



# THE HISTORY MAKERS



How Team GB Stormed to a First Ever Gold in Women's Hockey



Sarah Juggins and Richard Stainthorpe



TEAM GB



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## Foreword by Dame Katherine Grainger DBE

Chair of UK Sport, 2012 Olympic gold medallist and winner of a further four silver Olympic medals in a career spanning five Olympic Games.

Each Olympic Games creates moments of pure magic. There are scenes that are played over and over again as the years roll by, standing the test of time. Something about them captures the essence of sport: the gladiatorial competition, the collaboration, the glorious victory or crushing defeat, the burning desire, the spirit of humanity. Many times these magic moments are defined not only by the day in question, but also by the journey taken to arrive at that place.

Team GB women's hockey team's golden win in Rio 2016 is one of those moments and will rightly be remembered and celebrated. In the fading light of a warm Brazilian evening they battled through 60 minutes of match play and then raised their game in a penalty shootout, while a nation held its breath. But beyond that moment is a tale that involves a wider cast of characters and a broader range of emotions. Rio 2016 was only the last step of a long journey that Team GB women's hockey had been on. Further back along that road is the shadow of heartbreak and disappointment, of self-doubt and frustration. Such feelings and emotions cut deep and often last far longer than the thrill of victory. For some, those emotions sadly might last forever; for some lucky others they can be used to motivate and push forward.

The past five Olympic Games that some of the Team GB women's hockey team were part of also tracked my own Olympic time and I vividly remember sitting in a hotel reception in Italy where the Team GB rowing team were on training camp in 2004. The Olympic hockey qualification for Athens 2004 was being streamed online and a group of us were huddled around a laptop, entranced. When Team GB suffered their shock defeat at the hands of Korea there was a cumulative intake of breath. Someone asked what next for the team; how could they qualify now? The haunting silence that followed answered the question. There were no more chances. Their Olympic dream was over before it had begun.

Fast forward eight years and I was at the Riverbank Arena in the London Olympic Park for Team GB's final two matches of the 2012 Olympic Games. What a contrast of emotions was demonstrated in those two games. The heartbreak was palpable when Team GB lost their semi-final against Argentina. My memories are still strong of every Team GB hockey player collapsing to their knees knowing the dream of the gold medal was now out of reach. But sport tests character and the strong can survive and flourish. The spirit and fierce determination of the 2012 team saw them return for the bronze medal match and the joy of winning a medal in that Olympic cauldron perhaps hinted at what more would come. The fire was stoked, the game was on, and Rio 2016 would take things to a new level.

Watching from the stands in Rio, I was with a large British contingent who were hoarse by the end of the night from the vocal support given. We knew this was the just reward for a job very well done. And beyond the personal pride was the overwhelming knowledge that their result would now reach far and wide, inspiring old and young to perhaps do something, try something, take on a challenge, overcome a disappointment, plant a seed of what might be or simply make people proud.

This is the story of ordinary people, who harnessed their incredible skills and set about to achieve something extraordinary together. Some were fuelled by the past, some excited by the future, all driven to create their own piece of history and inspire as many as possible along the way. Coaches, support staff, management, past players, friends, family and fans all played vital roles and can rightfully share in the celebration.

This is the story of how Team GB women's hockey team cemented their place in Olympic history, united a nation, inspired a multitude and created their own moment of pure magic.



◀ Georgie Twigg celebrates at London 2012.  
Frank Uijlenbroek





## Photographer biographies

The majority of the images that appear within the pages of this book were taken by Dutchmen Frank Uijlenbroek and Koen Suyk, two of the world's leading hockey photographers.

### **Frank Uijlenbroek**

Frank has travelled the globe taking images of the sport, supplying various agencies, newspapers and major online news outlets as well as National Associations, Continental Federations and the International Hockey Federation (FIH). Frank has 25 years' experience in the business, and was on hand to capture the hockey images at the Beijing 2008, London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Frank is the owner of the FFU Press Agency and World Sport Pics.

### **Koen Suyk**

A veteran of eight Olympic Games, Koen has captured some of the sport's most iconic moments. Over a 40-year career he has earned a reputation as a world class photographer working for agencies such as Reuters, ANP and ANEFO (Amsterdam). At the Rabobank Hockey World Cup in 2014, the Royal Dutch Hockey Association (KNHB) honoured Koen by creating a public display of some of his finest images, while a famous shot of Alex Danson in full flight was named Best Photo at the 2015 EuroHockey Championships in London.

The authors wish to express our sincere gratitude for supporting this project.

◀ **Passion, desire, determination and unity were on show for all to see at Rio 2016.**  
*Frank Uijlenbroek.*

## How Great Britain Hockey works and the importance of GB Primacy

On 9 May 2006, the Great Britain Hockey Business and Performance Framework Agreement was signed between the national governing bodies of the three home nations: England, Scotland and Wales. This groundbreaking accord was developed following a steady decline in British performances in Olympic competition, the highest level of hockey, after 1996.

This legally binding document is built around the central concept of Great Britain Primacy, meaning that all three nations are fully committed to putting the ultimate performance goal of Team GB's men's and women's hockey teams achieving Olympic success ahead of everything else.

