



One of SMILE Through Sport's previous Boccia Opens

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England's biggest ever Boccia Open comes to Northumbria's Sport Central

North East based not-for-profit organisation SMILE Through Sport, founded by Northumbria alumnus and Paralympian Stephen Miller MBE, is hosting the biggest ever Boccia open event to take place in England.

[Boccia](#), pronounced bot-cha, is a Paralympic sport similar to bowls. Its name derives from the Italian word meaning "bowl" and the sport is thought to be one of the first games played by mankind, with roots in ancient Greece and Egypt.

A game full of tactics and skill, Boccia is played in a sports hall with soft leather balls. It is primarily popular among severely impaired disability groups but can be played by people of any ability or impairment.

Over 100 players will take part in the sixth SMILE Boccia Open for individuals. The competition, which takes place on 9th February from 10am until 5pm, will take place at Northumbria University's world-class, £30 million sports centre and events arena, Sport Central.

An open and inclusive event, the competition welcomes all disability groups with players from beginner to international level. Participants aged from just 8 to 56 years old will descend on Sport Central from across the North East as well as from Sheffield, Scotland, Scarborough and Leeds.

SMILE (Stephen Miller Inspiring Learning and Enjoyment) Through Sport is a not-for-profit organisation founded in 2013 by Paralympian Stephen Miller MBE and his wife Rachel Miller, who is the Managing Director of the business. Their mission is to provide and encourage high quality disability sports opportunities while inspiring individuals to participate, ultimately improving the perception and culture surrounding disability sport – the SMILE Boccia Open is a key calendar date supporting this mission.

With a former Northumbria student as its helm, SMILE Through Sport was able to access business support from the University. In its infancy, the organisation benefited from legal and marketing help through the Student & Graduate Enterprise, a service which provides alumni free advice from specialist advisors.

[SMILE Through Sport](#) founder Stephen Miller said: "As a former Northumbria University student I am delighted to be bringing our Boccia Open to Sport Central. Sport has been a large part of my life and I am passionate about the impact it can have on someone's physical and mental health. This year we are expecting over 120 people at this competition making it the biggest Boccia open ever in the UK. I would like to say thank you to Irwin Mitchell and Northumbria University for helping us with this event".

Northumbria's Head of Sport and Exercise, Katy Storie, said: "We are delighted to be supporting SMILE Through Sport by hosting England's biggest ever Boccia Open here at Sport Central. Boccia is a fantastic sport to play and to watch, and holding this event here at Northumbria is a great way to

highlight the empowering effects of disability sport and the work that Stephen and the SMILE Through Sport team do.”

Stephen, who graduated from Northumbria with a BSc (Hons) in Business Information Systems in 2002, is a professional athlete and competes in field athletics in the F32 Club Throw event.

He has represented Great Britain for over 20 years having competed in six Paralympic Games, six World Championships and five European Championships, gaining 26 international medals in the process. The well-decorated athlete has been given several honours over the years, the latest of which was receiving MBE award in the 2016 New Year’s honours. Stephen is currently in training for Tokyo 2020 - his seventh Paralympic adventure.

Spectators are welcome to pop along to watch the event at Sport Central this Sunday, no ticket necessary.

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Contacts



Rik Kendall

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences

rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk

07923 382339



Andrea Slowey

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Engineering and Environment / Health and Life Sciences

andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk

07708 509436



James Fox

Press Contact

Student Communications Manager

james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk



Kelly Elliott

Press Contact

PR and Media Coordinator

kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk



Rachael Barwick

Press Contact

PR and Media Coordinator

rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk

07377422415



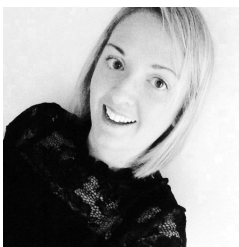
Ruth Lognonne

Press Contact

PR and Media Coordinator

ruth.lognonne@northumbria.ac.uk

07971274253



Gemma Brown

Press Contact

PR and Media Coordinator

gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk