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APPETITE FOR MORE



Euan Crumley
AW Editorial Director

It was, perhaps, a stupid question but it provoked an interesting response. Jakob Ingebrigsten is a man in demand from the media whenever he competes and, during a rather rushed scrum in Apeldoorn after he had pocketed yet another gold medal, there was only the briefest of opportunities to get his thoughts.

He is still only 24 and had just won the 17th – yes, 17th – European title of his career across the indoor, outdoor and cross country championships. He had also just completed a third successive European Indoor 1500m/3000m double and had looked entirely untroubled in doing so – even being able to toy with his opposition at times and apparently operating on a different level. Given all of that, then, I wondered...does he ever get bored with winning?

First, with a look of incredulity, he repeated the question back to me to check that he hadn't misheard it. Then, came a hearty laugh. Once that had subsided, he said: "I hope not. Then I think it's finished." As if to underline his point, a couple of weeks later Ingebrigsten was to be found capturing the first world indoor titles of his career – again in the 1500m and 3000m – in Nanjing.

"I like to compete and I think that's what it's all about," he said. "I wouldn't be much motivated to jump on the treadmill if it wasn't for a race coming up."

That last remark perhaps best sums him up. Ingebrigtsen certainly didn't need to subject himself to the rigours of this indoor season – especially when you consider the emotionally harrowing trial of his father and former coach Gjert looming in the background – but putting himself out there is central to his make-up.

He is a gatherer of prizes, a chaser of targets... and he is box office gold. In Apeldoorn especially, not a single person expected to see him finishing anywhere other than on the top step of the podium, but still you couldn't take your eyes off how he was going to get there. His tactic of lurking at the back and choosing his moment to strike set the field's nerves jangling and then, when someone was brave enough to push the pace on, a smooth gear shift snuffed out the danger.

Over these recent weeks, he has looked bulletproof, but another part of the Ingebrigtsen appeal is that we all know he isn't perfect. There are chinks in his armour and we've seen them exposed during World Championships and Olympic finals.

He doesn't hide, though, and is rapidly establishing himself as one of the greats. Let's hope that desire to keep coming back for more doesn't wear off any time soon. AW

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THE OUTDOOR SEASON GETS UP AND RUNNING
ON SALE MAY 1



PICTURE THIS

STRENGTH IN DEPTH

The women's 60m hurdles final at the World Indoor Championships in Nanjing saw a contest of the highest standard and depth. World record-holder Devynne Charlton successfully defended her title, winning in 7.72, but she was pushed all the way to do it.

Before the race, the record number of athletes finishing under 7.80 in a single race was three. Here, the top six all went under that barrier, Ditaji Kambundji taking silver in 7.73 and Ackera Nugent bronze in 7.74. The top six were separated by just 0.04. AW



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



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THE MONTH IN NUMBERS

A look back at some of the biggest news and best performances of recent weeks

3:58.35

New Zealander Sam Ruthe became the first 15-year-old to run a mile in under four minutes, after clocking 3:58.35 in Auckland on March 19.

Ruthe, who had Sam Tanner as a pacemaker at a wet Go Media Stadium, placed behind the double Olympian by just six hundredths of a second. The teenager accomplished his mission however, with the race specially staged for his attempt to make history.

New Zealand 800m champion Ethan Smolej took the field through 400m in 56 seconds and 800m in 1:57, before Tanner took over and, with Ruthe a stride behind, reached the bell in 2:58. Tanner upped the pace round the final bend but Ruthe all but closed the gap between them in the race to the line.

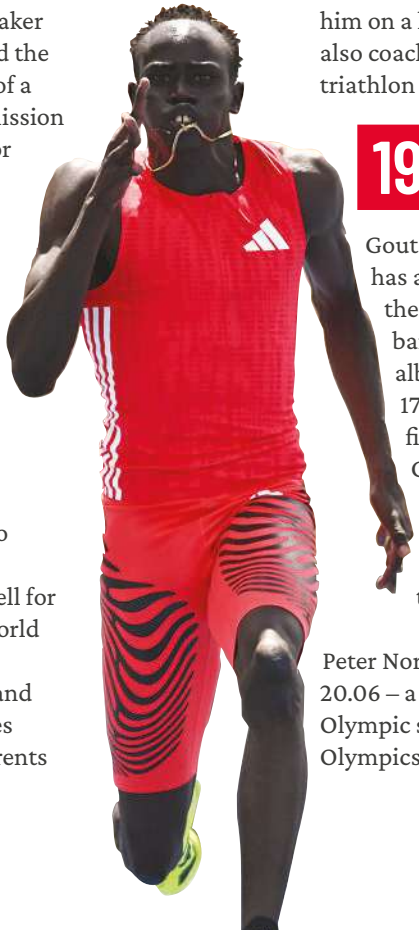
New Zealand has produced three mile world-record holders in the past – Jack Lovelock, Peter Snell and John Walker – so Ruthe is following in famous footsteps.

Concerns that he may be running too well for his tender years – he has also clocked a world age-best 7:56.18 for 3000m – are perhaps lessened by the fact that his parents Ben and Jess won numerous national running titles between them and his maternal grandparents Trevor and Rosemary Wright claimed a European marathon silver medal and a Commonwealth Games 800m gold medal respectively.

He also has a canny coach in former marathon runner Craig Kirkwood, who keeps him on a light training schedule. Kirkwood also coaches 3:49 miler Tanner and Olympic triathlon silver medallist Hayden Wilde.

ABOVE: Sam Ruthe with pacemaker Sam Tanner

BELOW: Gout Gout



19.98

Gout Gout, the Australian teenager who has already made headlines around the world, has broken yet another barrier by running under 20 seconds, albeit wind-assisted, for 200m. The 17-year-old ran 19.98 (3.4) to win the final at the Queensland Athletics Championships on March 16.

He did also run a wind legal and world leading 20.05 in the heats, blitzing the domestic field by more than two seconds in Brisbane.

Back in December, Gout took down Peter Norman's senior national record of 20.06 – a mark that secured Norman the Olympic silver medal at the 1968 Mexico Olympics – with 20.04.



ABOVE: New IOC President Kirsty Coventry

MIDDLE: Evan Dunfee

BELOW: Jimmy Gressier

2:21:40

Evan Dunfee set a world 35km race walk record at the Dudince 50 on March 22 in Slovakia. The Canadian's 2:21:40 was seven seconds inside the 2:21:47 set by Masatora Kawano of Japan in October in Takahata.

In his record-breaking performance, Dunfee race walked solo from gun to tape, with consistent four-minute plus kilometre splits throughout and lapping the entire field of 51.

The 34-year-old won bronze medals in the 50km at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics and 2019 World Championships in Doha, plus 10km gold at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

12:57

Jimmy Gressier became the first European athlete to break the 13-minute barrier for 5km on March 16, running 12:57 in Lille to lower the continental record. The Frenchman had been the joint European record-holder for the discipline alongside Dominic Lobalu with a best of 13:12, but moved to fifth on the world all-time list with his run last month.

It is Gressier's second European record of the year, having run 12:54.92 for 5000m indoors in Boston back in February.



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Kirsty Coventry was elected president of the International Olympic Committee, becoming the first female and African to secure the most powerful job in world sport. The 41-year-old, who saw off the challenge from both World Athletics president Sebastian Coe and Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr, will also be the youngest president of the IOC in its 131-year history.

Coventry has an eight-year mandate until 2033 and takes over from current president Thomas Bach – on June 26 (Olympic Day).

What was expected to be a close competition between Coventry, Coe and Samaranch turned into a formality, with the Zimbabwean securing 49 out of the 97 votes cast in the first round – an absolute majority of 50.2 per cent.

Samaranch placed second with 28 votes, while Coe earned eight votes in total.

88

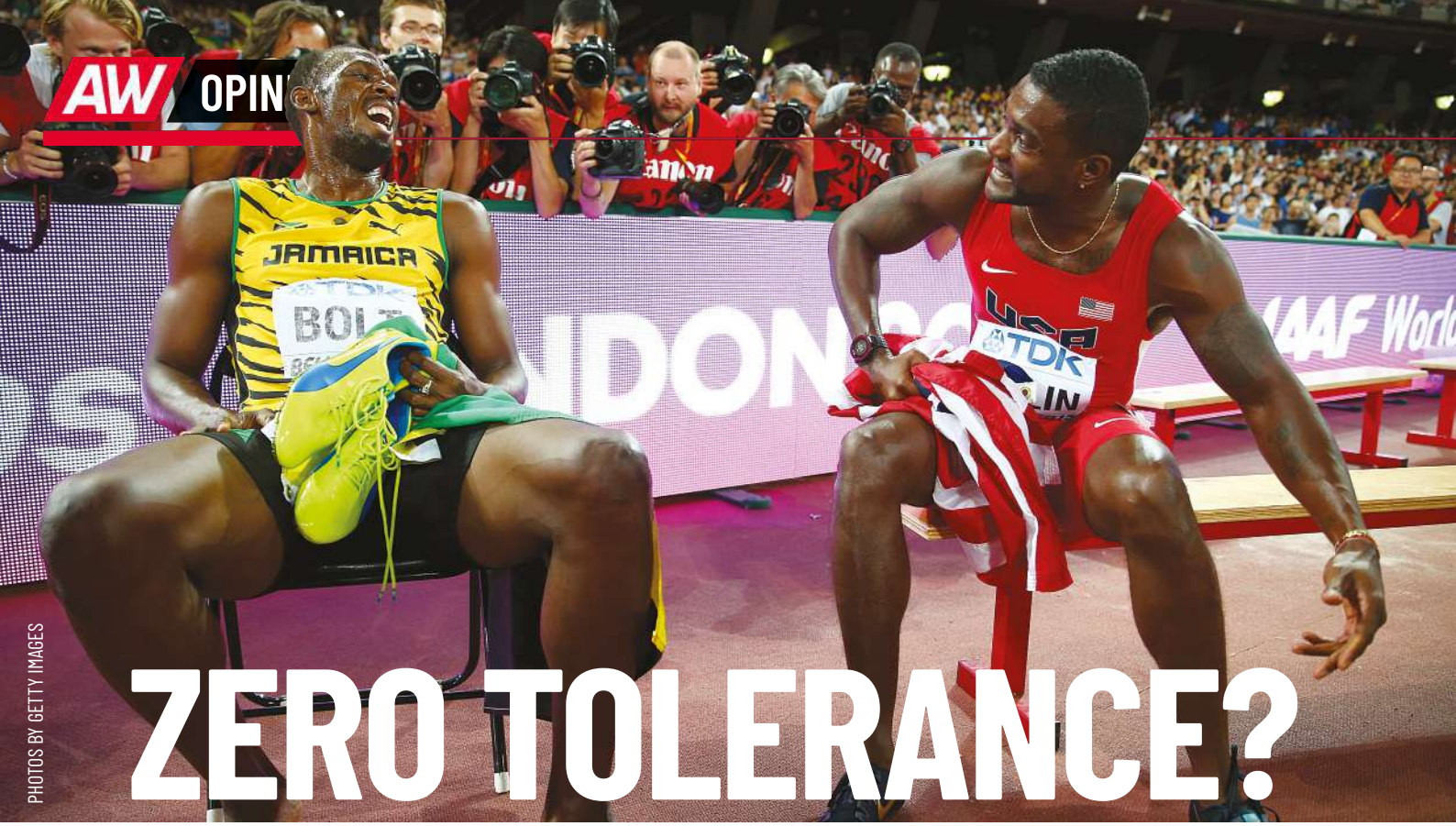
British athletics lost one of its finest servants last month when Don Turner died aged 88.

A top ultra-distance runner in his youth, he went on to become treasurer of the National Union of Track Statisticians (NUTS) for 22 years and was a long-time volunteer official who specialised in time keeping.

In addition to those duties, he found time every week to contribute results to *AW* and *Athletics Today* magazines and was one of this magazine's busiest and most accurate correspondents during the 1990s and turn of the millennium.

A quietly spoken character with a fine knowledge of the sport, he was the epitome of the word "gentleman" and demonstrated his athletics addiction by attending major championships in his later years as part of the travelling army of British fans.

Running for Epsom & Ewell Harriers, he was runner-up in the London to Brighton race in 1959 and 1962 and third in 1961 and 1963. In the gruelling Comrades Marathon in South Africa he placed third in 1962, covering the uphill course in six hours and seven minutes. AW



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

ZERO TOLERANCE?

A recent appearance by Usain Bolt on Justin Gatlin's podcast not only provided insight into the methods of two top sprinters, but also raised some interesting questions about how we view cheating in sport, writes **Ben Bloom**

There is a shared hope that exists among athletics fans – certainly the majority of those in Britain – that the sport, and everyone in it, is united in the battle against drugs cheats. Vilify those who sully the sport's name through their nefarious actions and cast them aside in the manner that UK Athletics has done in recent years by refusing to invite anyone convicted of major doping offences from competing at its events.

So when the latest episode of Justin Gatlin's *Ready Set Go* podcast dropped a few weeks ago, with Usain Bolt as the special guest, it prompted eyebrows to be raised.

Since his sprinting retirement in 2022, Gatlin has developed a successful media career. In some sense, that is little surprise. Even at the height of his notoriety, when fans would jeer his name and his losses would be heralded as necessary to protect the future of the sport, Gatlin remained gregarious company, endearing anyone he personally encountered with his naturally amiable nature (the opposite of his frostiness when in the cauldron of the start line) and a wide smile.

But there remained – indeed, there will forever remain – that drugs asterisk. Two of them, of course. The American's first ban for amphetamines in 2001 was initially supposed to be for two years before it was reduced on appeal on the grounds that the substance in question was present in his ADHD medication.

When he was then caught in 2006 with excess testosterone in his system it could – and many argue should – have been the end of the line. Instead, he was banned for eight years, again shortened on appeal to four years due to mitigating circumstances and his cooperation with the process.

As for precisely what that entailed, we do not fully know. Despite relentless questioning in the media, Gatlin opted to never publicly discuss the episode in detail – a marked contrast with someone like Dwain Chambers, whose eagerness to publicly atone for his indiscretions resulted in his eventual acceptance by most, but not all, of the British athletics community after his steroid doping ban. Yet in his native country – which retains a rather different view of sportspeople who transgress, compared to the treatment bestowed this side of the Atlantic – Gatlin's public standing did not much suffer.

On the track, he made two Olympic 100m podiums upon returning to the sport and memorably claimed the world title at London 2017. Behind him that day, running his final ever individual race, was Bolt, occupying a rare bronze medal position after extending his career for one season too far following his golden



ABOVE: Usain Bolt and Justin Gatlin share a joke after the 2015 World Championships 100m final

IS IT NAIVE TO THINK THAT EVERYONE IN THE SPORT POSSESSES THE SAME DISDAIN FOR DOPERS THAT SO MANY ATHLETICS FANS DO?

treble at the Rio Olympics. For a number of years, the pair were cast as good versus evil, eliciting BBC commentator Steve Cram's famous line when the Jamaican pipped Gatlin to world 100m gold in 2015: "He's saved his title, he's saved his reputation, he may have even saved his sport."

So why is Bolt now appearing on a podcast hosted by a direct rival convicted of trying to cheat his way to glory?

And, furthermore, when asked by Gatlin on the podcast to name his dream all-time 100m line-up, did Bolt really think it reasonable to include the disgraced figure of Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson (who was born in the same Jamaican parish)?

Is it naive to think that everyone in the sport possesses the same disdain for dopers that so many athletics fans do? After all, they do not just destroy the sport's entire reputation but directly threaten to rob fellow competitors of medals, money and livelihoods.

To judge by Bolt's presence on Gatlin's show, the answer must be yes. The Jamaican – the only man among the six fastest 100m runners in history never to have served some sort of drugs ban – has always been reluctant to accept his role as the sport's saviour. Memorably, for the journalists in attendance, he sniggered while Gatlin was grilled about his doping past while sitting next to him at the 2015 World Championships 100m final post-race press conference.

Two years later, on the same stage following Gatlin's 2017 world title win, Bolt elaborated slightly, insisting that "Justin has done his time and proven himself over the years".

Unsurprisingly, the closest the almost two-hour podcast episode comes to discussing such matters is when Gatlin thanks his former rival for not hindering his return to the sport in 2010 following his second drugs ban – a period obliquely referred to as his "absence".

The American tells Bolt: "The influence that you had at that point in time, you could easily have had a soundbite in an interview where you said: 'I don't want to race against him.' And you literally could have ended my career."

The gratitude is evidently mutual, with Bolt describing Gatlin as "one of the greatest persons I ever competed with". Crediting the American's presence with encouraging him to train so hard, he adds: "[Gatlin] kept at it for six years. Every year, every year, every year. There was no let-up. I couldn't miss a day. It was one of the best times and I really enjoyed it.

"Tyson [Gay] was two years, Asafa [Powell] was one year, [Yohan] Blake was one year. But me and Justin been going at it for years. It was great to have a competitor you know is going to keep you on top of your game."

If we ignore the unexplored elephant in the room, the conversation takes many interesting turns while meandering through Bolt's career. Gatlin reveals he did not watch the Jamaican's *I Am Bolt* documentary until after the end of his career as "I didn't want to humanise you yet because I knew I was going to like you".

Of their vastly different startline personas, he tells Bolt: "I was the opposite of you. You needed to be comfortable in your environment because then you knew you were able to race at your highest level. Away from the track, I was like you on the track: I was cool, relaxed, chilled. I knew that person away from the track would not do the job, for me, on the track. I needed to be that monster, I needed to be aggressive."

We hear how Bolt met with Nike executives some time around 2012, which then prompted his long-time sponsor Puma to match their proposed deal. "Nike got me paid, bro," laughs Bolt.

The Jamaican also reveals that he spotted a weakness in Gatlin – who had been the dominant force all season – ahead of the 2015 World Championships 100m final, when the American spoke to him before a race for the first time in their careers: "That's what helped me a little bit. He's nervous. We're good." Bolt would hunt him down to prevail by just 0.01.

It all makes for an entertaining journey down memory lane between two men who clearly retain the utmost respect for one another. Perhaps that is entirely understandable; after all, the presence of the other pushed them to greatness for years.

But if this really is the attitude of the finest sprinter in athletics history, then what does it say about how we should view cheating in the sport? And as for wanting to run against Johnson... let's not even get started on that. AW



BELOW: Bolt pips Gatlin to the 100m crown in Beijing



HAYLEY **TULLETT**

MY GREATEST RACE

Commonwealth Games, Manchester, July 31, 2002, women's 1500m, silver, 4:07.52

With training and racing not going to plan, expectations were not high for the Welshwoman in Manchester, but she stunned herself to edge out England's Helen Pattison and take silver behind race winner Kelly Holmes

For the smaller nations, the Commonwealth Games is a real stepping stone. I always viewed the 1998 Games as being just that for me: a first major outdoor championships and something that would set me up nicely for future events.

But that didn't happen – I got injured and pulled out – so then you go into the next one thinking: "I didn't achieve what I set out to achieve there." It kind of hangs over you a little bit and the Commonwealths only come round once every four years.

But, in 2002, I didn't know what was happening. I couldn't get in the right shape. I just felt a bit like a donkey all year and it was really frustrating. I had no clue why it was happening. I couldn't hit training properly. I just couldn't race. All season, I was having to hope it would come together, and then you get deflated when it doesn't.

My coach Mark Rowland couldn't understand it, either. What was it that just wasn't working for us? Was it a change in the weights [I was lifting in the gym]? Or what we were trying to focus on on the track? We just went back to basics the following year and I ended up getting bronze at the World Championships but, after 2002, 2003 felt like a last chance

ABOVE: Hayley Tullett (left) on the podium with Kelly Holmes and Helen Pattison

I WASN'T EXPECTED TO ACHIEVE ANYTHING AT THE COMMONWEALTHS. I WASN'T IN SHAPE. I REALLY FELT I WAS TRYING TO ACHIEVE SOMETHING AGAINST THE ODDS

because I couldn't keep going through things like this. I don't know if there was a pressure I was putting on myself because it was the Commonwealths, and I had missed the Games before, but I went into it not expected to achieve anything. I wasn't in shape. I didn't even make it out of the opening round at the European Championships a week later.

At the Commonwealths I was thinking: "I might blow up here because we've got the Kenyans, and we've got the Brits and the Australians ... a lot of good runners." I really felt I was trying to achieve something against the odds.

The week before, I went to Monaco, came 13th and ran 4:07. I am a person who will always view the glass as half full, but I came back broken after that race. At the end of the day, what could we do, though? I thought: "You've got a Commonwealth Games the following week – just get on with it."

I had nothing to lose. I got through the heats relatively easily and you always know you can't run the final if you're not in it. In the final, I came through towards the end but it still surprised me how I came away with silver.

You knew that, if Kelly was even 80 per cent fit, she was going to be on for a medal and was probably going to be champion, whereas I had to be 100 per cent to challenge. That silver was such a big achievement because there was so little expectation. Sometimes, it's about getting all those little things to go right at the right time, on the right day, in the right place. And I had that.

Maybe it was that racing brain of an athlete, that competitive edge. If you're running people down, you can sense that maybe you're going to achieve something. You just keep running to the line. I came past a few others and built on it down the home straight.

It meant so much that we got something out of a bad season. There was a silver lining in there. Or there was a little carrot dangling. I started to think: "If we get a good season going, let's see what we can get out of that." It shifted my mentality.

With hindsight, we maybe changed too many things, especially the gym work. I was better off just sticking with the basic stuff that I'd been doing before, and doing that well, as opposed to trying to do new things. At the end of the day, 5000m sessions aren't going to work for you if you're aiming for 800m-1500m specific training. It didn't work. We just went back to basics.

At the European Cross Country Championships in 2002 at the beginning of December, I finished fifth. We'd realised what my strengths were. It showed in how I felt really strong coming into that winter, and it kept coming out to the other side of it, into the track season where I was eventually able to do well at the World Championships and get on to the podium. AW

FACTFILE

Born: February 17, 1973

Events: 800m/1500m/3000m

PBs: 2:00.49/3:59.95/8:45.36

Major honours

2006: Commonwealth Games 1500m bronze

2003: World Championships 1500m bronze

2002: Commonwealth Games 1500m silver



BELOW: Hayley Tullett on her way to an unexpected silver in the 1500m in Manchester

RISING STAR

ALEX **LENNON**

FACTFILE

Born:
April 28, 2008

Club:
Sutton and District

Coach:
Nick Hancock

Events:
800m/1500m/3000m

PBs:
1:56.73/3:48.17/8:53.88

Jasmine Collett talks to the colourful teenager about winning streaks, viral social media videos, mixing fashion with athletics and targeting major championships

Recently, 16-year-old Alex Lennon has been catching the attention of social media followers with his energetic post-race interviews. These popular videos have stemmed from his standout performances over the past month, which include a remarkable win in the under-17 men's English National cross-country race at Parliament Hill, claiming the under-17 Inter Counties title and English Schools Cross Country victory in the senior boys' race.

Lennon, from Surrey, may be on a winning streak, but he hasn't just emerged from nowhere. Last year, he finished fifth in the 1500m at the European Under-18 Championships ahead of fellow Briton Evan Grime and, aside from running, he has previously owned a business that combined his passions for fashion and athletics.

With his cross-country season now behind him, Lennon is turning his focus to the track, where he aims to qualify for the European Under-20 Championships in August while also exploring opportunities to train in the United States.

How did it feel to win the National cross country title?
I was on a high for a very long time after that race because of all of the media attention. I hope it didn't get to my head too much. After seeing my *AW* video interview on Instagram and TikTok it was pretty crazy. All my friends saw it and it was amazing seeing new people being brought into running after that video.

Did you know you were capable of winning?
There are some races that you've prepared absolutely perfectly for and in your head you're thinking: "There's no way this could go wrong". I wouldn't say that was one of them. I was coming into the race thinking: "I'm not sure about this", but it got to about halfway and the pace was slowing down a bit but I was feeling quite all right. By then I was thinking I might have this in the bag. So, as the race went on, I got filled with more confidence.

My coach says, as a rule, never check your shoulders, because if you do that then you know you're dying. But I had to give it a quick little look at that last corner and, when I saw they were a little bit back, that was my cue just to enjoy the end of it.

How had the cross-country season been before the National?
I find cross-country is a bit of a strange season because you have a few races in October, and you have a





PHOTO BY GARY MITCHELL

long period from November through to February where there's not really much going on.

So I was basing a lot of my expectations of what happened in November, which turned out to not actually be so accurate. The Liverpool Cross Challenge was a rough time and Cardiff didn't go quite as I hoped but so much time had passed from those earlier races [up to the National] that I think my body had time to improve from training and whatnot.

How did you get into athletics in the first place?
Athletics came about in year five in school, where it was just school PE and school cross-country. I did one training session a week with my club at Sutton & District for a few years until Year eight and that's when I started getting a bit more serious.

What does an average week of training look like for you?
My average mileage would be in the realm of 70-80km per week so I try to supplement that with cross-training wherever I can. I do the long run on Sunday and Tuesday and Thursday and they tend to vary in length.

How was your Great Britain debut experience at the European Under-18 Championships?
It felt completely surreal to me. It was one of the most insane things I've ever done. On the track, I'd never competed for England and I'd never competed for GB before that so to go straight to the Euros, it was such a big step out of nowhere.

I had a very lucky competition. It was top four to make it through to the finals and in the heats I came fifth. I was absolutely devastated. Afterwards, I didn't want to talk to anyone and I just wanted to do my own thing. Then I got a message saying one of the boys ahead of me had been disqualified.

> **AT THE EUROPEAN U18S, THERE ARE LOTS OF THINGS I NORMALLY DO BEFORE RACES THAT I JUST FORGOT TO DO. IF THERE'S ONE THING THOSE HEATS TAUGHT ME, IT WAS TO DO EVERYTHING RIGHT ON RACE DAY**

To hear I was in the final was like a dream come true. To have my coach there, my dad there watching, to run in that final was the best thing ever. I think, with all the heat off me, I was able to run a much better race. I felt more comfortable and finished in fifth.

