



Unlikely Leaders

Nicola Adams

Ben Oakley:

My name is Ben Oakley and I'm the head of sport and fitness at the Open University. My unlikely leader is Nicola Adams, the gold medal-winning woman boxer; the first ever gold medal to be awarded in women's boxing. I can remember the day she won that and the roar from the crowd, it was a fantastic event.

For me, she is unlikely in many senses. Firstly, she's broken the mould in being a woman boxer. She's a confident young black woman. When she first took it up as a youngster in Leeds she could hardly find any opponents.

She kept on practising and through years of hard work and dedication she has reached the pinnacle.

I think in boxing they're trying to create and stimulate the idea of confrontation, and that's false personality, in a way, and aggression, particularly professional boxing where they're trying to sell television and seats. I think what shines through with Nicola is that she's got no swagger or posturing and she's fairly humble, she's not arrogant, and her honesty is what shines through. And an example is her willingness to openly talk about her bi-sexuality.

And, you know, you feel that there's some integrity there. And, therefore, she gains people's respect and people listen to her opinions which, perhaps, other leaders miss.

The leaders we most commonly hear about in sport are, typically, football managers. And we hear about all their antics – losing their temper or making huge financial decisions. We're not party to their individual style and communication because, obviously, we only get filters through the media.

With Nicola, I think some of the less-conventional features of her leadership are her overt enthusiasm – I don't see such enthusiasm demonstrated by some leaders – and, in that, she's inspiring other people.

Women's boxing and perceptions of women's sport has changed as a result of Nicola. Before the Games there were lots of articles about, 'should it have a place at the Olympic table'?

Interestingly, in the year or so after the Olympics, there is none of that because, when she's reported and people talk about her they recognise her for her finesse, her skill, for her supreme confidence, and competence at what she does. Which is... if you could contrast that with some other sporting stars, that's not always the case.

Here's an example of someone trying to promote women's sport and women's boxing. Her modest actions and her behaviours engage people, and engage the public and engage the press, particularly with young girls, which are a real target audience, I think.

Enthusiastic, confident, dedicated, inspirational and skilful, and I'm sure we're going to see a lot more of her.