



Championing oral health and baton twirling

Registered dental nurse **Anita Stanforth** has been involved with the sport of baton twirling for over 20 years and hopes to see it become an Olympic event.

Dentistry and baton twirling

In my current day job, I am the Oral Health Improvement Practitioner for an Acute Hospital Trust in the South East of England and serve as the Education Representative for the British Association of Dental Nurses (BADN). During my spare time I am the President of the National Baton Twirling Association (England), otherwise known as NBTA, and the co-chair of United Twirl England (UTE).

Organisations supporting the sport of baton twirling have been in existence since the 1950s. At NBTA we are celebrating our 40th anniversary this year. Historically, there have been many baton twirling associations in England, all with their own rules and competitions. In order for our sport to progress and be taken seriously it is now time for discussions on unifying the various associations in order to eventually become the governing body of twirling in England. We are now close to achieving this after many hours

of discussion in the spirit of co-operation and compromise. The next step is to join the International Baton Twirling Federation who will take our sport forward towards becoming an Olympic event.

twirling athlete performs dance and gymnastic moves and rolls the baton around the body to music. Twirling is great for developing agility, grace, flexibility and hand-eye co-ordination whilst promoting general fitness.

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What is baton twirling?

The sport of baton twirling has been around for many years and involves the manipulation of a metal rod which is weighted so that it spins when thrown into the air. At the same time, the

How did I become involved?

My own experience of baton twirling began in 1997 when searching for an after-school activity for my daughter who was 7-years-old at the time. She had tried many sports

including horse riding, swimming, ice-skating, gymnastics, ballet and more, but became bored with each one after a short time. Eventually we saw a small ad in the local paper: 'Try baton twirling – first session free!' We duly turned up for her first lesson and she was totally hooked. The baton was constantly in her hand during her free time and she loved doing displays at local events with her team mates.

After a few months my daughter was asked if she wanted to enter some NBTA competitions. There are several different events available at twirling competitions including Pom-pons, Twirl Solo, Duet, Two Baton and even Three Baton! There are also Team and Freestyle events. After a couple of years, my daughter started winning trophies and medals, finally winning one of the coveted first place sashes and becoming a national champion in her chosen discipline (pictured). Eventually her team was selected to represent England at the European Championships – a very proud moment!

Somehow, I found myself becoming involved in running a club, firstly on the costume side and eventually becoming a Corps Director for a local club.

What are the benefits of baton twirling?

Apart from the physical benefits, our athletes enjoy a wide social circle, not only with their teammates but also forming friendships at National and International level. Learning to work as part of a team is a valuable life skill. When their competing life ends, they can go on to become coaches and judges.

Why do I do this?

I have learnt many new skills, firstly as a 'twirling Mum' making costumes and sewing sequins until late at night. Later, when my daughter and I formed our own club I learnt about managing people, finance, sponsorship, grants and administration. More recently I have become used to chairing meetings and leading a committee. I now attend meetings and discuss strategy internationally, helping to take our sport into the future. I work with a multitalented group of people on both the committee and technical side of twirling and continue to learn so much from them.

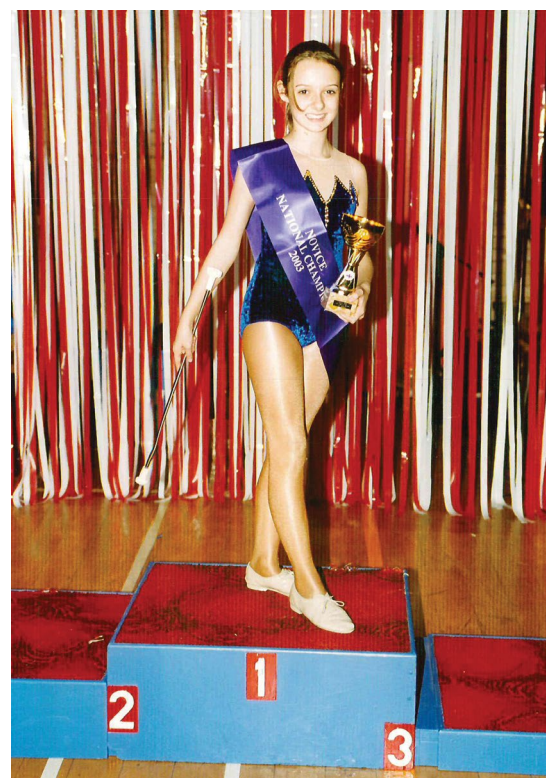
Actually, the bottom line is that the world of twirling gave my daughter so much joy and self-confidence, as well as her wide circle of friends. She now judges internationally and recently judged at the first IBTF World Championships at the M&S Bank Arena in Liverpool. I feel that I should now be trying to give something back for the next generation

of baton twirlers and the future of our sport.

My crowning achievement has been as part of the team organising the recent IBTF World Baton Twirling Championships. This was the first ever competition where the main associations of 21 countries unified and competed as one country. This event was held at the M&S Bank Arena in Liverpool over nine days and included the Nations Cup competition (for those athletes at a lower skill level), Majorette World Championships and World Championships.

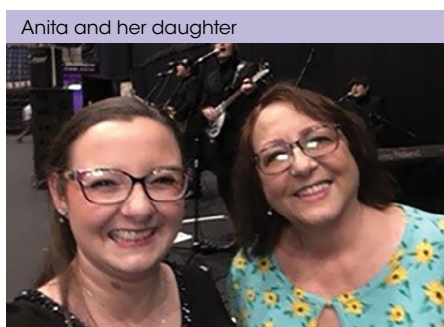


Anita



Anita's daughter as a champion

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Anita and her daughter



Anita's daughter as a judge

This event has been four years in the making having been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and has involved a dedicated team of experts and volunteers. I have definitely been able to develop my organisational skills and understanding of hosting large events during this work! Although the team came into this project from two different associations, we have learnt to work together as one team. I discovered that great things can be achieved if you work with the same result in mind... and have a deadline!

I would encourage any parent to get their children interested in sports. I see our

athletes from around the world develop into confident, fit, and highly skilled adults. They have used their free time constructively to acquire skills and make friends and they carry those skills into adulthood. I feel very proud to have played a small part in achieving that.

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