As part of the agreement, a nominated national governing body from the three nations leads the delivery of the Great Britain hockey teams' business operations and performance objectives, preparing the teams for the Olympic Games. The nominated country is appointed every Olympic cycle against agreed

criteria. This responsibility is held by England Hockey, who have been the nominated national governing body for each Olympic cycle since the signing of the framework agreement. As such, England Hockey lead the business and performance operations relating to GB Hockey.

The Great Britain Hockey Business and Performance Framework Agreement has been one of the most significant factors in the rise of Team GB over the last ten years, allowing a new level of commitment and understanding to develop between the home nations, putting the athletes at the very centre of a programme designed to maximise the chances of success for Team GB at Olympic level.

While the home nations regularly compete in international competitions as separate entities, in the two-year cycle that leads up to an Olympic Games it is Team GB that competes in top level events such as the Olympic qualifiers, Champions Trophy and, of course, the Olympic Games itself.

Complete information about the GB Framework agreement can be found on [www.greatbritainhockey.co.uk](http://www.greatbritainhockey.co.uk)

## Author acknowledgements

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### Dedication

A project like this is only possible with the support of the, by now renowned, Hockey Family. We would like to dedicate this book to some special members of the Hockey Family who would have liked to see the story through to its end, but who were tragically taken from us too early – Graham and Tom Wilson, Peter Savage and Peter Hogg.

Great Britain struggled at the elite Hockey Champions  
Trophy 2016 competition in London, where the team  
finished fifth, just six weeks prior to Rio 2016.  
*Frank Uijjenbroek.*



## Prologue

### Friday 19 August 2016

As the cameras panned onto the 16 women standing on the podium, gold medals around their necks, the emotions were as individual as the personalities. For some, there were expressions of disbelief; for others it was sheer joy; the huge smiles on the faces of Laura Unsworth, Georgie Twigg and Hollie Webb; the defiant celebration of Lily Owsley; the unmasked shock of Sam Quek; the quiet satisfaction of a job well done from Sophie Bray. And for married couple Kate and Helen Richardson-Walsh, it was the pinnacle of two international careers that had spanned the best part of two decades. These were the moments when a tight-knit group of players, who had trained, played and lived together in the most intensive of times, finally allowed the masks to slip. This was what they had prepared for, this was what the tough training, the tears, the aching muscles, the uncompromising search for excellence had boiled down to. This was it, this was their moment.

### Tuesday 23 August 2016

British Airways 747, flight number BA2016, repainted with a golden nose and renamed 'victORIOUS' carries the squad home from Rio to London. Moments after landing, footage filmed by track sprinter and 4x100m bronze medallist Asha Philip goes viral on social media, showing the hockey girls belting out the British National Anthem with pride and passion, before bursting into a plane-shaking rendition of Gala's 1997 dance hit 'Freed From Desire'.

Upon entering the arrivals hall, the players are amazed to find not just family and friends waiting to greet them, but dozens of members of the public. The next few days are a frenzy of press receptions, television appearances, radio interviews and photoshoots.

'It was absolutely bonkers,' recalls Hannah Macleod. 'Wherever you turned there were people wanting to speak to you, to hug you. It was overwhelming. You certainly don't go round saying you're an Olympic champion and it still sounds strange



Golden moment as Team GB's women's hockey squad and coaching staff celebrate Olympic glory at Rio 2016.  
*Frank Uijlenbroek.*



Team GB pose for photographers after their shootout victory over the Netherlands in the women's Hockey final at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.  
Frank Uijlenbroek

saying it, but we haven't stopped since; our feet haven't touched the ground.

'We probably won't know the true extent (of what we have achieved) for another couple of years and if we get another medal-winning team in 12 years' time it would be amazing to hear they were inspired by 2016. I think we have now truly evolved from the "Jolly hockey sticks era".'

## September 2016

Maddie Hinch may have been one of the heroes on the pitch but, since landing back in the UK the goalkeeper has become a media sensation, from a show-stealing appearance alongside Rene Zellweger on *The Jonathan Ross Show* to taking her place on the couch on the BBC's flagship programme, *The One Show*. She says: 'Since landing back in Britain, everything has started to hit home. We were in a bubble for three weeks; we had no idea what was going on at home. After winning gold, the first thing my brother texted me was, "Maddie, you're trending on Twitter", not "Well done on the gold".'

'BBC television's viewing figures for the Olympic final were something like nine million, which is incredible. I am glad I didn't know that before the game. It would have made it even more daunting.

'Coming back home and seeing the number of people in the airport, little kids with hockey sticks and team kits ... that was the moment when it hit home. They seemed to be in awe of us and wanted to be us.'

