

On the 12th March, 32 coaches and athletes (U17 & U20) attended the first of the South Surrey Athletics Networks' coach and athlete development days, called the 'Big Network Day'. Held at Sutton Arena, the day consisted of sprints workshops on the topic of 'taking winter fitness into summer track speed', a motivational talk from an Olympic silver medallist, plus a chance to question a current Great Britain athlete. The workshops were led by Mike Smith, coach to many top athletes including Kriss Akabusi, Todd Bennett and Iwan Thomas. In the morning workshop coaches discussed ideas in an open forum format, followed by some practical work with athletes looking at running form drills and some work with harnesses.



After lunch there was a forum with Roger Black MBE. He talked about the psychological aspects of training and preparation, and how this changed over the course of his own career, his training group, and fitting in training with work. Afterwards coaches and athletes had the opportunity to put their questions to Roger, and also to GB sprinter Harry Aikienes- Aryeetey, recently back from the European Indoor championships.

Everyone was pleased to hear that Harry was recovering well from a hamstring injury sustained at the AVIVA Birmingham Grand Prix in February, which resulted in him not being 100% at the European Indoors in Paris last weekend. He admitted being 'just too scared' of a recurrence of the problem (in Paris). He mingled with the athletes afterwards who (after their initial nerves!) found him very personable and easy to talk to. It was great to see one of our elite athletes giving back to grassroots athletics in this way.



Athletes (and coaches!) had the chance to pose for photographs with Roger and Harry, and ask for autographs on items ranging from diaries to their sprint spikes!

Roger Black attained 15 major championship medals over his career, of which his most treasured is the 400m silver from the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, which to the delight of everyone he had brought with him.

Pictured: Roger Black MBE poses with his prized OG medal and Elly Ball, Surrey U20 60m silver medallist and (below), posing for the media with aspiring athletes.

Elly, of Guildford & Godalming AC, said 'It was great to meet Mike Smith after having previously read his book. My coach (Tony Childs) and I picked up some useful tips on the best way to progress from winter to summer training. The talk by Roger Black was very inspiring and I will certainly take on board his advice on the importance of mental preparation both in summer competitions and in the future'.



The day concluded with a session focused on starts and drive phase, utilising the state of the art ReactTime machine which provides coaches with an instant readout of reaction time and the force exerted onto the blocks. Network chairman Rob Russell commented 'it was great to see a mix of coaches and athletes attending, and those from events other than sprints coming to listen to Roger Black. I hope to carry on the positive momentum from today to our next Big Network Day in the autumn'.