What did that experience teach you?
It taught me one thing that I still carry through today which is the power of doing everything right on the day of the event. For the Europeans, I wasn't quite with it in the heat. There are lots of things I normally do before races that I just forgot to do. I didn't do my energy gels. I didn't write up a plan of what I was going to do beforehand and so if there's one thing those heats taught me, it was do everything right on the day of the race.

Why did you decide to set up an athletics fashion business?
My old business, Bolt Running, was a way for me to combine my two passions of fashion and athletics. I brought that together for people in my age group and we hosted long runs and I did special clothing drops.

It was such an amazing thing to be able to bring all these people together and it's absolutely something I would love to continue. I lost a bit of passion for creating the clothes, but I never lost the passion for bringing communities together.

So if there's one thing that I would like to do in 2025, it's just to host long runs, sessions and things that I can bring people from my age group together.

What is next for you?
I would love to go to the US for university. This season is all about trying to get the best time I possibly can so I can open as many doors as I can for my future. The European Under-20 Champs is something I've really got my eyes on. AW

Scan the QR code to watch Alex Lennon's National Cross Country post-race interview



PHOTO BY BILL SCRIVEN

JOB SATISFACTION

Verity Ockenden writes about the preparation involved in putting yourself on trial, leaving no stone unturned, and leaning into the pressure of hitting the target on an all-or-nothing race day

On March 23, anyone with an interest in representing Great Britain at this year's European Running Championships in Belgium assembled in the quaint English village of Pulford. Bibs were assigned at the village hall, where a patchwork quilt made by a member of the WI and framed on the wall happens to mark out the 10km race route.

Michael Harrington's Cheshire 10km was not originally earmarked by British Athletics as the scene of the selection trial but, after a large sinkhole appeared in a vital country lane in Trafford, plans had to be diverted.

Of all the things that can re-route an athlete's race preparation, a sinkhole isn't the first that springs to mind, but while the date and location of our goal race moved this spring, we were fortunate that our preparations remained on course.

ABOVE: Verity Ockenden on her way to a PB at the Pulford 10km

The goal had been set long before Christmas came around – perhaps even earlier in the eyes of my coach, without my knowing – and it slotted in perfectly with the work we needed to do.

With the Tokyo World Championships 5000m lined up as my summer target, we were keen to develop a strong and substantial foundation of endurance work to build our castle upon.

What better preparation for a summer 5000m than a spring 10km, and what better preparation for making a world team than making a European team?

Mileage had been accumulating nicely until late autumn when I caught a chest infection that took three weeks to shake off. It put paid to any hope of winter racing and made it unlikely that I would be ready to contend a quality indoor season ahead of my road racing schedule.

A January training camp in Potchefstroom gave me the opportunity to make up for a little lost time, and while all my compatriots out there whizzed round 800m/1500m sessions, I was always the last one to finish my comparatively pedestrian threshold work.

I left South Africa knowing that I had worked consistently well, but still having no idea what kind of shape that meant I was in.

That was where our icebreaker came in. I wrapped my sunburnt shoulders up in thermals and headed to Armagh, Northern Ireland to race the town's infamous 3km loop of the mall.

It gave us all the feedback that we needed, and a very welcome win to boot. Somewhat refreshed by the race week taper, we decided to chase the Potch Camp with another mammoth training block at my base in Italy.

In South Africa, I had been able to make the step up to doing three workouts rather than two on alternate weeks, and I now felt strong enough to replicate that at home, too.

When you're going after a GB selection, knowing that the criteria requires a qualification time within a specific time frame as well as a top four placing, it takes complete trust in your process to commit to training quietly for one big day rather than going for the alternative approach of bagging the entry standard in an earlier 10km prior to the trials.

We went for the former, which makes it a high stakes build-up but there is something exciting about biding my time, learning to lean into the pressure, and knowing the value of the work I am doing. Having come to the end of that last block of work, I was proud of every single day of it – whether it was on day one when I reached out to a health club for personal training to ensure I never missed a beat on strength days, on day 15 when I made wise recovery choices after a tough week, or day 22 when I was brave enough to throw down early on during a "big girl" workout.

"IT TAKES COMPLETE TRUST IN YOUR PROCESS TO COMMIT TO TRAINING QUIETLY FOR ONE BIG DAY RATHER THAN GOING FOR THE ALTERNATIVE APPROACH OF BAGGING THE ENTRY STANDARD EARLIER

We primed the jets with a fun 5km at the Podium Festival which was the perfect precursor to the trial in Pulford.

A week out from the big one, we didn't back off going into the Podium race so I was prepared for it to feel like hard work with not much sparkle to show, but I was pleasantly surprised at how smooth the paces felt, even when things hotted up during the last mile.

I woke up early the next day to get one last long run in before leaving the race hotel, and set off for Loughborough where I would spend the week leading up to the trial.

With one more pre-race workout to complete, the most important part of my preparation would now be psychological. I deliberately chose to stay with a friend who always makes me feel good about myself, and scheduled my taper week to include all of the things that give me confidence and a sense of routine.

Four days out, I spent an hour discussing my goals for the race with my psychologist, how I wanted to react in certain moments and how I wanted to feel walking away from the race. We made a few key notes to go back to if necessary pre-race, and clarified the things that I wanted to check in with my coach about.

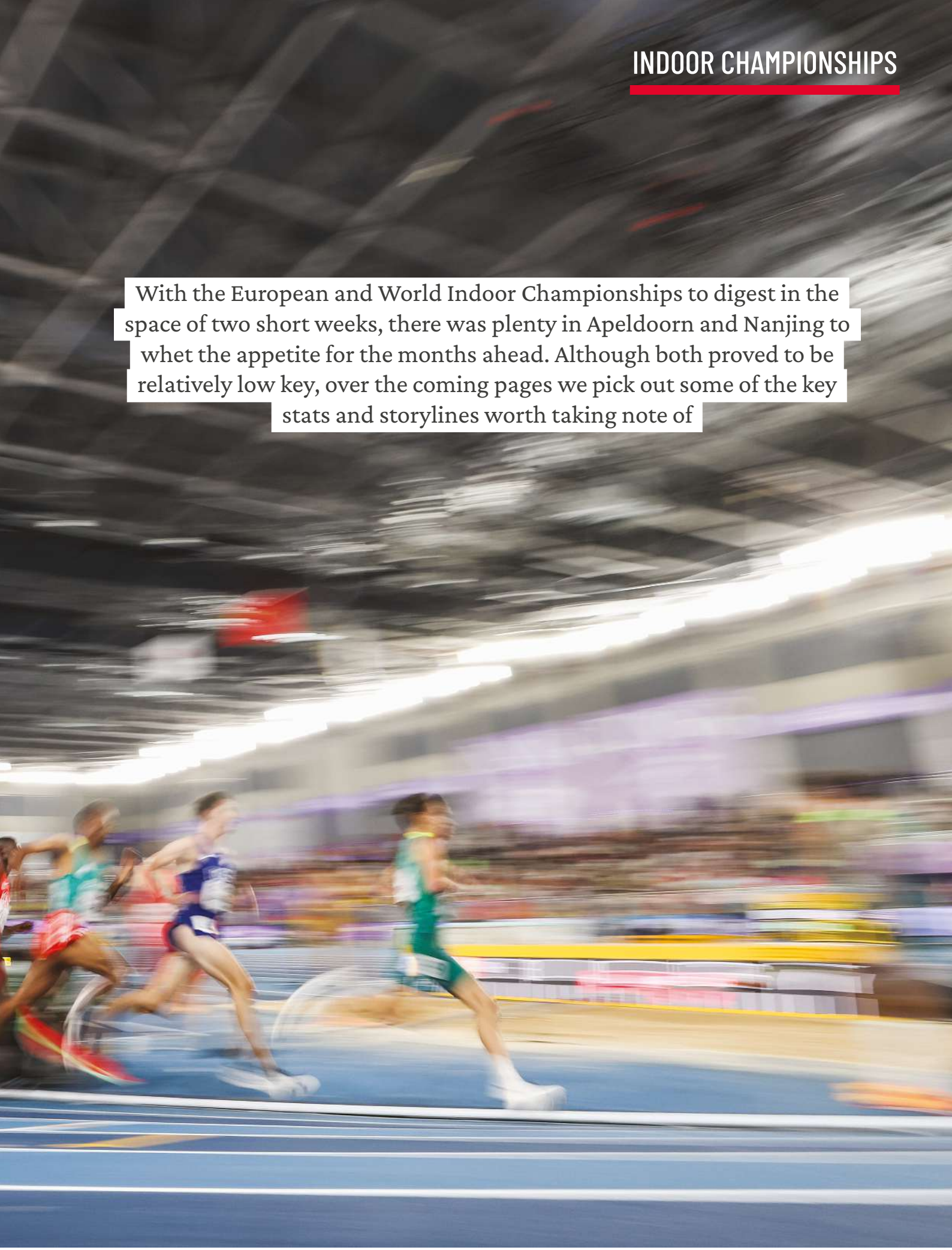
Three days out, I had my final physio appointment to oil the wheels. There was nothing left to do but run.

The end result of it all? Second place in 31:35, a 10km personal best by 26 seconds that's faster than even my 10,000m track PB from the Olympic 10,000m trials of 2021, and my place on the British team bound for Belgium later this month confirmed. The plan came together. AW

Double helpings



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES



With the European and World Indoor Championships to digest in the space of two short weeks, there was plenty in Apeldoorn and Nanjing to whet the appetite for the months ahead. Although both proved to be relatively low key, over the coming pages we pick out some of the key stats and storylines worth taking note of

The bigger picture



The indoor championships were never going to attract all of the top names, but many of those who chose to compete have used the recent events to set themselves up beautifully for the long summer ahead, writes **Katharine Merry**

The indoor athletics season can be a curious thing. I've really enjoyed these past few weeks and being able to watch the European and World Indoor Championships in quick succession.

There have been some great stories, and more than a few medal winners for whom getting on to the podium has clearly meant a great deal, but I've also found it very interesting to note the discussion that has centred on the athletes who chose not to compete as much as those who did.

"Aren't we all?" said Jakob Ingebrigtsen when asked if he was disappointed that his main rivals were posted missing in Apeldoorn and Nanjing. It didn't seem to disturb the Norwegian too much, mind you, as he won every single 1500m and 3000m race in sight but it was a valid question. Why didn't more of the big names show up across the events? After all, indoor athletics is a brilliant marketing tool for the wider sport and we're crying out to keep the attention levels on the sport as high as possible after the Olympics.

The answers are many and different for just about every single athlete. Some won't have wanted to travel as far as China. Some won't have wanted to disturb their training schedules and routines. Some just won't get the same kick out of competing indoors.

So many factors come into it, and I do feel that people sometimes get a little bit hung up on this debate.

Maybe it's borne out of frustration because everybody wants to see the best people competing all the time against each other – but I'm afraid it doesn't work like that.

Ultimately what it boils down to is the fact that the outdoor season is the one that matters and it's what every athlete is always going

ABOVE: Jakob Ingebrigtsen added to his vast medal collection

RIGHT: Amber Annning created history

KATHARINE MERRY



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

Katharine **Merry**

Olympic medallist and broadcaster

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to prioritise. The indoor season is the cherry on top of the cake. It always has been and it always will be. It's great if you can do well in it, but nobody who ever competes well indoors is going to sacrifice that for any success that they have outdoors.

Put it this way, if you talk to someone who has a world indoor gold and a world outdoor gold, I know which most would save if their house was burning down and they could only save one.

That being said, having a good indoor season

can also be such a good springboard towards the summer and, based on recent evidence, I'm already getting very excited about what's to come when everyone starts racing outside.

It won't surprise you to hear that the women's 400m is of particular interest to me and seeing Amber Anning starting to realise her potential has been a big highlight of these past few weeks. She is now Britain's first individual female world indoor champion in a sprint event and getting that gold in Nanjing will have felt so important to her, particularly after Apeldoorn didn't go to plan.

I was hugely confident that Amber was going to win European and world indoor gold – she was certainly capable of it – but her disqualification for a lane infringement during the heats in the Netherlands was devastating and probably the biggest setback she's had.

But, as the cliche goes, you learn more from failure than you do from success. These are the times that will teach you and winning a world title, in a final that proved to be challenging for a number of reasons, will have done her a power of good.

Yes, Amber is an Olympic and world relay medallist but she doesn't have a huge amount of championships experience so for her to be able to keep calm and get the job done in what she herself called a "messy" race will have done wonders for her confidence.

The 400m is completely different indoors and it presents challenges you don't normally have to face outdoors.

For starters, all of your markers are gone and everything you normally do in terms of how you break down a 400m race, and the way you run it, goes out of the window.

You're also negotiating traffic and having people invading your space, and you don't get that outdoors, so that's a tactic that you have to learn and then the point when you kick for home is obviously different. It does take a bit of planning.

Everyone wants to get to the bell first but, for some athletes, they're not capable of doing that and hanging on. Trying to do it can blow your whole race. That then presents the unfamiliar prospect of trying to run like a middle distance runner and pass someone who is directly in front of you.

You don't choose to overtake anybody on a bend, unless you're daft, so that leaves a small window for making moves and such a small margin for error. There's so much to think about and it's no surprise that you'll see some athletes who negotiate that better than others.



ABOVE: Amber Anning came out on top in her tussle with Alexis Holmes

Trying to be in front at the bell is the point at which Amber almost came unstuck, when she and Alexis Holmes "scuffled" as they tried to go for the same line just after the break. It forced Amber wide and it didn't help her at the time but I'm pretty sure the incident put a bit more fire in her belly.

I wouldn't have been happy if that had happened to me. There would have been no way I was losing that race if I'd had a little scuffle like that. I would have been thinking: "I'm passing you just for that!"

It was another important step for Amber on her upward career trajectory and the set-up she has in Arkansas with Chris Johnson is clearly bearing fruit. I think there's more to come and I don't see any reason why she can't break her own British record of 49.29 and dip



KATHARINE MERRY

> **I don't see any reason why Amber can't break her own British record of 49.29 and dip below the 49-second mark. She's just going to get quicker and quicker**

below the 49-second mark. She's just going to get quicker and quicker.

She and Ireland's Rhasidat Adeleke excite me very much in terms of European women's 400m running. They both have good base speed and their physical make-up in terms of balance, posture, style and technique is good, too. Plus they're smart. They listen and they learn and if you can do that in the 400m in particular, and you've got talent to go with it, you've got half a chance.

Another young female athlete that I can't wait to see tackling the outdoor season now is Amy Hunt. When we're talking about individual reasons for competing indoors, she is the perfect example of using it to help her develop with the bigger picture in mind.

Amy wasn't going to win the 60m but her back end speed was clear for all to see in these championships as she began to eat up the ground in the latter stages. When an athlete is confident enough to say in a TV interview they're expecting "something special" from themselves over their favourite event – in this case the 200m – in the coming months then you know things are coming together.

It can't have been an easy time for Amy, either. She has had big injury problems to overcome since bursting on to the scene as a youngster (I can relate to that!) and has had to adjust to moving to Italy to work with coach Marco Airale. It will have been difficult for her to see her former training partners Jeremiah Azu and Daryll Neita leaving that group but it looks to me like she is in the right place.

In fact, from the British point of view, we've seen a few talents – whether it be Amber, Amy and Jeremiah in the sprints or Neil Gourley, George Mills and Georgia Hunter Bell in the 1500m and 3000m – showing real promise over the course of these past few weeks. As Amy says, it will soon be time to grab the popcorn and watch the outdoor show unfold. AW



BELOW: Amy Hunt has used the indoor events as perfect preparation for the outdoor season



Finding his voice

Having grown up singing in a church band, Jeremiah Azu is no stranger to performing in front of a crowd. During this indoor season, the double 60m gold medallist was note perfect, writes **Euan Crumley**

From the moment he mentioned having been born in Rotterdam and then proceeded to speak fluent Dutch to charm the Apeldoorn audience at the press conference on the eve of the European Indoor Championships, Jeremiah Azu gave the impression of being in total control of everything he was doing.

He was a convincing winner of the 60m in the Netherlands, getting his hands on the first major individual title of his career, and that air of being in charge remained with him when he had to leave his newborn son and partner behind again just a couple of weeks later to contest the World Indoor Championships in Nanjing.

On both occasions, he clocked a personal best time of 6.49 in the final. On both occasions, he received a gold medal for his troubles.

Azu has barely put a foot wrong on the track in recent weeks but it wasn't so long ago that he felt "horrible" as he began the process of adjusting following a major life move. For what he says were a variety of reasons, the Welshman decided to leave the Italian base at which he had worked with Marco Airale since 2022, to return home to Cardiff, to his wider family and to his first coach, Helen James.

The switch had felt right but, when it came to the sporting side of his life, Azu says: "When I first started back, I felt so sluggish, like I was running in slow motion all the time."

It didn't take James long to make an impact.

"I did a one-to-one session with her, and we just dialled it back, did some basic stuff and from that session the confidence started

ABOVE: Jeremiah Azu celebrates his European 60m title in Apeldoorn



> **To be back in Cardiff... for me it's just important to feel that love from the people I care about. That's when it truly started to click**

to grow again," says the 23-year-old. "Then we decided to do a low-key race, at the Welsh Championships. Even the week leading up to that I didn't feel like I normally feel but, once I stepped on that track and the competitor came out of me, it just reignited that feeling.

"I actually enjoyed the racing. It was just nice to be back in Cardiff, with the home support, and for me it's just important to feel that love from the people I care about. That's when it truly started to click."

It was thanks to James that Azu took up athletics in the first place, but it was also her guidance that led to him breaking on to the international scene.

He insists there was no fallout with Airale, and indeed the Italian was one of the first to send his congratulations in China, but being back on more familiar ground is suiting the Olympic 4x100m bronze medallist.

"I think the biggest thing [Helen has] had an impact on is my mentality," he says. "It's allowed me to be confident again. It's allowed me to enjoy my running again and daily training. I think all of us as athletes, we can train as hard as we want, but the only thing that separates the ones that actually get the medals is the mindset and it's something I've been working on. "And it's the little things, like the reassurance, the positive comments, knowing that I'm doing things well. It's nice to be reassured."

Becoming a father has also, he says, helped to remove some of the fear factor about high level competition – while another aspect of his life at home is proving beneficial. Azu's father Alex is a pastor in Cardiff, and the European 4x100m gold medallist can regularly be found singing in the church band. Indeed, due to the tight travel schedule to Nanjing, he even took to the stage in his British kit as he stopped off on his way to the airport.

"I think my ability to perform on track has probably come from being put on stage as a young kid and being encouraged to sing," he says. "I don't have a memory of not doing it, so all I can remember is just being part of that, singing, and I think it does translate into what I do. It takes the pressure off when I've got all these people watching me, because I've been having eyes on me since I was a kid, and standing on stage as a kid is a lot more daunting.

"I'm actually so grateful to my parents that they encouraged me, that they pushed me into it. It's definitely impacting my athletics. I'm a performer at the end of the day."

With such a successful indoor season behind him, Azu is understandably now curious about what might be possible outdoors this year. After the disappointment of last year's Olympics, where he was disqualified after a false start in his 100m heat, the improvement in his 60m has helped to provide a far more positive outlook

"I believe I can run 9.8," he says, his current legal best for 100m standing at 9.97. "I've always known I've had the ability to do it, so something like this just confirms this for me. I wouldn't need to fly anything crazy with a 6.49 to go 9.8. There are certain numbers you hit and it equals this. Of course, you still have to go and do it, the races do still need to pan out."

If it were to pan out, then Zharnel Hughes' British record of 9.83 may start to come into view – as well as an individual gold medal at the World Championships in Tokyo.

"That would be amazing," says Azu. "Even watching Zharnel do that was inspirational in itself, so to be knocking around that ball park... it's nice to be in that conversation. It's a good place for British sprinting right now." AW



BELOW: Azu with fellow medallists Lachlan Kennedy and Akani Simbine after the final in Nanjing



PHOTO BY DAN VERNON



Emerging force

Jakob Ingebrigtsen wasn't the only Norwegian to produce outstanding European and world indoor performances. **Gabby Pieraccini** profiles Sander Skotheim, a combined eventer who is deservedly attracting some attention

For a country with a population of just 5.5 million, Norway has more than its fair share of athletics honours. With the bulk of the attention split between the feats of Jakob Ingebrigtsen, the exuberance of Karsten Warholm and the new Olympic decathlon champion Markus Rooth, there hasn't been much attention left over for decathlete Sander Skotheim.

But all that changed over the course of a few weeks in the 2025 indoor season, where the 22-year-old took three steps out of the shadows and into the spotlight with his heptathlon performances, becoming European record-holder, European indoor champion, and World Indoor champion.

A European record

Every year Estonia hosts one of the top indoor combined events meets in the world. A country rich in decathlon history, in 2021 Tallinn hosted the European U20 championships where Skotheim won decathlon silver behind Jente Hauttekeete. Earlier that year the Belgian had set a World U20 record of 6062 for the heptathlon and, a few days later, Skotheim scored 6015 for the second-best mark of all time.

The Norwegian might have just missed the world heptathlon record by a few points as a junior, but by the end of the first day of competition at the Tallinn Combined Events meeting in February 2025, he was on track for the European heptathlon record of 6479 points.

He extended his long jump personal best from 8.03m to 8.19m and threw a lifetime best of 15m in the shot, adding a high jump of 2.06m. On the second day, as Kevin Mayer lamented the peril in which his European record found itself – "My record is in danger!" the Frenchman declared on social media – Skotheim hurled himself over 5.25m in the pole vault.

Only a 2:38 1000m stood between the Norwegian and Mayer's record, a time he had run many times before. Fatigued from the efforts of the previous six events, he squeezed under the time with 2:37.85 and made history with 6484.

"In the 1000m, it was all or nothing," he said afterwards. "I knew it was a time I was capable of, but it was not an easy time to run. I felt we ran fast but, when I looked at the clock, it wasn't going that fast! So, with 400m to go, I thought maybe I'll not make it. But then, in the last 200m, I just sprinted with everything I had and barely made it."

A European title

A few weeks later, the European Indoor Championships took place in Apeldoorn. At the previous iteration of the competition in 2023 in Istanbul, Skotheim had won his first senior silver medal, behind Mayer. On that occasion, the Norwegian's devastating final event forced the Frenchman to run for his life to win, 6348 to 6318.



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Sander Skotheim clears the high jump bar in Nanjing

"He pushed me so hard," Mayer said at the time. "I was so scared because, before the 1000m, I didn't know if he was going to go fast. So that was seven hours of waiting and being scared."

Skotheim, meanwhile, was rather more relaxed about events.

"It's super cool to be this close to Kevin now," he reflected after his race in Istanbul.

"He's been a big idol of mine while I've been doing the decathlon, so it's cool to see that he's within reach to beat."

In 2025, the main challenger for Skotheim was Simon Ehammer of Switzerland, whose twin focus on the decathlon and long jump have made him one of the most recognisable faces in combined events.

Combined eventers tend to fall into four categories: the speed/power athletes, the jumpers, the throwers and the all-rounders. As a speed/power athlete, Ehammer dominates the standings in the early events. In Apeldoorn, such was the early flair of the Swiss that over-enthusiastic suggestions of a world record were emerging after three events.

In actual fact, it was Skotheim, in the shadow of Ehammer, who was on track for a record-breaking score. This time, he did it differently from his performance in Tallinn, where he had acknowledged the points missed in the high jump.

"2.06m is not a disaster, but it's almost 100 points lost to what I could have done," he said. "I got the height, but I didn't really have the timing, or a good feeling of where the bar was. Hopefully, I can push towards at least above 6500, maybe even 6600."

Skotheim found those missing points in Apeldoorn. Fewer points from the long jump, shot and pole vault with 7.95m, 14.39m and 5.10m respectively, but more points from a 2.19m high jump and sensational 2:32.72 1000m, in which he led seven men to PBs under 2:40.

He emerged from the shade cast by Ehammer's profile and – in addition to winning his first senior gold medal – elevated his previous European record to 6558, overtaking Canada's Damian Warner and Puerto Rico's Ayden Owens-Delerme on the world all-time list. Only Kyle Garland (6639) and Ashton Eaton (6645) have scored more.

A world title

Skotheim's competition at the World Indoor

> **For this level of competition, flexibility to deliver high scores across events in different ways is crucial, providing resilience should a flagship discipline not go to plan**

Skotheim's big steps forward

Event	60m	Long jump	Shot put	High jump	60m hurdles	Pole vault	1000m	Total
Tallinn	7.04	8.19m	15.00m	2.06m	8.04	5.25m	2:37.85	6484
European Indoors	6.93	7.95m	14.39m	2.19m	8.04	5.10m	2:32.72	6558
Worlds Indoors	6.97	8.00m	14.68m	2.13m	7.93	5.20m	2:36.08	6475

Championships in Nanjing was Johannes Erm of Estonia, the 2024 European decathlon champion behind whom the Norwegian had won silver in Rome.

Skotheim had beaten Erm soundly in Apeldoorn over seven events, but was tackling his third competition in seven weeks, and faced with an adversary hell-bent on redemption after missing out on a medal in the Netherlands. Perhaps for the first time in his career, Skotheim had the pressure of being favourite. A year earlier in Glasgow, Ehammer had won the world indoor title in a closely fought battle in which Skotheim had received yet another silver and Erm the bronze.

For most of the competition the Norwegian was on track to repeat his European record mark. But a 5.00m pole vault checked that trajectory, and instead a new dynamic emerged, as the Estonian's 5.30m vault brought him within 52 points of Skotheim after six events.

The final 1000m was brutal – not for the speed of Apeldoorn, but for the physicality of two tired athletes occupying the same banked curves and racing for gold. Skotheim stayed on his feet, and within a few metres of Erm. He was rewarded with his first world title in a score of 6475.

The jewels in Skotheim's crown are his jumps, where he has one of the best combinations of any decathlete: an 8.19m long jump, a 2.20m high jump and a 5.35m pole vault.

For the level of competition in which he now finds himself, flexibility to deliver high scores across events in different ways is crucial, providing resilience should a flagship discipline not go to plan.

