

Olympic Torch Relay, Day 52

In the seventy days before the start of the London 2012 Olympics, the Olympic torch made an 8,000 mile journey around the British Isles. 8,000 people were lucky enough to carry the torch for part of this journey. In this article, Matt King, one of the torchbearers, tells his story.

I'll be carrying the Olympic torch through Dunstable early on Monday morning, before eight o'clock, so hopefully the weather will have improved. I'm massively looking forward to it, of course.

I could never have foreseen how my life was going to pan out. Eight years ago I was playing rugby league for the London Broncos colts side. We travelled to Halifax one weekend, stayed overnight, and on Sunday I was paralysed from the neck down, making a tackle. As I lay on the ground I knew straightaway what had happened to me and, for a boy of 17, it was devastating.

I was in Stoke Mandeville hospital for nine months (the torch will visit Stoke Mandeville, birthplace of the Paralympic Games in 1948, shortly after I've done my leg of the relay) and found myself at a crossroads. I could either give up, or try to rebuild my life. So I went back to school and finished my A-levels, then went to the University of Hertfordshire, where I got a first-class degree in law. Now I work for a City law firm, where I have a training contract, working with clients with spinal and brain injuries. They are quite complicated cases and I can have empathy with them.

This has been a surreal month for me. A few weeks ago a very official-looking letter dropped through my door box. It looked serious and I thought it may be about my tax. It was from the prime minister's office, telling me that I'd been given an OBE*. It came out of the blue and is a tremendous honour; when I told my mum, she cried. The honour was, I suppose, for my charity work with people with spinal injuries. But I've not consciously looked for recognition. I've just tried in the last eight years since that fateful day to live as normal life as possible.

I know I won't be the last person to be paralysed in a sporting accident. It was a freak incident, and no one's fault – I don't hold any grudges. I knew rugby had its risks, but you just think that accident is going to happen to someone else. I still follow rugby league and rugby union, though; in fact I got my RFU coaching badges after the accident and went back to my old union club in Biggleswade to coach the youngsters. They were great, but I found it tough as it emphasised what I couldn't do anymore.

Today will be great, though: a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and recognition for my family, friends and all those strangers who have helped me after those dark times in 2004.

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Glossary

OBE — Order of the British Empire, a special award for outstanding services to the community

1 How did Matt rebuild his life after his accident?

1 mark

2 Why is Matt able to have empathy with his clients?

1 mark

3 Why do you think Matt describes the month as "surreal" (line 16)?

2 marks

4 What does Matt mean by "that fateful day" in lines 21-22?
Why do you think he describes it in this way?

2 marks

5 How did Matt feel about coaching rugby? Why?

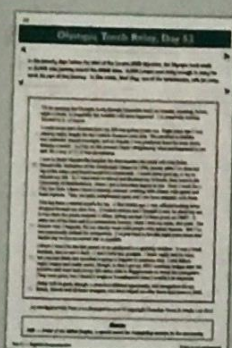
2 marks

6 Matt says he felt devastated after his accident (line 8). Do you think he still feels this way?
Explain your answer.

2 marks

Total
out of 10

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Question Book:

Year 6, pages 12-13

Author / Source:

Matt King, www.theguardian.com

Genre:

Non-fiction — news article

Cross-curricular links:

- PSHE (disability and accessibility)
- Geography (world cities)
- History (Ancient Greece)

Introduction

In this article, Matt King, one of the torchbearers for the London 2012 Olympic Torch Relay, describes how he rebuilt his life after a devastating rugby accident left him paralysed from the neck down. Before reading the article with the class, explain that torchbearers like Matt are selected because of their outstanding contribution to their communities and because they are role models to others. As they read, ask pupils to think about why Matt may have been nominated to act as a torchbearer.

Answers

1. E.g. He went back to school to finish his A-levels, went to university, and then got a job at a City law firm.
2. E.g. Because he has suffered a similar injury to them, so he understands what they are going through.
3. E.g. Because some very unusual things have happened, such as receiving an OBE and carrying the Olympic Torch.
4. The day his accident happened. E.g. He calls it a "fateful" day because it was a day that completely changed the course of his life.
5. E.g. He found coaching rugby difficult because it reminded him that he could no longer play rugby himself.
6. Any appropriate answer. E.g. No. Even though he can no longer do some things, such as play rugby, he no longer feels devastated because he has managed to move on and build a successful life for himself.

Extra Activities

- Ask pupils to explain why they think Matt was nominated by his community to act as a torchbearer. Get them to suggest role models in their communities who they would nominate to carry the Olympic torch.
- With the whole class, discuss the physical and social challenges that Matt may have faced when he went back to school after his accident. Ask pupils to identify anything their school has done to make it accessible for pupils with disabilities. What else could the school do to improve accessibility?
- Highlight the use of the first person in this article, and discuss, with the class, its effect on the reader. Discuss other uses of language that add to the impact of the article too.
- Assign groups of pupils different cities around the world, and ask them to prepare a bid for that city to host the next Olympic Games. Their bids might cover the city's size and location, its climate, its existing sports facilities, and how they think the Games would benefit the city and vice versa. Each group should present their bid to the class, and pupils can vote to decide which city should be awarded the Games.
- Get pupils to research the ancient Olympic Games. They should find out when and where the ancient Games began, who took part, and what events were involved. Pupils could use their findings to create a class display showing similarities and differences between the ancient and modern-day Olympic Games.