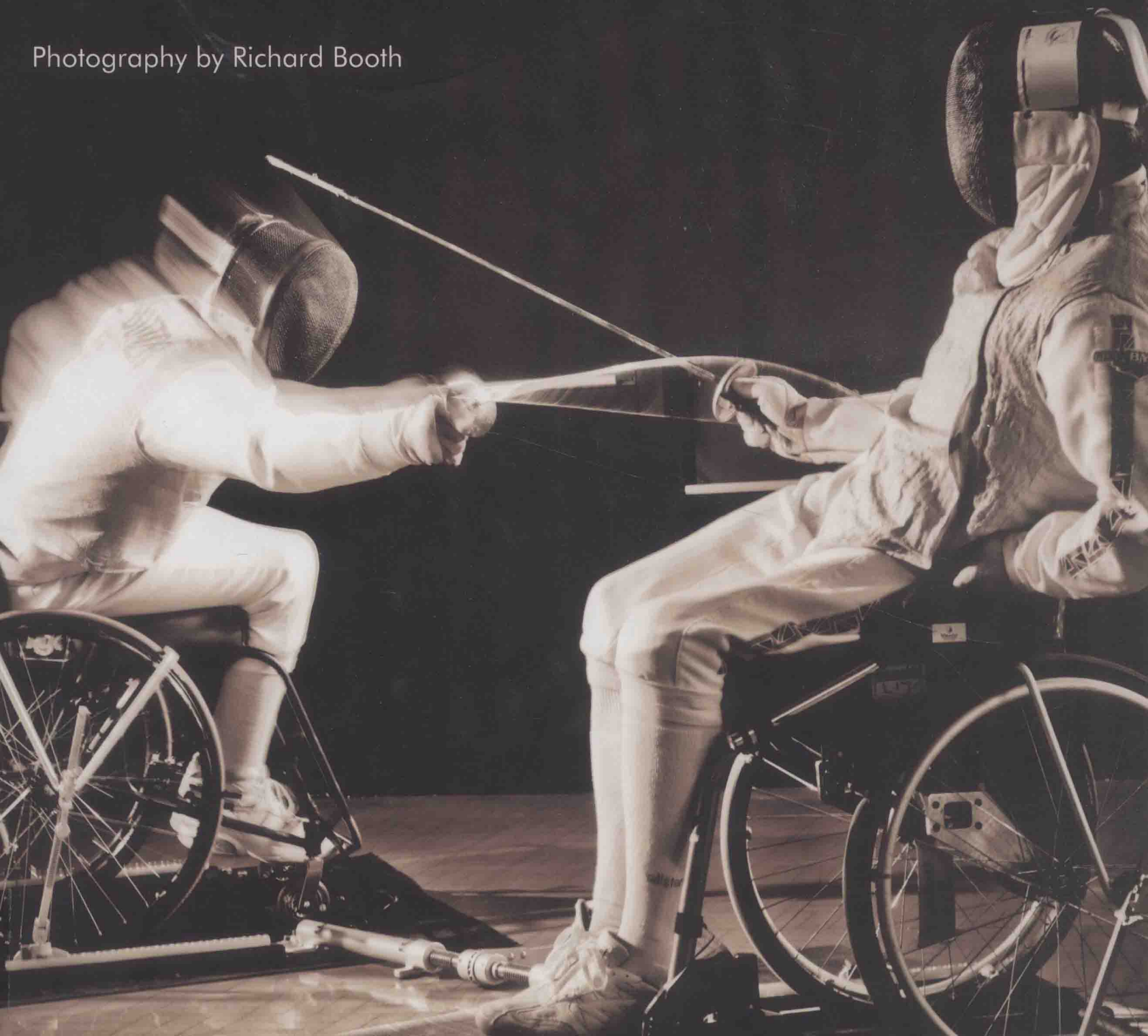


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Photography by Richard Booth