As Skotheim returns to ten events, he will face his team-mate Rooth, regarded as one of the most technically proficient decathletes currently competing – a true all-rounder rather than a specialist in any one, or set of, disciplines.

Skotheim has typically been one step behind his compatriot. He came second to Rooth in Multistars in Grosseto in 2022, where they both broke Martin Roe's previous national record.

A year later in the EU23 championships in Espoo, he and Rooth left the field in their wake as they battled to scores of 8561 and 8608, respectively. And then Rooth won the ultimate prize in Paris last year, an Olympic title, in a national record of 8796.

In Paris, Skotheim failed to register a height in the pole vault. In the moment he set aside the disappointment of what might have been, and focused on helping his team-mate achieve what was to be, also winning a World Athletics Fair Play award.

Skotheim's score from nine events in Paris was 7757. A vault of 5.10m would have given him another 941 points. A 1500m run for himself, rather than for Rooth, could have given him at least another 100 points. Taken together, that's a score approaching 8800.

With three confident steps out of the shadows and into the light in 2025, perhaps Norway has a little more room for another star to shine. AW



BELOW: Skotheim and Johannes Erm battle it out in the 1000m at the World Indoor Championships



APELDOORN BY NUMBERS

Key facts and figures from the European Indoor Championships





TOP: Ditaji Kambundji celebrates winning the 60m hurdles

ABOVE: Lieke Klaver wins the 400m

RIGHT: Menno Vloon on his way to sharing pole vault gold

FAR RIGHT: The victorious Dutch women's relay team

SEVEN

The Netherlands topped the medals table with the host nation winning seven gold medals, including five in the final session

THREE

The Dutch won all three relay events, taking gold in the mixed, men's and women's 4x400m

SEVEN

Jakob Ingebrigtsen became the joint most successful male athlete in European Indoors history, equalling Valeriy Borzov's haul of seven gold medals after successfully defending his 1500m and 3000m titles.

7.67 & 6558

Two European records were set at the championships, Switzerland's Ditaji Kambundji winning women's 60m hurdles gold in 7.67, while Norway's Sander Skotheim improved his own continental heptathlon record from 6484 to 6558 points.



WOMEN

60m
Zaynab Dosso *ITA* **7.01**
Mujinga Kambundji *SUI* **7.02**
Patrizia van der Weken *LUX* **7.06**

400m
Lieke Klaver *NED* **50.38**
Henriette Jaeger *NOR* **50.45**
Paula Sevilla *ESP* **50.99**

800m
Anna Wielgosz *POL* **2:02.09**
Clara Liberman *FRA* **2:02.32**
Anita Horvat *SLO* **2:02.52**

1500m
Agathe Guillemot *FRA* **4:07:23**
Salomé Alfonso *POR* **4:07.66**
Revee Walcott-Nolan *GBR* **4:08.45**

3000m
Sarah Healy *IRL* **8:52.86**
Melissa Courtney-Bryant *GBR* **8:52.92**
Salomé Afonso *POR* **8:53.42**

60m hurdles
Ditaji Kambundji *SUI* **7.67** CBP
Nadine Visser *NED* **7.72**
Pia Skrzyszowska *POL* **7.83**

High Jump
Yaroslava Mahuchikh *UKR* **1.99m**
Angelina Topić *SRB* **1.95m**
Engla Nilsson *SWE* **1.92m**

Pole Vault
Angelica Moser *SUI* **4.80m**
Tina Šutej *SLO* **4.75m**
Marie-Julie Bonnin *FRA* **4.70m**

Long Jump
Larissa Iapichino *ITA* **6.94m**
Annik Kalin *SUI* **6.90m**
Malaika Mihambo *GER* **6.88m**

Triple Jump
Ana Peleteiro-Compaore *ESP* **14.37m**
Diana Ana Maria Ion *ROU* **14.31m**
Senni Salminen *FIN* **13.99m**

Shot put
Jessica Schilder *NED* **20.69m**
Yemisi Ogunleye *GER* **19.56m**
Auriol Dongmo *POR* **19.26m**

4x400m Relay
Netherlands **3:24.34**
Great Britain **3:24.89**
Czechia **3:25.31**

Pentathlon
Saga Vanninen *FIN* **4922**
Sofie Dokter *NED* **4826**
Kate O'Connor *IRL* **4781**

MEN

60m
Jeremiah Azu *GBR* **6.49**
Henrik Larsson *SWE* **6.52**
Andrew Robertson *GBR* **6.55**

400m
Atilla Molnar *HUN* **45.25**
Maksymilian Szwed *POL* **45.31**
Jimy Soudril *FRA* **45.59**

800m
Samuel Chapple *NED* **1:44.88**
Eliott Crestan *BEL* **1:44.92**
Mark English *IRL* **1:45.46**

1500m
Jakob Ingebrigtsen *NOR* **3:36.56**
Azeddine Habz *FRA* **3:36.92**
Isaac Nader *POR* **3:37.10**

3000m
Jakob Ingebrigtsen *NOR* **7:48.37**
George Mills *GBR* **7:49.41**
Azeddine Habz *FRA* **7:50.48**

60m Hurdles
Jakub Szymański *POL* **7.43**
Wilhem Belocian *FRA* **7.45**
Just Kwaou-Mathey *FRA* **7.50**

High Jump
Oleh Doroshchuk *UKR* **2.34m**
Jan Štefela *CZE* **2.29m**
Matteo Sioli *ITA* **2.29m**

Pole Vault
Emmanouil Karalis *GRE* **5.90m**
Menno Vloon *NED* **5.90m**
Sondre Guttormsen *NOR* **5.90m**

Long Jump
Bozhidar Sarâboyukov *BUL* **8.13m**
Mattia Furlani *ITA* **8.12m**
Lester Lescay *ESP* **8.12m**

Triple Jump
Andy Diaz Hernandez *ITA* **17.71m**
Max Hess *GER* **17.43m**
Andrea Dallavalle *ITA* **17.19m**

Shot Put
Andrei Rares Toader *ROU* **21.27m**
Wictor Petersson *SWE* **21.04m**
Tomáš Staněk *CZE* **20.75m**

4x400m Relay
Netherlands **3:04.95**
Spain **3:05.18**
Belgium **3:05.18**

Heptathlon
Sander Skotheim *NOR* **6558** CBP
Simon Ehammer *SUI* **6506**
Till Steinforth *GER* **6388**

MIXED

4x400m Relay
Netherlands **3:15.63**
Belgium **3:16.19**
Great Britain & NI **3:16.49**

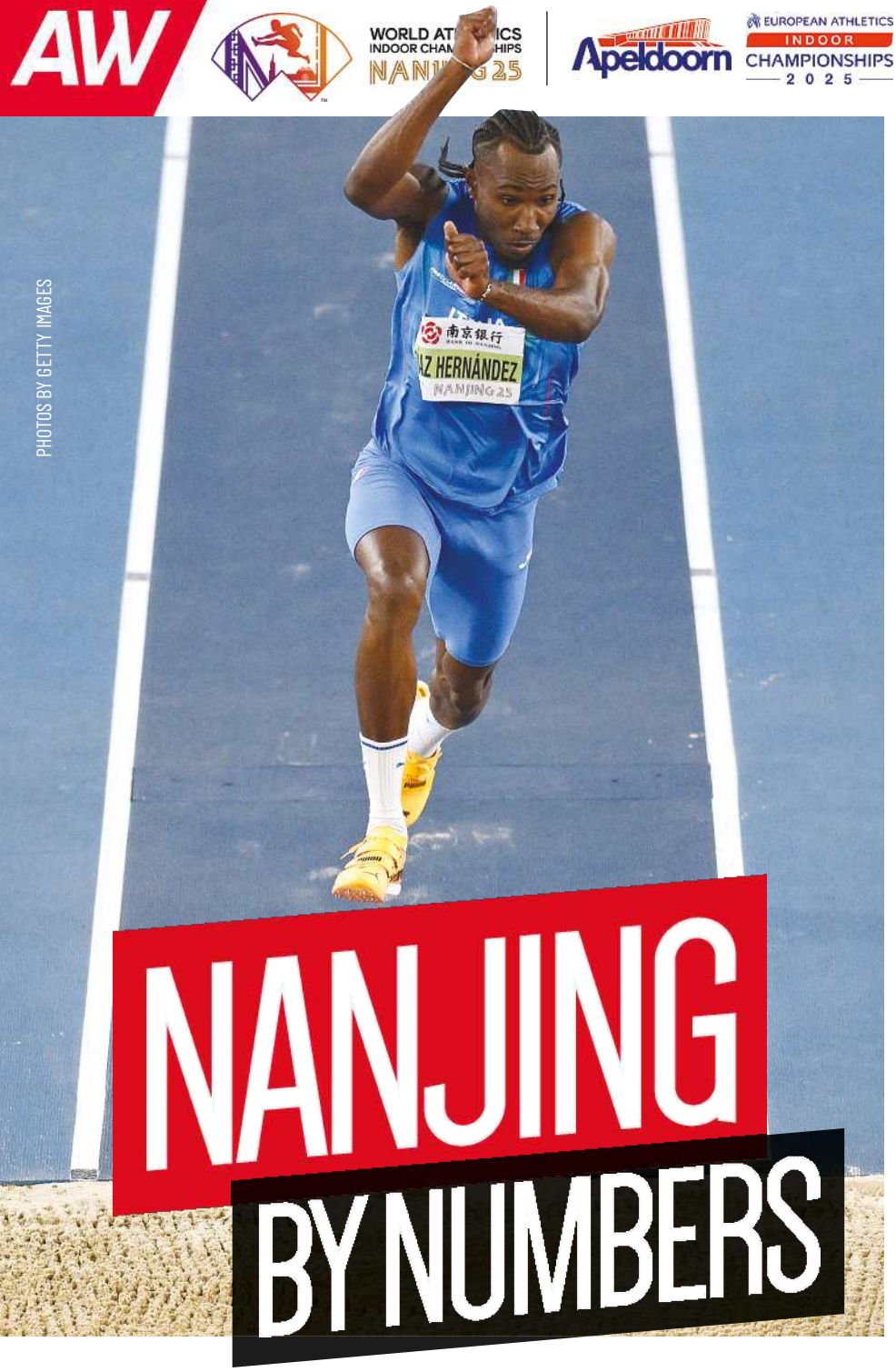


Medals table

RANK	COUNTRY	G	S	B	TOT
1	Netherlands	7	2	0	9
2	Italy	3	1	2	6
3	Norway	3	1	1	5
4	Switzerland	2	3	0	5
5	Poland	2	1	1	4
6	Ukraine	2	0	0	2
7	France	1	3	4	8
8	Great Britain & NI	1	3	3	7
9	Spain	1	1	2	4
10	Romania	1	1	0	2

Placing table

RANK	COUNTRY	TOT
1	Netherlands	91.5
2	Great Britain & NI	87
3	France	83
4	Italy	73.5
5	Spain	73
6	Germany	57.5
7	Switzerland	45
8	Poland	45
9	Portugal	45
10	Czechia	41



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

NANJING BY NUMBERS

Some of the key statistics from the World Indoor Championships

3:54.86

Just one championship record fell in Nanjing, with Ethiopia's Gudaf Tsegay clocking 3:54.86 to win the women's 1500m in a mark that is the fourth-fastest in history behind her own world record of 3:53.09.

THREE

Grant Holloway and Mondo Duplantis became the first men, in the 60m hurdles and pole vault respectively, to win three successive world indoor titles.

TWO

Jakob Ingebrigtsen became the second man in history to win two individual gold medals at a single World Indoor Championships, taking 1500m and 3000m gold.

FIVE

Five athletes – Ingebrigtsen, Jeremiah Azu (60m), Andy Diaz Hernandez (triple jump), Sander Skotheim (heptathlon) and Saga Vanninen (pentathlon) – won European indoor and world indoor gold in the same month.



ONE

Patrizia van der Weken, bronze medallist in the women's 60m, became the first athlete from Luxembourg to win an indoor or outdoor World Championships medal.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Andy Díaz Hernández, Grant Holloway, Mondo Duplantis and Gudaf Tsegay were all gold medal winners in Nanjing

WOMEN

60m
Mujinga Kambundji *SUI* 7.04
Zaynab Dosso *ITA* 7.06
Patricia van der Weken *LUX* 7.07

400m
Amber Anning *GBR* 50.60
Alexis Holmes *USA* 50.63
Henriette Jaeger *NOR* 50.92

800m
Prudence Sekgodiso *RSA* 1:58.40
Nigist Getachew *ETH* 1:59.63
Patricia Silva *POR* 1:59.80

1500m
Gudaf Tsegay *ETH* 3:54.86 CBP
Diribe Welteji *ETH* 3:59.30
Georgia Hunter Bell *GBR* 3:59.84

3000m
Freweyni Hailu *ETH* 8:37.21
Shelby Houlihan *USA* 8:38.26
Jessica Hull *AUS* 8:38.28

60m hurdles
Devynne Charlton *BAH* 7.72
Ditaji Kambundji *SUI* 7.73
Ackera Nugent *JAM* 7.74

High Jump
Nicola Olyslagers *AUS* 1.97m
Eleanor Patterson *AUS* 1.97m
Yaroslava Mahuchikh *UKR* 1.95m

Pole Vault
Marie-Julie Bonnin *FRA* 4.75m
Lachlan Kennedy *SLO* 4.70m
Angelica Moser *SUI* 4.70m

Long Jump
Claire Bryant *USA* 6.96m
Annik Kälin *SUI* 6.83m
Fátima Diame *ESP* 6.72m

Triple Jump
Leyanis Perez Hernandez *CUB* 14.93m
Liadagmis Povea CUB 14.57m
Ana Peleteiro-Compaore ESP 14.29m

Shot Put
Sarah Mitton CAN 20.48m
Jessica Schilder NED 20.07m
Chase Jackson USA 20.06m

4x400m Relay
USA 3:27.45
Poland 3:32.05
Australia 3:32.65

Pentathlon
Saga Vanninen *FIN* 4821
Kate O'Connor *IRL* 4742
Taliyah Brooks *USA* 4669

MEN

60m
Jeremiah Azu *GBR* 6.49
Lachlan Kennedy *AUS* 6.50
Akani Simbine *RSA* 6.54

400m
Christopher Bailey *USA* 45.08
Brian Faust *USA* 45.47
Jacory Patterson *USA* 45.54

800m
Josh Hoey *USA* 1:44.77
Eliott Crestan *BEL* 1:44.81
Elvin Josué Canales *ESP* 1:45.03

1500m
Jakob Ingebrigtsen *NOR* 3:38.79
Neil Gourley *GBR* 3:39.07
Luke Houser *USA* 3:39.17

3000m
Jakob Ingebrigtsen *NOR* 7:46.09
Berihu Aregawi *ETH* 7:46.25
Ky Robinson *AUS* 7:47.09

60m hurdles
Grant Holloway *USA* 7:42
Wilhem Belocian *FRA* 7.54
Junxi Liu *CHN* 7.55

High Jump
Woo Sanghyeok *KOR* 2.31m
Hamish Kerr *NZL* 2.28m
Raymond Richards *JAM* 2.28m

Pole Vault
Mondo Duplantis *SWE* 6.15m
Emmanouil Karalis *GRE* 6.05m
Sam Kendricks *USA* 5.90m

Long Jump
Mattia Furlani *ITA* 8.30m
Wayne Pinnock *JAM* 8.29m
Liam Adcock *AUS* 8.28m

Triple Jump
Andy Díaz Hernández *ITA* 17.80m
Zhu Yaming *CHN* 17.33m
Hugues Fabrice Zango *BUR* 17.15m

Shot Put
Tom Walsh *NZL* 21.65m
Roger Steen *USA* 21.62m
Adrian Piperi *USA* 21.48m

4x400m Relay
USA 3:03.13
Jamaica 3:05.05
Hungary 3:06.03

Heptathlon
Sander Skotheim *NOR* 6475
Johannes Erm *EST* 6437
Till Steinforth *GER* 6275



Medals table

RANK	COUNTRY	G	S	B	TOT
1	United States	6	4	6	16
2	Norway	3	0	1	4
3	Ethiopia	2	3	0	5
4	Great Britain & NI	2	1	1	4
5	Italy	2	1	0	3
6	Australia	1	2	4	7
7	Switzerland	1	2	1	4
8=	Cuba	1	1	0	2
8=	France	1	1	0	2
8=	New Zealand	1	1	0	2

Placing table

RANK	COUNTRY	TOT
1	United States	175
2	Australis	55
3=	Ethiopia	44
3=	China	44
5	Italy	42
6	Jamaica	41
7	Great Britain & NI	38
8	Switzerland	33
9	Norway	32
10	Poland	27



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

"I've got to say goodbye to my self that once was"

Richard Kilty talks retirement, the challenges of coaching, taking over from Carl Lewis and why he thinks Louie Hinchliffe is going to do "some serious damage" on the global sprinting scene

Words: **Euan Crumley**



The permanent move from athlete to coach has taken a little getting used to. "I was in the warm-up area with my wife, I got on to the track and I had my running gear on," says Richard Kilty. "For about 15 seconds, I thought: 'I've definitely got it today'. I completely lost myself, but you go into autopilot mode." The habits of a life consumed by competitive sprinting, it seems, die hard.

It didn't take Kilty too long to snap back to reality. A ruptured Achilles at last summer's Olympics means he can barely muster a jog at the moment, never mind top speed, and proved to be the final straw for the 35-year-old.

For years he has been coaching in varying guises alongside his own top level career but, at the beginning of last month, the former world indoor 60m champion announced his retirement from what he calls a "beautiful but brutal sport".

There hasn't been a lot of time to stop and think about it all. Talking to some of the British media behind the scenes at the Omnisport Arena in Apeldoorn, he is clad in a bright yellow tracksuit top emblazoned with Lithuania across the back.

He is at the European Indoor Championships, an event in which he also won two 60m titles, as coach to his wife, the Lithuanian triple jumper Dovilė. Being back in that competitive environment not only brought out those aforementioned automated responses but stirred up some memories.

"When you get somewhere like this and you see the championship, I look back and think: 'Wow, I won this thing twice, I was the man at one point here'. People are fighting to win it and to think that I won it twice is quite special."

Now, Kilty's world revolves around helping the athletes in his group towards experiencing their own special moments. In Apeldoorn, Dovilė produced her best international championships performance since winning the European under-23 title by coming fourth, while rather closer to home another of Kilty's charges, 14-year-old Celine Obinna-Alo, broke the championships record in February by winning the England Athletics under-17 indoor title with a time of 7.38. It was just 0.03 outside of Asha Philip's national under-17 mark and only 2000 Olympic bronze medallist Katharine Merry has run faster at the same age.

"She's 14 and she's been doing the sport for a year," says Kilty. "You're going to hear a lot about her next year. At 15 and 16, she's going to be a force to be reckoned with."

Most of the immediate attention, however, is going to fall on another member of the set-up that is based on Teesside in England's North East. Louie Hinchliffe burst on to the sprinting scene last year when clocking 9.95 to become the first European winner of America's prestigious NCAA 100m title, before adding the British title and then just missing out on the Olympic final.

The Yorkshireman's impact was substantial but he raised more than a few eyebrows at the end of the summer when he announced his decision not only to forego the final year of his time at the University of Houston, where he was being coached by nine-time Olympic gold medallist Carl Lewis, and turn professional but that he was also going to be guided by Kilty.

The two, who formed part of the British squad which won 4x100m relay bronze in Paris, first got to know each other when they shared a hotel room at the London Diamond League last July. "We just had very similar philosophies," Hinchliffe told the Guardian. "Very similar minds. I think that's why we hit it off so well."

His new coach is predicting big things.

"Louie's doing really, really well," says Kilty. "That kid's just a phenomenal talent. He's got something very, very special and he's very unique. He can do some serious damage.

"He understands movement particularly well and he has got a unique way of movement, but he also has a unique build. All the best are unique in their own way and he's very, very special. I'm just there to maximise the talent he has.

ABOVE: Louie Hinchliffe and Richard Kilty after competing in the men's 4x100m in Paris

RIGHT: Hinchliffe in the semi-final of the individual event

> **If I wasn't confident, I would never have taken Louie on. I've got every faith I'm going to be one of the best coaches in the world**





"There have been a few times this year where he's trained, and you just think 'wow'. Once he gets upright running, he's got the tools to be the very best."

But what exactly is so special that could set the 22-year-old apart?

"It's simple maths and the combination of two things," says Kilty. "How fast can your legs go multiplied by how long is your stride length? He can turn his legs as fast as anyone in the world and, for his height [Hinchliffe is 5ft 9in], he can also generate a step length which usually only people who've got the limb length of a 6ft 2in person can. He's unique in the way he's able to do that and he's also got an incredible mindset. He's a champion in his head and I think it's just very exciting, the things that he can do."

When asked if he expects Hinchliffe to become Britain's number one sprinter and challenge for major medals, Kilty adds: "I believe he's capable of it."

And can he break Zharnel Hughes' British record of 9.83?

"I wouldn't put the pressure on him to say we're going to do it this year, but if anyone can

do it right now, it's Louie. I'm very excited to see him and Zharnel go head to head. I think if we get them both together healthy this year, it's going to be quite a tear-up."

The first glimpse of how well Hinchliffe is settling into his new regime looks set to come at the beginning of May, when he is expected to open his racing year in Dubai. Kilty is well aware of the outside noises that were made about the partnership and his stepping into Lewis' shoes, but the "Teesside Tornado" is bullish in his riposte.

"If I wasn't confident, I would never have taken Louie on," he says. "I've got every faith I'm going to be one of the best coaches in the world. I've had six athletes compete this year and every single one of them has done a personal best, and they've all been trained by great coaches before.

"One thing's for sure, they'll be getting to the start line as well prepared as they can be and, when the gun goes bang, they'll be in the position to be as confident and ready to tear it up with the world's best.

"I wasn't the athlete Carl Lewis was, but I'm extremely smart, I'm extremely experienced and I'll back my athletes all the way. They'll enter that call room believing they're going to beat anybody with the words that I say to them. I've been trained by some phenomenal coaches and I'm thankful for them and all the knowledge I've gained. Every single one of them has taught me something, as has my own learning, and I just want to share that with all my athletes.

"I'm a young coach. I have been coaching on and off for a long time now and I've been helping coach my wife for the last eight or nine years, plus I coached the British relay teams in 2023, so it's not something that fazes me. You hear: 'Richard's new, this is a rash decision', but I believe the results will speak for themselves."



BELOW: Kilty on the podium after taking gold in the 60m at the 207 European Indoor Championships

Every morning I wake up and the first thing on my mind is: 'How am I going to help my athletes get better today?' It's helped massively

That he is so busy on the coaching front has undoubtedly helped Kilty navigate the transition away from being a professional sportsman.

"It's all I ever had growing up," he says of his previous life. "I always worried about it earlier in my career. I thought: 'Yeah, I'm having success now but what will I do [when I retire]? But every morning I wake up and the first thing on my mind is: 'How am I going to help my athletes get better today?' and it's helped massively for me.



"I've got to say goodbye to my self that once was. Now I've got to prioritise other people and I think that's what a lot of coaches struggle with. There have been a lot of great athletes who've gone into coaching and the problem they've had is that they haven't been able to let go of their ego. I believe, so far, that I've been able to do that – put my ego to one side, celebrate my own career and now be like: 'It's about the athletes. It's not about me'.

"So far it's been pretty smooth. There are a few moments where it can get a bit confusing but so far I'm really loving the challenge of being a coach.

"I believe I belong in the sport of athletics, and I want to stay in it for the rest of my life."

Kilty ended his sprinting career with Olympic, world and Commonwealth 4x100m relay medals to his name, but it was indoors, over 60m, where he made the biggest noise. There was a world indoor title in 2014, followed by European indoor gold in 2015 and 2017.

"For sure I could have achieved more over the 100m but I was a very injury-prone athlete and, just genetically, the 60m was my superior event and I was brilliant at it," he says. It's perhaps fitting, then, that the conversation wraps up not long before the identity of the men's 2025 European Indoor 60m champion is decided.

"Jeremiah," says Kilty emphatically when asked who he is tipping to win. "I believe he's capable of running under 6.50. We haven't seen that in Britain, I guess, since myself but he can do it. He has the tools to do it."

Later that evening, Jeremiah Azu will run a PB of 6.49 to convincingly win gold. Perhaps coach Kilty really does know what he's talking about. AW



BELOW: Kilty celebrates taking 60m gold at the 2014 World Indoor Championships

Chasing greatness

Daryll Neita talks to **Jasmine Collett** about being fuelled by Olympic disappointment, making big changes and being a part of Grand Slam Track

There's a particular kind of pain in finishing just shy of greatness. For Daryll Neita, that feeling hit hard when she crossed the line in Paris last year – fourth in the 100m and fifth in the 200m at the Olympic Games.

It was a season of highs and near-misses. A silver medal in the 100m at the European Championships and another British outdoor title proved she was on the right track but, when the dust settled, there was one glaring truth: she was still without an individual Olympic medal, and it wouldn't be until 2028 before she got another shot at it.

So, what do you do when you're knocking on the door but haven't quite walked through it yet? Neita decided to switch things up. After a solid few years of training in Italy with coach Marco Airale, she felt like something was missing, that she needed something more to take her sprinting to the next level.

Enter Florida and, more specifically, Lance Brauman – coach to Olympic 100m champion Noah Lyles. Rather than rushing into an indoor season, the 28-year-old took her time to settle into life with her new training group. Instead, her 2025 season begins with a trip to Jamaica for the first stop on the Grand Slam Track League timetable. Neita will compete in the 100m and 200m double in Kingston (April 4-6), Miami (May 2-4), Philadelphia (May 30-June 1), and Los Angeles (June 27-29).

BELOW: Daryll Neita competes in the 100m semi-final at the Paris Olympics

How have you been since we last saw you compete?

The last time I raced was Athlos [in September] and I'm just itching to get back onto the track. It's been exciting watching the indoors and I think if you're watching and you're not competing, it always gives you the buzz to be like: 'Hey, I want to get back competing now.' I've now made a bit of a change and I really wanted to put myself in the best position possible.



