

■ Rebecca Adlington gives coaching to swimmers Tizzy Ritblat and Cecilia Rafter, both 12



Olympian Rebecca makes a splash by inspiring students

Medallist advises girls to believe in themselves and achieve their goals

by Anna Behrmann
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Olympic swimmer Rebecca Adlington dropped into a girls' school this week to lead an inspirational training session.

The champion, who won two gold medals at Beijing and two bronze medals in the London Olympic Games, spoke to pupils at Francis Holland School, Regent's Park, Westminster.

The girls dived in, questioning the 25-year-old, now retired from

professional swimming, about her early ambitions and her experiences as a female athlete.

Rebecca told them: "I just believed in myself. If you believe in yourself, you can do anything. Everyone's human, and as athletes, everyone's there to be beaten. Always enjoy what you're doing. If you love something enough, you don't need the motivation."

"Men and women are equal - I always used to race against boys. Women's sports are growing; the

funding just needs to be there."

Commenting on the pressure to have a perfect body, she said: "Every single girl is insecure. For me, being involved in sport, I never expected people to judge me. I'm still a normal 25-year-old girl who feels insecure."

Role model

"I think as you get older, you think: 'I am who I am and if you don't like it bog off,'" the medallist added, laughing with the girls.

Phoebe, 12, said: "It was amazing to have Rebecca train us; she's such a hero of mine!" Tizzie, 12, added: "Rebecca taught us about streamlining and told us not to breathe on the first stroke. That's something I'll never forget."

Headteacher Vivienne Durham said: "It's wonderful for the students to have the opportunity to meet and be trained by Rebecca. She's an inspirational role model for young people and especially for the swimming team."

Couples hope to say 'I do' surrounded by blooms

Wedding bells are in the air for a Maida Vale garden centre which is applying for a licence to hold flower-filled, intimate civil marriage ceremonies.

Clifton Nurseries, in Clifton Villas, first caught wedding fever when they held a non-legal ceremony for one loved-up couple last year.

Wendy Bowen, who plans events at the nursery, said: "It was just a really beautiful September - sort of late afternoon, early evening, very casual, just friends and family, no fuss."

"The bride and groom arrived on a bike because they're really into cycling. We didn't really do too much, we just served drinks and canapés and they rode off into the sunset."

She added: "Gardening and horticulture is our key service and we don't want to move away from that. It would just be a very limited number of quite small, beautiful ceremonies. Due to demand we thought we'd get a licence."

"Everyone I've met thinks that it's the perfect place and it would be just a magical setting. Everyone seems to be very much on board."

Ms Bowen said the venue should appeal to couples who want a relaxed and informal ceremony in a "slightly unusual setting".

While the nursery has yet to decide on prices, it is likely they would be held seasonally.

The application is under consideration by Westminster Council.

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