

CAREER EDUCATION – WRITTEN Q&A: James Wilcox

1. What is your job role and organisation?

General Manager of Huntingdon and Nottingham Racecourse, The Jockey Club

2. What do you do in this job?

Working in the sporting and events industry my role is very dynamic and varies day to day. The horseracing industry is seasonal with different codes of racing taking place during different times of the year. This doesn't mean the off season is quiet however, as a lot of focus and attention goes into preparing for the race season including marketing themes and driving sales, whilst also juggling the demands of non-racing business in the form of conferences and events.

My responsibilities include but are not limited to providing strong management and leadership to the racecourse teams. I have full accountability of the delivering the financial performance of the racecourses and work closely with different stakeholders to drive this performance.

My role isn't limited to engaging with employees and customers but also to develop and maintain strong relationships within the local community acting as an ambassador for the Jockey Club.

3. Why did you choose this career?

One of my main passions in life is sport, it always has been throughout my childhood and this followed through into my university and post-grad career. I have always loved playing sport but also experiencing the thrill of live events and the unique feeling it can deliver, win or lose.

This passion spearheaded my ambition to develop a career in sporting events and deliver an experience for others to equally enjoy.

4. What background education or training do you have?

I did A-Levels in Business Studies, Economics and PE – choosing these subjects based on what I found most interesting and prosperous for a career in sport.

I went to University and did a BSc in Sports Management, based on my uncertainty on what element of sport I wanted to be involved in but believed that the management elements of the degree could provide me with a basis for Business Management outside of sport as well.

5. What has your career path been?

I left school in 2011 to enrol at University for 3 years. During my final year, I obtained work experience at a Tennis Event in the Royal Albert Hall. This was my first experience operating behind the scenes of a sporting event and I was instantly hooked. I was amazed by the level of detail and workload that is required to build for one weeks event. Following on from this I managed to line up two further work experience opportunities upon graduating at Henley Royal Regatta and then Newmarket Racecourse, working within the Operations and Events department.

My objective to obtain a role within the sporting events industry remained, but my first professional role was in London for a Ski company as operations assistant. This varied from my

objective but provided me with a great opportunity in sports tourism and some experience of travelling as well.

Six months later, whilst on the slopes in France, I was approached regarding a role as Events Manager at Sandown Park racecourse. I jumped at the opportunity and this commenced my progression within the Jockey Club. I was promoted into the role of Regional Assistant Operations Manager, followed by Trainee General Manager and then Interim General Manager over the course of four years. I eventually took over the position as General Manager permanently at Huntingdon racecourse in 2020 and six months later during the pandemic undertook the management of Nottingham Racecourse as well.

6. What does a typical day involve?

I wouldn't say there is a typical day as per say, but there are some key tasks that I try to achieve daily

- Depending on which racecourse I am at, I try and walk round all areas to pick up on any changes since my last visit
- Touch base with all team members at the racecourse.
- Check all financial performances for ticket sales, restaurant and hospitality to ensure it is tracking in the right direction.
- Attend any organised meetings, which can vary from Senior Management meetings to local stakeholders and key clients.

7. What is your work environment like?

My job is predominantly office based but I am very fortunate that I can move between two offices at the different racecourses. The setting of these offices are fantastic with plenty of green space around which creates a positive atmosphere. Both racecourses are made up of a small team of 4 office based staff and 5 estates team. But within my role, I work closely with peers who working nationally and alongside the Racecourse teams.

The hours can vary due to the nature of the events sheet, but it is well balanced for work and personal life.

8. What aspects of your job are most challenging?

The challenges can vary on a day to day basis, but that is what is so exciting about my role as no one day is the same. One consistent challenge is the management of people, whether this is employees or different stakeholders, these relationships are key to the business success. However as much as it is a challenge, I also find it the most rewarding.

9. Can you give an example of a project or piece of work that you have been most proud of?

I feel the most exciting part of my role is delivering unique experiences for customers. I am very fortunate to have worked on some of the world's largest events, delivering the Aintree Grand National, Cheltenham Gold Cup and The Derby at Epsom Downs. The delivery of internationally recognised events is something I am very proud to have been a part of.

10. How do you hope your career will progress?

I am a very ambitious individual, and it has taken a lot of hard work and dedication to reach this position so early in my career. I would love to progress further in The Jockey Club into a director role or perhaps consider a stadium manager role in an alternative sport.