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

What is it like with the new training set-up in Florida?
It's been really fun being in a new environment and being around people that I find very inspirational. I've been having things to learn every day about my technique or things in training that I can work on and be better at. It's been nice having a fresh set of eyes on me and to be able to work on things to become great – that's what I'm really enjoying. It's been nice to be feeling very nurtured.

How did the change in training groups come about and why did you make the jump?
The change was not something that was originally planned but I always want to put myself in an environment that's going to ultimately get the best out of me physically and mentally. I want to make sure that I can be the best version of myself because I believe that that is really important, especially when I am competing at this level.

I'm so close to the podium and I'm so close to achieving what I know I can do. I think I just needed that final push to make sure I'm ticking over in all areas and putting myself in the best possible environment and position for myself. It was a decision that I made, not very lightly, but I'm very happy with it.

Is finishing fourth and fifth at the Olympics something that you use as fuel and motivation?
One hundred per cent. I poured every single ounce of my being into those performances.

Not a night goes by that I don't think about how close I was but it does give me the motivation to stay grounded and stay positive. I'm putting things in place that I believe are important to me and to carry on reaching my goals and striving for them, I think that's what is really important. I truly believe that I can be on that individual podium.

How excited are you about opening up your 2025 season and the possibilities that lie ahead?
With Grand Slam coming up, it's a new opportunity, it's a new thing happening in track and field. I did Athlos last year and it was the first time that happened. I like to do things that are new and I like to see what's out there and I think this is a great opportunity to switch things up. It's going to be a whole new racing environment, a whole new situation and the whole structure of it is so different.

It's something that lots of people will be tuning in for and I think it really helps give that buzz to our sport, attracting new people and showing that it is growing in that way.

> **I poured every ounce of my being into those Olympic performances. Not a night goes by that I don't think about how close I was**

How excited are you to race in Jamaica?
It's somewhere that I've always wanted to race and it's somewhere that I've got family, too. It would be great for them to not only watch me on television as they always do and see me represent, but also to see me in the flesh.

Jamaica always has that vibe about it, whether it's the food, the music, the culture or the race in itself. It looks amazing to race in that National Stadium. That's really exciting to me that I'm opening my season there. It just feels very special and in a way close to home. I've got my mother coming out to watch me and I've got some other family members flying out. It's just one of the most amazing places to go to.

You are used to running the 100m and 200m double in championships. Will Grand Slam Track be any different?
For the short sprints, I think we're quite fortunate in a way because they are the events that we usually do, so it's going to feel pretty normal for me. But then, with some events, we've got hurdlers running the flat which we never see, so I think that brings a really big element of excitement and also it's challenging because you can't just be good at one thing.

Here you have to be good at both things to get the prize and I think that is going to show so many strengths in athletes that we haven't seen before.

What Grand Slam Track events are you most looking forward to watching as a spectator?
I'm mostly looking forward to the short hurdles. It's going to be really exciting seeing girls running over the 100m hurdles and then running the 100m flat. I think that is iconic because we don't watch them on the flat but they are so fast over those hurdles. I think we'll see really fast flat times and then we might see some hurdlers in the 100m more often. AW



Paul Larkins behind Peter Elliott and Sebastian Coe in the 1500m at Crystal Palace in 1984



Out of the shadows

In his new book, **Paul Larkins** recalls what it was like to mix it with the very best and looks back at a decade that changed athletics forever

For middle distance fans, the past year or so has represented something of a journey back in time to the 1980s. Just like those heady years of 40 or so years ago in front of the packed crowds in Oslo and Zurich, records are currently being broken on an almost weekly basis. And, when the big names do finally clash, not only is it headline news but no-one really is really able to predict which athlete will come out on top.

Back in 1980 the rivalry between Seb Coe and Steve Ovett was what every club runner talked about. Now the topic of conversation is all about Josh Kerr v Jakob Ingebrigtsen, not to mention half a dozen of their other rivals. Will the Scot use his incredible finishing speed or will Norwegian strength prevail? And what about Jake Wightman? Or any one of three or four American contenders?

It's this rivalry that makes the sport so interesting at the moment and it's no surprise that Kerr himself compares the pre-race banter and racing to that amazing era – one in which I grew up.

And that's what got me thinking: is the 1980s really responsible for everything we're enjoying today? I'll have to say it is, given that that is exactly the thinking behind my book, *Running in the Shadows of the Gods*.

Looking back at that incredible decade, it wasn't just about Coe v Ovett. Something called the London Marathon started, as did the Great North Run. Suddenly it wasn't just about watching on TV – we could all take part as well.

Runners were also rewarded with actual prize money for amazing performances rather than crystal vases (I have a few) and, as for footwear, well the development we enjoyed was every bit, if not more, amazing than the carbon-plated shoes that are responsible for currently rewriting the record books.

For those of you who need reminding – all but the keenest of statisticians, I suspect – my name is Paul Larkins and in 1981 I finished 171st in the U20 race in the National Cross Country at Parliament Hill (we'll come back to that later).

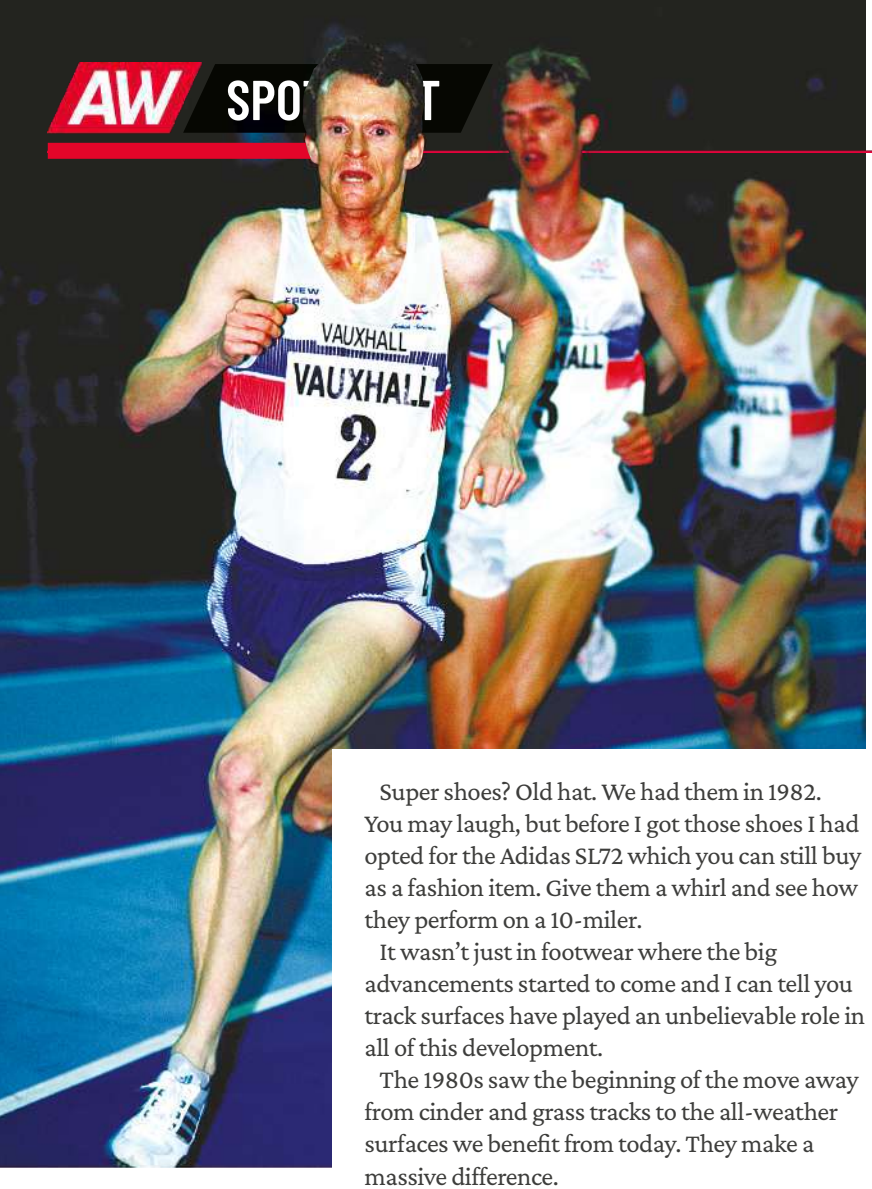
If I was running in the shadows of the Gods at the time, then I think you'll agree they were pretty long ones.

But, as the countless runners who now dip inside the once hallowed barrier of 3:40 for 1500m have discovered, those Gods are worthy of their status. You watch them, as I did, dream impossible dreams and slowly but ever so surely try to close that gap. Gods are there to be shot at and shadows can shorten. On occasion, there can even be glimpses of sunlight!

By 1984, thanks to a scholarship to Oklahoma State and undoubted advances in footwear, I too could crack 3:40 and even threaten overseas legends like Steve Scott (the 1983 World silver medallist) and Joaquim Cruz (the soon-to-be 1984 Olympic 800m champion).

Why do I mention the shoes? Well, even my first coach – three-time English Schools champion Trevor Rodwell – sported what looked like plimsols whenever he joined us for a Southern League match. Footwear was changing at an incredible pace.

Who remembers the Adidas Oregon shoe, for example? It used Dellinger's Web (created by the University of Oregon coach Bill Dellinger) which apparently dispersed shock throughout the shoe and reduced leg fatigue.



ABOVE: Paul Larkins competes in the 3000m in Birmingham in 1993

Super shoes? Old hat. We had them in 1982. You may laugh, but before I got those shoes I had opted for the Adidas SL72 which you can still buy as a fashion item. Give them a whirl and see how they perform on a 10-miler.

It wasn't just in footwear where the big advancements started to come and I can tell you track surfaces have played an unbelievable role in all of this development.

The 1980s saw the beginning of the move away from cinder and grass tracks to the all-weather surfaces we benefit from today. They make a massive difference.

We trained on cinder and raced on grass mostly. My schoolmate Steve Heard (1989 European Indoor 800m champion) won the Kent Schools 400m on a grass track in 49 seconds then clocked an English Schools record of 47.1 on what was, for us, a rare visit to an all-weather venue.

Indoor athletics was just taking off in a big way in the 1980s when I ran, but there wasn't anything like the state of the art facilities you come across now in places like Boston.

I still had to endure racing on wood and even lino. I clocked a sub-four-minute mile on a track essentially constructed of wooden pallets (no all-weather coating, just wood) and even helped Oklahoma State to a world-leading (but very slow these days) Distance Medley Relay with a 4:02 around the concession stands in a basketball arena.

It all sounds very old-fashioned – and it was – but by the end of that decade wood was retired and the concession stands returned to what they were built for – soft drinks and burger sales.

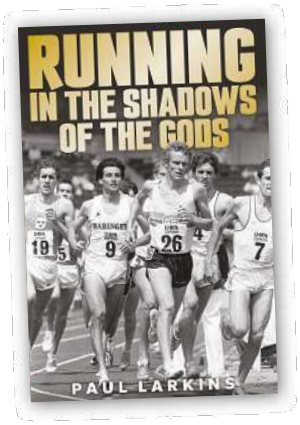
The sport was growing, adapting and developing at an amazing rate. It had nothing to do with me – I was just there – but we owe so much to coaches and meeting promoters from that era who saw what could happen.

Likewise Brendan Foster and Chris Brasher. Their visions of mass road running – that brought the creation of the Great North Run and London Marathon respectively – have changed the sport for the better. In about 1980 I ran in the Rochester 5 along with a couple of hundred other hardcore road runner types. It was great fun but, clearly, if you weren't a member of a club, it probably wasn't for you.

I write about all of this and more in *Running in the Shadows of the Gods*. There's a bit about me – winning an NCAA title was perhaps the highlight and my moment out of the shadows – but really the book is all about why we're enjoying such an amazing moment right now.

Now, back to that 171st place at the National. I'm also going to say you never know what can occur if you chase a dream. I say that because just recently, along with *AW*'s very own Jason Henderson, I chatted with the newly crowned National Cross-Country champion Richard Slade. He won pretty handily and was understandably delighted as his previous visit to Parliament Hill had seen him finish outside the top 200. Like us in 1980, he looked at what could occur if he trained properly. Well, you just never know!

Paul Larkins won the NCAA mile title in 1986 along with a couple of AAA Indoor 3000m golds. He represented GB at the World Road Relays in Madeira and the World Indoors in Seville, once ran a world record for the mile on a treadmill and worked for AW for many years. Oh, and once, working in Hawaii, he met his idol – four-time Olympic champion Lasse Viren – in a hotel lobby and went for an hour's run with him. Nearly 30 years later Paul, though probably not Lasse, can recall every second of that run...



Running in the Shadows of the Gods is available on Amazon and in all good bookshops

"The sport was growing, adapting and developing at an amazing rate in the 80s. We owe so much to coaches and meeting promoters from that era who saw what could happen"



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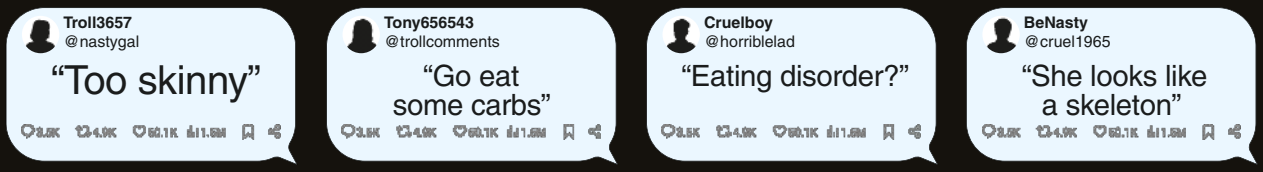
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Dark forces

With Eilish McColgan having highlighted once again just how much abuse she has to contend with, **Jasmine Collett** examines what has become an online epidemic of female body shaming and the dangerous impact it can have on its victims



These are just a few of the many harsh comments left on a social media post that was recently shared by Eilish McColgan. In the post, she is simply sharing a video of herself running on a treadmill while training for the London Marathon. However, rather than receiving supportive feedback for her dedication and effort, the replies quickly turn into a battleground of nasty remarks focused solely on her body.

Here we go again. The body shaming of female athletes – something that is, unfortunately, all too common. As more people leave hateful comments, the more it seems to normalise the behaviour and encourage others to join in. So many seem set on fuelling this harmful cycle.

This kind of abuse is, sadly, nothing new for McColgan. Like many female athletes who share their journeys on social media, she has faced similar scrutiny time and again – expressing that she now feels "numb" towards it.

Even her mother, former world 10,000m champion Liz, felt compelled to speak out in defence of her daughter last month, urging people to "stop the abusive online comments

on women athletes' appearances". This is the grim and persistent pattern that so many women can now face.

While their male counterparts are often praised for their strength, power and performance, female athletes are routinely reduced to their physical appearance. The focus shifts from their achievements to their shape and size, creating a dangerous environment that fosters harmful stereotypes.

What about all that McColgan's body has accomplished? She has represented Team GB in four Olympic Games, won a gold medal in the Commonwealth Games, set British records for the 5000m and 10,000m on the track, as well as 5km, 10km and half marathon on the road. These are just a few highlights from her impressive career and now she's gearing up for her marathon debut later this month. There's more to come.

It's clear that whatever McColgan is doing behind the scenes – from her training regime to her diet – is paying off. With her long, lean physique, the most frequent accusation she faces is of being anorexic. However, as she herself points out: "Being an elite female athlete is wild. Some people have no comprehension of how much you have to fuel your body to do this type of training. Bunch of clowns."

While it's often distance runners who are hit with the remarks about being "too skinny", McColgan's experience is just one side of the story. Holly Bradshaw, Olympic pole vault silver medallist and International Olympic Committee (IOC) mental health ambassador, knows all too well about the other extreme. Throughout her career, she dealt with comments about being "overweight".

As a teenager, Bradshaw was already making waves in the athletics world. After winning a bronze medal at the 2010 World Under-20 Championships, she was one of Great Britain's brightest stars, preparing for her Olympic debut at the 2012 London Games. For most, it would be an exciting milestone but, for Bradshaw, it was overshadowed by a flood of social media abuse, much of it focused on her body.

"There was a lot of pressure leading into the home Olympics. I got a lot of criticism about the way I looked, especially around my weight," she recalls. "People kept saying I didn't look like the other athletes, and so I was clearly never going to make it. When I jumped to third all-time in the world, I was still called overweight, with too much puppy fat.

"I had just jumped the third-highest ever. If that doesn't show you that what you look like on the outside doesn't matter, then I don't know what does. But, as a 20-year-old, it's hard to believe that when it's all anyone is talking about."

The relentless criticism eventually took its toll and, to shield herself from the hate, Bradshaw made the decision to stop wearing crop tops while competing. Instead, she opted for an all-in-one suit paired with shorts. In pole vaulting, tight clothing is essential to prevent brushing the pole, so this was her only option.

But things didn't get any easier. When it was time for Bradshaw's third Olympic Games, in Tokyo, she found herself facing a dilemma. The official Team GB kit choices included bikini briefs and crop tops, or a high-cut, swimming-costume-style one-piece.

Bradshaw knew that wearing either of these outfits would expose her to more abuse, so she pushed back against the kit. In response, Team GB eventually agreed to adapt the rowing unitard for her, but the underlying injustice still stung. Why, she wondered, should female athletes be forced to show their bodies when their male counterparts competed without having to reveal their stomachs, thighs and bums?

While female track and field athletes have become more accustomed to wearing two-piece outfits, these aren't something most women feel comfortable in, especially under the scrutiny of TV cameras and millions of viewers.

"The comments would say: 'Just imagine how much higher she'd jump if she lost weight?' or, 'Holly Bleasdale [her maiden name] is so unattractive and so unathletic'," adds Bradshaw. "Because I didn't look like many of the other women out there, I was judged for it."

Bradshaw went on to win an Olympic bronze medal in Tokyo, yet that wasn't enough to halt the online abuse.

One of the most painful experiences for her came at the 2022 World Championships in Eugene, after she had to withdraw from the competition due to snapping her pole in the warm-up and landing on her neck. The trolls came for her again and, this time, they blamed her weight for the pole breaking.

"You can get ten abusive comments in a week, but if you were sitting in a room with those ten people, there is absolutely no way they would say those things to your face. It's really cowardly, and it's a horrible, dark side of society," Bradshaw says.

"As an athlete, you're trying to stay focused, but it's upsetting when people pass judgment like that. These people who made those comments after Oregon – 99 per cent of them don't even care about me. They don't know me, so I don't know why they feel the need to say

> **Because I didn't look like many of the other women out there, I was judged for it. It's a horrible, dark side to society**

these things. Elite sport is hard enough as it is, especially in an event like pole vault, which is mentally demanding. Those comments can really get inside your head."

The situations faced by McColgan and Bradshaw are just two from countless examples of this kind of abuse being aimed at female athletes across the board. A simple fix would be to come off social media, but that's easier said than done when having an online presence has become such an important part of an athlete's world.

These platforms serve as spaces to share everything from updates on fitness and training to personal lives and interests, offering a glimpse into the athletes' personalities beyond the sport.

But it's not just a way to connect with fans; it's also an essential tool for securing the brand deals and promotions which help to fund their careers. Today, if you want to be an elite athlete, maintaining an Instagram account isn't optional – it's essential.

Take Georgia Hunter Bell, for example. Since her bronze medal at the Paris Olympic Games, she has seen a surge in followers, reaching 61,000 Instagram fans. As a Nike-sponsored athlete, she's active on social media, continually engaging with her audience. However, that comes with an unfortunate side effect.

"Sometimes I'll have people direct messaging me things and it is something that does need to stop," she says. "It is a really tough one, because it drains a lot of your energy. You only have so much and, when you're trying to focus on winning races, it's tough to respond to every comment and look at them.

"I try to just see it as a compliment, almost. That's what my husband, George, tells me to do. Because, when you get to a certain level, people think they can say what they want, that you're fair game. It's not nice, but it just proves people have got something to be angry about."

What's most concerning about this kind of abuse, now seen as "the norm", is that it's not just hurtful – it can be dangerous. Whether mentally or physically, it can sow the seeds of serious problems.

Even without the impact of social media, eating disorders are already a common problem in sport and can be incredibly difficult to manage. Athletes, especially, are at risk because their diet is such a big part of their training. That focus on food and weight can turn into an obsession, which is where issues start to take root.

Eating disorders are characterised by two key features – disturbed eating habits and disturbed weight control behaviours. Allie Outram, a former GB international runner who is now a BACP Accredited Psychotherapist and Supervisor, knows this struggle all too well.

"In some ways, running was really positive for me and because I really loved it I needed to eat to fuel my running. But it was also intrinsically linked to my eating disorder," she explains.

When there's a real pressure to fit a certain body type, that obsession can bring about harmful behaviours.

Developing an eating disorder is one potential consequence but, if an athlete doesn't get enough calories to support the energy demands of their sport, they are also at risk of RED-S (Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport). While the condition is not always tied to a diagnosed eating disorder, it can be just as dangerous – with symptoms for females including a loss of periods, reduced bone density and decreased immunity.

Outram has seen how common eating disorders can be in athletics. At the age of 16, she ran at the World Schools Cross Country Championships in Beijing, where she was captain of the British team. Of those six athletes, four were dealing with eating disorders.

Social media wasn't a factor back then, but the pressure to look a certain way was still very much there. Outram admits that, as a teenager, she already had a sense of what a "runner's body" should look like – thanks to what she saw on TV. And now, with social media, that comparison has only gotten worse.



RIGHT: Eilish McColgan has been the target of hateful messages



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



LEFT: Georgia Hunter Bell has seen a surge in online followers since her success at the Olympics last summer

> **You're born with the gun in society and it is your cultural and environmental circumstances that pull the trigger. Negative comments could tip someone over the edge**

If social media had been around when she was running, she can only imagine how much worse it would have been.

"I guess you're born with the gun in society and it is your cultural and environmental circumstances that pull the trigger," she says. "So I think if there are negative comments and female body shaming, then that could just be the trigger to tip someone over the edge."

The abuse can leave a lasting impact. As sports psychologist Josephine Perry, who works closely with athletes, explains, she sees the mental struggles and insecurities they face every day.

"In an 800m race, you're halfway through and that is when all those doubts creep into your mind," she says. "It's when it really hurts and the survival part of your brain is thinking you can stop right now.

"And that's when the thoughts creep in. What if I'm not good enough? What if they're judging you? What if my bum looks bigger than it should? What if they can see my cellulite?

"But what we want from athletes is for them to cross the finish line thinking, 'I couldn't have done any more' and they can be really proud of themselves. Then, other people's judgments of whether their knicker height is too high or whether they're too thin become irrelevant."

The problem is that this issue goes way beyond a few negative comments. It has become a culture. So how do we change that? How do we start turning this hateful tide?

There have been some efforts made towards doing just that. The IOC introduced a new AI-powered cyber abuse protection service during the Paris 2024 Olympics – the largest initiative of its kind in sports.

According to the IOC, the system flagged over 152,000 potentially abusive posts and comments, often before they even reached

the athletes. Of those, more than 10,200 were confirmed as abusive and reported for removal, coming from nearly 9000 different accounts.

While this was a step in the right direction, it's important to recognise that the service didn't catch every hateful comment and, of course, the Olympics happen only once every four years. Athletes are constantly competing in other events throughout the year where this kind of protection won't be in place.

Seb Coe, President of World Athletics, has been vocal about the damage caused by online abuse. Ahead of the IOC presidential election, he even called out X owner Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg (founder of Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram), urging them to address the "pond life" abusing female athletes on their platforms. Although Coe didn't win the election, there's still hope that some action might be taken.

Until then, though, the attacks will keeping coming, so what can female athletes do to protect their wellbeing?

Perry offers one technique. "I suggest athletes go into a 'social media bubble' three or four days before an event," she says. "I've even suggested to athletes to get an old Nokia phone so they don't have access to social media. Research shows that scrolling through your phone before a competition can actually harm performance, so finding other ways to distract yourself is key."

Both Bradshaw and Hunter Bell have used this technique to help keep their heads clear, but there is another way that has shown itself to be effective.

"In the last year of my career I started to reply and to call them out," says Bradshaw. "I like how Eilish always does it because it raises awareness of the horrible abuse that athletes are getting. I think as you get older and more mature you want to call them out because these people don't even think about the effect their comments can have."

With social media continuing to be so prominent, we can't ignore the reality that it's time to fight back. There is no quick fix or easy solution to these problems but perhaps the best way to start is with collective action.

Keep the conversation going, challenge these harmful behaviours and stand up for athletes when they speak out. Who knows? It might just start causing that culture to shift.

One thing for sure is that we have to try to shift it – otherwise we risk letting things only get worse. AW



ABOVE: Holly Bradshaw has called out online trolls



PHOTO BY GILLY PHOTOGRAPHY/COROS

"I want to find where my limits are"

Olympic triathlon champion Alex Yee tells **Euan Crumley** why making his marathon debut in London will be about so much more than covering 26.2 miles

Alex Yee vividly remembers the races he would run at his home track in the Ladywell Arena in Lewisham to qualify for the Mini London Marathon and represent his local borough.

Back then, the aspiring youngsters were fighting it out for the right to compete over the closing three miles of the full marathon route, from Old Billingsgate Market to The Mall, and between 2010 and 2015 he achieved the feat four times, twice finishing third in his age group.

A decade and one day on from his final Mini Marathon appearance, the now 27-year-old will complete the circle by lining up on the start line of the main event for the first time. The fact that the venue he first set foot in during his early days with Kent AC has been renamed as the Alex Yee Ladywell Arena perhaps best illustrates just how much life has changed for him in the intervening years.

"He'd be amazed," says Yee, when asked what that teenager would make of his older self's achievements to date. It's an impressive list.

Yee was once mooted as a potential heir to Mo Farah on the track, a British 10,000m champion in 2018 as well as European Cross Country medallist. However, it was only through triathlon that he first discovered his love of running and it's in that multi-sport discipline where his star has shone brightest. He is the most successful Olympic triathlete ever, having won individual gold in the men's event and Mixed Relay bronze in Paris last summer to add to his Mixed Relay gold and individual silver from Tokyo 2020. He was crowned world champion in 2024, too – only the second man to win that title and Olympic gold in the same year – while he is also a two-time Commonwealth gold medallist.

