

# Aiming

# high

■ SKY HIGH – Olympic performer Jaime Moore (right) and Yasmin Gumbs in action at Benham, where coach Tracy Whittaker runs her elite and community training sessions

## Whittaker taking trampolining into big time

The day after I met Tracy Whittaker to discuss the remarkable rise of her Northamptonshire Trampolining Academy, Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister in waiting, did exactly what she wanted him to do. In his Budget, he focused on the 2012 Olympics.

It was almost as if he had been listening to our conversation in the café at Benham Sports Arena and decided that, yes, Whittaker had a point – he should be seen to be doing more to help develop potential medallists for the London Games.

Whittaker wasn't complaining when she claimed that Britain was unlikely to achieve anything like the fifth place in the medals table that had been optimistically



### This Sporting Life

with  
Steve Pitts

bandied about unless more was done to support competitors and their coaching structure.

Indeed, despite spending most of her adult life dedicating 70 hours a week or more to young sportsmen and women – almost all of it unpaid and largely unrecognised outside her own sport – Whittaker rarely moans.

She's given far more than she'll ever get back, and she'll

carry on doing it until the end of her days.

Trampolining is a Northamptonshire success story. The county provided the first British trampolinist to take part in an Olympics in Jaime Moore in 2000. There are 760 members registered with British Gymnastics, the governing body, through Whittaker's club and there are satellite centres in Northampton, Kettering and

Long Buckby. The club has grown from a one-trampoline fun session at Lings Forum in 1977, to an eight-trampoline centre at Benham that coaches elite athletes alongside 'Bouncing Bunnies'.

Yet a new dawn beckons, and next year will see the opening of an exclusive £450,000 trampoline centre, the first of its kind.

"We came to Benham with one trampoline and about 20 members 16 years ago, and it's grown from there," says Whittaker, coach to Moore and four other potential Olympians. "We've never had to market or advertise, it's always been word of mouth. But with the new centre, we'll look to raise the profile."

If the future is bright, the past has been a colourful journey from obscurity, climaxing

in Moore's appearance at the Sydney Olympics. Unfortunately, the memories of what should have been a celebratory occasion are soured, and it took Moore several years before she could open up about a Games that saw her preparation hampered by her own governing body, and the after-taste so bitter she walked away from the sport.

The girl who won everything as a teenager is now back with an eye on Beijing 2008. But both her and Whittaker have had their ambitions shaped by events six years ago.

Whittaker is frank in her assessment of her own role, but the frustration she feels at all the politicking and backstabbing that went on has not yet been fully lanced. She looks to the future by learn-

ing the lessons of the past.

"Jaime is only 26 now," she says. "She was one of the youngest when she went to Sydney – the current Olympic champion is 31. She's definitely tougher now, but she had to be mentally tough just to come back after Sydney because it was a traumatic experience."

Just for Moore, or for Whittaker as well, the coach who shared all her protégé's dashed hopes and tears?

"Yes I think it was," she admits. "Obviously it's Jaime who has to get up there and perform, but you've always got someone in the background who's put all the work in as well.

"I can honestly say it was one of our worst years. It was fantastic qualifying for the Olympics, and there's no feeling like that, but politically there was so much to prove.

"Although she was the No.1 there were others who felt someone else should have gone.

"It became outside what she was supposed to do, and that puts so much pressure on the one individual in the whole country who has qualified because she had to prove she deserved her place. She won her place by right, at a world championships.

"The training at home was fantastic, but we probably didn't make use of going to national training as much as we should and we didn't go to the test event in Sydney. But

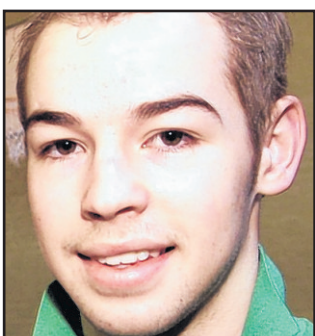
## Going for glory...Tracy's five aiming for the Olympics



■ Jaime Moore, 26, world class performance athlete



■ Steve Walsh, 20, world class start athlete



■ James Higgins, 22, back after a career break



■ Danny Creedon, 18, world class potential performer



■ Yasmin Gumbs, 16, world class start performer