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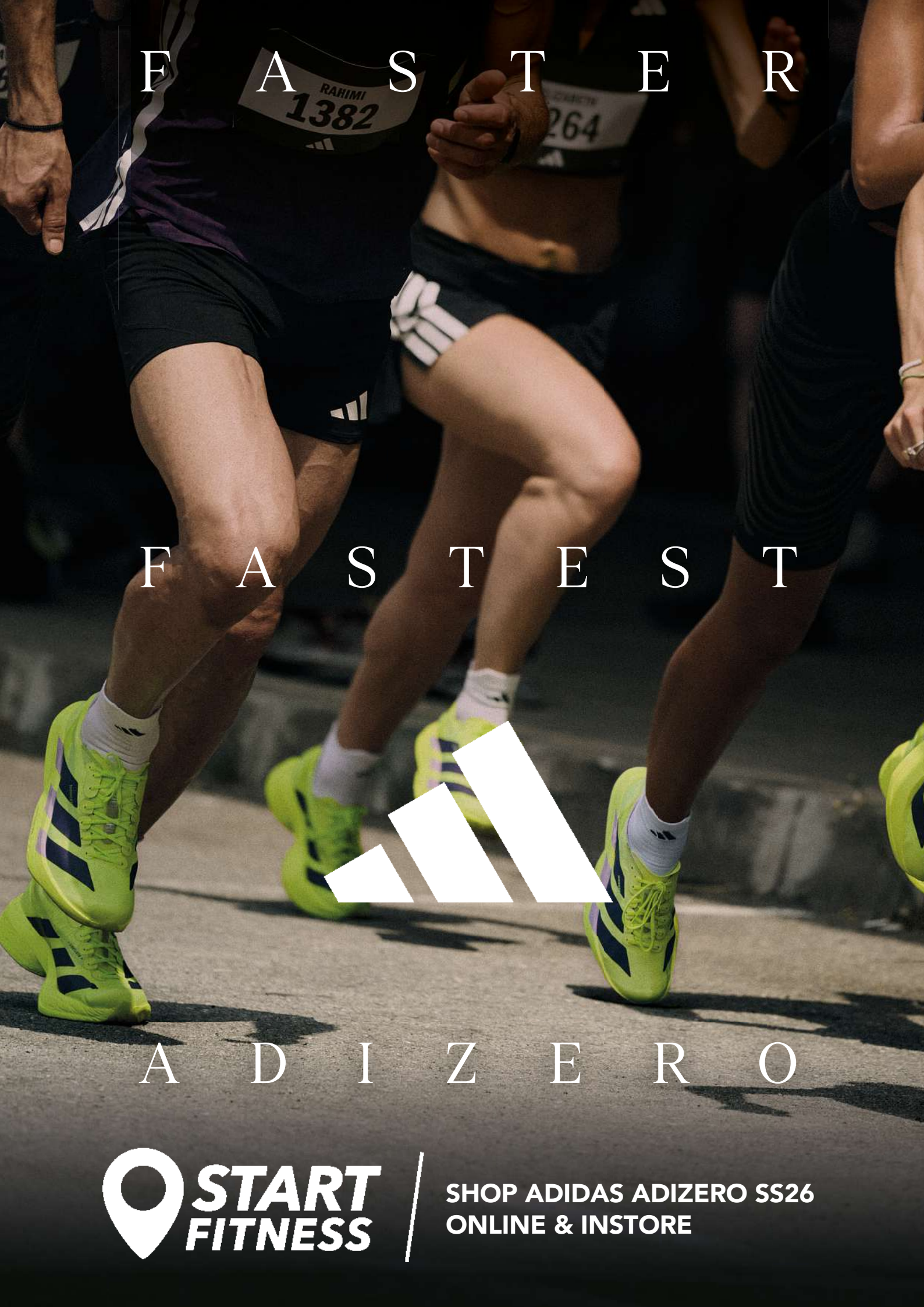
TRUE FAITH

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FINDING THEIR WAY



Euan Crumley
AW Editorial Director

One of the best parts about this job is being able to speak to the people right in the thick of it. Those who get out there, experience it and do it – the hard training sessions that hurt, the competitions that can hurt even more or those sweet, sweet occasions when everything clicks and a long-term plan falls beautifully into place.

With that in mind, this final issue of 2025 has been a pleasure to put together. Every year, we ask you to select the athletes who have excelled, made the biggest impression on you and that you feel are deserving of further recognition. Once those decisions are made, we then set about either documenting their achievements or, when we're lucky, take the opportunity to sit down and talk to them about it all. I'm happy to say we've been able to do just that with a number of this year's winners.

The majority of people who pick up this magazine will have experienced a big race day of their own and will know that feeling of putting yourself on the line, of seeing how the chips might fall. There aren't many of us who get to do that on the biggest stage of all, though, so hearing from the people that do can be very illuminating.

It would be easy to look at those who came out on top as having had a perfect year devoid of stresses or strains, but that simply isn't the case. And, regardless of achievements and abilities, it's clear they are always learning.

There's Amy Hunt, who has had the season of her life, but she admits: "We had so many times where it was not an ideal situation, but we managed to push through."

And there's Jake Wightman, who has been battered by the sport more than most in recent years. That he was able to call on so many experiences proved crucial.

"I've had a lot of opportunities to try different things," he says. "To make mistakes and to learn my own craft and I'd say the most important thing is there isn't a formula to racing, or there isn't a guide that you can learn to be good. It's about knowing what is good for you. I know what my strengths are, and I'm able to play into those."

He adds: "The reward is the race." That's as true for us fans as it is for the athletes.

Remarkably, we're already at the end of another year and on the brink of one that promises so much for our sport. We at *AW* will be there to cover it all and we would like to take the opportunity to thank you for all of your support in 2025. We wish you a peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year. See you in 2026!

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PICTURE THIS

GLORIOUS MUD

The Liverpool Cross Challenge threw up its traditional mix of mud and great racing at Sefton Park on November 22 as competitors battled it out for honours and places on the British team for this month's European Cross Country Championships in the Algarve.

In the senior men's race, Scott Beattie got the better of his training partner and Morpeth Harriers clubmate Rory Leonard, while victory in the senior women's race went to Cari Hughes, who edged out Poppy Tank by just two seconds. AW



PHOTO BY DAVID HEWITSON



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

THE MONTH IN NUMBERS

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

4

Jakob Ingebrigtsen endured a frustrating summer. Struggling with Achilles problems, he was unable to race on the Diamond League circuit and was eliminated in the 1500m heats at the World Championships in Tokyo before finishing an underpar 10th in the 5000m final.

He has clearly got back into better training this autumn, though, as he has been named in the Norway team for the European Cross Country Championships in Lagoa, Portugal on December 14.

The Olympic 5000m champion has been preparing at altitude in Sierra Nevada and carefully stepping up his harder sessions. He has also had his tonsils removed recently in order to minimise the chances of falling ill at crucial periods in future.

If he wins gold in Portugal, the 25-year-old will become just the third four-time winner of the senior men's race in Euro Cross history after Ukraine's Sergiy Lebid and Portugal's Paulo Guerra, the winners of nine and four senior titles respectively.



40

The 40-strong Great Britain and Northern Ireland squad bound for the European Cross Country Championships was announced on November 26. Innes FitzGerald will aim to win her third under-20 title on December 14, while Will Barnicoat is aiming to complete a similar hat-trick of victories in the under-23 men's race. British trials winners Scott Beattie and Cari Hughes, meanwhile, will look to make their mark in the senior races with selection for the World Cross Country Championships in Tallahassee in January at stake.

The European Cross course at Lagoa is described by organisers as "beaten earth and sand trails" and "technically demanding".

Winding around an artificial lake, it will feature two obstacles on each lap, a challenging ascent and several lighter climbs. Organisers add: "The varied terrain ensures a balanced yet demanding test of endurance and skill for all participants."



Great Britain and Northern Ireland squad
Senior women: Phoebe Anderson; Abbie Donnelly; Izzy Fry; Cari Hughes; Megan Keith; Poppy Tank
Senior men: Scott Beattie; Jacob Cann; Joe Hudson; Calum Johnson; Rory Leonard; Richard Slade
Mixed relay: Holly Dixon, Ava Lloyd, Jack Higgins, Callum Elson
U23 women: India Barwell; Rebecca Flaherty; Megan Harris; Emily Parker; Mia Waldmann; Bea Wood
U23 men: Will Barnicoat; Jenson Connell; Joel Doye; Sam Hodgson; Matthew Ramsde; Finley Proffitt
U20 women: Innes FitzGerald; Isabel Holt; Beth Lewis; Eliza Nicholson; Zara Redmond; Lizzie Wellsted
U20 men: Michael Clark; Jonson Hughes; Alex Lennon; Quinn Miell-Ingram; William Rabjohns; Miles Waterworth

ABOVE: Anouk Vetter, who has just announced her retirement

LEFT: Jakob Ingebrigsten and Will Barnicoat, who will both be competing at the European Cross Country Championships

93



George Bunner, one of the most imaginative, industrious and impactful characters in the history of British athletics, died on November 18 aged 93.

