Tycoon attacks 'terrible waste' of state pupils' Olympic talent

Jim Armitage

ONE of Britain's biggest sponsors of state schools today declared Team GB would be even stronger if it were not missing out on the talents of a vast pool of state-educated children.

Although stars such as Mo Farah and Laura Trott broke through from comprehensives, a third of Team GB's Olympic medallists were privately educated compared with about seven per cent of the country as a whole.

David Ross, the millionaire co-founder of Carphone Warehouse and a board director of the British Olympics Association, said this reflected a "huge waste of talent" and called for targets to get pupils from less-privileged backgrounds into squads.

The entrepreneur, whose charity runs more than 30 state schools, said sporting bodies and the Government should push for Team GB to reflect the country's wider education background by the 2024 Olympics.

"Team GB's achievements were phenomenal, but there is clearly a massive untapped resource of talent," he said. "At independent schools, the children

receive a regular diet of sporting opportunities several times a week. Your potential gets spotted and exploited by the time you get to university and club level. In the state sector, unless the parents are really engaged, that often just doesn't happen, so your potential never gets identified. That's a terrible waste."

He said that although the Government should spend more on schools' sporting facilities, it was more a matter of "will" within the institutions. He said in the seven years since his David Ross Foundation started running academies, it had invested heavily to get children involved in sport. "It doesn't actually take that long to make a difference," he said. "We have two or three kids who

should be good for Tokyo in 2020. If all state schools were doing what we are, Team GB would be even better."

He said local clubs should do more outreach to target state schools, adding: "Cycling has been very proactive in that, so the demographic of the squad is more mixed." Sutton Trust research showed 92 per cent of medal-winning cyclists were state-educated, compared with 48 per cent of rowers and 50 per cent of the women's hockey team.

Although the percentage of privately educated stars fell from 36 per cent at London 2012 to 32 per cent at Rio, Team GB's top Olympians are still four times as likely to have been privately educated than the rest of the population.

Mr Ross is also seeking to indulge another of his passions, as he has submitted plans to convert a stable block at his home in Leicestershire, Nevill Holt Hall, into a 400-seat opera house. Nevill Holt Opera, which has operated out of a temporary structure for 10 years, said the art form was booming thanks to the country house circuit.

Comprehensive victory: Mo Farah and Laura Trott, right, at the Rio Games. Both gold medallists attended state schools

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Robert Dex
Arts Correspondent

THE Olympics may be over but the spirit of Rio lives on with samba dancers aiming to make this weekend's Notting Hill Carnival the most vibrant yet.

Hundreds of dancers from Bermondsey-based Paraiso School of Samba, which has its roots in the Rio carnival scene, will parade through the streets on Monday, while the Latin Rave Street Jam sound system will be setting up by Golborne Road.

Richard Galbraith, a trustee of Paraiso School, said work on creating the costumes started last November.

He added: "It looks like the weather will be kind this year because we've had rain the last few years and that doesn't do the feathers any favours but that wouldn't stop us anyway.

"We have put so much work into it. Notting Hill is the country's biggest carnival with the biggest crowds."

Brazilian Juliana Campos is one of the 250 dancers who will be performing in full costume. The fitness coach, who used to be a personal trainer for royals from the United Arab Emirates, performs at the Rio Carnival every year before return-

ing to take part in the west London's annual street party. The 38-year-old, who lives in Kensington and runs fitness classes in Holland Park, said she first got involved in Carnival as a youngster: "I feel that it is part of me.

"I love dancing and seeing the crowds smiling at us, I like to see people happy. Rio is a bigger event and they are different in some ways but the energy and happiness are the same. I dance in high heels in the street for four hours and I don't feel a thing, it is amazing."

This year's carnival is expected to attract more than two million people with about 9,000 police on duty. It starts formally on Saturday and will generate more than £93 million for the city's economy.

The Metropolitan police launched its pre-Carnival clampdown on potential troublemakers with raids across London yesterday. Suspected drug dealers were rounded up and weapons sweeps and traffic stops took place.

Post-Rio blues? Don't worry, its Notting Hill Carnival time

Notting Hill dancer: Brazil's Juliana Campos in full costume and in her day job as a personal trainer

You can keep up with the carnival over the holiday weekend at: **standard.co.uk/news**

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