the attention of four-time Olympic rowing champion Sir Matthew Pinsent, who was full of praise for the first-time rower.

<https://twitter.com/GregJRutherford/status/1060277300430802944>

Following the experience, Rutherford added: “The interesting thing with something like rowing, which is another thing I didn't realise, is that there's a whole competitive indoor scene on the ergos, and you can go out there and start rowing that way; so actually, if initially you don't make it, there is still a good level of crossover from being able to go to a gym and train, which we don't have in track and field.”

With the Mizuno British Rowing Indoor Championships (BRIC) less than two weeks away on Saturday 8 December 2018, British Rowing has extended the former Olympian an invitation to take part.

Kenny Baillie, British Rowing Director of Partnerships & Communications, said: “Greg's performance at Caversham was phenomenal, particularly the leg press and then later, on the rowing machine. Although he rowed over a relatively short racing distance, he was competitive when up against some of our most senior athletes.

“After having Sir Bradley Wiggins competing at BRIC 2017, it would be a thrill to keep up the tradition of having Olympic gold medallists from non-rowing disciplines taking up the challenge.”

To watch how both Greg Rutherford and Morgan Lake got on, visit: <https://youtu.be/qPpBJ5bDvow>

Find out more information about the partnership between SAS and British Rowing here:
https://www.sas.com/en_gb/offers/british-rowing.html