He was best known for creating sportshall athletics, the popular programme for children aged 4 to 16, in 1976. It emphasised fun, safety and inclusivity, with a modified indoor version of outdoor track and field events featuring events such as standing long and triple jump, throwing a soft javelin and races using 'turnaround boards' at each end of the hall.

It formed an early introduction to athletics for a number of top athletes such as Denise Lewis, Katarina Johnson-Thompson, Robbie Grabarz, Jade Johnson, Kelly Sotherton and Mark Lewis-Francis.

Beyond this he was chairman of the AAA of England during a crucial time – from 2004-2007 – when the long-standing organisation saw lots of its traditional roles replaced by England Athletics following the infamous Foster Report.

ABOVE: George Bunner, who has died at the age of 93

RIGHT: Chinese athletes Su Bingtian and Gong Lijiao

32

Dutch heptathlete Anouk Vetter, winner of four global medals and a European title, announced her retirement last month at the age of 32. That gold medal came in 2016, in Amsterdam, followed by world bronze in 2016, silver in 2022 and a second bronze in 2023. She also won Olympic silver at the 2021 Games in Tokyo.

"I'm ending my elite sports career," wrote Vertter on social media. "For over 10 years, I competed with complete dedication at the highest level. There were lows, but so many more highs!

"I was so fortunate to have a great team around me, along with a fantastic coach and wonderful training partners. It was a wonderful adventure. I enjoyed it, learned a lot, and am grateful for everything this journey has brought me."

36



Chinese shot putter Gong Lijiao also retired from athletics last month following a fifth consecutive win at the National Games of China. The 36-year-old contested 19 global championships, reaching the final every time, from Osaka in 2007 to Tokyo in 2025. She won 13 medals on the global stage, including Olympic gold in 2021 and world titles in 2017 and 2019.

China's Asian 60m and 100m record-holder Su Bingtian, also 36, was another star to say farewell to the sport after the National Games of China.

As well as his records of 9.83 for the 100m and 6.42m for the 60m, he competed at six World Championships, three Olympic Games and four World Indoor Championships.

He won 4x100m relay bronze at the 2021 Olympics, as well as world 4x100m silver in Beijing in 2015 and 60m silver at the 2018 World Indoor Championships in Birmingham. AW



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AW WE'VE GOT CHRISTMAS WRAPPED



ATHLETICSWEEKLY AW



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

POSITION OF STRENGTH

This year has shown athletics to be robust enough to deal with the major slings and arrows that have headed its way, writes **Katharine Merry**

Athletics hasn't been without its challenges in 2025 but, when I think back on the past 12 months, I'm left with the strong feeling that it's been a really good year overall. It very much helped, of course, to have had such a successful major showpiece – in this case the World Championships in Tokyo – and they absolutely nailed it in Japan.

The positivity generated from those nine days of competition shone brighter than the negative headlines that we have had to wrestle with, such as the high-profile doping bans, the dreadful idea that is the Enhanced Games or Grand Slam Track's failure not only to achieve its aim of changing the sport but even to simply pay the athletes.

I also feel that 2025 reminded us about the depth and breadth of our sport. While we have firmly established champions in many events, there have been a number of new names coming through, taking their opportunities, winning medals or making headlines with their performances. Athletics doesn't stand still and, because of that, it's always going to throw up new names, new narratives and new conversations.

Innovation and doing things a bit differently has been a recurring theme this year, too. Grand Slam Track was supposed to be a prime example of that and there were some good ideas within the project, but it well and truly came up short.

How damaging has its collapse been? It has been damaging to the individuals involved in it and for the people who have struggled financially – whether that be athletes or other contributors – as a result. The sport as a whole could certainly have done without it and, with any innovation, especially with such a big name attached to it, you want it to fly.

But things move on quickly and one of the positive aspects to have come out of the whole affair has been that track and field has shown itself to be robust enough to cope with it not working out. Grand Slam Track certainly didn't bring everything else crashing down with it and I actually think that the women-only Athlos event in New York at the end of the season helped to repair some of the damage.

Michael Johnson tried to set Grand Slam up in such a way that it was going to be some great saviour, but it wasn't and it was never going to be. Given that it was pitting itself against the well-established Diamond League,

ABOVE: Busang Collen Kebinatshipi was one of the new names to emerge from Tokyo

GRAND SLAM WAS SET UP TO BE SOME GREAT SAVIOUR, BUT IT WASN'T AND IT WAS NEVER GOING TO BE"



Katharine **Merry**

Olympic medallist and broadcaster

@KatharineMerry

@katharine.merry

it was only ever going to run alongside or maybe enhance our sport.

And everything is so fast-paced now that the focus has already started to turn towards next year, and events such as World Athletics' new Ultimate Championships, so it doesn't take long for people's attention to be diverted elsewhere.

Looking even further ahead, there has been a lot of talk recently about the LA Olympics in 2028, following the release of the athletics schedule. One of the main discussion points to come out of it is the fact that, unlike in years past, athletics will start right at the beginning of the timetable and the opening day will feature all four rounds of the women's 100m (prelims and round one in the morning, following by the semis and final in the evening), while the men's competition will be split over two days.

I've got absolutely no problem with that plan. Some people have said: "It's not fair that men are not doing the same," but why should the men and women run on the same schedule?

In my opinion, it's not detrimental for the women and I like the fact that you then spread out the two big finals that people all want to watch.

Just because something's been done a certain way before doesn't mean that you can't mix it up and that's why athletics has gone to the beginning of the Olympic timetable. The sport needs eyes on it. It has needed eyes on it for a long time and, if you get an opportunity to potentially showcase a 100m final for each sex on different days, why wouldn't you be doing it?

Unless I've missed it, I have yet to see any female athletes claiming it's a bad idea, either. I saw the well-known Jamaican sprints coach Stephen Francis say it's anti-women and that it's a regression, but I don't think it is. I haven't got an issue with it at all and the distance means it's all possible, too.

None of the major players will be involved in the preliminary round in any case and they'll be more than capable of breezing an 11.00 or 11.10 in the morning before coming back and smashing the semi and the final. I'm confident that the majority of the competitors will be happy to get the whole thing done and dusted on day one.

Hopefully there will be a healthy British presence in those latter stages and I was heartened to see that Dina Asher-Smith has sorted out her long-term training situation. Having left Edrick Floreal's group last year, she is back in Texas but will be led by Michael Ford at Baylor University.

This is going to be a fascinating period in her career. She has just turned 30 but her very good friend Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce has pushed the boundaries of what is possible for a sprinter to achieve in their thirties and I don't see any reason why Dina can't continue to go onwards and upwards. I genuinely believe we'll see the best of her again. She still ran decent times this year, even at such an unsettling time, so if she can find contentment in this new set-up then the results will come.

Her fellow Brit Amy Hunt showed this year what can be done when everything is in sync on and off the track and there's a wonderful rivalry starting to build between the two of them. That's one of just many subplots that will be very much worth following as we move forwards. One thing's for sure – 2026 is not going to be dull. AW



BELOW: Michael Johnson's Grand Slam Track project fell well short of its aims



STEFANO **MEI**

MY GREATEST RACE

European Championships, Stuttgart, August 26, 1986, 10,000m, Gold, 27:56.79

The Italian led a clean sweep of the podium, winning by over a second from the reigning European and Olympic champion Alberto Cova, with their compatriot Salvatore Antibo in third. The animosity between all three men made for a curious celebration

I was very young when I went to my first major championships, the 1982 Europeans, where I ran the 1500m. When I was 16, I'd come eighth in the 3000m at the European Juniors in Bydgoszcz in 1979 in 8:10.64 (behind winner Steve Cram) and people were saying: "You're the new Jim Ryun."

People pushed me to step up but my coach, Federico Leporati, was very strict. He told me I had a lot of road to cover. That is why I stayed with him for 20 years.

He didn't want me to move up in distance just yet because I had an Achilles issue at the end of races where I could pass people but never kick.

I see these athletes who leave one coach for another so quickly and I can't believe it. Mine was more than a brother, a little less than a father. He collaborated with and pushed me to stay down rather than to fly up.

We both felt I would eventually be a nice athlete over longer distances, so I did a lot of technical work and came back running 800s, 1500s, only moving up step by step. We didn't want to lose the quality by doing more quantity.

In 1984, I made it to the Olympic Games in the 1500m and it was only afterwards that I really increased my kilometres, focused more

ABOVE: Stefano Mei won European gold ahead of two of his Italian team-mates

FACTFILE

Born: February 3, 1963

Events: 1500m/5000m/10,000m

PBs: 3:34.57/13:11.57/ 27:43.97

Honours:

1990: European Championships 10,000m bronze

1986: European Championships 10,000m gold, 5000m silver; European Indoor Championships 3000m bronze

1982: World Cross Country Championships U20 bronze

FOR US TO TAKE GOLD, SILVER AND BRONZE AS ITALIANS WAS FANTASTIC, BUT I'M STILL SORRY THAT WE WERE NOT BROTHERS TOGETHER IN THAT MOMENT

on endurance and kept paying particular attention to how my muscles worked.