While the Team GB squad and coaching staff basked in the glory of a gold medal and the adulation of a British public that has taken them into their hearts, there is not a person involved with the squad who has not also experienced the other side of top class competition. If ever a team has been at either end of a spectrum, it is this squad. For most of the players, the pain has been recent. Just six weeks prior to Rio, Great Britain finished fifth out of six in front of a home crowd at the 2016 Champions Trophy in London, leaving many to seriously question what possible chance they had of medalling in Brazil. Many of the squad represented England at the World Cup 2014 in the Netherlands,

travelling to The Hague ranked third in the world only to endure a woeful tournament and suffer an 11th place finish. That pain is hard to erase, but for three members of the squad the tough times started much earlier, enduring the most torrid of times at the start of their international careers.

For Helen Richardson-Walsh a bright start as the youngest player to represent Team GB women's hockey at an Olympics, being just 18 at Sydney 2000, was soon overshadowed by a series of career-threatening injuries which kept her out of the game for months on end. Meanwhile, for captain Kate Richardson-Walsh and fellow defender Crista Cullen, the lowest point of their careers had taken place during an Olympic qualifier in New Zealand in 2004 – an event that Helen missed as she was fighting back from injury.

## March 2004

'Devastated, humiliated, felt like walking away from the sport.' These were the sentiments of Kate Richardson-Walsh – then simply Kate Walsh prior to her marriage to Helen Richardson in 2013 – just 24 hours after the Team GB women's hockey team had crashed spectacularly out of the Olympic qualifiers in Auckland, losing 2-0 to Korea in a must-win battle in the chase for fifth place and a spot at Athens 2004.



Helen Richardson was also an Olympic debutant at Sydney 2000.  
Stu Forster / Getty Images



Kate Walsh in action for Team GB at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.  
Shaun Botterill / Getty Images

This was the first time Team GB women had failed to qualify for the Olympics since they had first entered the competition in 1988 and it was a miserable start to Kate's tenure as captain of her national side. The young defender had been named captain just a few months earlier and, with revered Australian coach Tricia Heberle at the helm, this was supposed to signal a brave new world for Great Britain women's hockey. The coach had introduced a new attacking style, backed up with improved fitness and skill levels as well as a psychologist to calm jittery nerves. This was paying dividends as the team climbed up the world rankings to fifth in the world. The Olympic qualifier should have been a formality. The top five teams would have an automatic passage to Athens and Great Britain were the highest-ranked team in Auckland for the event.

Over the course of the ten-day tournament, the hopes and dreams of the players were cruelly dashed. Team GB failed miserably to play to their potential. True, they beat two teams in the pool matches – Ukraine and Ireland – but a draw with New Zealand and a loss to Germany meant they finished third in the pool matches. This left them out of the race to the podium and contesting fifth to eighth place in the crossover matches. Their first opponents were Korea and everyone knew that only a victory against the Asian side would give Team GB the chance to play for that all-important fifth place. In the event, early goals from Kim Jin-Kyoung and Park Jeong-Sook saw the Team GB challenge fade to nothing. They finished seventh after a dismally unsatisfying 2-0 win over Ireland, returning home to a barrage of criticism from the media and the wider public.



Kate Walsh, Crista Cullen and Sarah Thomas crestfallen at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.  
Aamir Qureshi / Getty Images

'Those feelings (of devastation) will never go away,' says Crista Cullen. 'Missing out on an Olympic Games that you have trained so hard for is an incredibly hard position to find yourself in. As a youngster, I was lucky, I got to go to the Junior World Cup and get away from it all. Many of the players retired on the back of that performance, that was a very hard time.'

For Kate it was a seminal moment: 'Looking back on that time, I think that may be where I first began to build my inner strength,' she says. 'Over time I have become a firm believer that, in order to succeed, you really have to plumb the depths and understand what it is to lose. That is the only way you can really appreciate what it takes to win.'

And, as Kate and Crista have discovered, it is not just about learning to lose but having the patience to wait for their time to come. It has taken a full 12 years for the two Olympians to wipe away the stains of that time in Auckland.

## 2004-2008

The seeds of change began in the build up to Beijing 2008. In 2003, Danny Kerry started working with the England 'A' squad. The coach, who had previously coached Premier League side Canterbury, was swiftly promoted to take charge of England Senior Women on

1 January 2005 and then, in 2007, he was appointed as head coach to Great Britain Women's squad, giving him just a few months to prepare for Beijing 2008. The event was not an unqualified success, with Team GB finishing sixth and many questions being asked about the suitability of a new young coach, with limited international experience. As Kerry himself says: 'I was horribly naive and horribly inexperienced,' but he was also quick to learn and had an insatiable desire to improve every aspect of his coaching.

And, Beijing apart, Kerry's tenure was yielding a steady stream of results. During the period 2005-2010, his teams – England and Great Britain – amassed ten medals at European, Commonwealth and World level. This included a first ever podium finish, a bronze medal, at the 2010 World Cup.

Beijing 2008 may not have been a glorious triumph but it was an improvement on what had gone before. Team GB finished sixth, which was well above their world ranking coming into the tournament. But, as Kerry admitted, he had a lot to learn and Beijing was just the first step along a much longer journey. It would take time for the new coach to develop and then share his vision, although the steady haul of medals and the slow but steady climb back up the rankings was all that the bosses at England Hockey and UK Sport needed as proof to the wisdom of their selection.