"From 2010 to 2015 my only goal of going to London was to run as fast as I could and have the best time I could with the people around me," he says, casting his mind back. "To start off a sport just for the love of it, and still to be doing that for the same reason, I think is incredibly special."

Those initial encounters with racing on the streets of London were central to Yee's early education as an athlete, though he admits that wasn't necessarily his priority at first.

"I think in 2010 and 2011 most of my excitement probably came from going to Chinatown to have Dim sum after the race and it motivating me to get to the finish line!" he laughs. "To do that last three miles, I think I probably took it for granted for the first few years.

"But, as I got older and started to stay on a little bit [for the main race] afterwards, I began to appreciate that this was more than just a race. After 2012 there was more of an appreciation of sport, of the Olympics, the marathon and what it meant. It was during



I wanted to do something that challenged me and allowed me to grow as an athlete. I also have a deep love for the London Marathon and it's one of my only bucket list races

those years when I started to try to get in that front row to watch the elite guys come past.

"Having done some of the training, now I'm even more in awe of them because of how incredibly hard it is. It's pretty cool to think that I was once one of those people leaning over the barriers, cheering on everyone and hopefully I can be in that position [of being cheered on] as well."

Yee's profile, not to mention his running ability, means that his marathon debut is a particularly intriguing storyline at this year's event. Just as with the Mini Marathon, the idea of learning more about his capabilities is a central theme.

Anyone who witnessed his brilliantly timed late surge to grab Olympic gold ahead of New Zealand's Hayden Wilde back in August might disagree, but Yee insists he has work to do when it comes to his running. With the next Games in Los Angeles not rolling around until 2028, he decided to seize the chance to shake things up a bit.



ABOVE: Alex Yee (1113) competes in the 2013 Mini London Marathon

LEFT: Yee beats Andy Vernon and Chris Thompson to the British 10,000m title in 2018

"To find where my limits are," he says, when asked what he is looking to get out of the experience. "Post-Olympics, I wanted to do something that challenged me and hopefully allowed me to grow as an athlete. I haven't been able to work on my running for five years,



and this felt like the right time to work on that again, but then I also have a deep love for the London Marathon and it's one of my only bucket list races."

As someone who competes in the Olympic or "standard" distance triathlon, it's usually a 10km assignment which Yee has to tackle – immediately after having swum 1.5km and cycled 40km. His marathon mission means he has to run over four times further than normal, but the event in which he has made his name is never far from his thoughts.

"I know that if I do the same thing as I did before, I don't think I'll get the same outcome because, fundamentally, I'm a different person than I was three years ago," he says of this new Olympic training cycle.

"I need to do things slightly differently. Ultimately the goal is to go to LA and to be as competitive as I can there in triathlon but I think doing it in a way where I work on different bits, become a better person and a better athlete, is something that is exciting me at the moment.

"I've been very lucky in triathlon that I've been able to be competitive at the back end of a run on a few occasions, but I have also been left vulnerable on the odd occasion, and I would love to be in a position where I just test my limits and see what I can achieve. Is consistently running under 29 minutes or [around] 28:30 off the bike for 10km possible? What is the limit of my body that I can achieve and what can I find? That's something which keeps me up at night, keeps me excited and keeps me pushing the envelope."

On the afternoon when Yee sits down to chat with *AW*, he admits to feeling a little weary – perhaps not surprising given that the interview takes place not too long after the completion of a running session that included a continuous 30km effort and involved a few pace variations.

"I'm trying to get the best feel for what the marathon will feel like," he says. "There's a little bit of the unknown about it for me, but the more we can make it less of an intimidating distance, the more understanding we have of my physiology and what I can do then hopefully it won't be a scary distance and instead be something which I'll really look forward to. Then the day can be a bit more of a celebration than a bit of a scary fact-finding mission."

Yee's is by no means a conventional marathon training plan. Yes, he is placing a bit more emphasis on his running but he isn't just ignoring the other two triathlon disciplines, either.

PHOTO BY COROS



PHOTO BY GILLY PHOTOGRAPHY/COROS

"I'm doing about five hours of swimming at the moment, eight to nine hours on the bike and then my running volume is probably between nine and 10 hours, so between 80-90 miles," he says of a typical training week at his Loughborough base.

"I'm doing a lot of my running as longer single runs, instead of doing a few smaller double runs, and then I supplement the second aerobic stimulus of the day with a ride or swim. It helps to keep a feel for the swim and the bike, but also provides that extra stimulus that the guys are getting when they're running 120-130 miles a week.

"It's a low volume programme in comparison to guys running crazy distances and it's been interesting to learn and to be a bit unique and a bit different in my preparation. Hopefully I can either pave the way or show people what not to do in preparation for a marathon!"

Yee is a big admirer of a man who has proved himself adept at leading by example in the marathon but it was Eliud Kipchoge who publicly stated his desire to meet with the champion triathlete. The two are due to spend a little time together in London, where no doubt the Kenyan will impart some of his trademark words of wisdom. There are echoes of Kipchoge's philosophical nature in Yee's words, though, when he comes back to the thinking behind his marathon debut.

"I think where we do our most growth is when we don't know stuff about ourselves and we're learning," he says. "Learning is an important part of being an elite athlete, and if you're not doing it, then I don't think that you're able to progress and grow.

"It's been great for me to be able to learn about myself, but also put myself in an environment which I don't know much about. I guess I go into the London Marathon a bit like tens of thousands of other people do, being a novice and experiencing it for the first time, and that's really exciting.

"It's a place where I feel like I'll do my most growth and my most learning and hopefully we'll be able to take that back to triathlon, to running 10,000m on the track, to whatever it may be in a few months' time. Hopefully I'll be able to be a better athlete from it."

Where Yee differs from so many first-time marathon runners, of course, is not just in his athletic pedigree but also his target time, albeit he isn't about to make any outlandish claims.

"If I'm being honest, the goalposts keep shifting week on week," he says about what he might be capable of. "But I would love to be in that 2:08 to 2:09 bracket. I hope that there'll be a lot of British guys around there in the field. I'm sure there will be a few who will try and go quicker, but hopefully that puts me in that competitive domestic field, and I'd love to be a part of that.

"If I can do that then who knows? Maybe I can come back and do another marathon at some point but we'll have to see. I think my potential hopefully sits a little bit higher than what I can achieve in London so hopefully I can show that at some point in the future.

"Pre LA, my mind is fully focused on the triathlon, but I think over this year there may be another opportunity to do a marathon. It's a long season and there are plenty of opportunities during the first year of an Olympic cycle. I don't have the complete answers yet. I'll probably have a few more



ABOVE: Yee produced an astonishing finish to come from behind and win the Olympic triathlon gold medal in Paris last summer



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

> I would love to be in that 2:08 to 2:09 bracket. Hopefully that puts me in a competitive domestic field, and I'd love to be a part of that

answers once I cross that finish line and I either have a hunger for more or a desire to get back to the swim and bike after experiencing that level of pain. I'm really excited to do it and hopefully I can put down a good marker."

That marker should make him the fastest marathon runner in his family by quite some distance. Yee's parents have both run London and that he is about to get his own taste of the event which begins so close to where he grew up – a showpiece that has been part of the fabric of his sporting life – is a particularly enticing prospect.

"Experiencing what I've heard so many other people talk about experiencing, from the atmosphere, to the bands, to the noise," he says of what he is most looking forward to. "I want to soak that up as much as possible, as well as trying to run the best race I can."

This time, covering those final three miles of the marathon route is going to be a rather different experience to 10 years ago.

"I wonder what that last 5km will feel like?" says Yee. "[I won't find that out until] I'm in that last 5km. I'm looking forward to that, in a way. I think that's the best way I can do it – looking forward to that challenge rather than fearing it." AW

Lighting the spark

After his destruction of the world half-marathon record, Jacob Kiplimo's debut over 26.2 miles in London is hotly anticipated, with many expecting him to threaten the two-hour barrier later this month. **George Mallett** speaks to the coach who caught the first glimpse of what this young Ugandan might be capable of

Jacob Kiplimo's detonation of the world half-marathon record in Barcelona earlier this year may have shattered any preconceptions about the limits of human endurance but, for one man based outside of the Italian city of Siena, it didn't come as a great shock.

"For Jacob it's normal," says Giuseppe Giambrone with a smile, nursing a flu which is keeping him at bay from the 25 athletes he looks after in the rolling hills of Tuscany. Seven nations are represented under the roof of a 17th century villa built by the powerful Borghese family which has, over the years, also hosted its own kind of athletics royalty.

Said Aouita used it as a launchpad to world and Olympic titles, Ezekiel Kemboi as a studio to dance victorious on the Olympic steeplechase stage twice. But no one has surprised Giambrone in quite the same way as Kiplimo.

Even with his illness, the Italian has an infectious energy that is hard not to enjoy – and you get the sense it has to go somewhere. In 2014, soon after he formalised the Tuscany camp, he began to look to the next generation. Kenya and Ethiopia were, by then, a hive of scout and agent activity, and he took little interest in getting in on the act. Instead, he says he took out a map and looked at the nations on their borders.

Naturally, he drifted westwards and in early 2014 he found himself in Uganda, buoyed somewhat by his experience coaching the latter part of the career of Ugandan 2004 Olympian Wilson Businei.

Renting a motorbike, Uganda's rolling hills reminded Giambrone of home, even if the packed dirt roads wore a different red hue. For a few weeks he took time to learn the landscape of athletics in the country, assisted by compatriot Flavio Pascalato, who had been living there since the turn of the century. It gave Giambrone the confidence to return with purpose in October 2015.

Kapchorwa, the home of Joshua Cheptegei and before him fellow Olympic champion Stephen Kiprotich lays claim to Uganda's heavyweight running stars, but Giambrone decided to look elsewhere, continuing riding to its east.

Like Kapchorwa, the district of Kween rises on the slopes of Mount Elgon, the extinct volcano that forms a natural border between Kenya and Uganda. Common with the Rift Valley eastwards, its various villages have the advantage of altitude and many of its inhabitants share the same Kalenjin tribe from which the majority of Kenya's greatest athletes take their ancestry.

As scouting locations go, it is a logical hunting ground, but devoid of the same structures and focal points to be found over the border. There are some clusters of athletics

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PHOTO BY FRANCESCA GRANA (SPORTMEDIA)

activity, however, and it helps when one of those involves members of the same family.

Giambrone was introduced to four brothers, each displaying their own individual promise. All shared the same father in Peter Chebet and all displayed significant potential at mountain running, a practice popular in those parts for obvious reasons.

Robert Chemonges was the oldest, having just turned 18 at the time and was leading the charge, already being pushed by a sibling two years his junior.

Victor Kiplangat was, in many ways, the star of the quartet and would win the World Mountain Running title in 2017. Chemonges would claim one of his own the following year. One year younger and still finding his feet was Kiplimo, with the then 13-year-old Oscar Chelimo completing the foursome.

It didn't take long for Giambrone to figure out that he had some talent on his hands – talent that he believed would be best nurtured in the undistracted confines of his San Rocco a Pilli camp. He broached the idea of legally adopting the four and taking them to Siena to continue their development.

It is generally the rule that the top Ugandans have preferred to remain training within their borders. As Cheptegei told me before his testing marathon debut in Valencia: "Uganda always and always". Even Kiprotich didn't stray too far, moving a few hundred miles east to Kaptagat in Kenya.

In an hour's conversation with Giambrone, however, you can see how he could have sold his vision to Chebet, even if the pair's respective lack of English may have led that to being a long and sometimes frustrating conversation. Enough clarity was found to see the three eldest begin a first full year of training in Tuscany in 2016. Chelimo, deemed too young at the time, would arrive one year later.

Many things were different in Italy. There was the attention to science, onsite masseurs, doctors and lactic testing, while the climate is generally a few degrees warmer and without the rains that can so regularly cause chaos to Ugandan training schedules.

However, many similarities remained. The four cooked their own Ugandan style food, specially imported for them – "The only additions pasta and olive oil, this is good for athletes," says Giambrone – and the terrain for training is similarly sapping, with the ups and downs of the Italian countryside faintly mimicking the foothills of Mount Elgon. The only major difference is a significant drop in altitude for most of the year, their camp being at around 300m above sea level.

LEFT: Jacob Kiplomo celebrates smashing the half-marathon world record earlier this year

ABOVE: Giuseppe Giambrone in conversation with a young Kiplimo and another athlete during a visit to Uganda

Giambrone was introduced to four brothers, each displaying their own individual promise. All shared the same father in Peter Chebet and all displayed significant potential



PHOTOS BY FRANCESCA GRANA (SPORTMEDIA)

You could get Giambrone to write a whole book on what he perceives to be the benefits of a warmer climate over higher altitude but that's a story for another day.

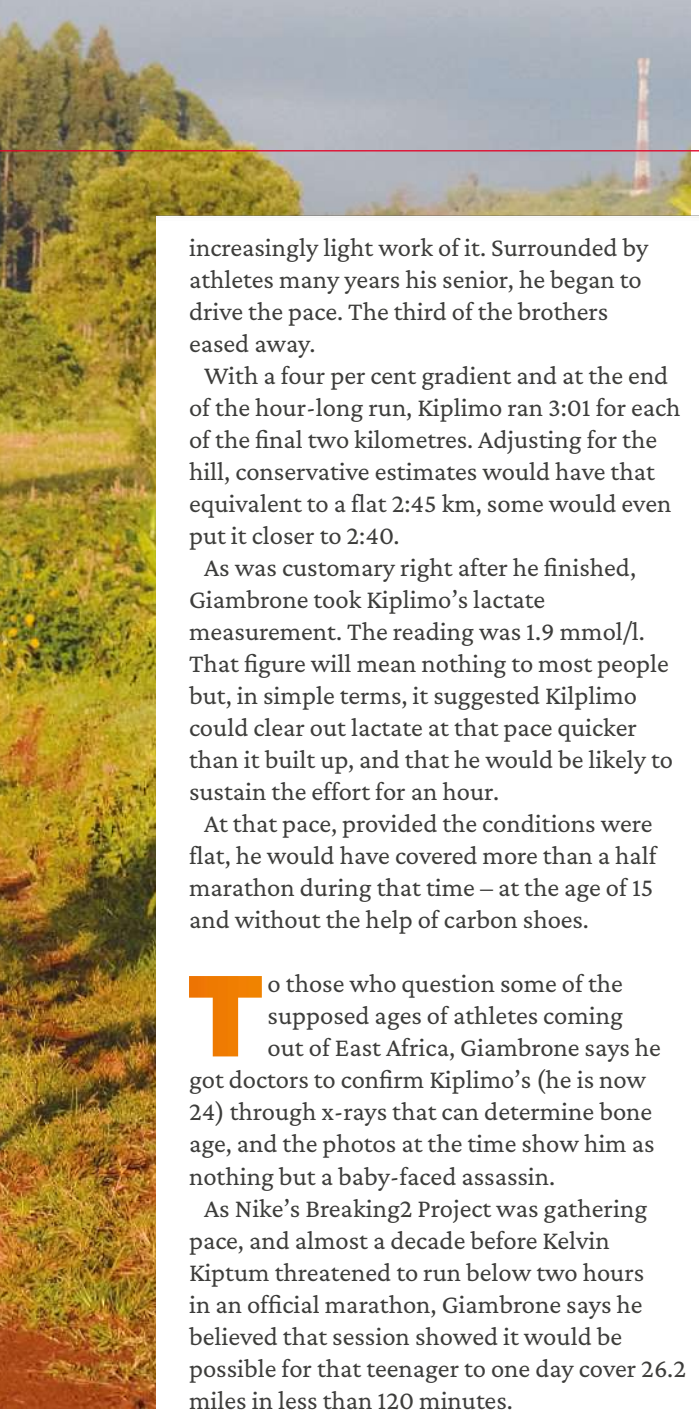
On their arrival in Siena, Chemonges and Kiplangat, perhaps by virtue of their age, were the more established athletes, but things changed quickly. Still early on into their stay a 15-year-old Kiplimo started to step up in a way Giambrone had never seen before and has never seen since.

A staple for the Italian is a one-hour progressive run, over a testing course which film fans will recognise from the original *Gladiator* movie. It features smooth rises and gentle falls on compacted trails and light tarmac, flanked by uninterrupted fields of wheat and olive trees.

With temperatures of at least 20 degrees centigrade all year round – and more like 28 in the summer – nothing about the setting or the run itself is easy. Nevertheless, six months into his stay in April 2016, Kiplimo was making

> **I spoke with people and said in the future 1:58, 1:59 in the marathon is possible but Jacob was only 15 years old**





increasingly light work of it. Surrounded by athletes many years his senior, he began to drive the pace. The third of the brothers eased away.

With a four per cent gradient and at the end of the hour-long run, Kiplimo ran 3:01 for each of the final two kilometres. Adjusting for the hill, conservative estimates would have that equivalent to a flat 2:45 km, some would even put it closer to 2:40.

As was customary right after he finished, Giambrone took Kiplimo's lactate measurement. The reading was 1.9 mmol/l. That figure will mean nothing to most people but, in simple terms, it suggested Kilplimo could clear out lactate at that pace quicker than it built up, and that he would be likely to sustain the effort for an hour.

At that pace, provided the conditions were flat, he would have covered more than a half marathon during that time – at the age of 15 and without the help of carbon shoes.

To those who question some of the supposed ages of athletes coming out of East Africa, Giambrone says he got doctors to confirm Kiplimo's (he is now 24) through x-rays that can determine bone age, and the photos at the time show him as nothing but a baby-faced assassin.

As Nike's Breaking2 Project was gathering pace, and almost a decade before Kelvin Kiptum threatened to run below two hours in an official marathon, Giambrone says he believed that session showed it would be possible for that teenager to one day cover 26.2 miles in less than 120 minutes.

"I spoke with people and said in the future 1:58, 1:59 in the marathon is possible but Jacob was only 15 years old," says the Italian.

A few months later, Kiplimo finished third over 10,000m at the World Under-20 Championships, still three months ahead of his 16th birthday. His time of 27:26.68 would sit seventh on the UK all-time senior's list, and it's worth noting that he's taken almost a minute off it since. At the Rio 2016 Games, he became the youngest ever Olympian from Uganda, finishing 11th of 25 in heat one of the 5000m. What came next – two World Cross Country titles, Olympic and world 10,000m bronze and two Commonwealth gold medals – is more widely known and remembered.

Though Kiplimo still refers to him affectionately as "father", he left Giambrone in 2019. The Ugandan wanted to return to the country of his birth, while his mentor is adamant he won't coach remotely.

Running in the family

Jacob Kiplimo and his brothers

ROBERT CHEMONGES

2:09:05 Marathon Best (Porto, 2018)
2018: World Mountain Running Championships gold

VICTOR KIPLANGAT

2:05:09 Marathon Best (Hamburg, 2022)
2017: World Mountain Running Championships – 1st
2022: Commonwealth Games Marathon gold
2023: World Championships Marathon gold

JACOB KIPLIMO

World Half Marathon record holder (56:42)
2024: World Cross Country Senior Men's gold
2023: World Cross Country Senior Men's gold
2022: World Championships 10,000m bronze; Commonwealth Games 5000m and 10,000m gold
2021: Olympic Games 10,000m bronze
2020: World Half Marathon Championships gold
2018: World U20 Championships 10,000m silver; Commonwealth Games 10,000m bronze
2016: World U20 Championships 10,000m silver

OSCAR CHELIMO

2022: World Championships 5000m bronze
2019: World Cross Country Championships U20 bronze

ABOVE, LEFT: A young Jacob Kiplimo leads a group including Victor Kiplangat (blue jacket)

LEFT: Kiplimo, far right in Mllan shirt, and Giuseppe Gambrone are joined by fellow athletes in Uganda

The Italian says he likes to have complete clarity on how an athlete is training and also be able to ensure they aren't receiving outside help in the form of performance enhancing drugs. Needless to say he is not casting aspersions on Kiplimo's current set-up, just espousing his own coaching preference in general.

The half-marathon world-record-holder is coached instead by fellow Italian Iacopo Brasi and on April 27 will take to the streets of London. A world-class field, almost exactly nine years to the day when he first convinced Giambrone that he could break the two-hour barrier, Kiplimo may well aim to do it on debut. Not that Giambrone necessarily expects it. "The first marathon 2:01, a second marathon, flat, 1:59!" he chuckles to himself.

When talking about Kiplimo, the unprecedented starts to turn ordinary in a world of science fiction numbers. Kiptum's world record stands at 2:00:35. Let's see if Kiplimo can fulfil that road racing potential he demonstrated to his first mentor almost a decade ago. AW

Just some of the storylines to keep an eye out for this month in Boston and London

Marathon markers



A HAT-TRICK FOR HELLEN?

Not since Fatima Roba, between 1997 and 1999, has a woman won the Boston Marathon three times in a row, but it's that feat which Hellen Obiri will be looking to match on April 21.

Just four women have won three consecutive Boston Marathon Open Division titles – Bobbi Gibb, Sara Mae Berman, Uta Pippig and Roba.

After making her debut over 26.2 miles in 2022 with sixth place in New York, the former 5000m world champion won Boston at the first attempt and has ruled the roost since.

She was victorious again last year, before finishing third in the OIympic marathon and coming second in New York – an event she also won in 2023.

Ethiopia's Amane Beriso and Yalemzerf Yehualaw have the fastest PBs in the field, but Boston's hilly course makes for tactical battles rather than all-out pace. Beriso, the reigning world champion, was second in 2023.

DID LEMMA LEARN HIS LESSON?

A number of the major contenders in Boston last year are back for more, with five of the top seven from 2024 due to toe the start line in the men's race. Sisay Lemma, with a PB of 2:01:48 is comfortably the fastest in the field and will be defending his title, but the Ethiopian will also be looking to show that he has learned some valuable lessons from his experience of 12 months ago.

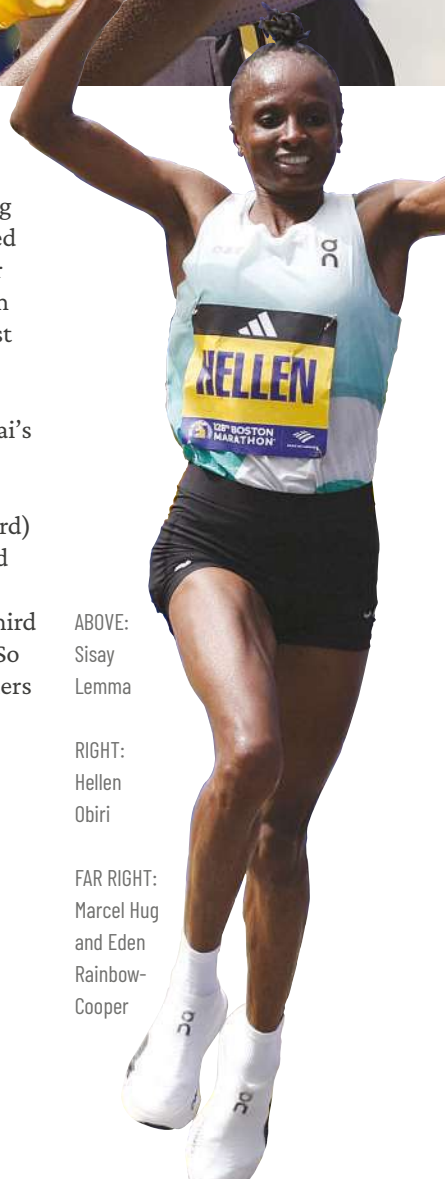
Last April he had appeared well set to break the Boston course record of 2:03:02, set by Kenyan Geoffrey Mutai in 2011, having shot into an early lead. Five miles was passed in 23:12, six seconds faster than anyone ever had at Boston, while his 28:28 split for 10km was 40 seconds faster than the previous best on the course and he hit halfway in 60:19 – another Boston record.

Lemma was still 48 seconds ahead of Mutai's schedule when he passed the 20-mile mark in 63:48 but the course (and the impact of running the largely downhill first half so hard) bit back and at 35km he had fallen off record pace, eventually coming home in 2:06:17.

Two-time Boston winner and last year's third placer, Kenya's Evans Chebet, also returns. So too do the 2024 fourth and fifth place finishers John Korir and Albert Korir.

LEADING THE HOME CHARGE

The Boston Marathon always takes place on Patriots' Day, an American holiday to commemorate the first battles of the revolutionary war. There will be particular poignancy to that connection this year, given that this is the 250th anniversary of those battles.



ABOVE: Sisay Lemma

RIGHT: Hellen Obiri

FAR RIGHT: Marcel Hug and Eden Rainbow-Cooper

In terms of the American contingent in the elite races, 2018 Boston champion Des Linden competes in the event for the 12th time and is part of the fastest ever US women's field at Boston, with 14 of those athletes boasting personal bests under 2:26.

On the men's side, Conner Mantz and Clayton Young will lead the home charge, having finished eight and ninth at the Olympic marathon respectively, and then both finishing in the top 10 in New York. Mantz also recently broke the US half marathon record with a run of 59:15 in Houston.

EYES ON THE WHEELCHAIR PRIZES

It's 50 years since Bob Hall became the first wheelchair finisher in Boston history and in 2025 the prize pot has been increased for the elite wheelchair competitors. The champion's prize has risen from $40,000 to $50,000, while there is also an incentive of $50,000 if either course record is broken.

Marcel Hug and Eden Rainbow-Cooper defend their titles. The Swiss won Boston for the seventh time last year in a course record of 1:15:33 that is also a world best, while Rainbow-Cooper created her own piece of history by becoming the first British woman ever to win the wheelchair race, breaking the tape in 1:35:11.

Four-time winner and women's course record-holder Manuela Schär of Switzerland is also competing, while her fellow Swiss, Catherine Debrunner, makes her Boston debut after a 2024 that included six Paralympic medals (five gold), including victory in the marathon. Debrunner is also a champion of the Berlin, London, Chicago, and New York City Marathons.