And so, in 1985, I started to run some good 5000s. I ran 13:20 in Zurich in fourth and I was second at the World Cup in Canberra behind Doug Padilla. I started to understand I was stronger, I had more natural endurance, and it increased to the point where I knew I could run with people like Alberto (Cova) and make a different kind of push to the finish line by going from 300m out.

That European Championships was only my fifth competitive 10,000m. I did one when I was very young in 1980 but I didn't do another one until 1986. My fourth one was in Oslo, where I ran my personal best, and that was the one which felt easiest because, with five laps to go, it still felt easy. And then came the Europeans.

By then, Alberto was established as a great runner. Salvatore (Antibo) was with us as well. It was a strange fight between us because we all had very different philosophies about the tactics and the sport. We were not friends then.

In the European final, I changed pace four or five times before really pushing it on the last 100m. The secret was all technical but we'd also changed the mindset of Italian middle-distance running because people looked at us and said: "You have to do some work like a sprinter," which I had done. Step by step, I'd built towards Stuttgart.

For us to take gold, silver and bronze as Italians and be on that podium was a fantastic moment, but I'm still sorry that we were not brothers together in that moment, too. It was bad on the day of the medal ceremony.

I remember that, in the 5000m some days later, when Jack Buckner was the winner, Salvatore and Alberto warmed up with the Portuguese and I was left alone. In the race, they started pushing a very fast pace with the Portuguese to try and give me some problems. But it didn't work for them. On the last lap, it was just myself, Jack and Tim Hutchings [the three medallists]. The other two Italians were eighth and tenth.

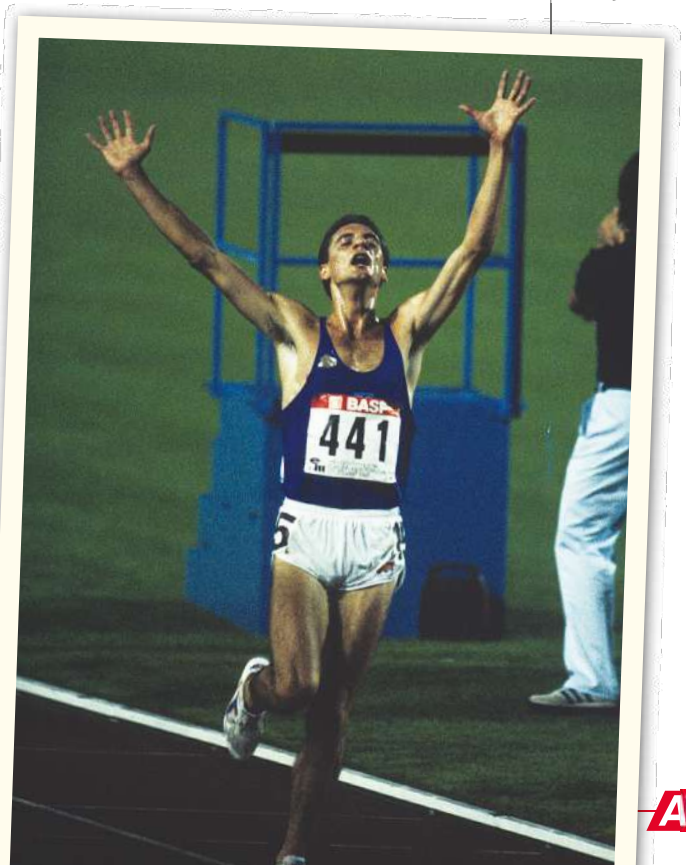
Maybe we were young and stupid but no-one wanted to slow down the conflict in that moment. That was okay, though. In life, when you're younger, you are brave but you are stupid too so, if I had this mindset in that moment, maybe I needed it.

I was sorry about those Europeans. I don't live so happily with what should have been a beautiful moment because maybe, in another time, we could have all been good friends. Now we have a very good rapport but, with Tim and Jack, the friendship is still so strong and Jack's European Championships record still stands before we go to Birmingham next summer.

That 10,000m victory is now water under the bridge. It was a little break of my career. But I learned something from that victory, that it is just a step in your life and you have to use that in a good way. If you think that you are alive with a victory, you're wrong. And life is like that.

Now, as president of the Italian federation, I talk to the girls and boys and I try to explain to them that this is not a war. It is the best moment in their life and this is the best work that they'll do for those five or ten years, so they have to take every single moment and not worry about disappointments, because every bad situation builds a success for tomorrow. AW

As told to Mark Woods



BELOW: Mei crosses the line in Stuttgart to claim the gold medal



SETTING AN EXAMPLE

Following a return to cross country in Liverpool, **Verity Ockenden** writes about why she's still learning from one of her early role models

There's no avoiding it at Sefton Park, the beating heart of British running will embrace you. Whether it's the thundering pack or the sticky mire that chews you up and spits you out, you'll finish rosy-cheeked and festooned in filth from head to toe either broken or triumphant, and there will always be somebody waiting to hug you anyway.

It's a rite of passage for most middle to long distance runners growing up in the UK, and as I walked through the melee of club tents again this year, I saw myself in the small faces of all the younger girls perhaps here for the very first time, streaming through the finish line with mingled tears and grins. It's 16 years since I first raced on this course in Liverpool at the English Schools Championships, which lends the partaking a ritualistic kind of nostalgia and a healthy reminder of my roots.

Club colours are tribal and there's a level of heroism present in every athlete who pits themself against the day's elements, leaning into the burn as the pulverised turf clutches at their gaffa-taped laces. Stampedes of junior athletes christen the course nicely ahead of the seasoned seniors, and I'm reminded of who led the way for me when I was one of them. One such heroine was Emelia Górecka, ever-present in the red, green and white of Aldershot, Farnham & District, slicing through the mud like it was butter, leagues ahead of the likes of me. Even when I began to move up the rankings from aiming for the top 50, then the top 20, and even an 11th place in 2017 when Emelia won the senior women's race, I never thought I'd stand a chance of following in her footsteps for anything more than 200m, let alone towards a professional career, but she set an example that I looked up to nonetheless.

When I returned from the NCAA having grown into my shoes somewhat but still operating with pretty raw naivety, I made my first British team at the Great Edinburgh Cross-Country in 2018. I was starstruck to discover that Emelia was going to be my room-mate as

ABOVE: Emelia Górecka (1010) leads the charge in Liverpool in 2017

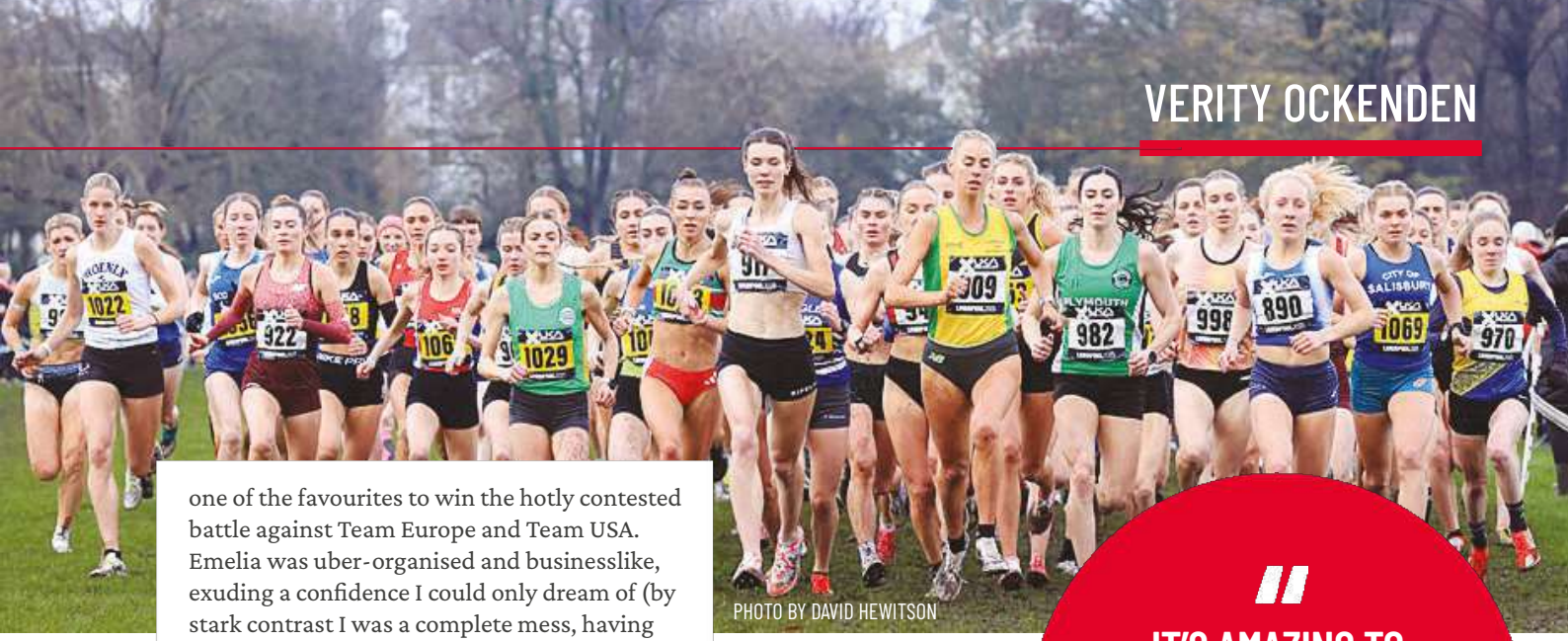


PHOTO BY DAVID HEWITSON

one of the favourites to win the hotly contested battle against Team Europe and Team USA. Emelia was uber-organised and businesslike, exuding a confidence I could only dream of (by stark contrast I was a complete mess, having smashed my car into a hedge the day before I was supposed to travel) but she was also kind and humorous, lending me a little of her own energy to absorb and cracking self-deprecating jokes that helped me to relax and realise we were both just human.

