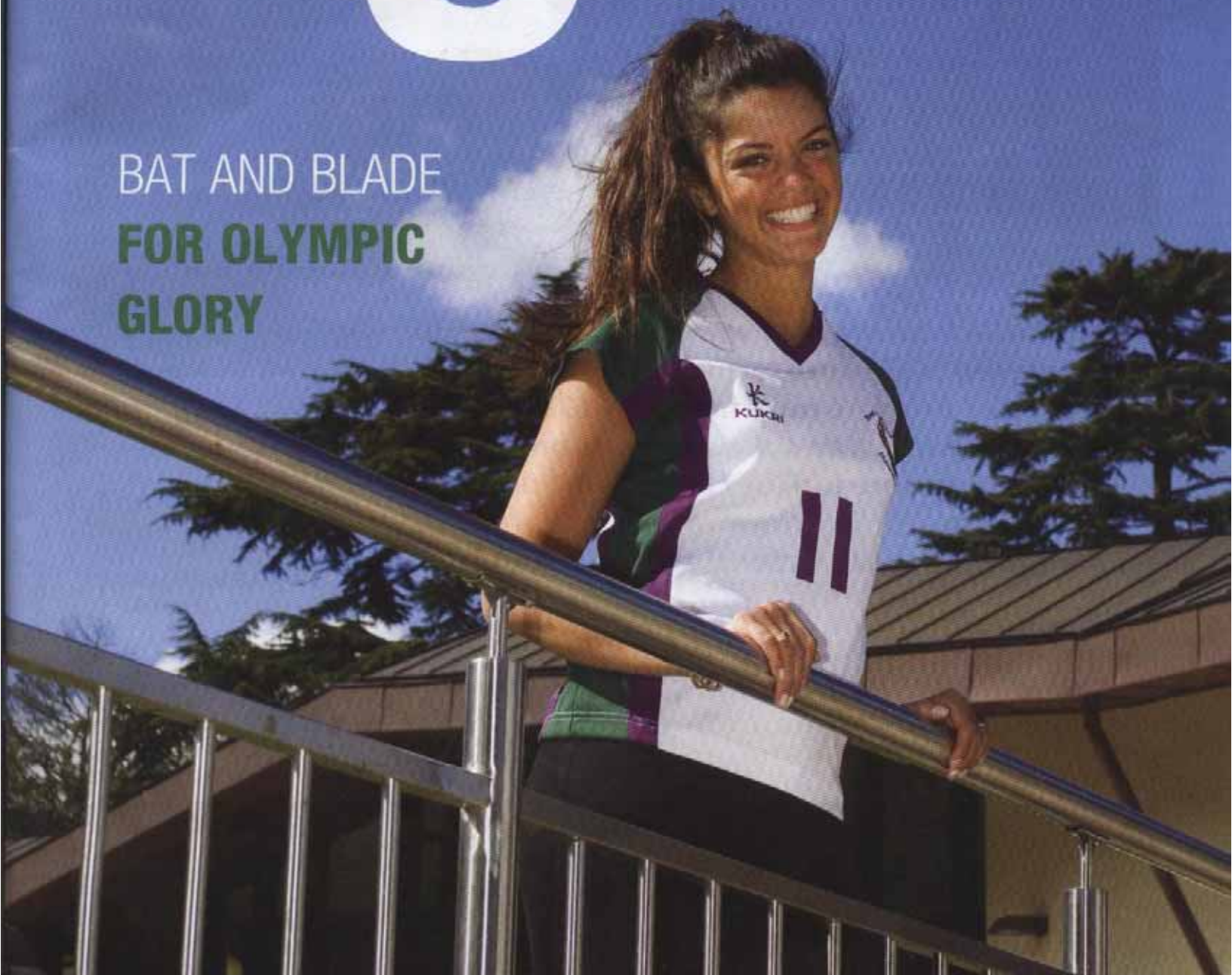


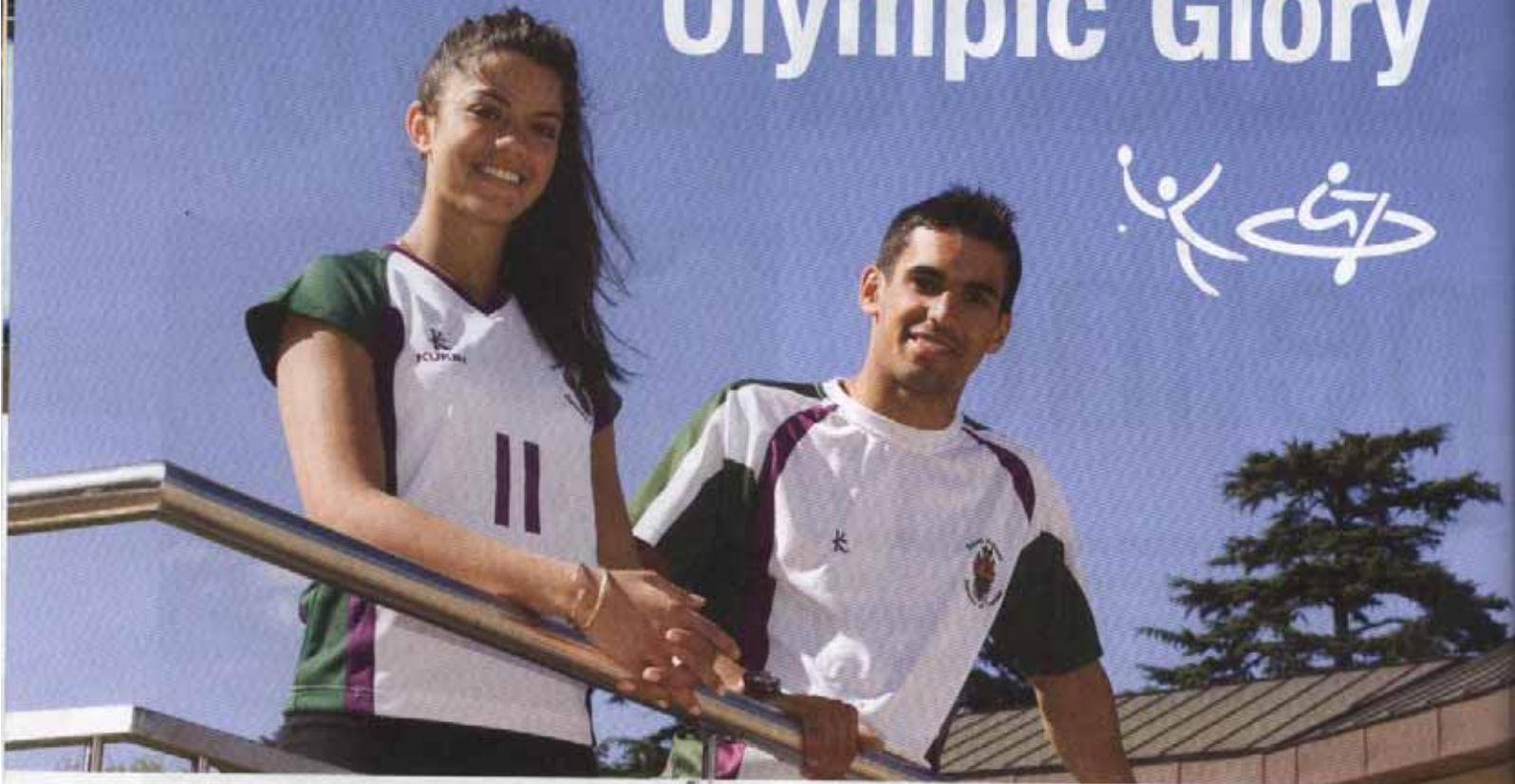
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BAT AND BLADE
**FOR OLYMPIC
GLORY**



Bat and Blade for Olympic Glory



This year Royal Holloway's Student Talented Athlete Recognition Scheme (STARS) will be helping two students in their quest for glory at the 2008 Olympic Games held in Beijing: rower Rodrigo Ideus and table tennis player Zeina Shaban.

The Principal, Professor Stephen Hill has given his personal support to both Rodrigo's and Zeina's campaign for Olympic success, and Royal Holloway has made a contribution to their training costs from the College's Annual Fund. In the 2007-08 academic year, alumni and friends of Royal Holloway pledged over £130,000 to the Annual Fund.

Zeina, 20, has been playing table tennis since she was seven. She practiced at her home in Amman, Jordan, until the age of nine, when she began competing in international events and travelled throughout Europe and to China, attending intensive training camps. The Economics and Management student will now spend this summer preparing for her second Olympic Games, having again secured the only place allocated for West Asian countries, which she also won for the Athens Olympics in 2004.