## August 2012

By the time London 2012 came around, Kerry's ideas were beginning to bear fruit and the exploits of the hockey women began to capture the public's imagination. A bronze medal in London was almost overshadowed by the horrific injury suffered by Kate Walsh. For an all too short time, the women's hockey team was all over the media as captain Kate, with her jaw wired up, led her team to the second bronze medal in their history, adding to the one claimed by Jane Sixsmith and co. at Barcelona 1992 some 20 years previous.

Across the UK, people were suddenly seeing hockey in the newspapers, front page and back; players were being interviewed on radio and television; and suddenly hockey players such as Alex Danson and Kate Walsh were becoming household names. The presence of Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge at several matches, plus a photoshoot in *Hello* magazine, showing the Duchess holding a hockey stick and chatting to the players, did wonders for the team's profile.

As Team GB took the game to New Zealand in that bronze medal match, there were signs the team that Kerry had envisaged was emerging. Despite a devastating loss to Argentina in the semi-final, tough mental resilience and belief in each other was beginning to blossom. London had in many ways arrived too early.

Speaking to *The Guardian* newspaper, joint-leading goalscorer at the tournament Crista Cullen said: 'A gold medal was what we had spoken about for so many years and that was what it was about, but we picked each other up, put our arms round each other ... We said we'd give every ounce of blood out there and that's what we showed today.'

And so began the four year countdown to Rio 2016, which was a rollercoaster journey to say the least. The team experienced victories, losses, fallouts and recriminations but always present, although sometimes hidden very deep, was a belief that this Great Britain squad had the potential to make history.

For Kerry it was all about developing the culture that he had started to put in place after Beijing. 'There were some things that I couldn't change without making too much noise,' explains the coach. 'But there were other things that we could do that would put us in the best possible place to win gold.'

Kerry speaks about marginal gains and attention to every detail. Craig Keegan, the goal-scoring coach, talks about momentum and its importance; Karen Brown, whose main role was coaching the defence, considers the way the team played without the ball as crucial to success; some of the senior players say



Champagne all round on the return flight from Rio 2016, with superstar triathlon gold medallist Alistair Brownlee (bottom right) and gold medal-winning swimmer Adam Peaty (top right) joining the hockey party.

Alex Livesey / Stringer / Getty Images

that learning from losing was the most important thing. Whatever the formula, Team GB got it right in Rio.

And how. Seven games stood between Team GB and a place in the final. Seven games and seven wins. And then the final itself, won in the most dramatic of fashion, after drawing with the world number one team and reigning Olympic champions, the Netherlands in full time. In accordance with hockey regulations, the match went to a shootout – a dramatic one-on-one battle where the attacking player has just eight seconds to score past the goalkeeper. It is gladiatorial in the extreme and is the one time when hockey – fundamentally all about the team – becomes an individual sport where someone can be a hero.

The statistics will show that Team GB won the shootout 2-0, but these stark figures fail to reveal the drama and emotion of that evening.

'It was one of the most unbelievable moments in my life,' says Kate Richardson-Walsh. 'I didn't really know what to feel. On the one hand we had just won a gold medal at the Olympics, the thing that I had aimed for all



my hockey career; but no-one else, no-one outside that tight band of players can even begin to imagine what we had been through to get to that point. I'm not sure anyone ever will.'

While this book is all about celebrating the gold medal that this team of inspirational women won against all the odds on that magical night in Rio de Janeiro, it is also a story of so much more. From those dark days in 2004 when the future of the sport was in doubt, to the highs of Olympic bronze in London 2012. It is the story of coach Danny Kerry's own battle to win over his players and shape them into the squad he wanted them to be, the tactical nous and philosophy he managed to instil into every athlete. It is about those that didn't make the final cut; it is about the injuries that players had to overcome; it is about the mental anguish of being in such a dark place, that picking up a stick and playing the game is the very last thing a player wants to do.

Above all else, this is a book about hope, belief and celebration. All of these players and the support staff have travelled along a turbulent road. As a collective unit they have had to face failure and pick themselves up. They have dreamed of glory only to swallow the bitter pill of defeat. They have turned

up to train day-on-day for a sport they always love but sometimes hate with a passion. They have put lives, careers, families and friends on hold, knowing that to lose their focus is to let go of their dream.

This is a story of individuals developing the mental strength to follow through on a vision; having the capacity and humility to be tough and honest when it comes to self-analysis. It is about the realisation that it is not just about self; it is about being able to look team-mates in the eye and know that what is reflected back is a mutual trust.

This book is also unashamedly a celebration. It doesn't deal in cynicism and doubt. You will find no mention in its pages of the legitimacy of pouring lottery money into elite sport; you will not find a discourse about hockey's place in the social fabric of the UK. What you will discover is how an extraordinary group of sportswomen, led by a visionary team of coaches, overturned the odds to put an enormous, collective smile on the face of millions of people in the UK and around the world.

Over the course of the next 14 chapters, we will chart the course of Team GB's journey from the low point of Athens to that golden evening in Rio.

