Rugby Star Shaunagh Brown Announced as New Youth Sport Trust Champion Rugby Star Shaunagh Brown Announced as New Youth Sport Trust Champion

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Ahead of the Women's Rugby World Cup, Shaunagh Brown joins Youth Sport Trust Champions, Sir Mo Farah, Hannah Cockroft, Dr Radha Modgil and Radzi Chinyanganya, to advocate for inclusion, equality and access to PE and sport.

The Youth Sport Trust is delighted to announce rugby union player and former England international Shaunagh Brown as its newest Champion for girls, strengthening the charity's mission to harness the power of sport to improve young lives.

Shaunagh, who has previously served as a valued member of the charity's Board of Trustees, returns in this new role to inspire and advocate for greater access to PE, sport and play for children across the UK. Her appointment comes ahead of the Women's Rugby World Cup, a moment when the spotlight is firmly on the women's game and its power to inspire the next generation. The tournament's Strong Bodies, Strong Minds' campaign emphasizes this movement to empower women and girls and champion body confidence.

Shaunagh's focus as a Youth Sport Trust Champion will be on tackling inequalities and breaking down barriers which continue to prevent many black girls and those from lower-income backgrounds from experiencing the life-changing benefits of sport.

Research from Sport England highlights the scale of this challenge. The 2023-24 Active Lives Children and Young People survey found that black girls are the least active of all gender and ethnicity groups, with only 36% achieving the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity per day. For these girls, specific barriers affecting this can include gendered inequalities, social inequalities, racism and systemic bias and a lack of understanding around their unique needs.

Furthermore, recent research from Women in Sport also found that while 60% of Black girls dream of being elite athletes compared to 33% of White British girls, almost half of these girls (48%) drop out of sport in their teenage years. This highlights a significant gap between aspiration and opportunity, and the urgent need to break down barriers, ensure all girls feel heard and supported, and create school environments where every young person has the chance to stay active and realise their potential.

Shaunagh Brown said:

"This is an incredibly exciting time to be coming on as a Youth Sport Trust Champion. I know the Women's Rugby World Cup will show millions of girls what's possible when they see themselves in sport. I want every black girl to know she belongs on the pitch, in the club, and in every space sport has to offer. Sport gave me confidence, purpose and a sense of belonging, but too many black girls still feel sport is not for them. As Youth Sport Trust Champion, I want to change that, and help build a future where every child, whatever their background, ethnicity, gender or ability, feels they have a place in sport. Nobody should ever feel, or be told, sport isn't for them."

Alongside her new role as a Youth Sport Trust Champion, Shaunagh has also served as an ambassador for the T1 Rugby Series, an initiative aimed at increasing participation in rugby among young people and schools. Last year, 70% of young participants in the T1 Rugby Series were new to rugby and 47% were girls. The Youth Sport Trust are working with School Rugby Managers (SRMs) as part of a wider partnership with the Rugby Football Union (RFU) to grow the sport in schools across England with the aim of introducing rugby to 5,000 new state primary and secondary schools by 2027. With girls now making up an average of 45% of participants, the 2024/25 programme is already delivering significant results:

- Over 97,000 participation opportunities created so far
- 470 schools previously offering little or no rugby have now engaged with the programme
- 91% of schools report a 'Very Positive' or 'Positive' impact on pupils' enjoyment of physical activity

Ali Oliver MBE, Chief Executive of the Youth Sport Trust, said:

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“Shaunagh has already developed a strong relationship with the Youth Sport Trust having spent three years observing our Board as part of her career transition, and we are thrilled she is moving into this inspiring new role ahead of the Women’s Rugby World Cup. Sport has the power to transform children’s lives, building confidence, supporting physical and mental health and helping young people feel a sense of belonging. We are delighted the RFU School Rugby Managers network we are supporting, are building interest among boys and girls’ engagement in the game. At a time when too many children are missing out on the benefits of play and sport, we are proud to be shouting louder than ever about its importance. Adding Shaunagh’s voice to this mission is instrumental. As a powerful role model, she brings authenticity, lived experience and a deep passion for equity. Her leadership as a Champion will be instrumental in helping us inspire more young people, and drive meaningful change in opportunity and access.”

In October the Youth Sport Trust will be releasing the annual Girls Active survey findings. The survey provides a deep insight into the attitudes and perceptions of girls and boys in relation to PE, sport and physical activity. Last year, more than 15,000 young people took part. This year’s research will place greater focus on intersectionality, exploring the experiences of young people with multiple characteristics of inequality compared with those without. For early access to the survey data please contact press@youthsporttrust.org.

About the Youth Sport Trust

The Youth Sport Trust is the leading UK children’s charity for improving young people's health and wellbeing through sport and play. We empower young people and equip educators to build brighter futures through the power of physical activity. Founded in 1995, we work with around 20,000 schools and provides opportunities for over two million children every year. Our vision is to create a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits of play and sport.

Our Well Schools movement brings together schools who are prioritising wellbeing alongside academic achievement. Schools can demonstrate their commitment to a whole-school approach through the free-to-access Well Check.

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