Zeina was first introduced to table tennis by her father, who was a champion at Warwick University. After a coach spotted her talent, she started going to training camps during school terms, practicing twice a day for five hours. "I cannot remember ever really sitting in a classroom during my childhood – I'd be studying on the planes going back and forth to training camps and competitions. I taught myself by asking for the curriculum from teachers and then I'd follow it by myself," she says, adding, "I've pretty much grown up abroad, and I've been exposed to a lot of different cultures which made me mature quickly. I lived alone in Germany when I was 13 because my coach lives there."

With hard work and dedication comes success and results, and Zeina has earned numerous titles, which include being voted Jordan's Athlete of 2003 following a nationwide poll. Something of an icon in her home country, Zeina is regularly recognised in Jordan – "even while I'm shopping for groceries," she laughs. "Sometimes it's hard having a spotlight constantly on me, but it's something I've grown up with, so I've not really known any different. I did give up table tennis for six months while studying at Royal Holloway and it



was so nice being a 'normal' student for a while, not having that spotlight there always."

Today Zeina manages a tricky balancing act between her studies and her training programme, which will be at its most intense as she prepares for the Beijing Olympics. "I've always juggled table tennis and studying. I'm enjoying managing both. The sport has never been full-time for me, whereas most of my opponents have dedicated their lives to table tennis – they do it full-time, for a living," she explains. "But I wanted to ensure that I have a good degree to fall back on so I have continued my studies. I'm really looking forward to competing in the Olympics. I qualified for the second round at Athens so I hope to at least achieve the same at Beijing." And how will she keep her nerves at bay before an all-important match on the world's biggest stage? "I won't even look at my opponent. I'll pretend they're not there," she says.

"It's a high speed game and you have to be strong mentally. The competitor uses the usual tactics of grunting to try to put you off, but I do not see nor hear anything surrounding the table – I just focus on the ball and play."

Rodrigo, 21, made history when he qualified for the Olympic Games, for he has become the first Colombian rower to compete at the event. "I still cannot believe it," he says. "Not many people can say they have raced at the Olympics, and to be the first rower to represent my country is incredible." With his primary goal already realised, the Economics student now hopes to rank among the top 20 rowers in the world after competing at Beijing.

To achieve this, Rodrigo is following an extremely rigorous training programme which involves rowing twice a day for two hours and weight-lifting for an hour and a half daily as well as following a strictly organic diet full of protein and carbohydrates. Rodrigo will be competing in the heavy-weight single scull, meaning he will not just be taking on the world's best, but also bigger athletes averaging 20 kilos heavier. "I believe the weight I am now is best for my body. It doesn't make any difference that my opponents are bigger than me.

I do not let it intimidate me," he insists. "Besides, I like being the underdog. No one expects anything of me when they see me. I like surprising people."

Central to Rodrigo's success is his parents' support, both financially and emotionally, and his mother, Carolina, is even the Colombian team manager. "The biggest challenge is the cost," says Carolina. "It's difficult for Colombian sportspeople to get the funding necessary for success. The Colombian Rowing Federation has supported us as much as it can. But more needs to be done – we want Colombia to be known for something positive."

Born in Reading, Rodrigo was barely a year old when his family moved to Bogota – where he spent his childhood until returning to the UK to live in London ten years ago. He dreamed of becoming a football player, but frequent injuries made the 14-year-old look for a new sport. His school offered rowing classes, but Rodrigo was initially reluctant to participate. "Then someone said to me, 'You'll have all the ladies after you if you do rowing'," he laughs. "So I gave it a go and as soon as I was on the water, I loved it." He then went on to join the Tideway Scullers School, became captain of the rowing team and has since won several awards.

Rodrigo has extended his degree at Royal Holloway and reduced his workload by half to accommodate his training programme alongside his studies. "It's important that I am productive and doing well in my studies – I do not want to just sit and row," he explains. "I want to make the most out of the incredible opportunities I've been given. I don't want to set myself any limits. My long term goal is to achieve an Olympic gold medal." He added,

"I still can't believe I have achieved my lifetime goal in my sport already; I have now become the first Colombian rower ever to go to the Olympics."



Royal Holloway's STARS scheme provides bursaries and academic support to talented individuals in training for competitions in a diverse range of sports. Since 1996 the scheme has supported four Olympians and more than 60 athletes with world and national rankings.