## The Greek Tragedy

As Team GB's women's hockey team prepare for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games and seek to achieve head coach Danny Kerry's aspiration to 'win as winners', it seems hard to believe that just over a decade ago, hockey in the UK was at an all-time low. As today's cohort of players embark on a full-time training programme at the National Sports Centre at Bisham Abbey, feted as inspirational heroes across the land and invited to numerous appearances as 'celebrity' sports stars, it is worth looking back to 2004, where the stench of failure was tainting anyone involved in the sport.

For three of the 2016 squad - Crista Cullen, Helen Richardson and Kate Walsh - it was a time when their senior international hockey careers were just getting started. A fourth player, Alex Danson, was also on the cusp of breaking through from the junior squad. While these were unquestionably difficult times for these young members of the Team GB squad, all believe that those experiences contributed to the gold medals that now hang round their necks.



Team GB defender Mel Clewlow shields the ball against host nation New Zealand at the 2004 Women's Hockey Olympic Qualification tournament in Auckland.  
Michael Bradley / Getty Images

'It was tough being a hockey player in 2004,' says three-times Olympian Crista Cullen, reflecting back to a period in the history of GB women's hockey that now seems like a dreadful nightmare.

In fact, the period around the start of the new century was far from comfortable for anyone involved in the sport, especially in the UK. The national governing body was on the verge of bankruptcy and the national stadium at Milton Keynes was a white elephant around their neck. In terms of international success, a major medal had not been claimed since Team GB's women won bronze at the Barcelona 1992 Olympic Games. England's women enjoyed relative success with silver medals at the 1998 and 2002 Commonwealth Games as well as a gold at the International Hockey Federation's second tier Champions Challenge event, also played in 2002, but the blue riband events were looking like a distant and unrealistic dream.

Sally Munday, the current chief executive officer for England Hockey and chief operating officer of Great Britain Hockey, was a regional development officer at the start of the new millennium. The memory of her beloved sport's decline still causes the normally cheerful CEO to wince. 'In 2002 we discovered the English Hockey Association was going bankrupt. It was hideous, I can't even begin to tell you how it feels when the sport that you love and care about so deeply is going bust. I just remember feeling really, really angry at the people who had led us down this route.'

Two years later, Team GB failed to secure qualification for Athens 2004. It was a devastating situation that deeply affected Munday, with one particular image being permanently burned into their memory. 'We were watching the match updates coming in from Auckland, where the qualifier was taking place,' says Munday. 'The updates were coming through every three minutes or so and it was becoming clear that we were not going to qualify. Then a picture was posted online of Kate (Richardson-Walsh), on her knees, just devastated. I will never forget that image as long as I live.'

'I remember thinking, this is the culmination of the sport having been managed badly. I felt this overwhelming sense of purpose that we would never let the athletes end up like this because of poor management.'

Kate Richardson-Walsh recalled that moment in an emotional interview with the BBC's Ollie Williams: 'I still get upset about it now, just having that emotion of... failing. Of not qualifying for an Olympics. That had never happened before.'

'I was lucky enough to be a young player, to know - if I was lucky - I'd have another opportunity. But for many players, that was their last chance to represent their



New Zealand's Suzie Muirhead and Jennie Bimson of Team GB in action at the 2004 Olympic Qualifier.  
Michael Bradley / Getty Images

country. When we go out and play now, we play with that in mind. We want to right those wrongs for them.'

The Athens Olympic cycle was a nadir for women's hockey, with the team's dismal failure to qualify for the Olympic Games leaving the morale and self-belief of the players, coaching staff and the governing body at rock bottom. For many players, this was a desperately sad way to end their playing careers and, for head coach Tricia Heberle, it was a blot on a coaching CV that was otherwise first rate.

Australian Heberle had been brought into the coaching set-up to take charge of Great Britain women, following the team's disappointing eighth place finish at Sydney 2000. She was an Olympian herself, representing Australia at the Los Angeles 1984 Olympic Games and had been part of the coaching team that had led the Hockeyroos – the nickname of the Australia women's team – to back-to-back gold medals both at the 1994 and 1998 World Cups and the 1996 and 2000 Olympic Games. Heberle had been coaching England since 2001, so she was a natural and accepted choice for the role.

For the Great Britain squad, under the leadership of Heberle, this was to be a fresh start. Any politics surrounding the sport were firmly the preserve of the national governing body, the athletes were just focused on the qualification. Heberle had guided England to a silver medal at the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth

Games, and within the Great Britain squad the momentum was really starting to build. Climbing to fifth in the world rankings, Great Britain headed to the Olympic qualification tournament in Auckland in March 2004 as the top seeds and with full expectations of securing their ticket to Athens, requiring a top five finish at the ten team event.

At the time, Danny Kerry was a young coach with the England development team and he believed, like everyone else, that Olympic qualification was almost a formality. 'They had been playing well and were rightly favourites for the tournament. But it all went wrong, Tricia resigned and the programme went into a hiatus until October of that year.'