BOSTON MARATHON, APRIL 21

Elite fields*

Women (selected)
Hellen OBIRI (KEN, personal best 2:21:38)
Amane BERISO (ETH, 2:14:58)
Yalemzerf YEHUALAW (ETH, 2:16:52)
Irine CHEPTAI (KEN, 2:17:51)
Joan MELLY (ROU, 2:18:04)
Keira D'AMATO (USA, 2:19:12)
Rahma TUSA (ETH, 2:19:33)
Edna KIPLAGAT (KEN, 2:19:50)*
Buze DIRIBA (ETH, 2:20:22)
Mary NGUGI (KEN, 2:20:22)
Sara HALL (USA, 2:20:32)*
Bedatu HIRPA (ETH, 2:21:09)
Calli HAUGER-THACKERY (GBR, 2:21:34)
Emma BATES (USA, 2:22:10)
Sharon CHEROP (KEN, 2:22:28)*
Desiree LINDEN (USA, 2:22:38)*
Sharon LOKEDI (KEN, 2:22:45)
Viola CHEPNGENO (KEN, 2:23:23)
Sara VAUGHN (USA, 2:23:24)
Lindsay FLANAGAN (USA, 2:23:31)
Stacy NDIWA (KEN, 2:23:42)
Gabi ROOKER (USA, 2:24:29)
Kellyn TAYLOR (USA, 2:24:29)
Dakotah POPEHN (USA, 2:24:40)
Jackie GAUGHAN (USA, 2:24:40)
Nell ROJAS (USA, 2:24:51)
Cynthia LIMO (KEN, 2:25:10)
Lily PARTRIDGE (GBR, 2:25:12)
Angie ORJUELA (COL, 2:25:35)
Jess McCLAIN (USA, 2:25:46)
Lauren HAGANS (USA, 2:25:47)
Tristin COLLEY (USA, 2:25:58)
Annie FRISBIE (USA, 2:26:18)
Stephanie BRUCE (USA, 2:28:41)*
Anne-Marie BLANEY (USA, 2:29:25)
Masters (40+) athlete

Men (selected)
Sisay LEMMA (ETH, 2:01:48)
John KORIR (KEN, 2:02:44)
Evans CHEBET (KEN, 2:03:00)
Cybrian KOTUT (KEN, 2:03:22)
Haymanot ALEW (ETH, 2:03:31)
Daniel MATEIKO (KEN, 2:04:24)
Alphonce Felix SIMBU (TAN, 2:04:38)
Lelisa DESISA (ETH, 2:04:45)
Victor KIPLANGAT (UGA, 2:05:09)
Asefa BOKI (ETH, 2:05:40)
Tebello RAMAKONGOANA (LES, 2:06:18)
Abel KIPCHUMBA (KEN, 2:06:49)
Albert KORIR (KEN, 2:06:57)
Tsegay WELDLIBANOS (ERI, 2:07:35)
Patrick TIERNAN (AUS, 2:07:45)
Conner MANTZ (USA, 2:07:47)
Clayton YOUNG (USA, 2:08:00)
Rory LINKLETTER (CAN, 2:08:01)
CJ ALBERTSON (USA, 2:08:17)
Amanuel MESEL (ERI, 2:08:17)
Yemane HAILSELASSIE (ERI, 2:08:25)
Erenjia JIA (CHN, 2:08:32)
Zach PANNING (USA, 2:09:16)
Colin BENNIE (USA, 2:09:38)
Reed FISCHER (USA, 2:10:14)
Tesfu TEWELDE (ERI, 2:10:21)
Wesley KIPTOO (KEN, 2:10:28)
Johannes MOTSCHMANN (GER, 2:10:39)
Nathan MARTIN (USA, 2:10:45)
Ryan FORD (USA, 2:11:08)
Colin MICKOW (USA, 2:11:22)
Turner WILEY (USA, 2:11:55)
Yemane HAILESELASSIE (ERI, 2:11:59)
Robert MIRANDA (USA, 2:12:07)
Charlie SWEENEY (USA, 2:12:23)
JP FLAVIN (USA, 2:12:34)
Joseph WHELAN (USA, 2:13:39)
Ilie CORNESCHI (ROU, 2:13:39)
Donnie COWART (USA, 2:13:39)
Lyle O'BRIEN (USA, 2:13:58)
Erik LINDEN (USA, 2:14:15)
Ryan EILER (USA, 2:14:22)
Josh KALAPOS (USA, 2:14:26)
Ben KENDELL (USA, 2:15:11)
Jacob HESLINGTON (USA, 2:15:12)
Primoz KOBE (SLO, 2:14:56)*
Louis SERAFINI (USA, 2:14:59)
Thomas TOTH (CAN, 2:15:09)
Tim McGOWAN (USA, 2:15:40)
Andrew BOWMAN (USA, 2:15:50)
Mason JONES (USA, 2:15:54)
Yudai FUKUDA (JPN, 2:15:57)
Mitch AMMONS (USA, 2:16:01)
Hiroaki FURUKAWA (JPN, 2:16:14)
Muktar EDRIS (ETH Debut)
Barry KEANE (IRL Debut)

Wheelchair Men (selected)
Marcel HUG (SUI)
Josh CASSIDY (CAN)
Aaron PIKE (USA)
Johnboy SMITH (GBR)
Daniel ROMANCHUK (USA)
Kota HOKINOUE (JPN)
Rafael Botello JIMENEZ (ESP)
David WEIR (GBR)
Patrick MONAHAN (IRL)
Sho WATANABE (JPN)
Hermin GARIC (USA)
Jeyna SENBETA (USA)
Jetze PLAT (NED)
Simon LAWSON (GBR)
Sean FRAME (GBR)

Wheelchair Women (selected)
Eden RAINBOW-COOPER (GBR)
Susannah SCARONI (USA)
Manuela SCHAR (SUI)
Tatyana McFADDEN (USA)
Catherine DEBRUNNER (SUI)
Marie Emmanuelle Noemi ALPHONSE (MRI)
Christie DAWES (AUS)
Madison DE ROZARIO (AUS)
Patricia EACHUS (SUI)
Aline Dos Santos ROCHA (BRA)
Vanessa Cristina DE SOUZA (BRA)
Michelle WHEELER (USA)
Yen HOANG (USA)

information correct at time of going to print

WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

This will be the 45th edition of the London Marathon and the organisers have pulled out all the stops to put together elite fields of the highest quality.

Last October, Ruth Chepngetich sent shockwaves through global marathon running when she destroyed the women's world record with a time of 2:09:56 in Chicago. The Kenyan will form part of a women's field that, for the first time ever, will feature three starters who have run faster than 2:14.

Olympic champion and 2023 London winner Sifan Hassan, as well as former world record-holder Tigst Assefa, the second-fastest woman in history, will also be lining up, as will 2021 London winner Joyciline Jepkosgei and defending champion Peres Jepchirchir.

MUTISO'S MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB

We have examined the credentials of marathon debutant and half marathon world record-holder Jacob Kiplimo on p54, but the rest of the men's field is crammed with experience of excelling over 26.2 miles.

Kenya's Alexander Mutiso will defend the title he won after an epic battle with Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia 12 months ago, but he will be up against competition of the stiffest variety.

As if one legendary athlete in the shape of Bekele (competing again in London this year) was not enough, the former world record-holder and four-time London winner Eliud Kipchoge is back, too.

Sabastian Sawe of Kenya, who ran the fifth-fastest time in history when winning Valencia in December in 2:02:05 on his marathon debut also looks ready to mount a major challenge, while you can also add Olympic champion Tamirat Tola into the mix. New York champion Abdi Nageeye is also one of five national marathon record-holders in the men's field.

A FOND FAREWELL?

Could this be the last time we see two distance running titans, in the form of Kenenisa Bekele and Eliud Kipchoge, facing off in the same race? Both are very much in the latter part of their extraordinary careers and, though they seem to have become adept at holding back the march of time, it would be wise to appreciate every chance we get to see this medal-laden pair in action.







LOCAL HEROES

Given his third-place finish in London, and following that up with fourth in the Olympic marathon last year, excitement had been building around British athlete Emile Cairess and what he might be capable of. An injury problem means we'll have to wait for his follow-up but there will still be an intriguing race among the home athletes fighting it out to be the British champion, while there

TOP: Ruth Chepngetich is the current world record-holder

ABOVE: Kenenisa Bekele and Alexander Mutiso do battle

LEFT: Mahamed Mahamed is the fastest Brit in the field

RIGHT: Sammi Kinghorn is making her first London Marathon appearance

is an added dimension given the fact that the window for World Championships selection closes on May 4.

Mahamed Mahamed had a race to remember in 2024, finishing fourth, and is now the fastest Brit in the field. Phil Sesemann is expected to push him all the way, while Alex Yee has high expectations on his debut and there will also be experienced athletes such as Jonny Mellor, Dewi Griffiths and Weynay Ghebresilasie on the start line.

The women's race will see the welcome return of Charlotte Purdue, who was forced to make a late withdrawal from the Olympics last year due to an ankle injury. Rose Harvey tends to do well in London, while Eilish McColgan is desperate to make her long-awaited debut over 26.2 miles. European Indoor 1500m medallist Holly Archer, who is making a name for herself in the fitness discipline of Hyrox, is also tackling the marathon for the first time.

KINGHORN BACK WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Many of the main contenders in the wheelchair races will be arriving in London straight after competing in Boston, but a new face on the Blackheath start line will be the Paralympic T53 100m champion Sammi Kinghorn.

The 29-year-old last raced over 26.2 miles when finishing fourth at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, but this marathon appearance marks a full circle moment for the Scot, whose first ever race came at the 2012 Mini London Marathon, where she finished second.

Her fellow British Paralympian Nathan Maguire, who came fourth in the 400m and 800m in Paris, is also making his marathon debut.



TAKING IT TO THE MASSES

London Marathon organisers are expecting to be able to celebrate a world record of a different kind come April 27. The event is on course to feature 56,000 people, which would beat the record of 55,646 for the most participants in a marathon,

LONDON MARATHON, APRIL 27

Elite fields

Men
Alexander MUTISO (KEN, personal best 2:03:11)
Eliud KIPCHOGE (KEN, 2:01:09)
Kenenisa BEKELE (ETH, 2:01:41)
Sabastian SAWE (KEN, 2:02:05)
Timothy KIPLAGAT (KEN, 2:02:55)
Milkesa MENGESHA (ETH, 2:03:17)
Tamirat TOLA (ETH, 2:03:39)
Mohamed ESA (ETH, 2:04:39)
Abdi NAGEEYE (NED, 2:04:45)
Hillary KIPKOECH (KEN, 2:04:45)
Amanal PETROS (GER, 2:04:58)
Sondre Nordstad MOEN (NOR, 2:05:48)
Yemaneberhan CRIPPA (ITA, 2:06:06)
Andrew BUCHANAN (AUS, 2:06:22)
Mahamed MAHAMED (GBR, 2:07:05)
Brett ROBINSON (AUS, 2:07:31)
Jacob Sommer SIMONSEN (DEN, 2:07:51)
Philip SESEMANN (GBR, 2:08:02)
Adam LIPSCHITZ (RSA, 2:08:54)
Jonathan MELLOR (GBR, 2:09:06)
Dewi GRIFFITHS (GBR, 2:09:49)
Weynay GHEBRESILASIE (GBR, 2:09:50)
Jake SMITH (GBR, 2:11:00)
Jack RAYNER (AUS, 2:11:06)
Marc SCOTT (GBR, 2:11:19)
Kevin SALVANO (USA, 2:11:26)
Luke CALDWELL (GBR, 2:11:33)
Marcelo LAGUERA (MEX, 2:11:54)
Dan NASH (GBR, 2:12:59)
Andrew HEYES (GBR, 2:13:52)
Alexander LEPRETRE (GBR, 2:15:01)
David BISHOP (GBR, 2:15:19)
Logan SMITH (GBR, 2:15:49)
William MYCROFT (GBR, 2:15:54)
James HOAD (GBR, 2:16:29)
Alex MILNE (GBR, 2:16:30)
Chris THOMAS (GBR, 2:16:32)
Carl AVERY (GBR, 2:17:01)
Sean HOGAN (GBR, 2:17:02)
Jacob KIPLIMO (UGA, Debut)
Alex YEE (GBR, Debut)
Jonathan DAVIES (GBR, Debut)
Jacob ALLEN (GBR, Debut)
Jack ROWE (GBR, Debut)

Elite Women
Peres JEPCHIRCHIR (KEN, 2:16:16)
Ruth CHEPNGETICH (KEN, 2:09:56)
Tigst ASSEFA (ETH, 2:11:53)
Sifan HASSAN (NED, 2:13:44)
Joyciline JEPKOSGEI (KEN, 2:16:24)
Megertu ALEMU (ETH, 2:16:34)
Stella CHESANG (UGA, 2:18:26)
Haven Hailu DESSE (ETH, 2:19:29)
Susanna SULLIVAN (USA, 2:21:56)
Charlotte PURDUE (GBR, 2:22:17)
Sofiia YAREMCHUK (ITA, 2:23:16)
Rose HARVEY (GBR, 2:23:21)
Fatima Ezzahra GARDADI (MAR, 2:24:12)
Philippa BOWDEN (GBR, 2:25:47)
Emily DURGIN (USA, 2:26:46)
Molly BOOKMYER (USA, 2:28:52)
Louise SMALL (GBR, 2:29:33)
Eilish McCOLGAN (GBR, Debut)
Holly ARCHER (GBR, Debut)

Men Wheelchair
Marcel HUG (SUI)
Rafael BOTELLO JIMENEZ (ESP)
Sean FRAME (GBR)
Kota HOKINOUE (JPN)
Jake LAPPIN (AUS)
Simon LAWSON (GBR)
Nathan MAGUIRE (GBR)
Ludwig MALTER (AUT)
Michael McCABE (GBR)
Patrick MONAHAN (IRL)
Hiroki NISHIDA (JPN)
Aaron PIKE (USA)
Jetze PLAT (NED)
Samuel RIZZO (AUS)
Daniel ROMANCHUK (USA)
Geert SCHIPPER (NED)
Jeyna SENBETA (USA)
Brian SIEMAN (USA)
John Boy SMITH (GBR)
Tomoki SUZUKI (JPN)
Sho WATANABE (JPN)
David WEIR (GBR)

Women wheelchair
Catherine DEBRUNNER (SUI)
Noemi ALPHONSE (MRI)
Christie DAWES (AUS)
Madison DE ROZARIO (AUS)
Vanessa DE SOUZA (BRA)
Patricia EACHUS (SUI)
Yen HOANG (USA)
Jade JONES-HALL (GBR)
Sammi KINGHORN (GBR)
Tatyana McFADDEN (USA)
Merle MENJE (GER)
Tsubasa NAKAMINE (JPN)
Eden RAINBOW-COOPER (GBR)
Aline ROCHA (BRA)
Susannah SCARONI (USA)
Manuela SCHÄR (SUI)
Wakako TSUCHIDA (JPN)
Michelle WHEELER (USA)

Follow the event build-up and race day action via athleticsweekly.com and the AW social media channels



The under-17 women's race starting from Horse Guards Parade last year

PICTURE: JASON LUDLOW/LONDON MARATHON EVENTS



Mini marathon, MAXIMUM impact

As London's younger sibling prepares to celebrate its 40th edition, organisers are aiming to grow it to help not just unearth and nurture the next generation of athletics talent but create a healthier future, writes Tim Adams



Think of the London Marathon and it's likely that one of the first images to pop into your head will be one of a stream of runners pouring down The Mall towards the hallowed finish line, with Buckingham Palace providing a spectacular backdrop.

Covering those closing yards – the end of the route was moved from Westminster Bridge in 1994 – is an unforgettable moment for anyone who has been lucky enough to experience it and it has inspired countless people down the years to lace up their shoes.

The same could be said for the event's younger sibling, the Mini London Marathon, which has borne witness to the early stages of some of the finest careers in recent British athletics history.

This year marks its 40th edition and organisers are marking the special occasion by inviting previous championship athletes back to take part in a "40th wave" around the 2.6km course, as well as celebrating the achievements of the youngsters involved.

The list of former competitors at the event reads like a who's who of British middle and long distance running, including athletes such as Keely Hodgkinson, Mo Farah, Josh Kerr, Jake Wightman, Laura Muir, David Weir, Hannah Cockroft, Alex Yee and Alistair Brownlee, to name just a few.

"You've got an unbelievable alumni that includes previous winners and participants," says Hugh Brasher, CEO of London Marathon Events. "Some of the athletes that didn't even win the Mini London Marathon went on to secure Olympic gold medals.

"There are so many names to choose from but more recently I think of an athlete like Innes FitzGerald. She was crowned a Mini Marathon champion [in 2022] and has gone on to represent Great Britain at the 2025 European Indoor Championships and win international medals at junior level as well."

The Mini Marathon began in 1986, and in its original guise it took place on the morning of marathon race day, covering the closing three miles of the marathon route and with the action very much focused on the elite competition between junior athletes.

Much has changed about it in recent years, however. Mirroring the main event, there is still that elite element to proceedings at the head of the fields, but now it is open to all and, since 2022 it has been given more room to



ABOVE: Multiple Paralympic champion Hannah Cockroft and Olympic 800m champion Keely Hodgkinson at the Mini Marathon

> **Some of the athletes that didn't even win the Mini London Marathon went on to secure Olympic gold medals. There are so many names to choose from**

breathe, taking place the day before the 26.2-mile extravaganza.

The Mini Marathon provides thousands of youngsters with the opportunity to experience the feeling of running, walking or wheeling themselves along those famous roads. Whether they complete one mile (for children in reception to year seven) or 2.6km (for those in years four to 12), participants set off from Horse Guards Parade and finish on The Mall.

Mass participation figures have sky-rocketed and the figure of 8257 finishers from 2023 rose to over 13,000 last year.

Not only is it free for schools to enter but title sponsor TCS donates £10 – which can contribute towards things like computer or sports equipment – for each pupil that finishes.

Such is the event's growing popularity that numbers have had to be restricted to 40 pupils per school for this year's edition, with the aim to give more schools across the UK an opportunity to get involved. Organisers are expecting over 18,000 finishers this month.

"Evolving the Mini London Marathon was very much something we started looking at around 2018," adds Brasher. "It was a semblance of an idea of: 'Why can't we make the Mini London Marathon something bigger and better?'

"We wanted to keep the essence of elite competition but what else could we do? How could we do it? That's when we had conversations with TCS as a sponsor and they just loved the whole idea of kids getting rewards, whether that be computer or sports equipment.

"We then started looking at schools in more underserved communities and those where sport wasn't intrinsically part of a typical day. The first year we put this new event on was 2022 but that was in the midst of the Tube strike, which rather affected the numbers!"

Mini London Marathon organisers are now targeting 50,000 finishers by 2030, which wouldn't be far off the estimated figure for the full London Marathon itself this year.

"Given we're a few years into this new format, schools are starting to see the Mini London Marathon as a real fixture in the calendar," says



Innes FitzGerald taking under-17 victory in 2022





Ben Cooper, Event Lead at the Mini London Marathon. "They will have these dates in the diary now. Schools are coming back to the mass event year-on-year and they're bringing different groups of children.

"It's a pretty unique experience, especially for kids who haven't been involved in a mass participation event as well. They may have never been on a start line and they almost certainly haven't run in front of Buckingham Palace on closed streets."

Both Brasher and Cooper also stress the importance of making sure that the positive impacts of the Mini London Marathon aren't just felt on the day itself but across the year. The ambition is for this to be a catalyst that helps more children to be active and, given some alarming recent statistics, there is a pressing need for that aspiration to become a reality.

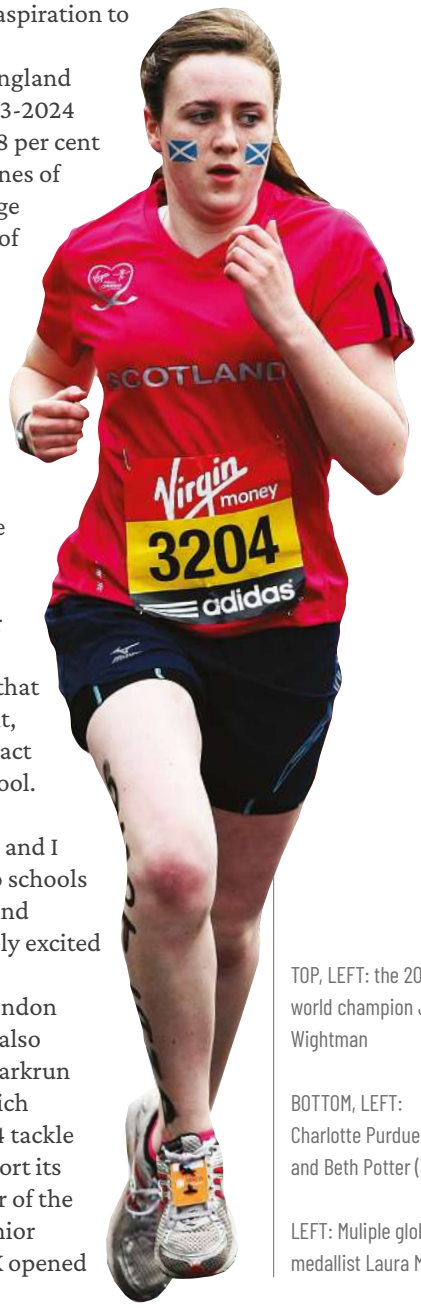
In December, Sport England stated that, for the 2023-2024 academic year, just 47.8 per cent of children met guidelines of taking part in an average of 60 minutes or more of sport/physical activity every day.

"We want to build this out so there's year-round activity because of the chronic inactivity of kids in schools," says Cooper. "It has to make a difference in the longer-term.

"They're getting their £10 per finisher and they're starting to put that back into PE equipment, so kids can see the impact on what they do at school.

"There's a buzz of participation around it and I know, when we go into schools and meet both pupils and teachers, they are hugely excited about the event."

Two years ago, the London Marathon Foundation also gave £1.19m to junior parkrun – a weekly event in which children aged four to 14 tackle a 2km course – to support its growth. In the first year of the partnership, 51 new junior parkruns across the UK opened





TOP, LEFT: the 2022 world champion Jake Wightman

BOTTOM, LEFT: Charlotte Purdue (3133) and Beth Potter (3205)

LEFT: Muliple global medallist Laura Muir



and a total of more than one million children took part.

"The singular purpose of London Marathon Events and the London Marathon Foundation is to inspire activity," says Brasher. "We believe there's a real ecosystem of: 'Start with the Daily Mile, do junior parkrun, then do the Mini Marathon and after that the English Schools Championships'.

"The more we can build that base pyramid, then the more people we can inspire into road running and athletics, creating a better sport for everyone. We're trying to create a virtuous circle to get kids active."

The other initiative that both Brasher and Cooper point to is the Mini London Marathon in Schools. Born out of the pandemic, participants are invited to run, jog, walk, wheel or be guided around a two-mile course within their school setting (this year's timeframe is from April 22 to May 2). Since launching in 2020, more than one million children have finished the event, with each pupil receiving a certificate and every school receiving a trophy for being involved. The expectation this year is that, on top of the 18,000 people running in the heart of London, more than 400,000 will take part in physical activity locally.

"There's something that's almost unquantifiable about seeing the faces of kids when they cross the finish line, whether that be on The Mall or at their school," says Cooper.

"There is such absolute elation when they finish because it is a huge achievement. It's priceless. You never quite know what's going to stay with a child when they grow up.

"You do think: 'This is going to stay with them forever' and with a bit of luck it will have a really positive impact on their future." AW

Above: Reigning world 1500m champion Josh Kerr (3184) tackles the streets of London



Far from finished

Jo Pavey talks to **Jason Henderson** about inspiring young athletes in her husband's training group, avoiding injuries and why a masters comeback appeals to her at the age of 51



LEFT: Jo Pavey on her way to European Championship gold in the 10,000m in Zurich

It is just over a decade since Jo Pavey stormed to the European 10,000m title in Zurich. The plucky style of her victory and the fact she was almost 41 years old at the time struck a chord with the public and later that year she placed third in the BBC Sports Personality of the Year awards. "I was known for being old," she says. "Old, but fast."

It was one of the high points of an amazing career. She won 10,000m bronze at the 2007 World Championships, Commonwealth Games medals in 2006 and 2014 and at Rio 2016 became the first British runner in a track event to compete at five Olympics.

Now aged 51, she is a busy mum of two. Her performances have naturally slowed in recent years, but she has been inspired by seeing results achieved by fellow veteran athletes and is toying with the idea of seeing what she can do on the masters athletics scene.

"I'm really motivated to get my fitness levels up," she says. "I feel like I spend a lot of time doing things involved with running but I need to make sure I get out there and do more myself. I'm still really motivated and I'm still loving it, definitely."

Pavey is talking to *AW* at Exeter Arena, close to where it all began many years ago. In 1988 she won an English Schools 1500m title in Yeovil, in the neighbouring county of Somerset. Today she lives on the edge of Exeter and helps her husband Gavin with their growing coaching group which is based in the city.

Gavin, of course, coached her for much of her senior career, guiding her to countless major track championships, big city marathon races and cross-country events. During the winter of 1996-1997 they travelled the world on a backpacking trip, but Pavey got incredibly fit during the journey as she ran in each of the countries they visited. When they returned to Britain she qualified for the 1997 World Championships in Athens and thereafter followed an incredibly consistent streak of championship appearances.

As time went on, she was so experienced that she joked that the Exeter Harriers vest she wore in various races was literally older than many of the competitors she was up against.

"I'm getting old," she says now looking back on her career but also forward to fresh challenges. "But it's lovely. My husband's doing so much coaching now and it's great seeing the athletes coming through. I'm



ABOVE: Pavey competes at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro

really enjoying that and really enjoying being involved with lots of things to do with running. I feel really fortunate to still be involved because it's such a great sport and I'm still really enjoying everything about it."

She still gets the competitive itch, though, as she explains: "I have aspirations to get in better shape. Sometimes I have a sneaky look at those sort of vets records and think, 'Oh, could I?'"

