



Six Olympic sports that deserve their change to shine

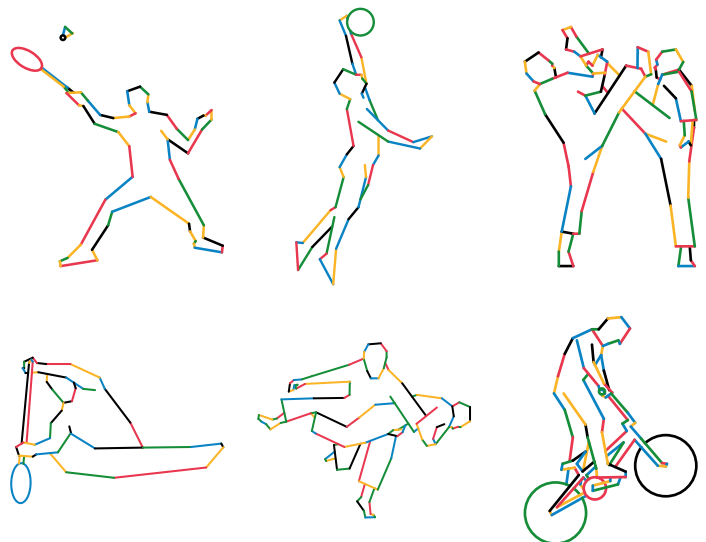
The often overlooked Olympic sports gearing up for their opportunity to shine

The London leg of the season-long IAAF Diamond League now doubles up as a weekend celebration, where thousands of athletics fans gather in London's Olympic Stadium to cheer on heroes of the past, present and future. The event is an opportunity to remember the glorious summer of 2012, when the likes of Jessica Ennis-Hill, Mo Farah and Greg Rutherford lit up Stratford.

All three of those athletes were present at the Sainsbury's Anniversary Games, enjoying the applause and adulation from the London crowd and giving fans a taste of what they can expect to see at the next instalment of the Olympic Games in Rio next year.

The likes of Ennis-Hill and Rutherford have, without question, been instrumental in raising the profile of their respective sports, thanks in large part to their success at London 2012. But while the growth of sports such as heptathlon and long jump – driven largely through the presence of a home nation hero, who has carried the baton forward from London 2012 – is to be acknowledged, there is still some way to go before all Olympic disciplines, and the athletes who compete within those disciplines, are given the level of coverage that they so deserve.

Here, we take a look at six phenomenal Olympic sports which continue to fly under the radar, and discuss how each discipline has plenty to offer not only on the field of play but also the British media and sponsors alike.