When race day came, I felt proud to know that any team points I scored would be tallied alongside hers and it motivated me to make every position count. I remember watching her disappear like an arrow fired into the distance in pursuit of Turkey's Yasemin Can and listening to the crowds and the commentator on the tannoy losing their minds as she closed in fast, so very nearly snatching victory, while I heaved myself up the same freezing slopes of Holyrood a good 35 seconds back.

Back then I would never have imagined that, this year, I'd return to Liverpool with Emelia continuing to inspire young athletes through her role working at On, the brand that have sponsored me for the past four years, and that she'd be cheering me on madly alongside my coach Chris who wrote so much of her training, too.

They had just come back from the 10-day On Youth Camp in St Moritz, a project that Emelia has been orchestrating for three years now. It is aimed at giving aspiring 15 to 18-year-olds a taste of what professional athlete life is really like, with coaching from people like Chris, and all sorts of educational workshops about altitude training, nutrition, sports psychology, menstrual health, anti-doping and media training.

These are all things that I would have loved to learn about sooner in my own career, and it's amazing to see Emelia now providing the kind of invaluable knowledge that you only learn through experience for the current generation of young talent. They may not have been following in her footsteps quite as literally as I have been over the years, but they're very lucky that she is now forging a path for them in a new way with such dedication.

> "IT'S AMAZING TO SEE EMELIA NOW PROVIDING INVALUABLE KNOWLEDGE TO THE CURRENT GENERATION OF YOUNG TALENT

When I asked Emelia what kind of advice she would give to a young athlete thinking of pursuing a career in running (and to be honest, it's advice that doesn't hurt for me to hear even now as a 34-year-old either), she said: "Enjoy the process and every moment of it. Take your time, and make sure you keep a healthy balance outside of sport. Find hobbies in areas that genuinely inspire you and give you energy outside of training.

"Listen to your body – pay attention to the small warning signs and to what it's telling you. Most importantly, don't measure your worth solely by results – the journey itself, the training, the friendships and the lessons learned along the way are just as valuable as the outcomes. The memories, experiences and connections you make will stay with you long after your career, and they're ultimately what matter most."

It's excellent advice, no matter how long you've been in the sport, and I was reminded of all of it over the past week of going back to where it all started. I'm conscious that one day it will end, too, and though I hope to keep going for a long while yet, I know that transitioning out of being a professional athlete might be just as challenging as it was to become one.

But, yet again, I find myself appreciating the example Emelia has set. She has transitioned from extraordinary athlete to extraordinary ex-athlete and so much more, navigating that journey with an abundance of grace, energy, generosity and a secure sense of identity that isn't tied to running. Much of her ability to do that lies in the advice that she gives, which isn't just the skin-deep kind of guidance that leads to short-term success but that which will stand you in good stead long after your legs are done running. AW

ABOVE: The senior and U23 women's race start at Sefton Park this year

EXCELLENCE AND EQUALITY





The Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2026 will be a celebration of Qatari talent and community spirit

As the countdown begins for the 14th edition of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo on January 16 2026, excitement is mounting for one of Qatar's most anticipated sporting events – a celebration of athleticism, community spirit and perseverance.

Expected to draw over 20,000 participants, the upcoming edition promises to be the most dynamic and inclusive yet. With five race categories, ranging from the Kids' Fun Run to the full 42km marathon, it welcomes runners of all ages and abilities.

The introduction of the Blue Race for children with autism, alongside free entry for participants with disabilities, reinforces the marathon's commitment to accessibility and community empowerment.

At the recent Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2026 press conference, Sheikha Asma Al Thani, Ooredoo Brand Ambassador and renowned adventurer, voiced her support for the event's inclusive vision.

"The marathon inspires people of all ages and abilities to push beyond boundaries and come together in the spirit of perseverance and community," she said.

The event continues to shine a spotlight on Qatari talent making waves internationally. As

Rabaa Al Msleh, left, and Abdullah Al Musalam, below, ran at the TCS New York Marathon after exceptional performances in Doha

part of Ooredoo's ongoing collaboration with New Balance, two standout athletes – Abdullah Al Musalam and Rabaa Al Msleh – proudly carried Qatar's flag at the 2025 TCS New York City Marathon, following their exceptional performances in the previous edition of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo.

Their inspiring journey from Doha's Corniche to New York's streets perfectly captures the marathon's mission to empower homegrown athletes, nurture national pride and strengthen Qatar's presence in the international sporting arena.

With QR 1 million in prizes and a Marathon Village buzzing with energy, music, and entertainment, the 2026 edition will mark another milestone in Qatar's sporting journey – blending excellence and inclusivity, and reinforcing Ooredoo's commitment to a healthier, more active, nation. AW

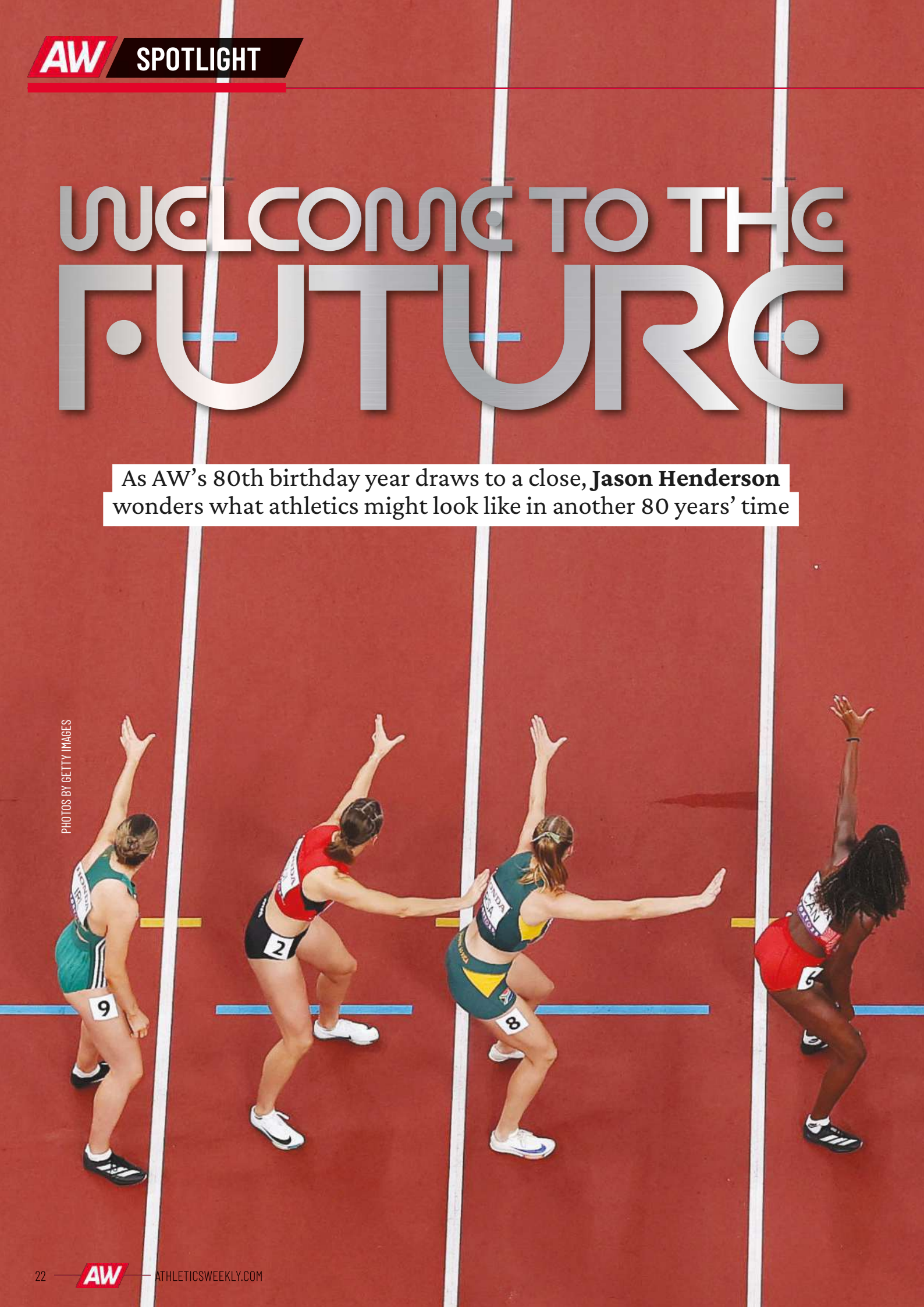


REGISTER NOW!