Yet she knows they won't be easy records. "Those masters athletes are running absolutely amazingly and I know it takes a lot of training to do that, but I love setting myself goals and trying to achieve them."

Pavey counts herself lucky that despite her long career she has not suffered from too many injuries. It is testament to her husband's coaching ability, too. "I think I'm lucky that I've

> **I have aspirations to get in better shape. Sometimes I have a sneaky look at those vets records and think, 'Oh, could I?'**

been able to keep running without too many injuries," she says.

One of the reasons for her recent injury-free running, she believes, are wearing Imbrace leggings which have knee supports built into them, thereby supporting her joints.

She adds: "I also feel like the stuff I've learned over the years does help me to listen to my body and make those good decisions. It's also prioritising what the important sessions are rather than trying to do everything and ending up being injured.

"I did feel, in the later years of my career, I used to actually be less injured because my body was more adapted to running and I was able to make those good decisions on a daily basis."

Pavey feels modern shoes also help keep injuries at bay. "It would be a silly decision not to wear super shoes if your rivals are wearing them, wouldn't it?" she says, matter of fact.

"It's not only the performances in the races, it's the impact the shoes can have on training. I think athletes are able to do more training without getting injuries in the same way.

"I think back to when I was running marathons and you'd be wearing such thin flats, you could feel the roads. I remember when I did the New York Marathon, I was trying to go sightseeing with my family the day after and I literally couldn't walk.

"I'd try and do a half marathon before I did my marathon, but I would have to accept that [during the] whole week after the half marathon I couldn't get back into marathon training because I'd be so sore."

On her great experience, she adds: "So Gavin and I feel that we're able to pass on things we've learnt to try and keep the athletes as injury-free as we can."

The group coached by the Paveys is called ISCA Endurance and its members include Innes FitzGerald, who studies at Exeter University in the city and whose family live nearby in Devon, plus Jake Smith, winner of the recent Bath Half Marathon.

"I help Gavin where I can because we've obviously got our own kids and that can sometimes be challenging," says Pavey. "Gav is very much the lead coach and he's done that for a lot of years obviously helping me and it's been really exciting to see how well the athletes are doing.

"It's great to see how motivated they were. They've all done absolutely brilliantly and it's really exciting to see how well they're doing."

She continues: "I say to any junior athlete: 'Build up gradually. Don't try and get all the training done in the first couple of years of your career because you want to capitalise on your body being at the best it can be and don't burn yourself out'. It's good to have a long career and I've really enjoyed the amount of years I've been able to take part in championships." AW



Why Jo Pavey embraces Imbrace leggings

Jo Pavey wears Dynamic+ leggings to reduce knee pain and tight hips. She finds they help with blood flow, reduce swelling and fatigue, whereas the thermoregulation fabric technology keeps her cool.

The five-time Olympian says: "I've been really excited to wear the leggings and work with Imbrace because I thought it's a really unique concept to have leggings with in-built support around the low back, the IT bands, the hips and around the knees.

"You can really feel that sort of level of support. But also for me, I additionally benefit from the fact that it keeps my knees warm!"

See imbrace.com for more.

"It's my mission to inspire people"

Jess Martin ran for Great Britain at the Rio Olympics and the London 2017 World Championships but then promptly retired at the age of 24. Now, eight years later and after having three children, she talks to **Jason Henderson** about her comeback

In 2016 the Night of the 10,000m PBs was won by a 23-year-old Aldershot, Farnham & District athlete called Jess Andrews. In only her second attempt at the distance, she enjoyed a dramatic breakthrough run of 31:58.00 to qualify for the Rio Olympics, where she placed 16th with a PB of 31:35.92.

The following year she qualified for the World Championships on home soil in London but dropped out of the 10,000m. Struggling with injury and keen to start a family with Tour de France cyclist Dan Martin, she promptly hung up her racing shoes at the age of just 24.

Eight years and three children later, the Olympic 10,000m runner has started training seriously again with Dan, who is now retired from cycling and helping to pace her during running sessions, often pushing a baby buggy at the same time near their home in Andorra.

"There are so many reasons why I stopped in 2017," says Jess. "One of the main ones is that myself and Dan were spending so much time apart. I loved running from a young age but it flipped to becoming something that I dreaded. I began to put pressure on myself and didn't enjoy it any more.

"I am very much an all or nothing person, so I decided to stop running and move to the next chapter of my life, which was starting a family and supporting Dan with his cycling."

The couple got married in 2016. "It was perfect. I got to the Olympics and we got married," Jess remembers. But things changed in 2017 when injury struck.

"I began putting pressure on myself and became miserable. So I just stopped," she says. "It was quite life changing to go from training for the Olympics to then doing nothing but I fell pregnant quite quickly with our twins and then running really went to the back of my mind. I didn't care for running at all.

"After the girls [twins Daisy and Ella] were born, I started to want to run a bit but it wasn't until I fell pregnant with [third daughter] Heidi that I thought 'I want to run'."

The Martins are friends with Jo and Gavin Pavey. "They were two of the first people



LEFT: Jess Martin with husband Dan and children Daisy, Ella and Heidi

> I felt so complete when I had my third child but I also felt a bit lonely and a bit lost. Now I'm running again, I have a purpose

I reached out to when I decided to make a comeback around a year ago," says Jess. "I had roomed with Jo as an athlete and they are phenomenal and such a big support. It's nice to have someone who has been there and done it."

However, in a twist of fate, Jess also bumped into Josep Carballude, the coach who had guided her to the Olympics and had just started a job coaching in Andorra. "He knows what makes me tick," she says.

Since then her comeback has gathered momentum with a 10km in Castellón in February in 33:49. Next month she is targeting track races in Andorra in a match against other "small states of Europe".

She has lived in Andorra for a decade but is keen to continue representing Britain, assuming she gets another international call-up in future.

"It's my mission to inspire other people," she says. "It is possible to run and be a mum. I felt so complete when I had my third child but I also felt a bit lonely and a bit lost. Now I'm running again, I have a purpose."

Dan, who competed in the Olympics for Ireland and won stages of the Tour de France in 2013 and 2018, describes his wife as "goal oriented" and adds: "I want her to have the opportunity to see how fast she can run and, as a family, it's nice to go to these races together. I also enjoy training with her because I want to see how fast I can go. I'm now running a lot more than riding."

He is targeting records such as "the fastest marathon by a former pro cyclist" and reckons he can break 2:30 for the marathon.

But the main focus is on his wife's comeback. As someone who quit just before super shoes came into fashion, Jess is excited to see how fast she can go in coming months, too.

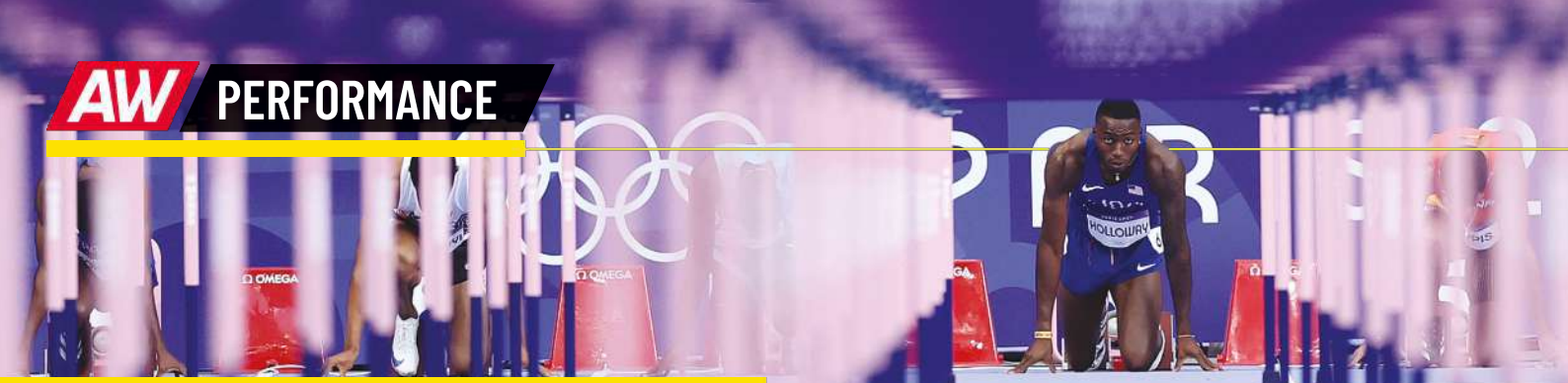
"I didn't believe that a pair of shoes could make such a difference," she says. "When I first put them on I felt like I was wearing a pogo stick!"

"Most importantly I'm enjoying it so much now. I want to set a good example for my kids. And who knows how fast I can run?" AW



RIGHT: Jess Martin celebrates winning at the Night of the 10,000m PBs

PHOTO BY MARK SHEARMAN



FINDING BALANCE

Sprinters who learn to take control of pre-race mental and physical anxiety can be up to three times more successful than those who don't, writes **Michele Beltramo**

PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

"Twenty seconds before a race, there's absolute focus. The key thing is to achieve relaxation, but at the same to have absolute total control. You've got to find the balance between being totally ready to go and being really at peace with yourself as well."

That was the approach which helped take Cathy Freeman to the Olympic 400m title and serves as a reminder as to how crucial the mental side of sprinting, when you are also looking to excel physically, can be.

In fact, a unique sports psychology study shows that those sprinters who are able to manage worries and physical tension leading into a race can be up to three times more successful than others.

The study investigated 66 sprinters, divided into four categories. About an hour before competition, the athletes completed a questionnaire that evaluated their cognitive (pre-race concerns) and somatic (physical tension) anxiety, as well as their levels of self-confidence.

Two important components in sports psychology are cognitive anxiety (the mental aspect) and somatic anxiety (the physical aspect). Self-confidence is the third component that measures "Pre-Competitive State Anxiety". Optimal anxiety regulation and good self-confidence are both important for performance.

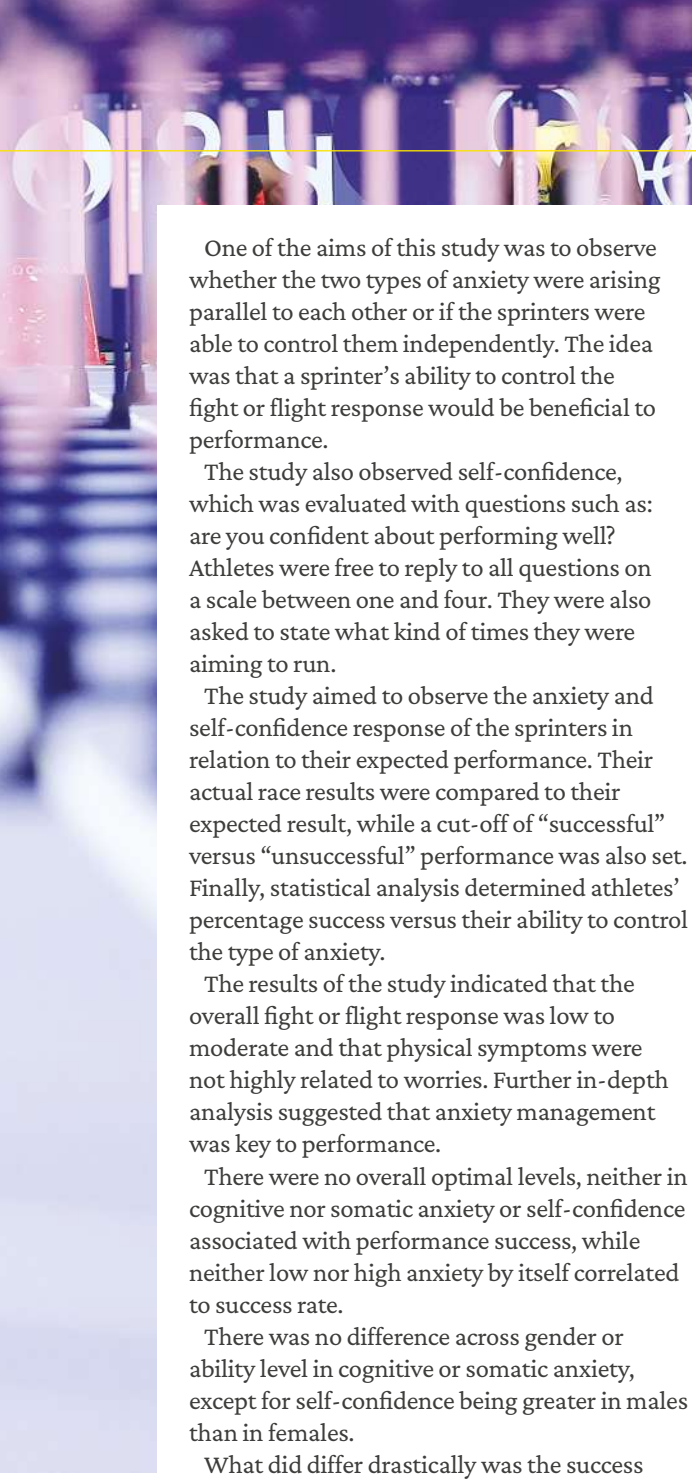
As race day approaches, competitors begin making their own "mental appraisal" of the situation, for example by imagining the consequences that a successful or unsuccessful race might have. This refers to the athlete's cognitive process.

Particularly on competition day, that cognitive anxiety is coupled by physical tension (somatic anxiety), a process that typically manifests itself with a release of epinephrine – an adrenaline rush – that occurs as the athlete approaches the starting blocks. Heart rate significantly increases in an attempt to meet the demands of the task.

The somatic reaction – or "fight or flight" response – is typical of a person facing a demanding situation. However, it is postulated that when the situation is perceived as challenging, but not threatening, the fight mode is activated which in turn boosts immediate energy release.

Yet, when the situation is seen as dangerous such energy output may be impaired due to reduced blood flow, and performance may decline.

ABOVE: Grant Holloway on the starting blocks ahead of the 110m hurdles final at the Paris Olympics



One of the aims of this study was to observe whether the two types of anxiety were arising parallel to each other or if the sprinters were able to control them independently. The idea was that a sprinter's ability to control the fight or flight response would be beneficial to performance.

The study also observed self-confidence, which was evaluated with questions such as: are you confident about performing well? Athletes were free to reply to all questions on a scale between one and four. They were also asked to state what kind of times they were aiming to run.

The study aimed to observe the anxiety and self-confidence response of the sprinters in relation to their expected performance. Their actual race results were compared to their expected result, while a cut-off of "successful" versus "unsuccessful" performance was also set. Finally, statistical analysis determined athletes' percentage success versus their ability to control the type of anxiety.

The results of the study indicated that the overall fight or flight response was low to moderate and that physical symptoms were not highly related to worries. Further in-depth analysis suggested that anxiety management was key to performance.

There were no overall optimal levels, neither in cognitive nor somatic anxiety or self-confidence associated with performance success, while neither low nor high anxiety by itself correlated to success rate.

There was no difference across gender or ability level in cognitive or somatic anxiety, except for self-confidence being greater in males than in females.

What did differ drastically was the success rate according to each group's ability to control mental and physical symptoms. The study results indicated that the athlete's ability to control psychophysiological reactions appears paramount to performance, as the ability to use cognitive resources, thus regulating thoughts and symptoms independently, is associated with better performance.

Those athletes who had a high pre-race physical response of somatic anxiety but low cognitive anxiety or high worries but the ability not to physically react to them were had the highest percentage of success rate.

Conversely, those athletes whose worries and somatic anxiety were going up (or down) simultaneously had the lowest level of success rate.

Elite males had the highest success rate (50 per cent) coupled with the lowest association between anxiety responses, indicating that they were better equipped at coping with anxiety at multiple levels. By contrast county level males had the lowest success rate (14 per cent) coupled by the highest cognitive/somatic anxiety association.

Category	Success rate	Correlation between cognitive and somatic anxiety	Level of self-confidence
Elite males	50 per cent	Very low	Medium/high
County females	44 per cent	Low	Medium/high
All females	32 per cent	Low	Medium
All males	34 per cent	Low	Medium/High
Elite females	20 per cent	High/moderate	Medium/low
County males	14 per cent	High	High

Self-confidence was not significantly different among the two sub-groups, indicating that this had not a direct effect on performance success rate. Yet, it must be pointed out that high self-confidence is also generally key to optimal performance success, particularly because past studies indicate that when low self-confidence is coupled with high cognitive anxiety performance can drastically decline.

In conclusion, sprinters who can better manage worries and physical tension are more successful than those less skillful at it. The finding indicates that sprinters can use anxiety to their own advantage to obtain their desired performance. They can do so by regulating their own feelings of anxiety, both mental and physical, in a way where one is not automatically a consequence of the other.

For example, when sprinters are conscious of the above process, they can intervene with mental strategies to reduce worrying thoughts in advance. An optimal regulation of positive thoughts – looking forward to competing as an opportunity rather than a threat – is important to performance.

High worries about performance without intervention may result in the athlete's inability to perform as expected. Meditation, imagery and mental rehearsal are some of the methods that can be used to control anxiety. AW

Michele Beltramo, MSc in Optimal Performance for Elite Athletes

Full study title: National level sprinter's competitive anxiety and performance success according to ability level and sex: An observational study with a cross-sectional design *© 2020 Michele Beltramo all rights reserved.*

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HOW THEY TRAIN

SCOTT LINCOLN

AGE: 31 **COACH:** DALE STEVENSON



Katy Barden speaks to the man who has moved to the other side of the world in the search for shot put improvement

"What am I going to do all day?" thought Scott Lincoln. The 19-time national champion had finished training for the day. His chores were done, his bags were packed and his flight from Australia back to the UK for the British Championships wasn't until later that evening. "It was weird," he says. "I felt really stress-free and I wasn't used to that."

Lincoln moved to Australia in November 2024 after an impressive season – which included a 21.31m personal best and fourth place at the European Athletics Championships in Rome – was clouded by a disappointing Olympic Games in Paris.

"Things were working to some extent, but I guess I wanted more," admits the 31-year-old. "It was nobody's fault other than my own [in Paris]. It was a bad day at the office and I couldn't really put my finger on what it was, but I was just sick of going to major championships and not qualifying for finals. I was just a little bit fed up and I fancied a change."

Now coached by London 2012 Olympian Dale Stevenson – the Australian who guided New Zealand's Tom Walsh to three world shot put titles, two Olympic bronze medals and Commonwealth gold – Lincoln has joined a talented group of athletes including Matt Denny (Olympic discus bronze medallist) and Jacko Gill (Commonwealth shot put silver medallist).

Interestingly, he has cut down on training since moving to Australia. "Dale is big on minimal effective dosages," he says. "Being fresh for every session is more important than flogging yourself in the gym every day, especially at my training age."

Increased rest days have opened up opportunities for new adventures, as well as creating greater capacity for life admin. Having his bags packed in advance of a trip was no coincidence; Lincoln is now more organised with a less cluttered mind.

Stevenson's approach appears to be subtle but effective.

"He's more about the whole process than the specifics, so it's quite refreshing," says Lincoln, who won Commonwealth Games bronze in 2022. He recalls being questioned by his coach on arrival: "He made me do a couple of standing throws and he was just asking questions, like, 'Do you feel like you're striking them well?', and I was like, 'Yeah, I am', and he said, 'Interesting, you're not hitting them at all.'

"It's been a weird one because it doesn't feel like a lot has changed since then, but when I look back and compare now to then, my technique has improved a lot. I'm nowhere near where I should be, in my opinion, but I've never been in a position where I'm throwing further in training than I am in competition – it's usually the other way around – so I know for a fact that there's a lot more in me."

Lincoln's review of the season so far is a measure of how far he has come. He competed at the UK Indoor Championships within 48 hours of a long-haul flight and although he didn't feel he connected with any of his efforts, he threw a best of 20.86m, a distance he admits



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

A TYPICAL TRAINING WEEK

Lincoln trains in a two-week cycle alternating one day on, one day off. Each day includes a throwing session followed by a lifting session in the gym, with the afternoon off.

The gym session will usually include between six to eight lifts, some of them specific, some of them Olympic lifts, plus additional sprinting and plyometric work.

"It's very different, but I've embraced it," he says. "Physically I'm in great shape in the gym – all of my gym numbers have gone through the roof – but I'm just trying to replicate the type of throw I do in training in a high-pressure situation such as a big competition, so it's just figuring all of that out at the moment and being fearless."

Lincoln is throwing more in Australia than he did in the UK, but a key difference is a regular change in implement weight versus working with a fixed weight for a longer period (e.g. 6-8 weeks).

"I've gone from every throw being for distance and high in tension to maybe one intense session in every four sessions," he says. "We also change weight regularly – up as high as 8kg and down as low as 6.5kg – so some sessions I'll do two different weights alternatively. I'll throw a 7.26kg then a 6.5kg, or a 7.5kg and down to a 6.5kg, it varies [based on targeted speed or technical changes] and I don't question it, I just trust the process.

"I've also been training a bit more leading into competitions. Usually, I'd have a few days of rest and drop the weights right down, whereas now I'm training even up until the day before the competition, so that's new and pretty exciting too.

"At the moment Dale is also challenging me in ways to make me feel a bit more comfortable in uncomfortable situations. He's making me accountable for all of my actions so that when I do get to a championships, I know what I'm doing, and I've got the confidence behind me."

Favourite session: "I love intense throwing sessions. I don't have a specific favourite, but you can find cracks in your technique by adding intensity. That's what I'm finding in competitions in high stress environments – you become tense and you've got to try and see past that to enable you to throw far, so it's a massive learning curve."

Least favourite session: "I've been enjoying everything, but maybe that's just because it's all fresh right now!"

he'd have been happy with 12 months ago.

He qualified with ease for the European Indoor Championships final, finishing just outside the medals with 20.73m, and although disappointed with his performance at the World Indoors, it brought another major championship experience.

September's outdoor World Championships presents another opportunity to mix it up at the business end of a major competition. The qualifying standard is 21.50m, not far off Lincoln's current best. He's looking beyond that, though, and wants to be the first British athlete to throw in excess of 22 metres.

"We speak about allowing me to be open enough to win medals," he says. "If you throw 22.00m/22.50m at a major then you're knocking on that door. That's where we want to be, fighting with the top three or four in the world. That's the aim for the season." AW

“It’s okay not to know everything”

DEAN MILLER




PHOTO BY ZACH BLAIR

COACHING CONVERSATIONS

Katy Barden speaks to the Paralympian who left PE teaching behind to follow in the footsteps of his mentor at the University of Birmingham

University of Birmingham Athletics Club Endurance Manager Dean Miller is a former British international athlete who finished seventh in the T37 1500m at the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

The Barrow and Furness Strider moved to Birmingham as a student in 2007 after being "sold the dream" by former university endurance lead Bud Baldaro. He won a bronze medal at the 2014 IPC Athletics European Championships but was forced to retire from competitive sport after rupturing his patella tendon in 2015.

Now part of a thriving team led by Director of Athletics Luke Gunn, Miller oversees the coaching programme for around 50 athletes (from a total of around 200 distance runners at the club) including GB representatives and 2025 British Universities cross country champions Jess Bailey and Tomer Tarragano.

How did you get into coaching?

I had to take a step back from athletics when I ruptured my patella tendon in 2015. I think I had a bit of a chip on my shoulder after that because I missed out on going to the Paralympic Games in Rio and that was the one where I thought I'd have my best shot of getting close to the podium – or even making the podium.

At the same time, Bud's health was starting to deteriorate [he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2009] so he dragged me back in a bit, getting me involved with the stopwatch at sessions. I was working part-time in the PE department of a local school, leading a lot on inclusion, and I started coaching a few of the university guys to help Luke and Bud, as well as doing some consultancy with British Athletics on the Paralympic Futures Programme.

I knew I probably didn't want to teach long-term, but I did want to upskill myself, so I went back to Birmingham to do a master's degree in inclusion and special educational needs, graduating in 2019. I made the call that summer [just as the Talent Hub funding was coming into play] that I was going to coach full-time. Coaching isn't necessarily valued massively as an occupation so it was a bit of "beg, borrow, steal" to get stuff going at first, but it soon snowballed.

Who has been your greatest influence?

[My university coach] Bud has always been my biggest mentor and he still is, along with my dad [who coached me before university]. My dad was a steeplechaser, so some of my earliest family holidays were coming to Birmingham to watch him get knocked out of the AAAs heats on the Friday night, so it's quite ironic that I've ended up living here. It's awesome that we get to work together with Jess [who he also coached before university]. I feel like I'm living the dream a little bit there.

It was Bud that persuaded me to come to Birmingham in the first place. He's so charismatic and such a people person; he has



time for everyone and really wants to help. He has always focused on being elite, not being elitist, and the way he ran the club and the culture he fostered here was incredible.

Bud also encouraged me to coach. I've learned so much from him and he's still that person that, when it's been a tough week or whatever, I'll drop him a message or go round for a cuppa. Sometimes we get imposter syndrome as coaches and we think we need to have all the answers, but he's taught me not to be afraid to say: "I don't know that".

I'm sure Luke will say the same, but I think it's due to Bud that we've been able to evolve as a university club and to build our endurance programme. Imagine if Bud hadn't allowed Luke and me to coach? He encouraged us, and that's what we're trying to do with others in the club now.

How have your own experiences as an athlete influenced the way you coach?
I'm very all or nothing in what I do and I think that allows me to see those traits in other athletes. I think I can read those athletes who have real intensity and might need to be held back a little bit.

While having an all or nothing approach can be a brilliant strength, it can also be quite destructive – as I experienced when my career ended early due to injury. The good thing is that I'm well aware of that and I can use my experience to help others get the best out of themselves. It's been super useful as a coach.

I think I'm probably a little firmer as a coach than Bud was with me. He was quite different in his coaching style; he'd give you his thoughts and he'd allude to things, but he'd let you learn your own lessons.

Can you describe the athletics club's ethos and why you think it works so well?
We went through a tough period with Bud's health, and then we lost the track while the campus got re-developed, but we're at a point now where we've got around 200 distance runners at all different levels very much combining community with performance, which was always Bud's way. It doesn't matter if you're Issy Boffey, Will Barnicoat or Jess Bailey, or if you're turning up to run at the university for the first time, everyone grafts and everyone is on the same page.