A horrendous qualifying campaign began with a reasonable start, drawing 2-2 in their opening Pool A match against host nation New Zealand. That result was followed by a 2-1 loss to Germany, a team that would eventually go on to take the Olympic title in Athens. Speaking after the Germany defeat, a frustrated Heberle said: 'I am not happy with one point from two games, but we have a quality team and we are playing good hockey. We'll most likely be playing off for fifth to eighth now but we just need to put ourselves in the best form by the end of the week.'

The next two matches saw Team GB record a 1-0 win over lowly-ranked Ukraine, followed by a 2-0 victory

against near neighbours Ireland. Heberle's prediction proved correct and Team GB found themselves in the fifth to eighth place play-offs, needing to win both matches to qualify.

A strong and very determined Korea took the game to Team GB and, to the amazement of everyone, Korea emerged as 2-0 winners, destroying the Olympic dreams of the Team GB players. Korea would go on to take fifth place, joining Spain, Japan, New Zealand and Germany as the teams to progress through to Athens.

One of the members of the Team GB squad in 2004 was Mel Clewlow, who still plays National League hockey but also commentates on international matches on behalf of the BBC and the International Hockey Federation (FIH). Several years on, there is still a sense of deep regret and bitterness in the defender's voice as she recalls that time.

'I will always remember that qualifying tournament. We were ranked number one going into it and completely believed we would qualify for Athens. Of course, things happen in the build up that you can look back on and think had an impact but we, as the players and the coaching staff, have to take responsibility for what happened.'

For Clewlow, however, a lot of the fault lay at the door of the governing body. 'My own opinion of that time is that, as an England team, we had Trish Heberle as head coach with Ian Jennings as her assistant. This worked well. Trish oversaw the programme and managed the players while Ian delivered the coaching sessions on the pitch. The two of them played to their strengths and, if Ian was pushing us a bit too hard – as he sometimes did – Trish would step in.

'I believe this should have been the Team GB set up as well, but about five months before Auckland, Ian had his contracted hours reduced and subsequently decided not to continue.'

For Clewlow, this is when fractures within the squad began to appear. 'When things started to go wrong the cracks got bigger and bigger to the point where we hit an all-time low. It was made worse because we were in New Zealand and couldn't have been further from home.'

If Clewlow was struggling, for Crista Cullen, then just 18 years of age, it was simply a bewildering time. 'To go through that emotional rollercoaster at that stage and to not gain qualification for Athens, well that was really tough. Not only had we not qualified, but the national governing body was going through some almighty issues as well. We didn't know what direction we were heading in as a group. We were just in an element of disarray.'



Philip Kimberley.  
Koen Suyk

Back in England, the new board – led by chief executive Philip Kimberley, a man with a long and distinguished international general management career with Burmah Castrol PLC, and Sally Munday in position as development director – had some serious thinking to do. Munday takes up the narrative: 'Of course we lost 60-70 per cent of our funding across the board – both grass roots and elite level investment. We had been saved from bankruptcy by a loan from businessman Stewart Newton, but the removal of funding by Sport England meant we really had to go back to our roots and think long and hard about what we were going to do.'

'Typically for a man with his business acumen, Philip Kimberley kept very calm. He simply said: "We are just going to have to rebuild", and so the performance side began a rebuilding process on the back of that Athens disaster. David Faulkner (an Olympic gold medallist with Team GB at Seoul 1988) had been appointed performance director and he, Philip and myself spent an enormous amount of time writing a performance plan and looking at the things that really needed addressing in the sport.'

Kimberley himself had been horrified at the state hockey was in when he took up the reins. 'There wasn't much information around about what had happened and how bad things had got. When I arrived in 2003, it was very, very bad. There was a very shell-shocked team

of people running things and we had a completely new governance structure and a completely new board. We owed £500,000, we had no strategy and we had no financial control. We couldn't even afford a sandwich for a volunteer. At that stage, the elite side was being run by a completely separate organisation called World Class Hockey. And I can tell you, they were a long way from being "world class".

In 2005, Kimberley managed to re-integrate World Class Hockey back into the fold, and along with Faulkner, the two men put their considerable strategic ability towards re-shaping the performance element.

Prior to Faulkner's appointment, one key move initiated by Kimberley had been the appointment of two young coaches: Danny Kerry was to become head coach to the England women's team, while Jason Lee was appointed as the England men's head coach. Kimberley, who put together the selection panels for the two positions, was very clear about the qualities he was looking for. 'I was pretty clear that I wanted coaches with brains, who could work up a learning curve. I felt that the coaches had to be English or British because the cultural nuances offered by coaches from abroad were just not working.'

Kerry recounts the events surrounding his appointment. 'The job as senior coach to England came up and Mike Hamilton was outgoing performance director. I asked whether it was worth me applying and he was typically honest. He told me to apply, but really it was just good experience and a chance to get my cv together. He certainly wasn't optimistic of my chances.'

'At the same time the chance to apply as head coach to Scotland came up, so I sent my cv off for that one too.'

'I spent a lot of time on my cv, I thought very hard about what to write and then I printed it out on really top class paper. I went through the first round for England and then I was invited to the first round for Scotland. Then, as I was invited to the second round for England, I got offered the Scotland job.'

