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**Special Olympics Great Britain
Ski Team Send-Off to
World Winter Games Boise, Idaho, USA, 7-13 February
Skiers to Represent Great Britain vs 100 Countries**
BBC TV Presenter and Ski Champion Graham Bell Accepts Role as Ambassador

Sunday, 1 February – London: Special Olympics Great Britain's (SOGB's) World Winter Games Ski Team were fêted at the Park Inn Heathrow Hotel on the eve of their departure to represent Great Britain versus 100 nations at the **World Winter Games, in Boise Idaho 7-13 February 2009.**

Head of Delegation Candia Wragg read out congratulatory letters to the ten learning disabled athletes and their families from **Lord Seb Coe** (one for each athlete!), **Prime Minister Gordon Brown**, **David Cameron MP**, Olympic athletes **Sir Steve Redgrave** and **Sir Matthew Pinsent**, **TRH The Earl and Countess of Wessex**, **Nick Clegg MP**, BBC Presenter **Adrian Chiles**, and personal letters from the Team managers for **Manchester United** (Sir Alex Ferguson), **Arsenal** (Arsene Wenger) and **Aston Villa** (Martin O'Neill), and reams of best wishes from some of SOGB Official Partner **National Grid's** 400 volunteers and management, among others.

Also on hand was newest SOGB Ambassador, eight-time British Ski Champion and host of BBC TV's Ski Sunday and BBC TV's High Altitude TV shows **Graham Bell**. Bell spoke to the team about being determined and concentrating on their "race face" (think Beowulf!)

According to **Bell**, "I know how much hard work goes into making a skier the best he or she can be. These ten athletes have competed and trained across the country and in Italy. They are the best of our best learning disabled skiers and I am thrilled to know them and be an **Ambassador** for Special Olympics Great Britain."

Another highlight was a motivational talk with one of Europe's top MIND COACHES, **Dr. Karl Morris** (www.golf-brain.com). He focussed on relaxation breathing techniques whilst in the starting gate position, and asked Bell to help present each member with a Magic Moments Diary to write their daily record of all POSITIVE thoughts and experiences, to be read before practice and racing.

Joining the Team in Boise, **Jonathan Shaw, Minister for Disabled People**, said: "I'm really proud to be raising the profile of disability sport at a world event. It's vital that we champion the participation of disabled people in all levels of sport, which is why I'm heading out to Idaho to support our team. I wish them lots of success and hope they do well!"

The Team represents 4 of the 19 different SOGB regions: **West Midlands** (**George Brunt** of Bromsgrove; **Beth Wragg** of Stourbridge, **Craig Hannah** of Halesowen, **National Grid Volunteer Sue Hughes-Payne** of Leamington, **Assistant Head Coach Keith Parish** of Redditch, **Head of Delegation Candia Wragg** of Stourbridge, **Assistant HOD Alan Lines** of Redditch), **South Eastern** (**William Cottrell** of London/Blackheath, **Hannah Dempsey** and **Coach Liam deVanney** of Bromley, Kent, **Jonathan Frett** of New Malden, Surrey, **Greg Friend** of Cobham, Surrey), **Wales** (**Hannah Gleeson** of Nantycaws, **Amy Raddon** of Llanelli, **Family Co-ordinator Alexis Williams** of Llandeilo), **Lothian** (**Claire Jeffray** of Gifford).

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Andy Heffer, SOGB Director of Sports and Services, said, "Despite the difficulties we have in training – for the most part there's no snow in Great Britain – Special Olympics Great Britain has a proud tradition of success in alpine skiing. At our last World Winter Games in Nagano, Japan in 2005, 10 out of 12 of our skiers medalled. We have high hopes that our team will perform just as well this year in Idaho. I know that each and every one of them is proud to represent their country."

During their time in Idaho, the athletes will compete in three different Alpine Skiing disciplines - Super Giant Slalom, Giant Slalom, Slalom, in Advanced, Intermediate and Novice levels. The Alpine Skiing events will be held at Bogus Basin, the closest ski resort to Boise.

The team is generously sponsored by Virgin Atlantic, Park Inn Heathrow, Squire Foundation, The Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons, White Mountain, Zurich Insurance, Helly Hansen and Pilaski.

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EDITORS NOTES:

- **2008 was Special Olympics Great Britain's 30th Anniversary Year.** Our Chairman is **Lawrie McMenemy MBE**.
- **Special Olympics and Paralympics are two separate organisations.** **Special Olympics Great Britain** is recognised as the third member of the Olympic family, providing year-round sports, sports training, and local, regional, national and international competitions for all learning disability levels. **Paralympics** provides elite-only level sports competition for multi-disabled groups including physical, blind and deaf.
- **Special Olympics Great Britain** was established in 1978 and has nearly **8,000 athletes** who participate in local sports programmes, and regional, national and international competitions. National Games are held every 4 years (Glasgow 2005, Leicester 2009) alternating between Summer World Games (Shanghai 2007 and Athens 2011) and Winter World Games (Boise Idaho 2009) and then European and International Games.
- **Special Olympics Great Britain's** first sports Ambassador was **Olympic Gold Medalist Sebastian Coe**, now Lord Coe, Chairman of the London Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games. Our current Sports Ambassadors include: England and Portsmouth FC goalkeeper **David James**, Olympic Champions **Darren Campbell** and **Katharine Merry**, England Women's Football Coach **Hope Powell**, Tennis legend **Mark Cox**, NBA superstar **John Amaechi** and England Basketball Team Captain **Delme Herriman**, World and Olympic Champion Canoeist **Anna Hemmings**, Extreme Kayaker **Shaun Baker** and SOGB athletes **Georgina Hulme** and **Moira Brown**.
- Special Olympics was founded in 1968 by Eunice Shriver Kennedy, sister of US President John F. Kennedy. The programme originally started out as organised summer camps for people with learning disabilities. Since then, the Special Olympics movement has evolved world-wide to include **160 countries** and **2,256,733 athletes**. In 20,000 communities around the world for 365 days of the year, Special Olympics provides sports training and athletic competition in 30 Olympic type sports for learning disabled children and adults from age 8 to 80 with an IQ of 75 or less.



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- In 1988, Special Olympics was recognised by the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)**. It is the only sports organisation authorised by the IOC to use the word 'Olympics' in its title.
- **Special Olympics Great Britain** is a registered charity and is generously supported annually by individual and corporate donations and receives no government funding. **Special Olympics GB's Official Partner is National Grid Plc.** **National Grid** is an international electricity and gas company and one of the largest investor-owned energy companies in the world. They play a vital role in delivering gas and electricity to over 11 million homes and businesses across Great Britain and North Eastern USA in an efficient, reliable and safe manner. They believe the power of action can play a major role in safeguarding our global environment for future generations and tackling the effects of climate change, providing all our customers with the highest standards of service through network investment and through our talented, diverse workforce.
- **SOGB's** current Premier Partners & Sponsors are the Coca-Cola Youth Foundation, FlipFlops, ABB, SAS, Dominos Pizza, The Geoff & Fiona Squire Foundation, and Lions International.
- One of the guiding principles of Special Olympics is that anyone, with encouragement, support and access to resources, can be provided with a positive sporting experience, raising their self-esteem and the expectations of the community around them. Special Olympics seeks to focus on a persons abilities and qualities giving them opportunities to develop further.
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