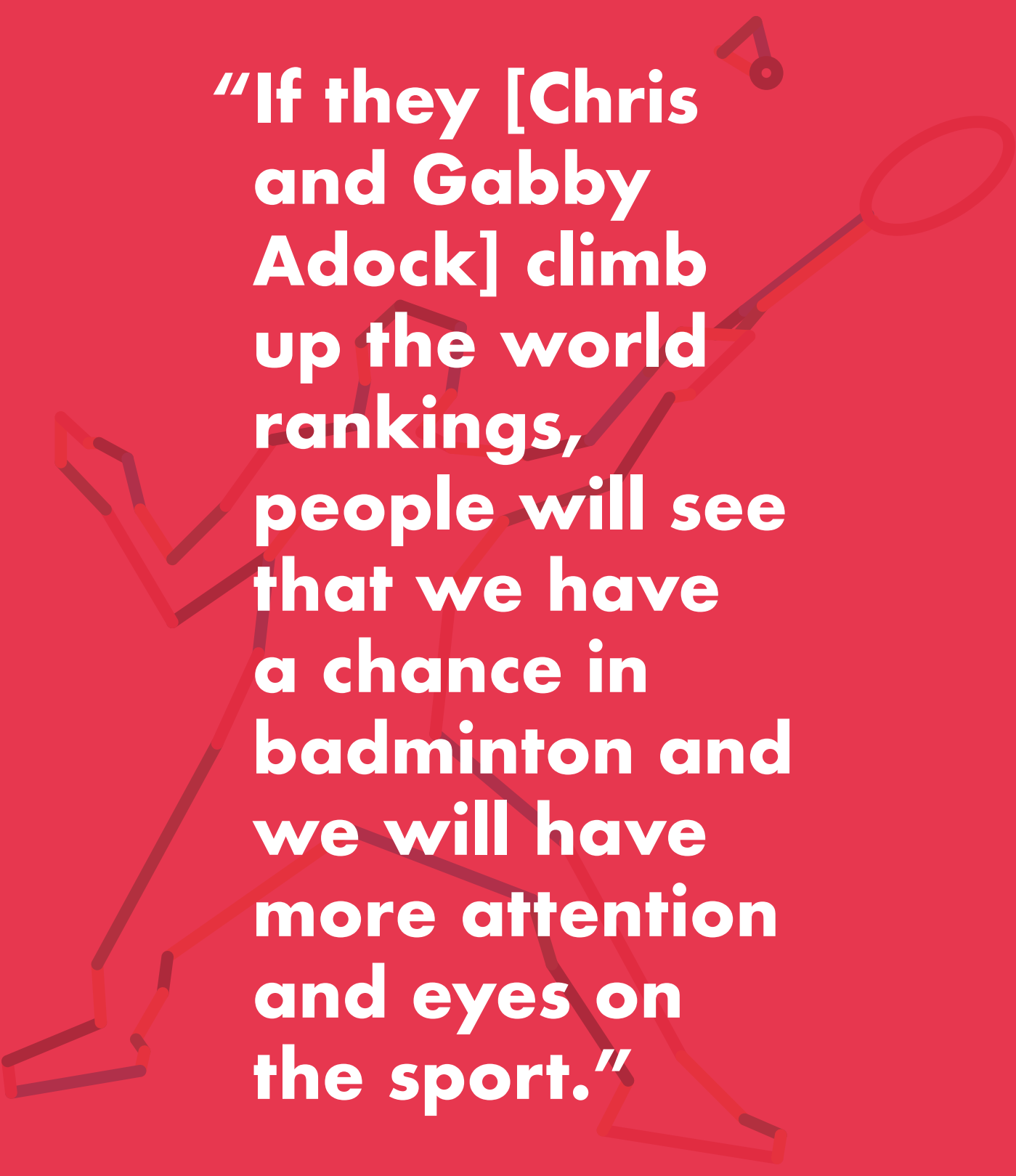
Badminton

A relatively new Olympic sport, badminton was officially included in the Games at Barcelona in 1992. Since then, Britain – along with Denmark – has been the dominant European nation, with only the Asian powerhouses standing in the way of greater success. Admittedly it is this kind of success which is pivotal to injecting greater interest in any given sport. But more than ten years on since Gail Emms and Nathan Robertson won mixed doubles silver in a pulsating final at Athens 2004, coverage of badminton remains few and far between, despite the sport's own efforts to broaden its appeal.

A recent nationwide road show called SmashUp has seen badminton participation numbers soar amongst school children and the announcement of a partnership with racket-makers Babolat will undoubtedly see greater investment for British Badminton. Yet big-name sponsors remain elusive at a time when badminton is seemingly on the up and the rewards are arguably greater than ever.

Two players to look out for ahead of Rio 2016 are Chris and Gabby Adcock. The Commonwealth champions have reached the world's top five and represent Team GB's best chance of a return to the glory days of Emms/Robertson. The pair are quietly confident of their chances in Rio, and Badminton England and Team GB will understandably be looking at them as a possible medal prospect. If the Adcocks are able to produce a medal-winning performance, we can only hope that this will re-ignite media interest in the sport of badminton and that big name sponsors will follow suit.



A stylized, abstract graphic of a badminton player in mid-swing, rendered in dark red and orange outlines against a solid red background. The player is positioned behind the main text, with their racket raised high and their body angled towards the right. The lines are thick and geometric, giving it a modern, graphic feel.

