

Jonathan Edwards

We meet Olympian triple jumper and world record holder Jonathan Edwards CBE, who visited Lewisham last month

★ What were you doing on your visit to the borough?

I went to Forest Hill Boys School to talk about the Olympic and Paralympic Games coming to London in 2012, and my journey as an athlete, from my first triple jump to competing in the Olympic Games. I was a late developer and didn't start training for the triple jump until I was 21. At that point, I wasn't amazingly good and it wasn't obvious I'd be an athlete. It's very different for young athletes now as it's a career choice, especially with the availability of lottery funding, which has made a massive difference.



Seven years on I'm only just starting to feel comfortable.

★ What have you been doing for the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games?

I have a broad ambassadorial role, going around the country talking to people about the benefits of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. I was also involved in the bid phase and I'm now the athletes' representative on the Board.

★ Apart from the athletics, what other sports will you be watching in 2012?

I love the cycling, and there's a fantastic velodrome being built on the Olympic Park site. I'm also looking forward to the beach volleyball on Horse Guards Parade and the equestrian and modern pentathlon events at Greenwich Park, right on Lewisham's doorstep.

★ How can Lewisham residents get involved in 2012?

There are lots of opportunities for those aged 18 and over to volunteer for London 2012. Specialist volunteers will have an existing skill, such as medical training, whereas general volunteers will receive training for roles in the athletes' village or greeting at Heathrow, for example.



For more information about London 2012's volunteer programme, visit www.london2012.com/get-involved/volunteering

★ You've held the world triple jump record since 1995. Are there any athletes around who might break your record?

You never know who might come through. Phillips Odowu (who won gold at last year's World Championships), Nelson Evora and Christian Olsson are only half a metre behind my record (18.43m, 60ft 5½ in).

★ As a veteran of two Olympic Games, how would you describe the atmosphere?

It's unique. It's the most important competition in the world, the biggest celebration of sport and humanity. The pressure and expectation set it apart as well as the fact that all the athletes are together in the athletes' village. People come from all over the world to watch it and it's magical, a melting pot of cultures that brings the city to life.

★ By 2002 you held gold medals for the four main sporting events (Olympic Games, World Championships, Commonwealth Games and European Championships). Was there anything more you wanted to achieve in your sport?

I didn't set out to hold all four world titles but it completed the circle. I'd done everything I wanted to do. So it seemed like a good time to retire – I felt I could walk away.

★ You retired in 2003 – how has it been adjusting to a life off the track?

It's been difficult, even though I've had lots of opportunities to get involved in TV and with London 2012. But you have to start again and build a new life using different skills. It's been challenging and I've worked hard.