

## Sky Betting & Gaming and IMAS – reflections on a purposeful partnership

*Steve Birch, CEO, Sky Betting & Gaming*

Breaking down barriers is what International Mixed Ability Sports (IMAS) does. Based in Bradford, this progressive social enterprise helps people of different abilities, age, gender and background participate in sport. And for the last six months, I am proud that Sky Betting & Gaming has been helping them to do this.

We have always valued spending time in the local community at SBG, as we know how important our history and heritage in Yorkshire has been to the success of our business. That is why it is so pleasing to support initiatives and charities that give back to the local communities that have served us so well, particularly in the North.

When the leadership team visited IMAS last year, there was no question that the charity was one of these projects, and it was clear that SBG could help in accelerating its growth and building awareness of its work. The last six months of effort from our skills-based volunteer group, led by SBG Gaming's Andrew Rushgrove, has focused on building the charity's flagship event – the International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament. Held in Cork last month, the five-day tournament is a global gathering of over 1,000 players from 16 countries playing across 28 men's and women's teams.

Rugby is a tough sport. There are stereotypes about who it is for, how the game should be played, and by whom. However, taking part in mixed ability sport, as our leadership team was able to do at IMAS during our visit, gives you a sense of why these events matter. The tournament in Cork is a great example of how the work of IMAS can help to transform perceptions. It gives the game new meaning – making it not only more inclusive, but equally enjoyable for players and spectators alike.

*IMART brings together people from around the world, from all backgrounds and people with and without disabilities to play full contact rugby. I have been honoured to meet so many incredible people and hear life changing stories. This is something that will stick with me for a long time."*

**Rachel Matthews, Campaign Planner, Sky Betting & Gaming volunteer**

Over the last six months we have utilised the skills of our team and the capabilities of our business to support IMAS – creating a brand for the event, defining its tone of voice, and developing creative content to increase awareness of the event and its values. For example, our complementary owned content strategy heightened social media interest, with 100,000s viewers of IMAS' posts helping to drive real engagement.

Then there was support at the tournament itself. We had 10 volunteers from SBG on the ground in Cork to provide hands on support throughout the five days. There, our professional film and camera crew captured 2,000 professional images and film footage to use as a legacy of the event and boost its future marketing plans. Personally, I have been particularly interested in

following the Mixed Ability Podcast created with the support of SBG, which highlights the unique IMAS community of players, events and achievements.

*"I think it was one of the best days of my life. I made friends with every team, laughed and smiled. It was such a positive and warm day"* **Mark Carroll, AML Analyst, Paddy Power Betfair volunteer**

Encouraging people to participate in mixed ability sport is a cause we will continue to champion. As set out in our Inclusion Pledge, the value of enabling everyone to succeed is something critical to SBG's own strategy, as well as across Flutter, which has an equally critical mission set out in our 'Positive Impact Plan'. As part of this, the Group is committed to investing in sport at a grassroots level, where it can boost participation and promote health and wellbeing across the communities in which it has a presence.

I want to pay tribute to the role that my colleagues played over the last six months, all of whom demonstrated a commitment to learning about an important cause and went the extra mile to make an impact. Most of all, we are excited to be supporting IMAS as it continues to go from strength to strength and look forward to helping them promote mixed ability sports to not only those that can participate, but to the wider public. Sport is for everyone and at SBG, working with IMAS, we want everyone to know this.

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