**“If they [Chris
and Gabby
Adock] climb
up the world
rankings,
people will see
that we have
a chance in
badminton and
we will have
more attention
and eyes on
the sport.”**

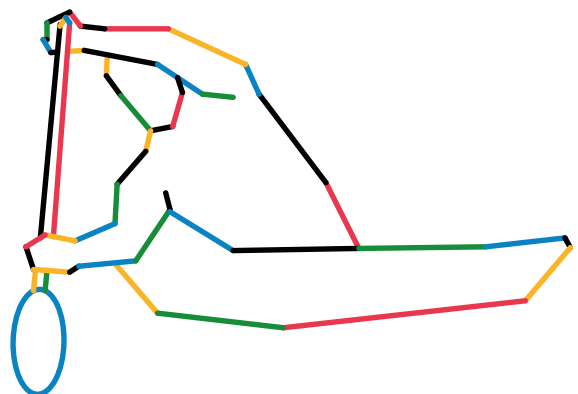
- Gail Emms

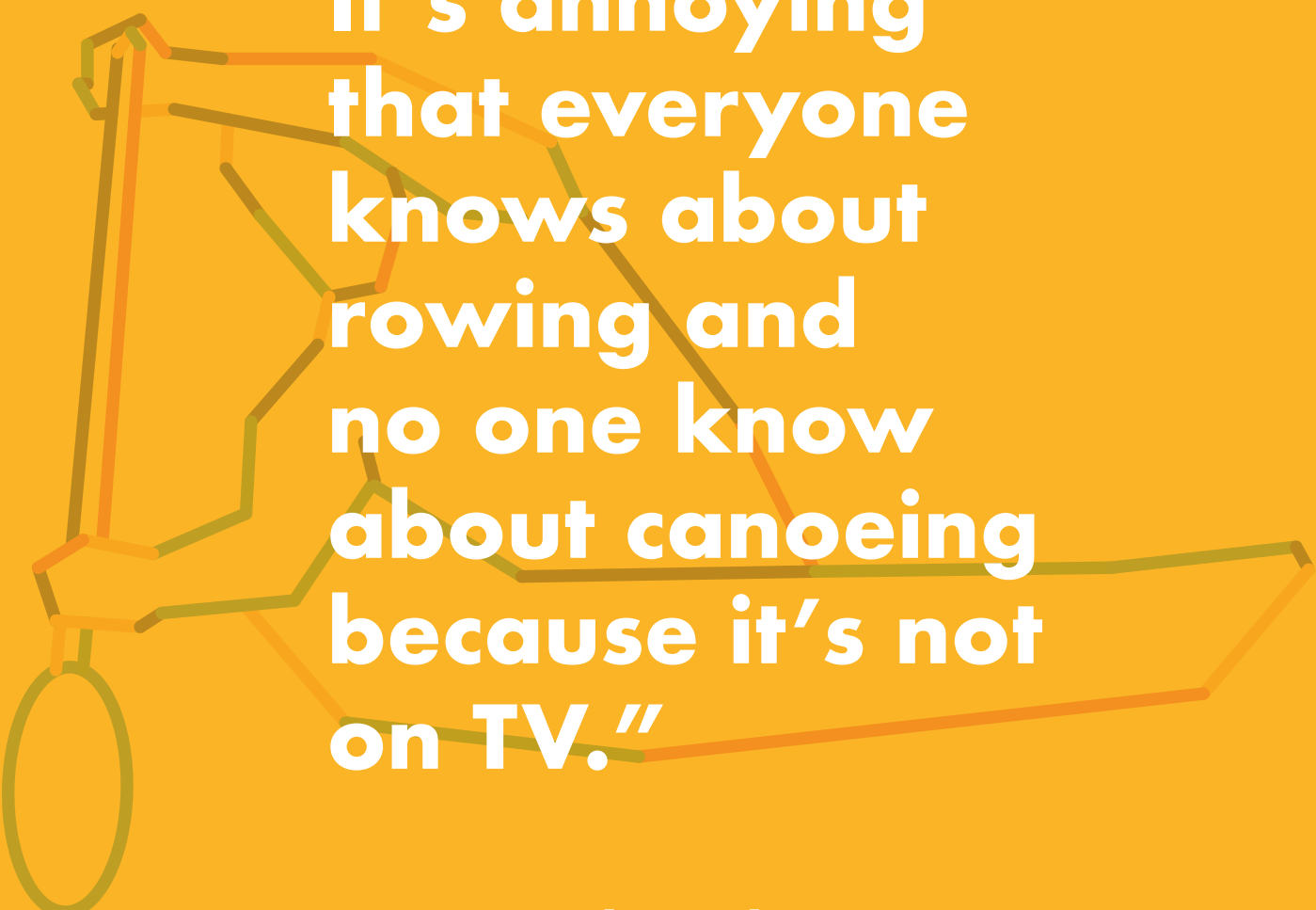
Canoeing

Introduced in 1936, canoeing has a rich history at the Summer Games and has the distinct advantage of being a sport which almost all British children are exposed to on school or club trips. However, at some point down the line rowing inevitably becomes the more popular choice and its hold over canoeing is reflected by its relative media coverage. Outside of Olympic years, the Rowing World Championships, Oxford v Cambridge and the Regatta all receive noteworthy press coverage. The same can't be said for the sport's younger brother, which benefits only from nuggets of media attention every four years when the Games roll around. While British canoeing relies largely on UK sport funding, rowing has attracted support from the likes of Siemens, Nestlé and Müller.

Canoeist Rachel Cawthorn has reached the finals in the last two Olympics and in 2010 she became Britain's first female medallist at an Olympic distance, winning bronze in the K-1 500m at the IFC Canoe Sprint World Championships. She is also a former European champion, having won bronze in the K2 500m alongside Hayleigh Mason.

With a prospect like Cawthorn on board, and arguably just as much to offer the viewer as rowing, there is no reason why the sport of canoeing should continue to fly under the radar, as we head towards Rio 2016.





**"It's annoying
that everyone
knows about
rowing and
no one know
about canoeing
because it's not
on TV."**

*- Rachael
Cawthorn*

Judo

Judo is another sport with a strong Olympic pedigree. First open only to men in 1964, women were invited to compete at the Barcelona Games in 1992. And it was a female judoka who provided a standout performance at London 2012. The image of Gemma Gibbons looking up to the sky and mouthing the words "I love you Mum", in homage to her late mother, provided the London Games with an iconic moment that even gave 'Super Saturday' a run for its money.

