

Athlete Representative Panel 2022 Candidate Statements

Athlete Representative Panel 2022 Candidate Statement: Gemma Collis

Having been the vice-chair of the International Wheelchair Fencing Athlete Council for the past three years, I feel passionately about the importance of strong athlete representation and the power of the athlete voice. I strongly believe that including athletes within every step of the decision-making process is key to ensuring athlete interests are best served, to engaging athletes in any changes proposed and ensuring any potential concerns are addressed at the outset. Consequently I would relish the opportunity to be part of the British Fencing Athlete Representation Panel.

I have a proven record as an athlete representative, having been responsible (alongside my fellow athlete council members) for representing the views of hundreds of athletes from across the globe. I am an excellent communicator, with good interpersonal skills, a high level of knowledge and the ability to analyse a problem and develop solutions.

Through my role as the Vice-Chair of the International Wheelchair Fencing Athletes Council, I have experience of managing a diverse group of personalities and cultures in order to get the most out of everyone within the group. I regularly help to facilitate productive, but frank discussions on key athlete issues in order to come to a majority decision on our direction, taking into account the varying circumstances of our stakeholders. I always contribute to group discussions, encourage and ensure all voices within the group are heard and that everyone within our council are happy with our collective response before drafting proposals/replies to the IWAS Board.

As part of my role, I have advocated for athlete rights and interests – ensuring that athletes are at the heart of every decision made. I have collated and provided the international governing body with athlete-centred feedback on a variety of issues. This has included drafting written proposals to the IWAS Board on key issues facing athletes – including making recommendations regarding proposed rule changes (for example the sabre distance and proposed modifications to wheelchair rules), about whether the Tokyo qualification period should be cut short in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and whether Russian and Belarussian athletes should be permitted at competitions in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

As a Council, we have raised concerns about and held the international governing body to account on their response to the coronavirus pandemic, ensuring athlete safety and wellbeing are the number one priority at all times.

I have represented IWAS and our International Athletes Commission at the past two International Paralympic Committee Forums in Germany and the United States. In doing so, I have shared best practice, furthered my understanding of what effective and impactful athlete representation looks like/can achieve, have worked collaboratively with other sport representatives to further the athlete voice within the Paralympic movement and have debated key issues facing athletes in order to come up with well-reasoned and well-thought out proposals.

Most recently, my involvement with the IWAS Gender Equity Commission has furthered my experience and understanding of how best to run an effective and impactful Commission - something I think would enable me to further my impact if elected to the BF Athlete Panel.

Athlete Representative Panel 2022 Candidate Statement: Piers Gilliver

I've been competing internationally since 2012 and medalled at 2 Paralympic games.

I have been the wheelchair fencing athlete representative since 2018, during which time I've been: World Class Program Lead, British Disability Fencing board member (until merger), and been a member of a number of council groups for the British Paralympic Association, Bath University, Paralympic Heritage Trust. I've also been on several athlete representative training courses, which I continue to attend.

Athlete Representative Panel 2022 Candidate Statement: Billy Shepherd

Having previously worked as an athlete representative for the TASS Athlete Advisory Group (TAAG) for three years, I understand how important it is to represent the rights of athletes by providing them with a safe space to share their feedback on any issues they have during their time in sport. During my time at TAAG I gathered and collated feedback from TASS athletes and used this information to suggest improvements for the TASS scheme during meetings with other athletes and representatives from TASS.

Furthermore, I have represented athletes in meetings with British Fencing and The University of Nottingham and served as a wellbeing officer at The University of Nottingham's Fencing Club, where I learnt how to provide confidential support for fencers and how to appropriately signpost them where necessary. From these experiences, I would be able to provide athletes with a confidential, supportive space to provide feedback and effectively communicate this during meetings and through written reports to British Fencing to improve and help continuously develop the ADP to continue to create a high-performing sporting environment.

Athlete Representative Panel 2022 Candidate Statement: Kat Smith Taylor

As an athlete who has been fencing for 18 years and competed on the senior international stage for over a decade. I recognise that women's voices can be lost when it comes to sports, I am prepared to be that voice that will not get lost in the crowd.

Having been around the circuit for as long as I have, I have built relationships with many members of BF and I am not afraid to be the voice for someone who feels something who needs to be said.