'It certainly helped my cause that Scotland had offered me the job. It also helped that we had recently had a string of foreign coaches, so it was a case of "do we pay for an established foreign coach or invest in a young English coach?" I think a set of circumstances helped my cause.'

As Kerry and Lee took up their respective positions, the men were ranked tenth in the FIH World Rankings, while the women had slipped to 11th. 'Our aim,' says Munday, 'was to move up the rankings, one place per year.'

However, the true game-changer for both England Hockey and GB Hockey came on 6 July 2005,



Sally Munday.  
Peter Savage

when London was named as the host city of the 2012 Olympic Games. 'That felt like an unbelievable moment,' says Munday. 'We now knew we had seven years to get things right from a performance perspective but we also wanted to use a home Olympic Games to grow the sport and have an impact on the wider sport. That was where our culture of "inspiring a generation" was born.'

And so the new England Hockey Board set about implementing the new strategy, and the first task was to win back the trust of the grass roots hockey players – this was to be the tentative first step towards creating the Hockey Family. To build trust and bridges between the hundreds of clubs in the UK, Munday and Kimberley got out and about, spending days meeting and talking to people involved in all levels of hockey. 'We were faced by tremendous hostility to start with,' recalls Kimberley. 'In Sally and myself, you have two very stubborn people. We were determined to drag people with us.'

While the grass roots were being wooed by Munday and Kimberley, at performance level, politics was still proving an issue. All the other hockey nations were able to start their Olympic programmes the day after the previous Games had finished. For Great Britain, a unique collaboration between nations that more often than not competed very much as separate entities, this was not the case. It was standard for the Great Britain coach to be appointed just nine months before the start of the Olympic Games, although occasionally this was extended to a year in advance, if they were lucky.

Even after the appointment of a head coach, things were far from simple. The coach was expected to take a large group of players to test events to ensure they were seen to be giving everyone a fair chance. The team would finally get down to its preparations with about six months to go, which was far from ideal.



Alex Danson shows her striker's instinct to score against New Zealand's Black Sticks at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.  
Frank Uijlenbroek.

To counter this disadvantage, Kimberley developed the concept of the Great Britain Framework, a legally binding document that after months of intense negotiations was finally agreed and signed in 2006 by the three home nations: England, Scotland and Wales.

It was built around an underlying structure called Great Britain Primacy, meaning that all three nations committed to putting the ultimate goal of Team GB achieving Olympic success ahead of everything else. A nominated country would have full and complete responsibility to lead the delivery of the Great Britain hockey teams' business operations and performance objectives, preparing the teams for the Olympic Games. The nominated country would be named at the start of each Olympic cycle, with England being nominated for each cycle since the framework was signed more than a decade ago.

'I cannot stress enough the significance of that framework agreement and what it has allowed us to do,' says Munday, looking back at what was a new level of commitment and understanding between the home nations. 'It stopped all of the political shenanigans that were going on between England, Scotland and Wales and it has stood the test of time. Great Britain is first and the athletes are at the centre. That fundamentally is what has really changed.'

By 2009, the strategies for change began paying off as England men became European champions. At this point though, the women were still waiting for a breakthrough. A series of third- or fourth-place finishes were promising, but now the ambition was for a second- or first-place finish.

While the women sought silver or gold medals, Faulkner

and Kerry began to plot for a Team GB success at the London 2012 Olympic Games. Behind the scenes, Kimberley and the board were doing their bit by securing the rights to host the 2010 Champions Trophy.

This was important from both a commercial and a performance standpoint. While hosting home games would spark public interest and be interesting to sponsors, for the coach, it was an important opportunity for the players to get used to playing in front of home crowds, otherwise they could be overwhelmed when it came to London 2012.

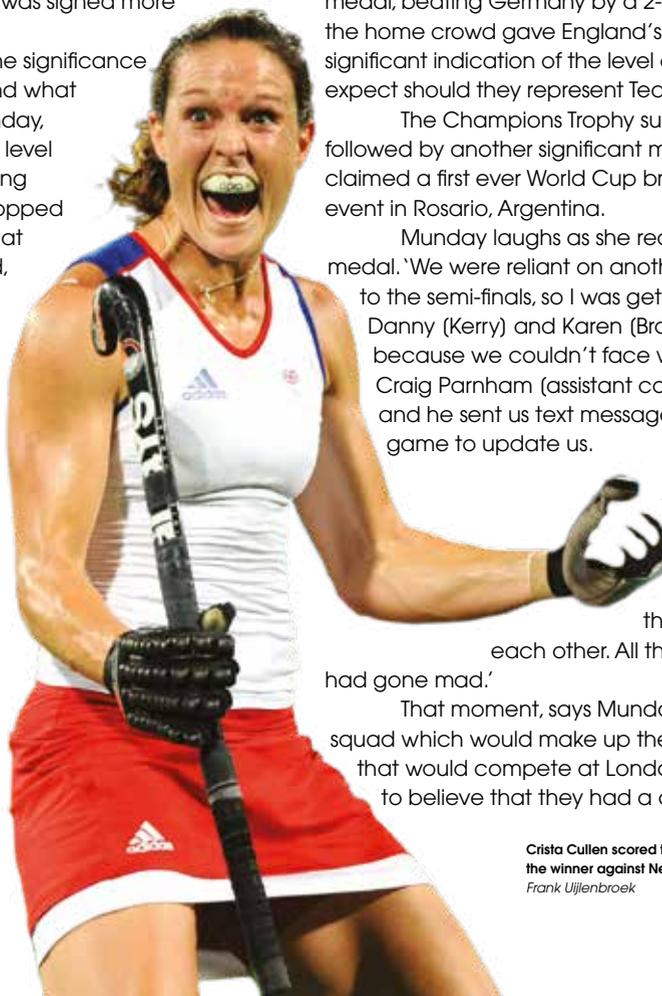
The first chance to host a home event came in 2010 with the Champions Trophy being held in Nottingham. It couldn't have gone much better. England competed in the event and took the bronze medal, beating Germany by a 2-1 scoreline. Importantly, the home crowd gave England's athletes a small but significant indication of the level of support they could expect should they represent Team GB in two years' time.