Many expected the sport of judo to flourish on the back of Gibbons' success. But while the sport undoubtedly receives a greater level of coverage today as it did some five years ago, there is still a long way to go before judo is given the acknowledgment it deserves.

For now, hopes of generating that heightened level of media coverage and attracting lucrative sponsorships deals rest largely of the shoulders of Gibbons. But make no mistake, she is certainly a strong reason to invest.





**“They were our
first medals
since 2000
and I do think
it’s the reason
we’ve kept
most of our
funding.”**

**- *Gemma
Gibbons***

Taekwondo

Taekwondo was only introduced as a medal sport at Sydney 2000. It took over a decade for the sport to make any sort of impression on the British media and that move came largely as a result of young welsh talent, Jade Jones.

Not only is taekwondo a young, burgeoning sport but its many technical aspects and scoring methods mean it's a versatile sport for all shapes and sizes. Of course Jones is Team GB's great medal hope for Rio 2016 and now, far from an unknown, she serves as a familiar face for the British public to get behind.

Jones should also have great pulling-power in terms of sponsorship; she is an Olympic champion – one of only three Welsh women to achieve that status – and was voted BBC Wales Sports Personality of the Year. Jones' sporting capability, together with her ambition to build on the successes she has achieved to date, make her - and the sport she loves - an attractive investment for any sponsor. But she will also need the support of the British media if she is to continue to raise her own profile and to help drive this sport forward.





**“After the
profile
taekwondo
got from the
Olympics,
hopefully
there's even
more media
attention
for our
championships
and our regular
competitions.”**