Register now at **register.dohamarathon ooredoo.com** and bring your club, colleagues or family to unlock group savings. January in Doha is fast, flat and unforgettable.

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE

As AW's 80th birthday year draws to a close, **Jason Henderson** wonders what athletics might look like in another 80 years' time



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

The year is 2105 and the scene is the 60th World Athletics Championships in a packed Seb Coe Memorial Stadium in the megalopolis of London. Due to air pollution and intense heat, the entire championships are being held in an air-conditioned indoor arena. As athletes in the opening event of the women's decathlon settle into their blocks, a golden statue of Usain Bolt, who died eight years earlier aged 110, towers over the competitors.

Is this what athletics will look like in 80 years' time? Probably not. In fact, maybe that is all beyond our imagination. Yet this doesn't stop us speculating and posing some genuine questions.

Will world records continue to fall, for example, or will they reach their ceiling at some point? If so, which marks have scope for improvement and which are closer to plateauing? When will Bolt's sprints records fall and what might they be eight decades from now? Will a sub-two-hour marathon be commonplace in 2105 – not just for men but women as well? Will our grandchildren and great grandchildren look back at the sub-four-minute mile for women with a smile as dozens of female runners in 2105 comfortably beat the barrier?

How much might climate change affect athletics, especially marathon running? Will drug cheats continue to give anti-doping police the runaround? Will injuries one day become a thing of the past due to advances in medical knowledge and treatment? Will we see any current track and field events die off... and new ones emerge?

Just look at the enormous changes that have taken place since *AW* was first published back in December of 1945. The sport has seen cinder and dirt tracks replaced by synthetic surfaces. Manual timing devices have been overtaken by hi-tech electronic methods.

Footwear and athletics equipment have advanced massively. Recreational running and women's athletics have boomed. When it comes to simply following the sport, listening to the action on a crackly radio has been replaced by online streaming and instantaneous clips on social media, with the





athletes themselves often breaking news on their own social channels.

World records have tumbled. In the marathon alone the men's world record in 1945 was 2:26:42 and the idea of women even completing a marathon in a reasonable time was considered absurd.

Yet some things have not changed much at all. Apart from some notable innovations such as the Fosbury flop in the high jump, many "techniques" have remained the same over the decades. A handful of world records set in the 1980s have proved unbeatable thus far, too.

Despite organisers imaginatively toying with new events and competition formats, the basic disciplines of running, jumping and throwing that we saw in the days of Ancient Greece, let alone in 1945, are still popular today.

How much will world records improve?

Stan Greenberg attended the 1948 London Olympics as a teenager and went on to become long-time athletics statistician at the BBC and a founder member of the National Union of Track Statisticians (NUTS). The 94-year-old has witnessed many of the changes in the sport over the past 80 years at close hand. He admits it's difficult to make predictions over what might happen in future, but can see where advances could come.

"No doubt even more changes to shoes will happen and improve performances in most events," he says, "although I think the sprints can't improve too much more – surely not a sub-nine 100m.

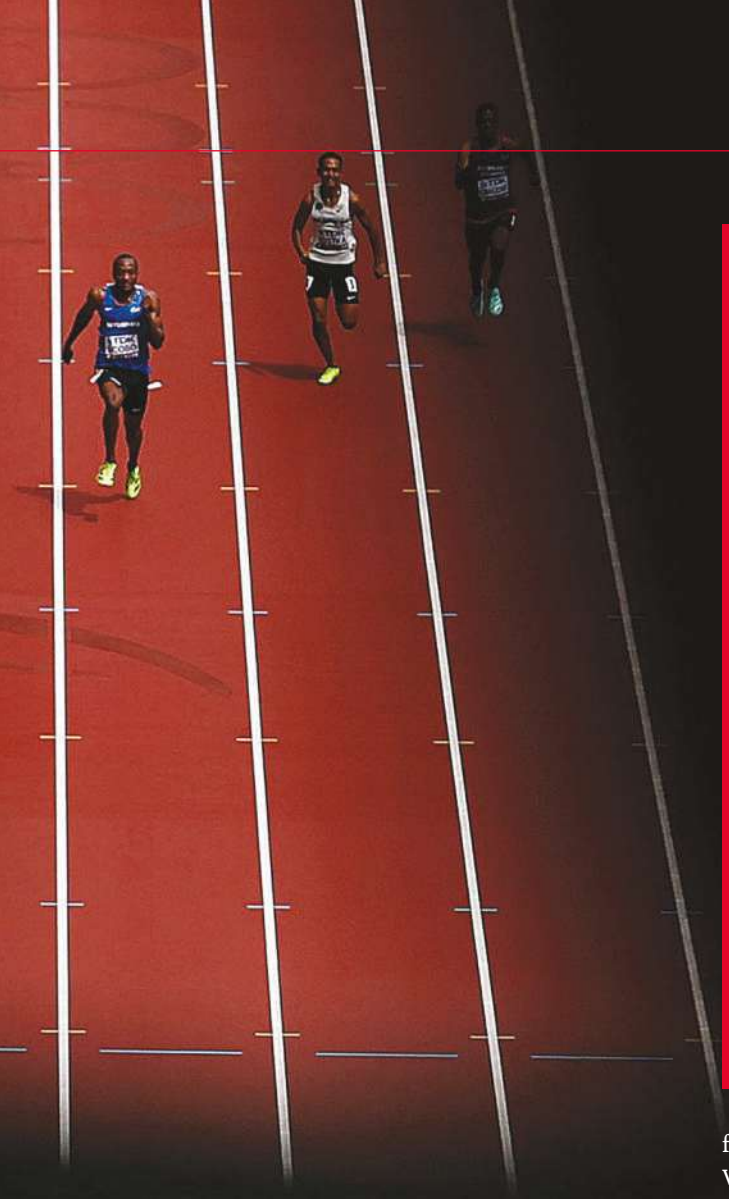
"I assume that other distances will get faster, as presumably better fed athletes, let alone 'medically improved' ones will be able to hold their basic speed for longer, so that distances like 400m-1500m will definitely get considerably better.

"Distances will still be governed most of the time by tactics which will generally keep improvements down, though I expect the marathons to get considerably faster as bodies improve. Field events will be generally more difficult, but I expect to have much taller high jumpers in the future.

"Techniques will change in the throws

ABOVE: Improvements in technology could see improved times and distances for athletes

> "The advances in science – combined with more appropriate levels of investment – will pretty much eradicate doping



World records in 1945 / 2025

MEN
100m 10.2/9.58
200m - /19.19
400m 46.0/43.03
800m 1:46.6/1:40.91
1500m 3:43.0/3:26.00
Mile 4:01.4/3:43.13
5000m 13:58.2/12:35.36
10,000m 29:35.4/26:11.00
110m hurdles 13.7/12.80
400m hurdles 50.6/45.94
3000m steeplechase 8.59.6/7:52.11
Marathon 2:26:42/2:00:35
High jump 2.11m/2.45m
Pole vault 4.77m/6.30m
Long jump 8.13m/8.95m
Triple jump 16.00m/18.29m
Shot 17.40m/23.56m
Discus 53.34m/75.56m
Hammer 59.00m/86.74m
Javelin 78.70m/98.48m

WOMEN
100m 11.5/10.49
200m 23.6/21.34
400m - /47.60
800m 2:13.8/1:53.28
1500m - /3:48.68
Mile 5:15.3 /4:07.64
5000m - /13:58.06
10,000m - /28:54.14
100m hurdles - /12.12
400m hurdles - /50.37
3000m steeplechase - /8:44.32
Marathon - /2:09:56
High jump 1.71m/2.10m
Pole vault 2.53m/5.06m
Long jump 6.25m/7.52m
Triple jump 11.66m/15.74m
Shot 14.38m/22.63m
Discus 48.31m/76.80m
Hammer - /82.98m
Javelin 47.24m/70.28m

somehow to get more speed and surely the basically simple long jump will produce far faster athletes who will send the distances well over nine metres, whereas the triple jump needs somewhat more technique and control.

"Again, bigger and fitter athletes will send the shot and javelin further, while the discus and hammer will need different or better techniques. Bigger, stronger competitors will obviously improve the decathlon and heptathlon. I believe the mixed relays will get much faster, though I feel the men's 4x100m can't get too much better."