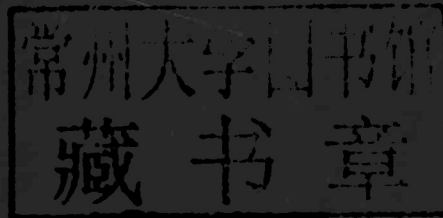


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Text by Debbie Beckerman



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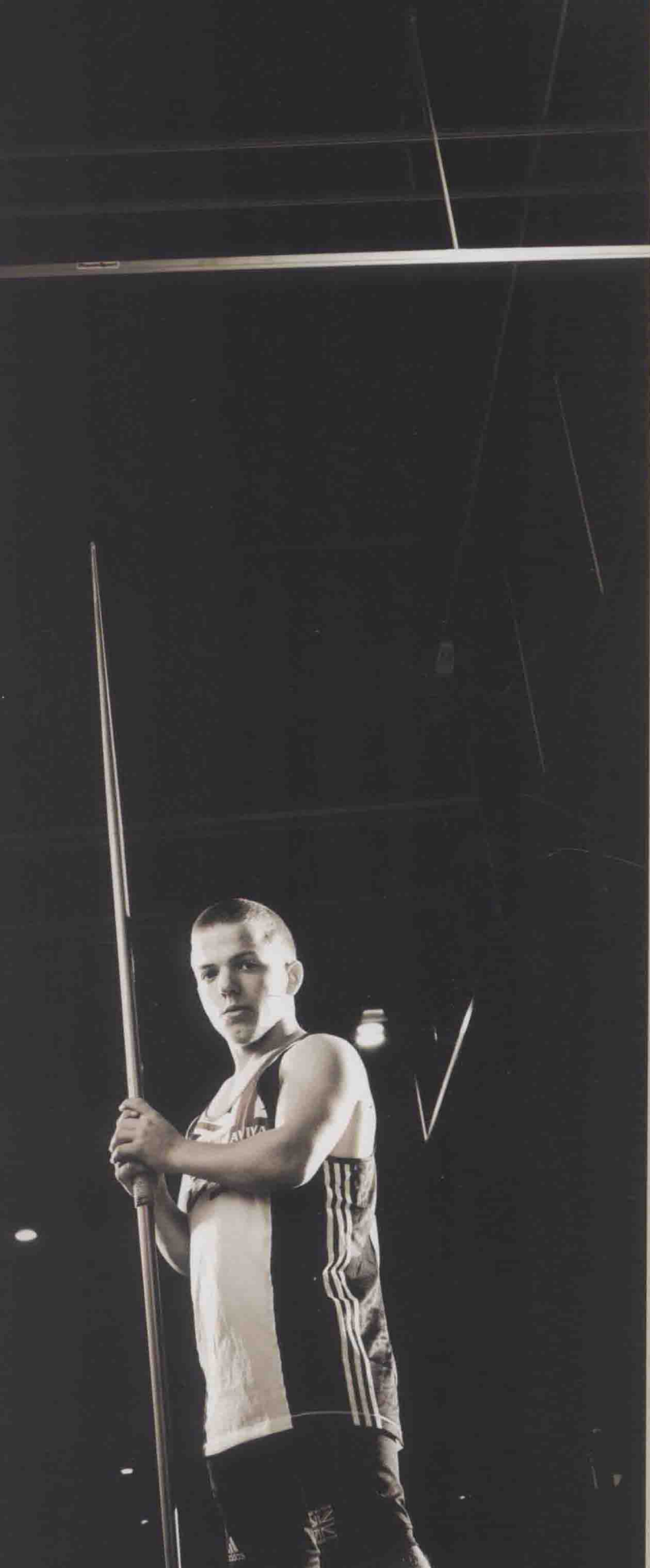
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To all the Paralympic athletes I have worked with in preparing this book, with best wishes for their future success.

p.2 Liz Johnson, who won gold at Beijing 2008 in the 100m Breaststroke, was only 14 when she became part of the British Paralympic Swimming team. In 2011 she was invited to place the last of 180,000 tiles in the Aquatics Centre for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, where she hopes to repeat her success. 'I've got the taste for gold, and I won't be short of motivation to land another one in 2012.'

p.5 At 19, Kyron Duke's international career has already spanned two sports. He represented Wales in powerlifting at the Commonwealth Games in 2010, and the following year turned to track and field for the World Championships in New Zealand, where he won a bronze medal in the javelin competition. He now has the London 2012 Paralympic Games firmly in his sights. 'Being able to compete on home turf and in front of a home crowd would be brilliant and it would really spur me on.'

p.7 Sarah Storey has won Paralympic gold medals in both Swimming and Cycling events, most recently at Beijing 2008. She relishes the opportunities that her success has brought and is a committed patron of two charities.

p.14 Tom Hall-Butcher, who also enjoys playing wheelchair basketball, has developed the mental and physical strength to take on the best wheelchair fencers in the world. 'I like being part of a squad and of the fencing family.'





INTRODUCTION

BY RICHARD BOOTH

In May 2011 I was working in Weymouth, on Britain's south coast. It was blowing a gale out on the boat, with winds up to 30 knots, and I was struggling to shoot some of Great Britain's finest Paralympic sailors. This was one of the trickiest shoots of the entire project and the weather was not exactly helping. However, as I reflected back on what had brought me to this point, I was determined to get it right, however long it took to get the images I was looking for.

