



Pass it on: Goode channels the drive and resilience he has learnt from others into his work mentoring younger players

“You can complain, or you can work on your game”

understood there will be setbacks in sport. You can complain about your luck or you can work on your own game and improve. I've been there with injury and selection, and then gone away and focused on my game.”

An inner steel and determination runs through Goode's family. His father Tim, also a top badminton player, and his mother Sarah, who played Junior Wimbledon, have always been there to support him. His dad even learnt to play rugby so he could practise with his son before and after work, and brought an analytical mind to the youngster's game. Sarah's drive and compassion is a constant source of inspiration. She volunteers in prisons and has spent the past decade running her own charity, which builds schools in Malawi.

“She's a pretty impressive woman,” says Goode. “I always joke that I'm half the person she is, but it's true – she sees the good in everyone. She's a fantastic example of selflessness.”

Goode went to see the work his mum has done for himself in 2018, and another trip is already pencilled in for next year.

“I was there for two weeks and it was the best thing I've ever done,” he says. “It was remarkable to see how she's genuinely changed lives. I did some teaching and it was a real eye-opener because I've never taught in my life. I learnt a lot. It was a truly amazing experience and I can't wait to go back.”

Goode has been lucky enough to have found strong role models outside his family too. Richard Mitchell, his first coach at St Faith's prep school in Cambridge, spotted his raw talent and nurtured it.

“He was a very kind, gentle man, but he also backed me massively as a player and was a very good coach,” says Goode. “He made me think about my game. He was always asking questions – why I had done something. I remember once I was putting kicks in and he asked me what my aim was. He said, ‘Are you aiming for territory or are you trying to regain the ball?’ I wasn't sure, but I made a point of having a definite intention every time I kicked the ball after that. He would analyse my game with me, which in turn taught me to analyse it for myself.”

Goode now finds himself mentoring younger players at Saracens, and is attempting to pass on the formative lessons instilled in him by others.

“I take it very seriously,” he says. “I've tried to get to know the lads as well as possible first, and to understand them. I want to impart as much knowledge as I can. It's not just about what you do on the field, it's what you do off the field.”

“I don't want them to make the same mistakes I did. How you conduct yourself, how you take care of yourself, your drive to improve, is everything. I enjoy it hugely and it's very fulfilling when they start to blossom.”

As the official legal partner of England Rugby, Irwin Mitchell is developing a mentoring programme with the Rugby Football Union. The programme will create a community of mentors across 750 clubs throughout England to help age-grade players transition into adult rugby.

Forces for Goode

Saracens full back Alex Goode teams up with Irwin Mitchell, which is partnering with the RFU in a rugby mentoring scheme, to talk about the people who inspired him in his own career

There's no better example for an aspiring young sportsman than to have an elite athlete in the family. For Saracens full back Alex Goode, 31, the journey that led to him being named 2019 European Player of the Year, and winning several Premierships and Champions Cups with his club, arguably began as a child, watching his aunt play badminton. Jo Goode was a top doubles player, a multiple Commonwealth gold medallist who competed at both the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta and four years later in Sydney – where she and her partner were favourites. But in sport things don't always go to plan, as her nephew discovered. Sitting in front of the TV in his pyjamas, the 12-year-old Goode watched in dismay as his aunt's dream fell apart. “They were one set up in the

semi and in a good place, then her partner just went – his game collapsed,” recalls Goode. “They lost and had to play off for bronze, but they fought through and won despite having to save match point. That showed me so much about resilience. They nearly had gold one minute, lost, which was devastating, and then they almost ended up with nothing. But she was so strong that in the end, bronze was a real achievement.” Goode weighed the medal in his hands when she came home and kept the VHS of those matches along with cuttings from her sporting days for years. Her determination has stayed with him through a career that has had its share of disappointments. “I know how hard she trained, especially because she became a mother not long before Sydney,” he says. “After that defeat I also



Dynamic duo: Goode's aunt Jo with doubles partner Simon Archer after winning gold at the 2002 Commonwealth Games

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