Geoff Wightman, stadium commentator, father to world 1500m medallist Jake and a 2:13 marathon man himself in the 1990s, makes the bold predictions that we could see 100m records of 9.41 and 9.85 for men and women respectively in 2105, together with 800m records of 1:38.88 and 1:46.90, plus marathon records of 1:58:58 and 2:08:48.

Technology, doping and hypnosis

"Running shoe technology will have evolved to become a midsole and outer plate that can be bonded directly on to the sole of the athlete's foot without inhibiting foot motion or toe-off," Wightman predicts before adding another element that could play a vital role.

"Hypnosis is the cutting edge technology in training," he says. "In conjunction with AI, it will allow better training, rest and recovery, sleep and injury prevention and treatment. In the warm-up area at major championships, athletes will use MP3 devices for last-minute hypnosis boosters to get in the right frame of mind for competition."

Alfons Juck, athletics manager, commentator, journalist and statistician, believes performances will improve. "World records will be at a level we cannot foresee now," he says, "and much better than we expect due to quality of life, health status and technology improvements."

And could it be that doping might not be such a big factor in the future? Wightman explains: "Drug testing worries will have dissipated as all children will have a detailed sample of their blood and DNA taken and stored at birth and this can be used to avoid any suggestion of gene manipulation or artificial boosting outside their known parameters at any point in their lives."

Matt Lawton, chief sports correspondent at The Times and a talented teenage runner, agrees that marathon world records could



advance more slowly due to drug testers eventually winning the battle against cheats.

"The men's marathon world record has improved by 25 minutes in the last 80 years," says Lawton, "but I don't anticipate that level of progression over the next eight decades. For a start, I suspect the advances in science – combined with more appropriate levels of investment – will pretty much eradicate doping. Experts have told me that gene testing would essentially end the war against drug cheats, and I'd like to think that day will eventually arrive."

Stuart Mazdon from the National Union of Track Statisticians agrees, saying: "Doping will no longer be a major problem, as most people will have health-monitoring implants which scan the blood for diseases and chemicals continuously."

Greenberg is not so optimistic, though, saying: "I fear that drugs use will become much more extensive, especially if prizes become bigger. It's bad enough as it is now."

And, drugs aside, there might still be ways for athletes to cheat. "For older or perennially-injured runners, training might be eased by use of a skeletor suit that takes the weight partially off ankles, knees and hips," suggests Wightman. "But debates will rage about whether this should be a permitted category within races."

Mazdon says we could have a problem with "genetically-engineered athletes" in 2105 and suggests: "This could start with a rogue state splicing a combination of advantageous genes on to an embryo's DNA before birth."

Will athletics prevail in the popularity contest?

What about the "appeal" of athletics? Will it remain the No.1 Olympic sport in 2105? Will the Olympic Games even still exist by then? Certainly, the future of the Commonwealth Games is in doubt. We could even see cross-country running in the Winter Olympics (although don't hold your breath!).

"The sport will continue to evolve in its effort to make it more appealing to fans," says Lawton. "This is a very personal view but I

hope that means an end to race-walking; a discipline I've never understood when the pure essence of running, and racing, involves getting to the finish line as fast as you can!"

Mazdon agrees, predicting that despite shoe technology improving to require unbroken contact with the ground, "race-walking will barely exist any more in 2105".

He adds: "World Athletics will farm it out to an independent federation, effectively abandoning it, and with no interest from sponsors, there will be a terminal decline."

On the Diamond League, Wightman suggests: "It will have morphed into a ten-times-a-year, two-division competition around the world where elite athletes contest eight track and four field events but compete in team franchises that align with the main winter team sports around the world. In winter, the New York Giants fans support their NFL team. In summer, they support their track and field team against Barcelona, Chelsea, Ajax, AC Milan, the Toronto Maple Leafs and LA Dodgers.

"Agents will no longer have to worry about appearance money deals. Their job will be to try and get their clients signed by one of the franchises who also have a reserve team."

On the Olympic Games, Mazdon says: "By 2105 there will have been problems with demand for tickets to attend the athletics, due to increased population, numbers of super-rich and fear of missing out. At first this will lead to ballots with ever-decreasing chances of success. This will be followed by ever-increasing prices and lavish hospitality. However, crowds will then be seen to be uninterested in the sport and only interested in being seen there on social media.

"There will be large gaps in the stands during many disciplines at the Olympics as the super-rich partake in the hospitality. Attendance at World Championships will also decline until World Athletics (if it still goes by this name) eventually follows other sports in requiring fans to attend other meetings in order to qualify for Olympic tickets. To qualify, fans will have to accrue points by attending a world or area championships (or other events with the required identification technology) since the last Games."

In addition, Mazdon can see the Olympic venues being set long in advance and rotated around the world to avoid the kind of corruption associated with bidding wars.

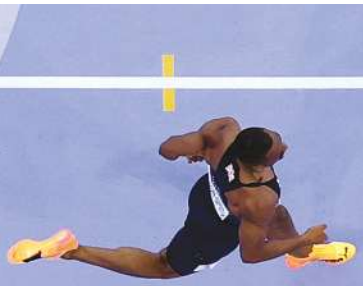
Along with most experts we asked, he also sees the sport being affected by climate change, with track and field becoming "largely an autumn and spring sport with two indoor seasons".

On the future of the Paralympics, Mazdon believes it will decline due to advances in medical science eliminating many of the physical issues. Instead, he sees masters athletics growing.

"Decades of data will allow us to assign a fair handicap to all ages down to single-year age categories," he explains, "so the World Masters Association will be able to operate their championships with only one competition at each discipline, which increases the popularity of the sport. With few tickets available to the masses for the Olympics, WMA will create what will be dubbed the 'Oldlympics' event to be held every four years after the Olympic Games at the same venue. This will prove to be popular among fans, particularly those who have missed-out on Olympic tickets."

New events and old ones reborn?

What kind of track and field events will we see in 2105? There have already been experiments in recent years relating to a boardless long jump or triple jump, with athletes using take-off zones instead. Similarly, we could see more mixed relays in future with organisers





ABOVE: Could racewalking disappear from the schedules of major championships?

tinkering with the changeover zones. Might we see long forgotten techniques such as the 'spinning javelin' make a return? The standing long jump is another former Olympic event that could come back.

Is there potential for handicap races – a type of racing with a long history in the sport – where humans would potentially be handicapped like horses by wearing weighted vests as females and younger (or older) athletes take on the fastest men?

It seems only a matter of time before the height of the barriers in the women's 400m hurdles is increased. Could we see 'throwing for height' instead of distance, or 'long vaulting'? Will women one day overtake men in some events, especially endurance running? Will we see more manufactured time trial events such as the INEOS 1:59 Challenge or Nike's "Breaking 4", with organisers pushing the limits to help athletes run faster?

Imagine an entire marathon on a flat and straight stretch of synthetic track, for example, with a mild tailwind and energy drinks ingested at the perfect moment thanks to smart wearables and a pacing truck to act as a windbreak right through to the finish.

On the presentation of the sport, Juck reckons results will flash up immediately. "Hopefully this will come earlier than 80 years from now," he adds.

Advances in technology, he believes, will help fans pick which competition, or athlete, they want to watch, whereas there could be wind measurements for every lane on the track and at continuous points in a race. What's more, high jump and pole vault are likely to feature a 'virtual bar' (perhaps using a laser beam) and real-time results. Athletics stadia, he adds, are also likely to have retractable roofs due to climate change.

The next 80 years will almost certainly bring changes that are beyond our imagination right now. Who could have predicted in 1945, for example, that results from an event taking place on the other side of the world would now be visible instantly?

But it's fun to speculate and Wightman in particular enjoys making predictions. In the world of road running, he suggests: "There will be no need for a race number because everyone will have their personal details on their wrist band or an implant in their upper arm and when viewed by spectators using virtual reality goggles this projects their name and details above them."

He adds: "All major marathons will be capped at 100,000 in-person participants but a further 100,000 can take part part virtually and in-real-time by using treadmills that re-create the race contours and conditions and enable the runner to have their personal avatar projected into the race alongside the in-person runners."

Most importantly of all, will *AW* still be around to report on the sport in 2105?

"Yes," says Wightman. "AW will still be read in digital form but most people will prefer to absorb the detail subliminally overnight via their wrist and headset device!" AW



"Athletics has a habit of surprising us"

Jon Mulkeen of World Athletics has a stab at predicting the future

Projecting the future of athletics is a little like trying to predict the path of a discus in a swirling wind – you can make an educated guess, but the sport has a habit of surprising us. Still, certain trends are already hinting at where the next eight decades may take us.

The first is climate. As global temperatures continue to rise, major championships – especially those fixed to summer months – will face mounting challenges. It's not unthinkable that marathons and race walks could eventually be removed from track and field championships altogether, shifting to standalone events in cooler conditions. At the same time, there's growing momentum behind adding cross country to the Winter Olympics. Give it a few decades and we might even see a hybrid discipline emerge, blending cross country with the ever-expanding world of trail running, breathing new life into the off-track landscape.