I have always had a passion for sport and for creative photography. In addition, through one of my commercial clients, I had helped to raise money for the British Olympic Association (BOA) and the British Paralympic Association (BPA). Soon after that I met, and began to photograph, some exceptional Paralympic athletes, including swimmer Kate Grey, fencer Tom Hall-Butcher and athlete Libby Clegg. I was inspired by the sheer drive and energy they showed. It dovetailed perfectly with the style and dynamism of the images that I was developing for this sporting portfolio.

By this time, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) had become involved and I had also met the Vice-Chair of the BPA, Ann Cutcliffe. She shared with me a determination to redefine traditional perceptions of disability, fitness and power. We had the same vision: to

celebrate the skill, expertise and beauty of Paralympic athletes. The final stage was to secure a partnership with John Wiley, one of the official publishers for London 2012, who commissioned me to produce all the photographs for this book. The brief was to capture the extraordinary journeys of these individuals, including

their aspirations and motivation as they moved towards their goal of taking part in the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

I began work on the project in December 2010. This first involved a lot of research on the sports themselves. Some, such as Boccia, Goalball and Football 5-a-side for visually-impaired athletes,



British sailors John Robertson, Stephen Thomas and Hannah Stodel sailing in the mixed Sonar class in Weymouth in May 2011.

Left: Boccia champion David Smith enjoys the opportunity to demonstrate his skill.

are unique to the Paralympic Games and I admit I knew little about them. Gaining an understanding of each of the 20 sports to be covered was essential, so the photographs could show these very varied disciplines to best advantage. There was also much to organise in advance of the shoots. I had to plan (and on occasion re-plan) a shooting schedule, involving constant contact with PRs, coaches and sometimes the athletes themselves. At

times there were logistical challenges, as these are all, understandably, very busy people. Athletes are frequently away competing and are based in a huge variety of locations around Britain. In total I travelled over 40,000 kilometres. From Glasgow and Sheffield, via Nottingham, Loughborough, Staffordshire, Cardiff, and through to London, the South East of England and Weymouth, there is almost no part of the country that I did not travel

through during the six months that it took to complete this project.

Sometimes, I was given a choice of dates for a shoot, or advance warning of where and when I could photograph the athletes in question. On other occasions, because of their training and competition schedules, I would be told, as I was with wheelchair tennis, 'Our top guys are playing week in week out, and are available for one day at the end of February – is that OK?' Wheelchair tennis is a global sport and Peter Norfolk, one of its stars, is understandably not often in town. When it came to the shoot, Peter, being a very driven character, said we had five minutes. I decided to shoot to a laptop so that he could immediately see the images of him we were capturing. This seemed to do the trick because 30 minutes later we were only just packing up. However, just before we did, I thought I'd ask him to play a final shot close to my camera. His aim was perfect: he got so close that he hit my tripod, just an inch below my £25,000 camera. A heart-stopping moment – although some might say it served me right for pushing my luck!

The shoots began in earnest in January, during heavy snowfalls and downpours of rain. First off was table tennis in Sheffield, followed by a total contrast, equestrian, with nine-time Paralympic gold medallist Lee Pearson in Staffordshire. Soon after, it was up to Glasgow for my introduction to boccia via the brothers Stephen and Peter McGuire, two of the funniest and most brilliant



Wheelchair tennis ace Peter Norfolk powers a ball straight towards the camera.

characters in the game. Nothing was too much trouble, and they generously gave me three precious hours of their time. I didn't know much about the technicalities of boccia beforehand, but it was inspiring to meet them both, and to witness their competitiveness even if it was during a set-up photo shoot. And luckily, being half Scottish, I immediately got their sense of humour.

Every athlete is, by definition, unique, and it was important for me to try to convey their personalities through the images. It sometimes took a little time for them to understand what I was aiming for. Some of them imagined that I would just be turning up, clicking away for 10 minutes, then going away. It was only when they saw me setting up double sets of lights that they realised these were not going to be ordinary photo shoots.

I have always said it doesn't matter what you shoot on, be it digital, film or throw-away, as long as you see it and shoot it. But for this project I needed the very best of what camera and lighting manufacturers could give me. When it came to lighting, about which I am passionate, I used a mix of very fast flash, to capture the frozen motion, and continuous Tungsten lights, to capture the flow and energy; these gave me everything I wanted in the images, and I then used either long or very fast shutter speeds. For the camera, I had decided that I wanted to show every nuance of the athlete in motion. This led me to use the same equipment that I use



Nine-times Paralympic Games gold medallist Lee Pearson, saying hello to his horse, Gentleman.