I remember turning up to training in the lead-up to London 2012 and Bud was like: "This is Ian, he's training with you tonight,"

> **I'm very all or nothing in what I do and I think that allows me to see those traits in other athletes. I can read those who have real intensity and might need to be held back**

ABOVE: Will Barnicoat, part of the group at the University of Birmingham, crosses the line to win the men's under-23 race at the European Cross Country Championships



and he'd have just met Ian at a local parkrun. It might not be quite as extreme now, but the club has always had community at the forefront and Luke and I remain committed to that. Performances are going a bit crazy now, too, so we've had to reflect and ask ourselves: "Now that we've got this talented group of athletes, how do we ensure that we're doing right by them while still keeping that community aspect?"

It's great that you can turn up at different points in the week and train with Issy one day, Will on another day, or someone you've never even met. It's a lot of work, but it's been worth it this year because I feel like people are getting the community vibe while, at the same time, we're showing that the elite side can thrive.

You've previously talked about the importance of developing a person as well as an athlete. How significant is that within your role as university endurance manager?

It's probably my biggest challenge. At the moment I coach a programme for about 50 athletes. It's great at the performance end to see Tomer Tarragano winning the Liverpool Cross Challenge or Jess doing what she does, but a coach is sometimes wrongly judged by what their best athlete is doing. In a university setting I straddle a world where I can occasionally come across an athlete who will make international teams and maybe even make an Olympic Games one day, but actually I've got a duty to provide a university athletics experience.



LEFT: Jess Bailey winning the BUCS Cross Country title in Cardiff this year

I love what I do – I love people and I love conversation – but there are 18-year-old kids who are extremely driven, have just moved away from home, and sometimes have tendencies to be extreme in how they do things, so it's not all about performance. A lot of my week is very much pastoral stuff and looking out for people, and it can be pretty heavy at times.

Granted, we have five or six athletes who are doing really super things on the performance side and that's awesome, but two days after Liverpool I spent the day with the five to ten athletes who were having a tougher time, so I guess there will be people who I've coached who will say, "He's brilliant", and others who probably didn't have as good a time, but as long as they all say, "He definitely cared", that's what really matters. I won't get everything right, but I want our athletes to know they can talk to me.

What's your experience of working with athletes' personal coaches?

When we started to rebuild the programme, Luke and I were keen that we wanted people to come and run for Birmingham, but to understand that they didn't have to be coached by Bud, Luke or me, and as young coaches that approach has really helped us.

I spend a lot of time on the phone to personal coaches. It's helped with our recruitment to be honest, because we've always stayed true to the fact that there's no expectation to be coached by us. We'll work with home coaches, we'll try and learn from them, and we'll try and mentor where possible. There are times when it's right for an athlete to transition over to one of us, but we never put that on them.

As an example, Will Barnicoat is coached by Tim Eglan and I speak to Tim regularly. He sends through the programme each week – he tries to align it with our programme – and we have the athlete numbers here that if Will needs to do something specific, I can go out to the group and find a few other guys to help him out. We want to work collaboratively and we've proved we can do it successfully.

What's the best piece of advice you'd give to a new or aspiring coach?

It's okay not to know everything. It can really settle you when you're able to say confidently to an athlete: "I'm not sure, but we'll find out". I think too many coaches, particularly young coaches, feel like they need to have all the answers, but it's more about having the right people around you to ask and learn from. AW

MIZUNO WAVE REBELLION PRO 3

Emea.Mizuno.com **£210**



Being a little less aggressive than the previous model, the new Rebellion Pro 3 should allow a wider range of runners to experience the brand's "Smooth Speed Assist" design.

While the new model looks familiar, the tweaked heel adds a little more stability and maximises the effect of the deep cushioning and propulsive geometry of the shoe.

The new Rebellion still demands a more efficient, neutral gait but for those that suit the shoe it really does return every bit of energy you put into it. With this in mind, Mizuno is aiming the Pro 3 at runners covering the ground at around six-minute mile pace and, at this speed, it excels.

The sole design is another great, often overlooked, element. Here the low profile "G3" material acts like miniature teeth that manage to "bite" into the road for exceptional, non-slip traction. The Rebellion Pro 3 is a great choice for faster, efficient athletes looking to maximise performance on the roads.

BEST FOOT FORWARD

Paul Freary looks at the latest racing options for spring marathon season

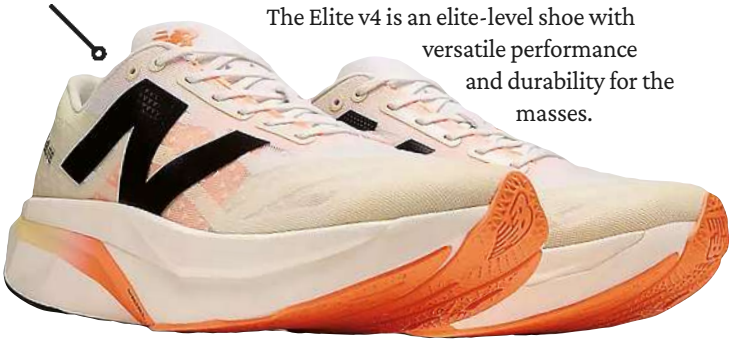


NEW BALANCE FUELCELL SUPERCOMP ELITE V4

Newbalance.co.uk **£260**

Perhaps the most stable of super shoes, the Elite v4 is a great choice for those seeking a high-performance racer but are conscious of rearfoot stability.

Here the FuelCell foam and sculpted carbon plate combine to give all the benefits of the super shoe components but in a stable and durable package. That stability doesn't detract from the shoe one bit, though, and it remains fast, smooth and responsive for the marathon distance. The light, breathable upper gives a minimal but supportive fit and good rubber coverage of the sole offers great, durable traction.



The Elite v4 is an elite-level shoe with versatile performance and durability for the masses.

DECATHLON KIPRUN KD900X LD2

Decathlon.co.uk **£159.99**

Certainly the cheapest of carbon-plated race shoes, this second-generation model from Kiprun, Decathlon's in-house running brand, is feature-packed for high performance.

The shaped carbon plate and cutaway arch helps enhance energy return which, combined with the highly responsive VFOAM PLUS midsole, gives this shoe a propulsive feel that matches models costing £100 more.

The slim fit and single-layer breathable mesh upper enhance the racer design and fit, meaning the shoe shows its intentions – to move quickly from the moment you pull it on. For those wanting to experience a great value carbon-plated racer, this is a great option.



PUMA — DEVIATE NITRO ELITE 3

Uk.puma.com **£195**

One of the most versatile carbon racing shoes on the market, the Nitro Elite manages to provide a highly responsive ride at any pace thanks to the smooth, nitrogen-injected foam and carbon PWRPLATE.

It also feels very stable, which adds further to its versatility and makes it an option for a wide range of runners, regardless of gait or pace. The PUMAGRIP outsole has now become established as a byword for great traction and, alongside a lightweight upper, completes the all-around high-performance fit and feel of this race day model.

TRACKSMITH — ELIOT RACER

Tracksmith.com **£280**

It might not possess over-the-top super shoe looks, but the Eliot Racer combines Tracksmith's classic, minimalist styling and clean-cut appearance with an underlying level of high-tech energy return for race day.

The secret here lies in the unique ATPU drop-in midsole unit, which places the performance directly under the foot. Within the body of the sole sits a moulded carbon fibre plate and when the two come together we get a shoe that feels both soft and welcoming, as well as fast and responsive.

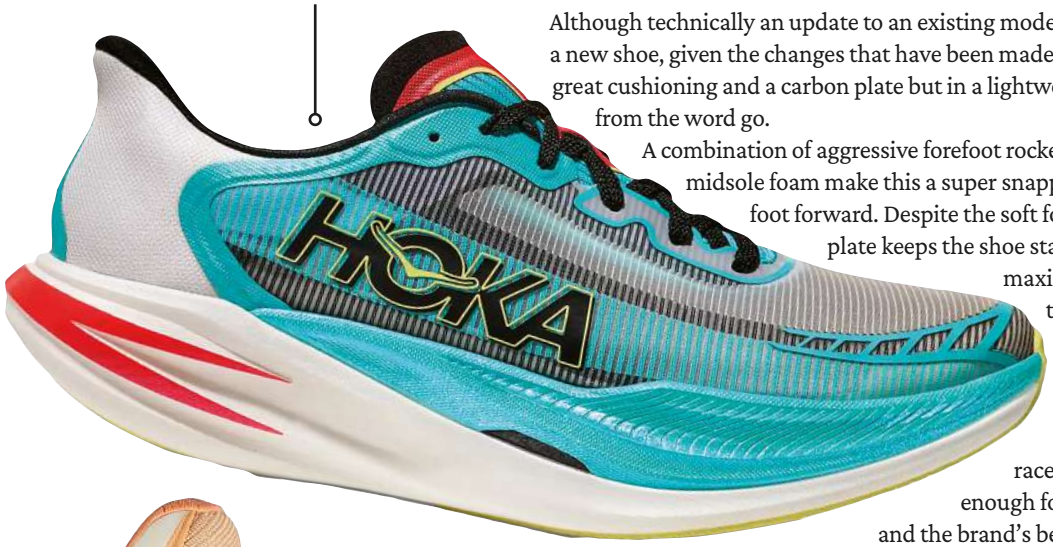
The fit is neat and precise and the clean-cut design lends itself perfectly to race day. The drop-in cushioning design could lead to opportunities for future development with the package but, for now, it's a race day model perfectly tuned for longer distances on the road.

HOKA

CIELO X1 2.0

HOKA.com

£250



Although technically an update to an existing model, the X1 2.0 could easily be a new shoe, given the changes that have been made. Now we have a shoe with great cushioning and a carbon plate but in a lightweight package that feels fast from the word go.

A combination of aggressive forefoot rocker, carbon plate and PEBA midsole foam make this a super snappy racer that propels the foot forward. Despite the soft foam, the winged carbon plate keeps the shoe stable enough at speed to maximise energy return, while the Metarocker positively flicks the foot forward into toe-off much like a track spike.

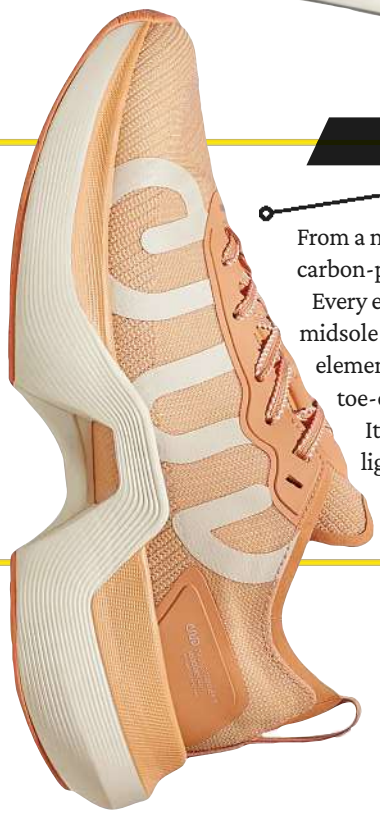
The result is a fast-feeling race shoe that's versatile enough for a wide range of distances and the brand's best racing shoe to date.

ENA

PROTO RUNNER 1

Enaathletics.com

€230



From a new brand, born of Greek heritage, the Proto Runner 1 is their first model and a carbon-plated racer designed to offer a natural ride that works for any gait type.

Every element of the shoe has been designed with sustainability in mind, with a bio-based midsole and recycled, sustainable materials in the upper. The unusual design with cutaway elements gives the shoe a striking look, but the ride is great. The geometry rolls the foot into toe-off and the carbon plate gives it a highly propulsive feel.

It would be perhaps more accurate to describe the shoe as a racer-trainer as it's not as light as the majority of race shoes but does feel much more supportive, durable and able to handle more regular use than most race-specific models. It's certainly a shoe to look out for as it becomes more widely available.

BROOKS

HYPERION ELITE 4 PB

Brooksrunning.com

£200



A "mid-season" update to the Elite 4, the PB edition adds PEBA foam to make the shoe softer and, ultimately, faster. While the previous version was a great model for shorter distances, the softer feel of this iteration provides a smoother ride and makes it more capable of handling longer distances.

The PEBA midsole features the same carbon fibre plate, so has great toe-off at speed and the shoe feels softer, lighter and naturally quicker from the outset.

A super-breathable mesh upper keeps weight down further and gives the shoe a track spike feel and a high-performance fit. Built for speed, this is the best-ever racing shoe from Brooks.

ASICS METASPEED SKY PARIS

Asics.com **£220**



With the brand's fastest and lightest FF Turbo Plus foam midsole and a carbon plate tuned to help you make the most out of your stride, the Metaspeed Sky is a real long-distance performer.

At the marathon distance, the shoe has great credentials and road-proven form thanks to the combination of highly responsive foam and carbon plate.

The shoe takes advantage of the brand's long history and experience and manages to get the most out of a minimal package, weighing in at under 200g. It almost disappears on the foot and yet gives great energy return for a fast and highly efficient ride that's perfect over the marathon distance.

SAUCONY ENDORPHIN ELITE 2

Saucony.com **£280**



The next generation of super shoe, the Endorphin Elite features what feels like the most responsive and springiest foam ever. With a 40mm stack of cushioning, the new IncrediRun midsole also makes this one of the softest-feeling race shoes on the market right now.

A full-length carbon plate helps maximise the return from the foam and adds to the toe-off which, thanks to the rocker toe design, gives the shoe an aggressive pop.

Unlike some carbon racers, which I often feel can be too aggressive for the marathon distance, this model feels better the more miles you cover. Over 5km it felt a little too soft but, over a 20-mile tempo run, the shoe came into its own and the level of responsiveness and cushioning made for a smooth ride throughout the run.

This really could be the next shoe to take the marathon race day market by storm!

PUMA FAST RB NITRO ELITE

Uk.puma.com **£300**



RB stands for rule breaker and this shoe certainly doesn't comply with World Athletics' 40mm stack height limit. But it does give us a glimpse of what goes on in the minds of footwear designers when there are no limits!

With a heel stack of almost 50mmm and three plates combined in the midsole, this shoe does indeed break all the rules, but it does create a unique running experience. For mid and forefoot strikers, the ride is nothing short of extraordinary and does help you appreciate the "assistance" that modern technologies can offer.

This is a good shoe for some runners to use for fast training sessions, but for most it's a conceptual glimpse of potential footwear design. AW

A LAP WITH...

ANDY ROBERTSON



Katy Barden talks to a British sprinter whose hard work and perseverance was rewarded with a European 60m medal

Characteristically good humoured, Andy Robertson starts to compare himself to a cartoon bird, but its name escapes him. "What's the one that used to go, 'Beep-Beep'?," he asks.

It is of course Road Runner, the Looney Tunes favourite who starred alongside his cunning, devious, and comically unsuccessful long-time rival Wile E. Coyote.

"That's the one!," laughs the 34-year-old. "I've always been quite a choppy sprinter; you could see it in my leg turnover. It was almost like watching Road Runner, my legs were moving so quickly I wasn't going anywhere!"

Robertson has experienced a resurgence over the past 12 months, most notably winning European indoor 60m bronze – his first major championships medal – and he credits his coach Alex O'Gorman for much of his progress.

"[Alex] realised we could open up my stride length while still maintaining frequency and good mechanics," he explains. "I was already quite explosive, but we've done a lot more specific work in the gym to help with my stride length when I run.

"We also do a lot of speed work, but the focus has mostly been on the technical side. If you watch my 60m now you can actually see me accelerating and holding it better, whereas before I'd get out and hold on for dear life."

The pair started to work together in April 2024 and, within a few weeks of training, part-time delivery driver Robertson had clocked a 10.19 100m, his quickest in five years.

Making the podium in Apeldoorn, an event for which he was originally a reserve, was a new high point in a lengthy international career that began at the European Youth Olympic Festival in 2007 and has included European U20 and U23 Championships, Commonwealth Games and World Championships indoors and out.

Q. If you could choose one person to train/compete with, past or present, who would it be and why?

A. [Multiple Olympic and world champion] Maurice Greene would have been my perfect training partner. He was the reason I got into sprinting when I was young. The fact that he was such a competitor – and winner – I'd have learned so much from training with him.

Robertson had made the final at two previous European Indoor Championships – in 2017 and 2021 – and his experience, coupled with addressing his restrictive 'Road Runner' style, helped him achieve his most recent success.

He ran his second-fastest ever time in the final (also securing the 6.55 qualifying time for the World Indoor Championships). "I really wanted this European medal," he says. "It was something I knew I was capable of and it was a special day. I went in believing I could win, so I had mixed emotions at first because I thought I could have done better, but it's always important to try and enjoy every moment.

"My mentality has changed over the years. I think the older you get the more you relax and appreciate it. I've learned to be more patient in life and to take one step at a time. When I was younger I was probably overly driven and wanted it too much. I was labelled as a fast starter who could run a fast time if I could convert it, but over time I've let go of that pressure. I've tried to enjoy it more, to relax and embrace it instead of fighting it, because as soon as you start to fight it, you instantly tense up and lose form."

It can be a cruel sport at times, and Robertson's "epic" indoor season finished frustratingly with an injury in the 60m heats in Nanjing. While it had never been part of his initial plan to compete in China, the fact that he'd been selected for an event he'd first qualified for in 2020 presented a unique opportunity to bring things full circle.

Ever the optimist, his focus has already switched to making a full recovery before a slow build towards a long outdoor season.

"I still believe I can run sub-10," says the Sale Harriers athlete who has a 10.10 best. "I probably won't change too much in training because I want to maintain the speed I've built from the indoors. The Europeans has given me a confidence boost. I always physically knew I was in the mix but it was that mental belief and questioning, 'Can I really do it?'. Now I know I can." AW

STARTER FOR 10



Test your knowledge of current athletics events with our teasers

1. **Apart from Jeremiah Azu, can you name the three British sprinters to have won men's 60m gold at a World Indoor Championships?**

2. **How many European titles across indoor, outdoor and cross country competitions has Jakob Ingebrigtsen now won?**
   a) 15 b) 17 c) 19

3. **Whose European heptathlon record did Norwegian Sander Skotheim break at the European Indoor Championships?**

4. **How many times have the World Indoor Championships been staged in China?**

5. **Grand Slam Track begins this month with the opening meeting in Kingston, but in which US cities are the other three "Slams" being held?**

6. **Which world record, set by British athlete Elliot Giles, was officially ratified last month?**

7. **Hellen Obiri is going for her third successive Boston Marathon win this month, but in which track event has she twice been world champion?**

8. **Can you name the Massachusetts town in which the Boston Marathon starts?**

9. **Eilish McColgan is due to make her marathon debut in London later this month. How many times did her mother, Liz, win the event?**

10. **In which year did this month's cover star, Alex Yee, compete for Great Britain over 10,000m at the European Championships?**

Answers in the May issue of AW

March answers: 1 Karsten Warholm; 2 Women's pole vault, Men's 3000m, Women's 800m; Women's 4x400m relay 3 Writing notes in her journal; 4 French athlete Margot Chevrier broke her ankle after landing awkwardly; 5 They have a dairy farm in Vermont; 6 The 2014 Commonwealth Games and the Kelvin Hall; 7 Birmingham; 8 Mondo Duplantis (men's pole vault), Ryan Crouser (men's shot put), Miltiadis Tentoglou (men's long jump), Hamish Kerr (men's high jump), Thea Lafond (women's triple jump), Tara Davis-Woodhall (women's long jump); 9 Long jump; 10 Six

AW LETTERS

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HAVE YOUR SAY



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

Time for a Highland fling?

A number of interesting points were raised in the pages of the March issue of *AW* and its examination of the changes, as well as difficulties, currently facing athletics.

In my view, our present problems include the loss of senior athletes in our clubs and the need to financially support masters athletics, plus the failure to provide depth of athletics education in our age 9-13 club group, as well as a decline in the standards in all technical events.

We must accept reality, that nothing will suddenly result in the arrival at our clubs of dozens of experienced field events coaches, even if we offered to pay them. We do, as John Shepherd wrote, need to try to create a paid coaching system, but that will take time and will encounter considerable resistance from what is still a harrier culture. We also can't ignore the outliers – people who are doing a lot of fine work away from the sport's governing bodies.

We can, however, produce a world-leading athletics education programme for that 9-13 age group. Curricular athletics usually consists of little more than school sports heats, and after-school athletics has virtually vanished, but the sport is uniquely positioned to make a rich contribution to curricular physical education.

When it comes to events, I am in agreement with those who point towards the inclusion of more "town square" meetings away from stadia. There does need to be a creativity in this area and I would go so far as to propose that World Athletics hold the inaugural World Highland Games Championships, the first at that level to feature both men and women. The Highland Games are already held in nations all over the globe – even Switzerland has its own Highland Games Association – so why not use that to the sport's advantage?

There will be no magic bullet but there needs to be a rigorous and honest review of the present state of our national track and field environment – one which results in positive, realistic strategies.

There should be a similar World Athletics review of the present state of the sport globally, involving a representative sample of the world's nations.

Tom McNab

Cancel culture

I read with interest and a quiet chuckle your article about events being cancelled. It made me recall my first National cross country title in 1989 at Hawick. Travelling to the venue in a complete white out was difficult enough before racing 12km in about six inches of snow. I ran out a clear winner ahead of Paul Evans and Steve Ovett, so perhaps we have gone soft or health and safety has gone mad. Back then, cross country was real cross country – not the sport we see on the manicured parks we now use.

Tommy Murray

WHAT'S ON



APRIL 4-6
- Grand Slam Track
  Kingston
  grandslamtrack.com

APRIL 5
- Generali Prague Half Marathon
  runczech.com

APRIL 6
- Milano Marathon
  milanomarathon.it
- Brighton Marathon
  londonmarathonevents.co.uk

APRIL 10-13
- Australian Athletics Championships
  Perth
  athletics.com.au

APRIL 12
- England National 12 and 6 Stage Road Relay Championships
  Sutton Park
  englandathletics.org
- Surrey County Track and Field Championships (sprint hurdles and steeplechase)
  Kingston
  surreyathletics.uk
- BMC Regional Races
  britishmilersclub.com

APRIL 12-13
- European Running Championships
  Brussels-Lievin
  european-athletics.com

APRIL 13
- Scottish National Athletics League
  Kilmarnock
  scottishathletics.org.uk
- Schneider Electric Marathon de Paris
  schneiderelectricparismarathon.com
- NN Marathon Rotterdam
  nnmarathonrotterdam.nl

APRIL 16
- Watford Open Graded Meeting
  watfordharriers.org.uk

APRIL 19-21
- CARIFTA Games
  Port of Spain
  athleticsja.org

APRIL 19
- B.A.A. Invitational Mile
  Boston
  baa.org
- Boston 5km
  baa.org
- Loughborough Open inc. BUCS 10,000m
  Loughborough
  lboro.ac.uk

APRIL 20
- Leigh Harriers Spring Throws Open
  Leigh
  leighharriers.org

APRIL 21
- Boston Marathon
  baa.org
- BFTTA Outdoor Series 1
  Lee Valley
  befittodaytrackacademy.co.uk

APRIL 22
- Trafford Grand Prix
  Stretford
  traffordac.co.uk

APRIL 25
- scottishathletics 10,000m Track Championships
  Crownpoint, Glasgow
  scottishathletics.org.uk

APRIL 26
- scottishathletics National Outdoor Open
  Linwood
  scottishathletics.org
- TCS Mini London Marathon
  londonmarathonevents.co.uk

APRIL 27
- TCS London Marathon
  londonmarathonevents.co.uk
- UK Youth Development League (upper age group)
  ukydl.org.uk

MAY 2-4
- Grand Slam Track
  Miami
  grandslamtrack.com

MAY 3
- UK Youth Development League (lower age group)
  ukydl.org.uk

For all the latest athletics news and updates, visit **athleticsweekly.com**

FROM THE AW ARCHIVE

It's 23 years since London witnessed a men's marathon world record, when Khalid Khannouchi's late charge saw him overcome a field of the highest calibre

As the anticipation builds around how fast this year's London Marathon might be, let's take a look back to the last time that the famous finish line on The Mall witnessed a world record-breaking performance by a male athlete.

April 14, 2002, was a landmark day. Not only did home favourite Paula Radcliffe produce an incredible debut over 26.2 miles with a run of 2:18:56 that represented the second-fastest time ever by a woman, Khalid Khannouchi bettered his own men's world best by four seconds with 2:05:38.

As the pages of *AW* from April 17 that year point out, all of the pre-race attention had been directed towards Haile Gebrselassie, Paul Tergat and defending champion Abdel El Mouaziz. But it was the African-born American who proved to be the star of the show.

After a disappointing 2001, the bookies had made Khannouchi a 6-1 third favourite behind El Mouaziz and the double Olympic 10,000m champion Gebrselassie, who was making his marathon debut.

In a race of exceptional quality, Khannouchi pulled away in the final mile to lower the record he had set in 1999. Tergat became the second-fastest man in history with 2:05:48, while Gebrselassie set an Ethiopian record in third with 2:06:35. El Mouaziz, who suffered a heavy fall at 20km, managed to recover to set a personal best of 2:06:50 in fourth.

"Tergat and Gebrselassie have been a big inspiration for me and I remember watching them break world records. We went out quickly today, I just had to run my own race," said Khannouchi, who started life in the United States working as a dish washer in a New York restaurant in 1993. "I felt really easy at halfway [reached in 62:47]."



LEFT: Khalid Khannouchi, right, leads from Haile Gebrselassie and Paul Tergat on his way to the marathon world record. And how Athletics Weekly covered his achievement

It was an injection of pace from Khannouchi at around 24-and-a-half miles that saw Gebrselassie dropped and Tergat – the two-time Olympic 10,000m silver medallist – ultimately had to settle for second place again.

Asked if the win over such esteemed company made him "the greatest", Khannouchi replied: "My win here does not make me the greatest. It is very difficult to call someone the greatest. There is not just one." AW

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