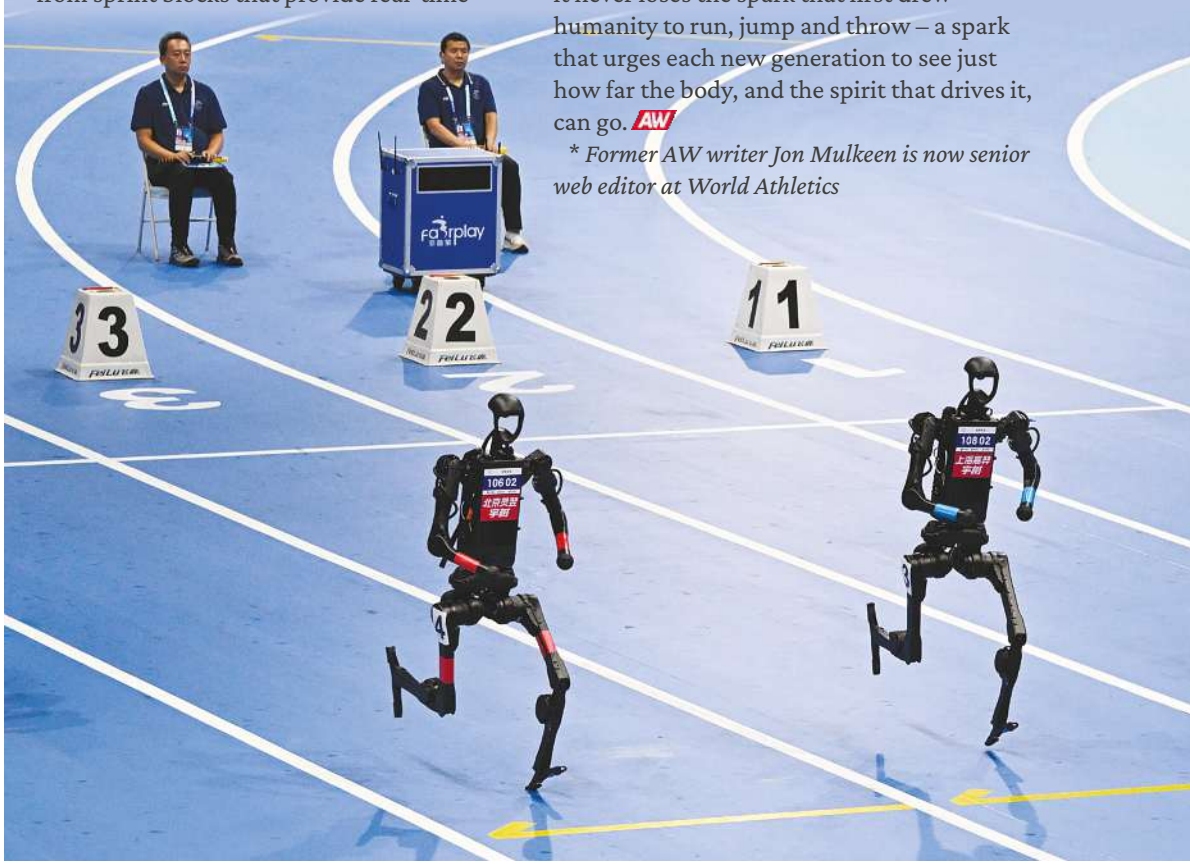
Technology, of course, won't just tap politely on the door – it'll stride right in. Advances will benefit every discipline, from sprint blocks that provide real-time micro-feedback to throwers using AI-driven biomechanics, to jumpers training in immersive, wind-controlled environments. In 80 years, 'high-tech' might simply be 'standard'.

Sadly, I think it's unlikely that doping will vanish entirely. In every corner of society, a small minority will always look for shortcuts, and sport is no exception. But as testing technology accelerates – with ultra-sensitive detection methods and data-driven profiling – the net will tighten. Retroactive bans and medal reallocations should continue to correct the record, ensuring rightful medallists ultimately receive the honours they earned.

The sport's presentation will also continue to evolve. Future audiences, raised on fast-paced media, may favour competitions with sharper, more dynamic, formats. The combined events may also reach parity: perhaps the decathlon trims, the heptathlon expands, or they meet in the middle with an octathlon.

Whatever shape athletics takes, I hope it never loses the spark that first drew humanity to run, jump and throw – a spark that urges each new generation to see just how far the body, and the spirit that drives it, can go. AW

** Former AW writer Jon Mulkeen is now senior web editor at World Athletics*





BIG BATTLES IN BIRMINGHAM

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

There will be so much to look out for at the 2026 European Championships. Here are just some of the mouthwatering match-ups that lie in wait



Day one (August 10)

Dina Asher-Smith v Amy Hunt

Women's 100m and 200m

There has been much discussion recently about the release of the athletics schedule for the LA28 Olympics and particularly the plan for all of the heats, semi-finals and final of the women's 100m to take place on the opening day.

That is precisely the challenge that will also lie in wait for the competitors in Birmingham as the European Championships gets off to what promises to be a spectacular, and fast-paced, start.

That first day of competition at the Alexander Stadium has the potential to be truly explosive and home athletes will be in the thick of the women's 100m action.

British record-holder Dina Asher-Smith, with no fewer than six European titles to her name, will be front and centre and on the lookout for more honours. She will be up against long-time rival Daryll Neita but, in Amy Hunt, faces a competitor packed with confidence after winning 200m silver at the World Championships in Tokyo. Expect sparks to fly not just in this race, but also over the half-lap event on day four.



Day two (August 11)

Mattia Furlani v Miltiadis Tentoglou

Men's Long Jump final

Miltiadis Tentoglou might only still be 27, but he has amassed an extraordinary number of honours in his already lengthy long jump career. Indoors the Greek has two world and three European titles. Outdoors, he has two Olympic, one world and three consecutive European gold medals to his name. Securing a fourth in Birmingham will be at the top of his to-do list but there is a new kid on the block who will be standing in his way.

Mattia Furlani became the youngest ever men's long jump world champion in Tokyo, producing a lifetime best of 8.39m to claim gold at just 20 years old in a final where Tentoglou struggled and finished 11th. The Italian was also world indoor champion this year.

Sparks flew when the two met at the 2024 European Championships in Rome, with Tentoglou breaking the championships record thanks to a leap of 8.65m, while Furlani took silver with a world under-20 record of 8.38m. This contest should also be one to remember.

Day five (August 14)

Keely Hodgkinson v Femke Bol

Women's 800m final

Okay, we may be jumping the gun just a little bit with this one, seeing as Femke Bol hasn't run an 800m race since 2017, but the 400m hurdles champion's decision to move to the two-lap event has already caused quite a stir in the athletics world.

Expectations are high that the Dutchwoman will be a force to be reckoned with but she will be arriving in an event packed with talent. There is Britain's world silver medallist Georgia Hunter Bell and Swiss European under-23 champion Audrey Werro for starters, plus the reigning Olympic and two-time European champion, as well as home favourite, Keely Hodgkinson. Will the latter have too much firepower for her friend to cope with? It will be fascinating to find out.



Day six (August 15)

Jake Wightman v Isaac Nader

Men's 1500m final

The men's 1500m final was one of the standout races of the Tokyo World Championships and it promises to be another contest of the highest quality when the best of Europe battle it out in Birmingham. Reigning European champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen and former world champion Josh Kerr will be back from injury, plus Niels Laros will be out to atone for his disappointment at missing out on a world medal.

Arguably most intriguing, however, will be the performances of Isaac Nader and Jake Wightman. The Portuguese produced a searing finish to deny Wightman a second world title in Japan and the Briton, backed by a home crowd, is going to be focused on trying to turn those tables.

Yaroslava Mahuchikh v Morgan Lake

Women's High Jump Final

When she is on form, Olympic high jump champion Yarsolava Mahuchikh has shown herself capable of achieving great things. A world record of 2.10m, Olympic and world gold, plus two consecutive European outdoor titles covers just some of her sizeable honours list. In 2025, however, the Ukrainian was not quite at her dominant best and her rivals will be aiming to test her limits in Birmingham. Angelina Topic did just that at the last edition of the championships in Rome, when the young Serbian took silver behind Mahuchikh, but there will also be plenty of attention on British record-holder Morgan Lake. The Commonwealth silver medallist cleared the two-metre barrier for the first time this summer and has an increasingly solid platform to leap from.





Day Seven (August 16)

Mondo Duplantis v Emmanouil Karalis

Men's Pole Vault Final

The 2018 European Championships was the stage upon which Mondo Duplantis first announced himself to the world, the then 18-year-old breaking his world under-20 record with 6.05m to take gold in Berlin. Now the Swede wants to break the senior world record yet again in Birmingham. He has already stated that that will be his aim and all of the evidence points towards him being able to bring the house down at the Alexander Stadium on the final night of action. Few would bet against him being beaten, but the progress made by Emmanouil Karalis has helped drive Duplantis towards even greater heights.

The Greek might not be able to match his illustrious opponent, but he could very well play a key role in more athletics history being made. AW

Get your tickets at Birmingham26.com

AND THE AW AWARDS WINNERS ARE...

