

20th Year of School Games National Finals Redefines Success for Young Athletes

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The School Games National Finals will mark its 20th anniversary when it returns from 3rd-6th September 2026, celebrating two decades of bringing together talented young athletes from across the home nations. This year's event sees a renewed focus on helping young people recognise what they gain from participating in sport, not just what they achieve by winning.

First staged in Glasgow in 2006, the School Games National Finals was created to give young people the opportunity to experience a major multi-sport event. The anniversary carries added weight with Glasgow hosting the recent Commonwealth Games, returning elite sport to the city where the School Games National Finals began.

Over the past 20 years, the event has provided a launchpad for thousands of young athletes, many of whom have gone on to represent their nations on the biggest stages in world sport. Among the notable alumni are Olympic and Paralympic champions including Dina Asher-Smith, Adam Ramsey-Peaty, Ellie Simmonds, Alex Yee and Hannah Cockroft. Their journeys highlight the role the School Games National Finals has played over the last two decades in nurturing talent and giving young people access to a major sporting event as a launchpad for further success.

Improving access and competition for all young athletes

The School Games National Finals 2026 will take place at Loughborough University, delivered by Youth Sport Trust, and will bring together young athletes from across the UK for four days of athletic competition as well as personal development through sport. This year's event will challenge traditional ideas of sporting success by celebrating competitor progress in self-identified personal goals, rather than medal table results alone.

This year's competition builds on insights from the Wired to Win report, based on research conducted during the School Games National Finals 2024. The study explored the experiences of young athletes and identified the barriers that can limit participation, access and enjoyment.

To help close this gap, School Games National Finals 2026 aims to give young athletes from a broader talent pool access to professional sporting mentors and major competition experiences which too often remain out of reach for those without the financial means, networks, geographic access or background traditionally associated with elite sporting pathways.

In particular, the new Elevate programme within the School Games National Finals, co-designed by Sport England, Youth Sport Trust and Greenhouse Sports, will engage 45 promising athletes outside traditional talent systems and from some of the country's most under-resourced communities. Over three days, they will take part in an inclusive, developmental talent experience, learning from leading coaches and athlete mentors.

By addressing these challenges, the 2026 event aims to ensure every young person can benefit from being fully engaged in the experience and achieve success in a meaningful and personal way.

School Games National Finals Programme

The 2026 sports include:

- 3x3 Basketball
- Athletics
- BMX Freestyle
- BMX Racing
- Cricket
- Hockey

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- Modern Pentathlon
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In addition, all competitors will take part in Obstacle Course Experience, the new discipline within Modern Pentathlon for the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

Phil Smith Executive Director of Sporting Systems at Sport England, said, "The School Games National Finals showcases the incredible talent and dedication of young athletes, and as we celebrate the achievements of the past two decades, we're also looking ahead. While competition remains an important part of sport, positive and fun experiences (that don't necessarily end in a podium finish) are what really help young people develop a lasting love of being active that continues far beyond their time in school. Active children are more likely to become active adults, and the School Games has an important part to play in this."

Ali Oliver MBE, Youth Sport Trust CEO, said, "For 20 years, the School Games National Finals have given young talent from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland the opportunity to compete at a national multi-sport event; an incredible experience which can play an important role in preparing young athletes for their future sporting journeys and major Games. The Wired to Win findings reinforced the importance of creating environments where every athlete feels supported and encouraged to enjoy the experience of competing. When we do this for young people, we create mentally stronger and resilient athletes."

"It is incredibly inspiring to look back at the athletes who have competed at the School Games National Finals and gone on to become Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth champions. Their achievements show what can happen when young people are given opportunity and the right experiences. We hope every young person competing in September feels proud of what they have achieved so far, recognising success in all its forms, and the School Games National Finals provides a stepping stone towards whatever sporting goals they set themselves."

Find out more information about the event at the [School Games National Finals](#) website.

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