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Turning news into lessons



NEWS DETECTIVES

TODAY'S BIG STORY

Dyslexic athlete rowing towards Olympic dream

Does sport make everyone equal? British Olympic rowing hopeful Callum Dixon struggles with severe dyslexia, but that has not slowed him down.

Callum Dixon belongs at the World Rowing Championships. While the 23-year-old is **frank** about his struggles with **severe** dyslexia, on the water, nothing can hold him back.

In sport, he says, "nobody's going to ask me to do something that I think I can't do".

Sport became a lifeline for the young Dixon, who at age eight, noticed that he was struggling to read like his friends.

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that makes it harder for people to recognise written words.

To this day Dixon cannot read a book,



Pulling his weight: When rowing, Callum Dixon feels like nothing can hold him back.

THE STORY SO FAR

Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty, affecting at least one in 20 people. Scientists think it comes from different connections in the areas where the brain turns written words into sounds.

or a restaurant menu. But when rowing, he knows exactly what to do.

He says it is perfect for him, because "It is all numbers", not words.

"We do like doing the same things every day. We get our **programme** and I just need to know how far I'm going

today," he says.

Rowing was not Dixon's first sport. He had dreams of **Olympic** glory in sailing. But when the event for which he had made the British team, the **Finn**, was **scratched** from future Olympics, he had to find a new sport to live out his dreams.

Within four years, Dixon had made it onto the British team, rowing in the 2022 World Cup.

Now he has his sights set on the Olympics. "Going to the Olympics would be pretty special. That's something that has been a dream for almost as long as I can remember."

KEY WORDS

Frank:
Honest

Severe:
Very serious

Programme:
Training routine

Olympic: A major worldwide sports contest held every four years

Finn:
A small one person sailing boat

Scratched: Removed



YOU DECIDE

Does sport make everyone equal?

YES. Sport is all about fair play. Nothing matters except how you do on the day.

NO. Sport is incredibly unequal. Most people will never be Olympians. That is why we watch it.



THE DETECTIVE ZONE

SPOT THE FAKE

One of these three news stories is fake.
Which one?

Workers drill shortcut through great wall of China

Man hurt after climbing Geneva's giant fountain

Man tries to straighten leaning tower of Pisa

Dyslexia affects one in 20 people. Which of these famous people has dyslexia?



- A) Richard Branson
- B) Noel Gallagher
- C) Tom Holland
- D) Steven Spielberg

TIME TO DESIGN!

Everybody's brain works in a slightly different way. Dyslexia is one of a number of conditions people include when they talk about neurodiversity. Can you design a neurodiversity flag by making a colourful pattern that fits on the brain?

Step one:

Think about your design! What colours will you include on your flag? How will you show that different people's brains work in different ways?

Step two:

Create your design!
Draw your flag with its colourful brain!



Talking point

Are sports lessons just as important as maths lessons?

Amaze someone

Dyslexic people often do better on many tests involving visual memory and organising shapes.

Many famous sports people have been dyslexic, including Muhammad Ali, probably the most famous boxer of all time.

THE EXTRA PAGE

Callum Dixon on dyslexia

It has long been said that sport is a great leveller, where differences are put aside in pursuit of one common goal.

It is certainly the case for Callum Dixon. In sport, he says, "nobody's going to ask me to do something that I think I can't do".

In so-called "real life", his severe dyslexia means he can only read about 25 words. He cannot read a book, or a menu in a restaurant.

But what he can do is row – and the Olympics are in his sights.

Dixon, now 23, was around eight years old when he noticed he could not do the things his peers could.

The alphabet never stuck. "I remember never quite understanding what even it was, struggling to say the names of the letters. It was such a hurdle," he tells BBC Sport.

Growing up in Mile End, east London, Dixon and his three siblings were home educated. In the afternoons and evenings, he took part in every 'after school' club, sports team or Scouts group he could squeeze in.

He did attend school for a very short time, and recalls struggling to read his teachers' questions written on the board.

Dixon still relies heavily on the support of others, in particular his parents. His mum played a



Scull skills: Dixon (right) switched to rowing after Olympic sailing got rid of his event.

huge part in him being awarded a degree in psychology through the Open University.

"She read everything, and wrote all my answers," he says. "She read every single word of my degree with me."

He fears what the future will hold, when he has to get a "real" job after his athletic career.

But for now, he has sport – and "the best job in the world".

Dixon started out as a sailor, progressing up the ranks and joining the British team in 2016.

He was set for a successful future in the Finn class, one that likely would have included becoming an Olympian – a dream he had held since being captivated by London 2012.

But when in 2018 World Sailing

announced it was dropping the Finn from the Olympic programme from Paris 2024 onwards, Dixon had to change sports if he was to make his dream a reality.

Enter rowing. Fast forward to 2022 and Dixon was making his World Cup debut as a rower.

Earlier this year, he was selected in the men's quadruple sculls for the European Championships, finishing fourth, and it is in the quad that he will again line up at the World Championships in Belgrade, Serbia.

"Going to the Olympics would be pretty special. That's been a dream for almost as long as I can remember." ■

This is an edited version of a story from
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Read more on this topic



The Girl Who Rowed the Ocean
Alistair Humphries

Lightning Books



Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief
by Rick Riordan

Bloomsbury

Answers to the puzzles

Dyslexia question

The answer is all of them have dyslexia.

Spot the fake

Man tries to straighten leaning tower of Pisa