**17th December 2015 - National Lottery**

My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Holmes, for tabling this debate

this afternoon. It was a privilege to be on the same team as him—at least when we were playing sport together.

Celebrating the 21st birthday of the National Lottery is perfect timing for the launch of the Government’s new strategy for an active nation. I congratulate the Government on that. There are some really positive things in there in terms of encouraging physical activity. If we have more active children with better physical literacy skills, it will be good for our medal chances but it will also be good for the health of our nation. I am also delighted to be heading a working group looking at the duty of care. The work of that group is going to be quite wide ranging.

I have a number of current interests in sport and they are all listed in the register. I also have a number of historic interests. I sat on the Sports Council for Wales, the English Lottery Awards Panel and UK Sport, and I was a lottery-funded athlete.

The last 20 years have been an interesting time in the development of sport. We have gone from being the plucky British athletes who turned up and had a go to teams which are taking on the world—and lottery funding has done that. Lottery funding has changed the mentality of athletes.

If we look at the context, 20 years ago I was part of the Manchester bid that went up against Sydney for the 2000 Games. There was a very brief period then when I was disappointed that we did not win. It did not matter that we had 100 years of data to show that there was more rain in spring in Sydney than there was in Manchester in the summer—all they had to do was show a picture of Bondi beach and they came through on top. But I am glad that we did not win because, without the lottery funding and the time that it took to embed into sport, we would not have had the success that we did in 2012.

The Sports Council for Wales ran some innovative programmes, including the Elite Cymru programme, which supported young athletes but also looked at education and the transition out of sport. At one point, the English Lottery Awards panel had the enviable job of allocating £20 million a month to new sports facilities. But it also changed the ethos of a number of clubs. Some clubs that had a blackball rule were told that they could not have any money. When they realised that there was money on the table, clubs that only allowed women to use the back entrance suddenly decided that that was not a bastion they had to defend. We also realised that the clubs that were getting money were the ones that were really good at filling out forms—so the priority areas initiative meant that funding was equitable for sports clubs and initiatives.

In 1996, the Olympic team won a single gold medal; the Paralympic team won 39 golds and was third on the medal table. When it was announced that because of the poor Olympic performance we were going to have lottery funding into sport, I started to say, “Well, actually, the Paralympic team—”, and then decided that I would be quiet, because for me it was about driving change and promoting inclusivity. This was an opportunity to get national governing bodies to think about disabled athletes. Up until that point, they really had not considered it.

In the early years, there were a number of sports that struggled. Sports had not been used to writing performance plans or having to justify where their money went. Some sports embraced it early on, such as cycling and rowing; other sports took longer to get used to it. But look at the amazing success we have now across all the Olympic and Paralympic sports and wider. We are showing the world what a wonderful sporting nation we are.

There were national disability sports organisations, and unfortunately some of the work they did has often been forgotten. They did a huge amount of work in bringing on and developing young athletes, and they still have a really important role to play in multisport activities for young people. Lottery funding meant that national governing bodies that wanted money had to take on supporting Paralympic teams. There was some success. They were advised that they should be inclusive, and some have been better than others.

I would like the Government to ensure that there is genuinely equitable treatment within elite sport for disabled athletes. This goes beyond the provision of kit. It is about representation on websites and the promotion of athletes. The public expect it, especially after 2012. They do not think that disabled athletes should be treated as second-class citizens. Occasionally, that still does happen. I ask the Minister whether the equitable funding of disabled athletes is taken into consideration.

It is a hard balance. In a changing world of sport, programmes for talented athletes start younger and younger—my own daughter is on a regional talent programme. There must be balance between education, sport and the transition out of sport, to make sure that the athletes who leave are able to come back and work in the sport as coaches or volunteers. I have no problem at all with every last ounce of talent being wrung out of a sportsperson while they are on lottery funding, but the transition out of sport is incredibly important and is a difficult one for a lot of athletes to deal with. Sport teaches you so many positive things and we should be able to funnel that into other areas.

Lastly, along with other noble Lords, I pay tribute to Sir John Major and all those who campaigned for lottery funding. It has contributed hugely to our medal success, it has been an inspiration to young athletes, and it contributed to the success of 2012 and our reputation worldwide as an amazing sporting nation.