



Meet the medics

Supporting Jersey's athletes at the Commonwealth Games will be an experienced medical team, as Martyn White discovers

Joining Jersey's sportspeople on the plane to the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne will be three new team members. Yet they won't be competing. Instead, they'll be helping our elite sportspeople by administering medicine, offering massages and generally patching them up.

Adam Garnett, Nick Hooper and Morag Obarska are local sporting stalwarts. They've been involved in numerous Island Games as part of a medical support team offering advice and help with injuries, with Morag even having the honour of carrying Jersey's flag at the opening ceremony of the Shetland Island Games last year.

Despite their Island Games experience – physiotherapist Morag has attended seven, doctor Adam has been to five, and masseuse Nick the last two – it's their first Commonwealth Games. Completing the medical team in Melbourne will be Sonia, an Australian-based physiotherapist.

All are really looking forward to the experience. "It's going to be awesome," says Nick. "Being in the athletes village, amongst some of the best athletes in the world, will be immense."

Local athletes at previous Commonwealth Games have had to use the medical facilities provided by each host city. Whilst the clinics are often comprehensive and the advice and support good, it can lead to some problems, says Adam. "There is always medical support at the Games, where they'll run huge clinics for the athletes," he points out.

"But we're obviously offering this solely for our team. Without us the athletes will often have to queue at those clinics for massages or for help with strains, which is not the best scenario for them when they want to concentrate on their performances."

Team Jersey manager Paul Huddleston, who is responsible for recruiting the three medics, has worked hard to integrate them into the overall team. So much so, that they've already been measured for their blazers, ties and so on, which they'll be wearing with pride at the opening

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and closing ceremonies as they walk alongside Jersey’s 35 sportspeople and 20-plus team managers, coaches and other officials. All three have already worked with most of the team for the Island Games and in the build-up to Commonwealths. “We’ve already been working with members of the team, especially where massage is concerned,” says Nick. “If we can loosen them up the athletes will be able to perform in more comfort and to the best of their abilities, which is one of the reasons we’ve been asked to go to Melbourne.”

The knowledge of the individual team members through their Island Games experiences will stand them in good stead when in Australia, says Adam. But he does see the Commonwealth Games offering a number of new challenges.

“At the Island Games we were dealing with hundreds of athletes, often starting at 7am. And we were dealing with medical ailments, torn muscles and so on, before finding out where else we were needed. We wouldn’t finish until late at night, so it was a very tiring experience.”

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Despite Paul Huddlestone’s pledge that the medics will be available 24 hours a day, Adam is hoping for a less exhausting time in Melbourne than he experienced at the Island Games: “We don’t have the volume of sport to deal with at the Commonwealth Games because there are fewer athletes, so we can offer a much more personalised service.”

Nick, who with Adam has recently set up the All Sports Injuries Clinic for local sportspeople, believes it will enable them to offer more advice to the team members: “Once we know what athletes are doing and what injuries may occur we’ll have a broader picture as to how we’ll spend our time with the athletes. We’ll be holding team meetings each night with the team managers to see what they want for their teams so we can react quickly to any problems.”

Adam is hoping to attend a three-day world sports medicine conference while he’s in Melbourne, but believes the role goes further than simply providing the team with advice: “As well as giving them correct information about ice baths and so on, which they might not be fully aware of, we’re there as someone to dump their problems on as well.”

Instead of being based in one area, they will be visiting the athletes who want care or treatment at the venues for their sports. The swimming team has already requested Nick’s massaging expertise, so each swimmer will have a massage directly after every swim session.

“A lot of these guys are starting to put themselves through tough training and are finding the benefits of massage before they even get to the Games,” says Nick. “And more and more professional sportspeople are making massage a part of their daily or weekly routine.”

The equipment needed to take care of Team Jersey will be enough to rival many well-stocked medical practices. Morag, who runs her own sports injury and physiotherapy clinic in Le Geyt Street, will take lots of strapping and physiotherapy equipment, including an ultra-sound machine.

“In medical supplies we’re taking the best part of £1,000 worth, which includes everything from cough and cold supplies to drugs that fight infections to sleeping tablets that will combat jet lag, which could be a problem for the first couple of days,” says Adam, who has also been liaising with the Games authorities on medical exemption forms for the athletes. He continues: “We’ve got loads of different antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and pain killers, as we have to cover all bases. The list is long!”

The medical team is renowned for being well prepared. “When we were in the Shetlands the Guernsey doctor was pinching some of our equipment because we were so well stocked,” Adam reveals, with a look of satisfaction.

The Commonwealth Games may be a once in a lifetime experience for Jersey’s sportspeople, who have put in four years’ hard work just to get to Melbourne. And with all of this effort going into the behind-the-scenes medical support as well, it seems that Team Jersey will be in safe hands when they get there!