The Champions Trophy success was quickly followed by another significant milestone as England claimed a first ever World Cup bronze medal at the 2010 event in Rosario, Argentina.

Munday laughs as she recalls the World Cup medal. 'We were reliant on another result to get through to the semi-finals, so I was getting a coffee with Danny (Kerry) and Karen (Brown) in a cafe in Rosario because we couldn't face watching the game. Craig Parnham (assistant coach) was watching and he sent us text messages throughout the game to update us.

'When he texted the final result, and we realised we were into the semi-finals, we were jumping around the cafe and hugging each other. All the locals thought we had gone mad.'

That moment, says Munday, is when the England squad which would make up the bulk of the team that would compete at London 2012 really began to believe that they had a chance of winning an



Crista Cullen scored three times at Beijing 2008, including the winner against New Zealand in the pool phase.  
Frank Uijlenbroek

Olympic medal. 'I honestly don't think that they believed they were good enough until then.'

For Crista Cullen and Kate Richardson-Walsh – then simply known as Kate Walsh prior to her marriage to international team-mate Helen Richardson – the pain suffered in 2004 is something that will haunt them for ever. Helen Richardson-Walsh missed the trip as she was suffering the first of many back injuries, while teenager Alex Danson was very much a junior on the cusp of the squad. All of them have spoken individually about the experience and the inner strength that came from those difficult times, especially when it comes to dealing with subsequent events. And, as one, they attribute their success in Rio with the failures suffered by the Great Britain squad of 2004.

It is a point with which Mel Clewlow agrees: 'I have to admit, when I look at what the team did in Rio, a little part of me thinks, "yes, I played my part in that", I truly believe that those difficult times were the catalyst for a huge change in both England Hockey and its structure and the attitude and culture surrounding the players.'

For Clewlow, it was not the end of her international career, but she struggled to get over the disappointment. She took time away from the

international game before returning to the fold and playing at Beijing 2008. 'It was horrific not to qualify and I personally took some time out of the international game as I felt disillusioned after this. It sounds dramatic, but I needed to reassess my life. It was a harsh and very honest debriefing process but looking back now, hitting rock bottom in 2004 helped start the rebuilding process that led to gold in Rio.'

Once they returned from Auckland, Crista Cullen returned to the England U21 squad to play in the Junior World Cup in Santiago, Chile. It was the break from the senior set-up she needed, but now she looks back, she reflects on how the older members of the squad must have felt. 'Being the youngster in the team, there is an element of lack of responsibility. I was the new kid on the block. But there was also that ingrained respect for the other athletes who have achieved a huge amount.'

'I was a whippersnapper brought in mainly because of my physical attributes rather than my ability to play hockey, if we are being genuinely honest. I was in a relatively luxurious position, going to Chile was a good time to get the experience of Auckland out of my mind as quickly as possible. Not all the athletes had that same luxury. I think it was a really hard time to get non-



Victory lap following England's bronze medal triumph over Germany at the 2010 Hockey World Cup in Rosario, Argentina.



Sally Walton and Ashleigh Ball celebrate England's bronze medal at the 2010 Women's Hockey World Cup in Rosario, Argentina, where goals from Alex Danson and Helen Richardson sealed victory over Germany.  
Frank Uijlenbroek

qualification. A lot of athletes retired on that. It was a very disappointing campaign, and those emotions and feelings will never go away. Missing out on an Olympic Games that you have trained so hard for – no matter what your age – is, I think, an incredibly hard position to be in.

'Dealing with disappointment and coming from rock bottom is fundamental for an athlete gaining success. I think that, unless you know what it is like to

have been in the worst possible position, you don't have the fundamental blocks to build on. As much as it is a terribly hard, emotional nightmare from a sporting context to be going through, I think it did stand us in quite good stead. If you do exactly what you don't want to do, which is not gain qualification, then I think that you do have to take a good hard look at yourself and you learn a lot about yourself and others.'



A semi-final defeat at the hands of the Netherlands ended England's title hopes at the 2010 Women's Hockey World Cup in Rosario, Argentina.  
Frank Uijlenbroek