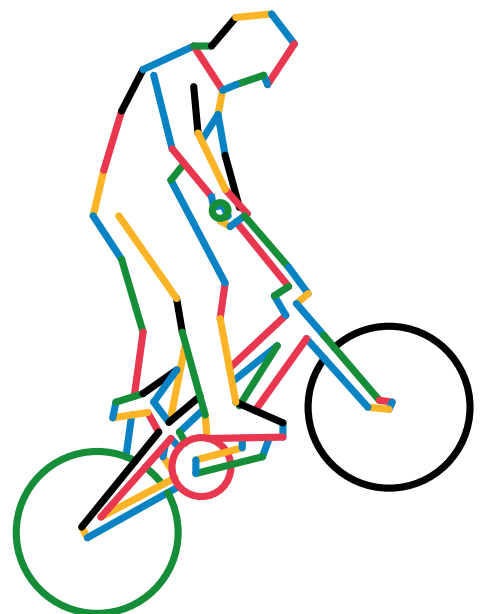
- Jade Jones

BMX

Making its debut in Beijing in 2008, BMX proved to be one of the most popular sports at London 2012 and for good reason. BMX is an accessible sport to get into, with thousands of kids honing their skills in bike parks across the country. For many, BMX racers are competitors who youngsters can relate to: it's a 'cool' sport and its riders are more often than not inner-city kids who have found a discipline and stuck to it.

No-one embodied this more in London than Shanaze Reade who began biking in Crewe where she grew up and famously bought her first BMX for just £1. The public took to Reade not only because she presented a genuine medal hope but also because her success helped introduced us to a fresh, urban alternative to cycling, one which truly carved a niche for itself at the Games.

Reade is now on the come-back trail, following disappointment at London 2012, as is Liam Phillips who in 2014 became Britain's first winner of the UCI BMX Supercross series world title. With fresh home grown talent emerging on a regular basis, there is no reason why BMX racing – a sport which is arguably one of the most thrilling and dynamic Olympic sports – should not be a discipline for fans and media to follow. Similarly, if you represent a brand which looks to appeal to the young, energetic consumer, then this sport should be well and truly on your radar as we head into Rio 2016.



A stylized line art illustration of a BMX rider in a racing crouch, positioned diagonally across the frame. The rider and their bike are composed of thick, dark red lines. The background is a solid, vibrant red. The text is overlaid on the central part of the image.

**“As a sport,
I’ve been
passionate
about trying
to raise the
profile of BMX
racing for a
long time.”**

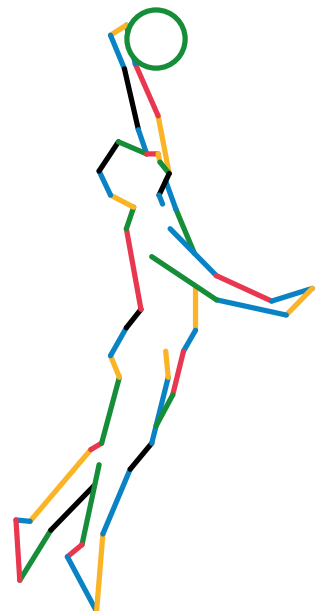
- Liam Phillips

Beach Volleyball

The last of our featured oft forgotten Olympic sports, beach volleyball was introduced into the programme at the Atlanta 1996 Games. In a short space of time, the sport has attracted a fairly strong level of media coverage. However, there remains a perception amongst certain consumers, fuelled at times by the media, that beach volleyball is little more than glamorous, bikini-clad women throwing a ball around on the beach.

Of course, that is far from the truth. Beach volleyball players are amongst the most dynamic, athletic individuals to compete at an Olympic level, something which is acknowledged and rewarded by nations such as USA and Brazil. In those countries, beach volleyball is the most-played sport and only second to football in media popularity, with millions watching games live. It comes as no surprise, then, that Brazil and USA remain the two most dominant teams when it comes to the Olympic competition.

In the UK, meanwhile, the sport continues to seek investment and support, in the absence of funding from UK Sport. Two British prospects for Rio - the home of beach volleyball - are women's pair Zara Dampney and Lucy Boulton. Both are world class talents on the beach and fantastic spokeswomen for their sport. As we head towards 2016, we can only hope that they, and the sport they represent so well, are given the platform on which to thrive.



A stylized line art illustration of a person in mid-air, performing a jump shot or layup in basketball. The figure is composed of thick, dark green lines for the main body and thinner, lighter green lines for the limbs. The person's arms are extended upwards, holding a basketball (represented by a simple circle) above their head. The background is a solid, vibrant orange color.

**"We are
professional
athletes who
work just
as hard as
everybody
else."**

- Zara Dampney

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