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M&S Manager Nick Steel

Topping up the team

Funding for the island's Commonwealth Games team has finally been found, as Martyn White finds out

Taking a team to the Commonwealth Games costs thousands of pounds. And when the team needs to travel to the other side of the world, it can cost a whole lot more.

Jersey's Commonwealth Games team was desperately searching for sponsorship. Yet with the Games in Melbourne just three months away, Martin Hebden and Alan Cross, the president and secretary of Jersey's Commonwealth Games Association, were struggling to find the necessary funds.

"We've always said that the finances wouldn't stop us from sending any athlete who met the qualifying standard," says Martin.

Despite getting a grant towards travel costs from the Commonwealth Games Association of Australia, it was based on a smaller number of Jersey athletes attending the Games.

"The grant is based on the average number of competitors at the previous three Games. Yet, the size of our team has increased from 25 competitors at the last Games in Manchester to 35 this time. So we're actually being penalised for taking a larger team to this Games," points out Martin, who admits to being slightly worried that the Jersey Association would have to pick up the bill.

He continues: "We were a little concerned about the financial situation. We had contingency plans and were determined that no-one would forego a place because of finances. If we hadn't secured a big sponsor then it would have left us in a weaker position for future Games, especially as the Youth Games is coming up in 2008."

Step forward the Jersey branch of Marks & Spencer who answered

the plea and have become official team sponsors, providing the money for travel, accommodation and kit.

"When London won the bid to host the Olympic Games in 2012, we in M&S Jersey thought we should be more involved in sport on a local level," says store manager, Nick Steel. "So when we were contacted by the Commonwealth Games people we were delighted to confirm our involvement."

Nick admits there is no commercial gain for sponsoring the team, but hopes that it will encourage future generations of local athletes to represent their island. "The island has fantastic sporting facilities and there are thousands of us involved in sport, many of us at a very high level," he says. "If we can encourage more young people to be involved in sport and play a positive role in the community then we'll be happy."

The store will be promoting Jersey's Commonwealth Games team on the storefront at each of the M&S outlets in St Helier, St Clement and St Brelade. "We want the public to know that we're involved in the team, as we're delighted to be associated with sport on a local level," adds Nick.

"We feel so pleased about M&S coming on board," says Martin, who points out that this has been augmented by additional sponsorship from Education, Sports and Culture and the Royal Bank of Scotland. "This sponsorship has secured the financial future of the whole team," he adds.

M&S also want first option to continue their sponsorship for future Games, says Alan, which means that Jersey's elite athletes won't have to concern themselves with finances for upcoming Games. Instead, they can concentrate on doing the island proud at the highest level possible!