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Female sports coaching standard at all-time high at the University of Birmingham

Following the announcement earlier this year that the University of Birmingham was selected as one of eight official FA High Performance Football Centres in the country, it's fair to say that the University is firmly on the map for its world-class facilities, elite athletes and superb sport opportunities for young and aspiring sportspeople. But further to this, it's the behind the scenes support that truly makes the University exceptional in its offering. Recently, the level of coaching expertise was increased even further for netball and triathlon.

Last month, the University's Lead Triathlon Coach, Lou Barron, was accepted onto the latest cohort of UK Coaching's 'Women into High Performance' programme, securing one of the 18 coveted places. Having started coaching in 2002, Lou became the Lead Triathlon Coach at the University in 2011, where she still coaches and runs a club of 106 triathletes, including a high performance squad of 12. Lou said about her selection: 'There is such a great history of women coaches who have graduated from this course and I am privileged and excited to be joining them. I'm looking forward to seeing how this will push my coaching to the next level and develop the existing talent at the University.'

This elite pathway, funded by Sport England and UK Sport, allows female coaches to prepare for the demanding requirements of high performance coaching positions with support, funding and guidance. The bespoke programme is aimed at female coaches who have been identified by their National Governing Body, in this case British Triathlon. With few women operating in the performance pathway, not only is it an exceptional achievement for a coach who has been so dedicated and committed to nurturing talent for so long, it will be hugely beneficial to the University's triathlon club.

Adding to the University's high performance coaching team is Dannii Titmuss, recently recruited as Head of Netball for the University. Dannii, who is also the Wasps U21 coach, will oversee all four of the netball teams, creating a fantastic alliance with the West Midlands Superleague team.

Dannii, with 8 years of performance coaching under her belt in both the UK and Australia, will align the Wasps U21 programme with coaching for the British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) teams, allowing players that are part of both teams to train with a coherent and structured schedule, as the current Superleague champions continue to engage and enhance the sport in the region. Dannii's presence at the university already seems to be motivating the club, with all four teams winning their first BUCS home games of the season last week, including a nail-biting match against Loughborough where the 1st team won 55-52.

Currently, the University has three netball scholars for the 2017-18 academic year who are all part of the Wasps squad: first year student and England U21 Captain, Francesca Williams (Economics), first year and Wasps U21 player, Ashleigh Dekker (Philosophy) and second year Biomedical science scholar Hannah Leighton, who is also in the Wasps U21 Academy.

Having these two high-class coaches on board is fantastic for the University, highlighting the exceptional standard of coaching available to students and scholars, as well as showcasing the offering of both the netball and triathlon clubs.

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Notes to Editor:

- The University of Birmingham supports around 100 performance athletes each year including Olympic gold medallist Lily Owsley MBE, and British Indoor 1500m Champion, Sarah McDonald. Sport scholars receive a comprehensive package of support per academic year, consisting of sport science, sports medicine, strength & conditioning, lifestyle and financial expense payments.
- The University of Birmingham Performance Centre was established over ten years ago, and provides one of the best integrated athlete-centred specialist support teams in the UK for developing performance. It offers the latest specialised sports science and medicine support delivered by a team of multidisciplinary experts, and the team of specialists work closely together to create a bespoke, integrated support plan. All the support is underpinned by scientific theory and the latest research with the use of state of the art specialist equipment, including the AlterG® Anti-Gravity Treadmill and Altitude simulator.
- The University of Birmingham was selected as one of eight FA Women's High Performance Football Centres in the country in July 2017, allowing the University to develop as a central hub of excellence in the region for the sport and headed up by Gemma Davies, Head of Women's Football and Football Development Officer.
- University of Birmingham Sport & Fitness opened in May 2017, it features Birmingham's first 50m pool, six glass back squash courts, 200+ station gym, five activity studios, an indoor sports arena, 10m climbing wall and more. The outdoor developments include a new athletics track, two synthetic hockey pitches, a 3G rugby/football pitch and 10 netball and tennis courts, due for completion this year.
- The University of Birmingham is currently ranked in the top ten universities for sport in the UK.
- The University of Birmingham is ranked amongst the world's top 100 institutions, its work brings people from across the world to Birmingham, including researchers and teachers and more than 5,000 international students from over 150 countries.