

SPORT FOR ALL

In the '70s, '80s and early '90s Bristol Civic Society was frequently in partnership with the South West Sports Council, later expanded to the South West Council for Sport and Recreation (SWCSR), Bristol Sports Association and Bristol City Council. Our joint commitment was to the protection of playing fields from "development" and the creation of modern swimming pools and indoor sports halls that would attract much wider participation by local communities. We enjoyed much national support.

These environmental partnerships gradually drew us into much wider and more radical campaigns. I vividly remember alarming government officers by drafting 20 parliamentary written questions in support of the first Adjournment Debate on Sport *** that **established three fundamental reasons for promoting "Sport for All"**. They were:

1. Sport provides a healthy choice of exercise essential for all ages.
2. Competitive sport channels the aggressive instincts of young people into constructive physical activity.
3. Carefully structured sporting activity provides a challenging ladder of progress that can lead to international fame - which inspires increased participation

The **Wolfenden Report on Sport**, which triggered this crusade, required all these elements; and they began to be delivered by democratically elected representatives of a wide range of sports at all levels - schools, local clubs and national squads.

Traditional sports and a host of 'new' ones were gradually introduced and coached on "Joint Provision/Dual Use Facilities. These were a great benefit to deprived local communities who lacked provision within walking distance.

The SWCSR led the way in a critical appraisal of School Sport. We mounted a sustained monitoring exercise from 1982 - 1990. The gulf between the best and worst schools proved unacceptable. Dr Armstrong's research for Exeter University revealed that: "In an average week more than 50% of teenage girls and 33% of teenage boys took part in no activity as strenuous as a ten minute jog or a fast walk at 4 m.p.h. The subsequent government response "Sport for Young People" indicated a need for radical national improvement; specific targets

were set and ignored in many vital aspects. National interest evaporated.

4. **SO WHAT WENT WRONG?**
WHY WAS PRESSURE NOT MAINTAINED?
WHY WAS PROVISION FOR SPORT DECREASED?

Just over ten years ago the Government delivered a series of devastating blows to "Sport for All" and the many cross cutting benefits which had somehow been achieved.

- Despite fierce opposition the Regional Councils were dissolved. Sustained constructive representation was effectively stifled. The outcome has not been monitored.
- The school physical education curriculum was emasculated. An elite anti competition lobby removed almost all measured targets and competitive sport (retention of the minimum 25 metre requirement for swimming was only saved by a visit to No. 10 Downing Street) but countless competitive structures continued to be dismantled. (A head teacher in an Avon Primary School was reprimanded for allowing a competitive egg and spoon race!)
- Contract hours were imposed on teachers which resulted in far less voluntary sports activity beyond school hours.
- Head teachers were allowed to sell their dual use recreation land which we had so vigorously campaigned to protect.

WE HAVE REAPED THE WHIRLWIND OF JUVENILE OBESITY, LOSS OF SUSTAINED GREEN SPACE AND ARMED GANGS WHO MAKE CITY STREETS VERY ALARMING. THIS IS A MAJOR CRISIS FOR CIVILISED SUSTAINABILITY.

It has recently been claimed that our unhealthy and violent youngsters are being offered a revival of sporting alternatives; Roger Black (the famous Olympic athlete) is working hard to realise these intentions. Bristol University has announced plans to enhance educational leadership which I presume includes physical education. This is all very, very good news. But it will take years of tireless inspirational coaching and monitoring to reinvent the wheel. Can we learn from past success and disaster?