You voted in your thousands to determine the athletes who came out on top in the 2025 *AW* Readers' Choice Awards

Once again, our knowledgeable *AW* readership responded magnificently to the challenge of deciding the outcome of our annual Readers' Choice Awards. It was no easy task, given the range of top class performers and performances to take into account, but your choices have been made and, over the coming pages, we hear from and profile each of the winners.

Reliving 2025 through the eyes of the athletes is the perfect way to look back on another highly eventful 12 months in athletics so sit back and enjoy... AW

Your 2025 AW Readers' Choice Awards Athletes of the Year

International Male
1. Mondo Duplantis
2. Jimmy Gressier
3. Emmanuel Wanyonyi

International Female
1. Faith Kipyegon
2. Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone
3. Beatrice Chebet

British Male
1. Jake Wightman
2. Tom Evans
3. Jeremiah Azu

British Female
1. Amy Hunt
2. Georgia Hunter Bell
3. Amber Anning

International U20 Male
1. Gout Gout
2. Cooper Lutkenhaus
3. Cameron Myers

International U20 Female
1. Kelly Doualla
2. Jana Koscak
3. Birke Haylom

British U20 Male
1. Tom Waterworth
2. Jack Sanderson
3. Daniel Emegbor

British U20 Female
1. Innes Fitzgerald
2. Mabel Akande
3. Lucy Tallon

Para Male
1. Marcel Hug
2. Dan Pembroke
3. Jonathan Broom-Edwards

Para Female
1. Hannah Cockroft
2. Sabrina Fortune
3. Kare Adenegan

British Masters Male
1. Colin Spivey
2. Mark Symes
3. John Wright

British Masters Female
1. Sarah Roberts
2. Clare Elms
3. Ellie Stevens

Mel Watman Performance of the Year
1. Mondo Duplantis breaks his pole vault world record in Tokyo
2. Sydney McLaughlin's golden 400m run at the World Championships
3. Faith Kipyegon breaks the 1500m world record in Eugene





PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

INTERNATIONAL MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR AND MEL WATMAN PERFORMANCE OF THE YEAR

How high can he go?

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

It has been another spectacular year for Mondo Duplantis, a man who seemingly bends pole vaulting to his will. Matt Majendie profiles athletics' major star, whose appetite for success seems only to be growing

The clock had already struck 11pm Tokyo time, long after the rest of the night's events had ended inside the National Stadium. And still an estimated 55,000 people stayed behind with all eyes on the man in the yellow vest. Twice Mondo Duplantis had knocked over the bar, and he had a last chance to become the first man to clear 6.30m, a height that seemed unthinkable before his career took off.

It was apt that the person he idolised as a wannabe athlete, Renaud Lavillenie, should be the one closest to him, standing just a few metres behind and clapping along with a boisterous crowd to get him into the rhythm on the runway. By this point, Duplantis already had a laser-like focus on what lay ahead of him.

The 26-year-old says he needs to be perfect to achieve each record he attains, centimetre by centimetre. He rattled the bar as he cleared it and looked down nervously, but it remained in place. A remarkable record had been achieved.

Duplantis says the celebrations are never premeditated, each one a little different. On this occasion, he bounced off the mat and into the arms of silver medallist Emmanouil 'Manolo' Karalis before blowing kisses to his fiancée, Desiré Inglander, in the stands.

Tokyo was in rapture to a man who has eclipsed the world record 14 times and counting and who broke it four times in 2025 alone. It seems like a lifetime ago since he suffered his last major championship defeat, all the way back in Doha six years ago. This was his 36th straight competition victory and a 16th win this year alone.

It is telling that his competitors celebrate almost as vehemently as the man himself. Australian Kurtis Marschall, who took home the bronze, said: "It was an amazing night, the fans were fantastic. Mondo is from another planet – he is doing incredible things, things many people thought were impossible. I can't wait to see what he's got in the future." It is testament to his likeability as much as actual ability.

Duplantis had celebrated glory in Tokyo before at the same venue – at the Olympics of 2021 – but on that occasion it was devoid of fans in Covid times. He had relished his return, able to capture the sights and sounds of the

MONDO DUPLANTIS



His is a dominance which is matched only by very few of the all-time greats. There are echoes of Tiger Woods, Michael Jordan or Michael Phelps

Japanese capital and, in particular, the cuisine on offer. He had visualised what the moment would be like inside the stadium... it exceeded all expectations.

"I always wanted to come back to Tokyo because I knew it was a wonderful city," he said. "This is better than I ever imagined. I'm lost for words. This was the biggest dream ever coming true for me. I'm so happy. To give you guys this world record is amazing. For the past two weeks, I really enjoyed being in Tokyo. I feel the only way to leave Japan was to set the world record. That was my mentality. I was feeling really good the whole day. I knew I had the record in me. I am glad it all worked out. Thank you, thank you, thank you."

The year started with a first world record of 6.27m in Clermont-Ferrand in France at the All Star Perche in February, an event created by Lavillenie. World record number two followed in June in the land of his mother's birth, Sweden, before another in Budapest the month before the World Championships.

Still only in his mid-twenties and with so much ahead of him, it begs the question what might be possible, having won every major title available and become the first man for 68 years to defend the Olympic pole vault title? A pursuit of 6.40m is the next mathematical long-term target.

Duplantis has spoken in the past of the fear that the fire inside him one day might be extinguished and yet the animated manner in which he dissected his Tokyo gold in the bowels of the stadium during a press conference deep into the night suggested that is a long way off.

He once told me that, when he competes, he knows that only a world record is enough for those watching. Everyone expects him to win – Duplantis included – as well as break his most recent mark because it's become that commonplace. It's taken time, he says, to get over that feeling that, "nothing's ever good enough".

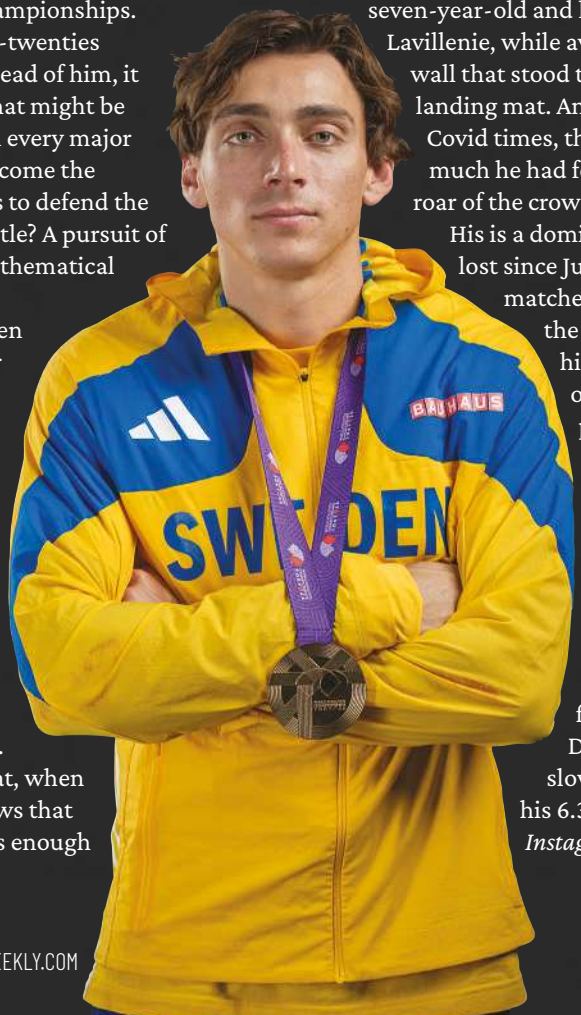
Athletics is lucky to have him, as it was Usain Bolt before him. On the Bolt comparisons, he is dismissive. "I can only be who I can be," he once said. "I can't be Usain Bolt, we're different people and do different events so it's hard to compare us. But what I want to be is the best pole vaulter that ever lived."

That's long been guaranteed and, like Bolt, Duplantis is the ultimate showman. He never thought he was until Covid happened and he was consigned to compete back in his parents' old backyard in Lafayette, Louisiana, with a six-step run-up compared to the 20-stepper he has grown accustomed to.

It was there where he first used poles so thin so that he could bend them as a lightweight seven-year-old and he dreamed of being Lavillenie, while avoiding the red brick wall that stood to the left of the landing mat. And it was there, in Covid times, that he realised how much he had fed on and missed the roar of the crowd.

His is a dominance – he has not lost since June 2023 – which is matched only by very few of the all-time greats. With him, there are echoes of Tiger Woods in his pomp or Michael Jordan or Michael Phelps.

It was apt that another sporting great, Kelly Slater, an 11-time surfing world champion, should be among the first to reply when Duplantis posted a slow-motion video of his 6.30m clearance on *Instagram*. Slater wrote



simply: "Wow. That's wild! Slo-mo tells a story. Nice work."

Duplantis may not get the recognition of the superstars of other sports. Is that a fault of athletics or that the pole vault lacks that same universal awe and appeal as the 100m? But his status within his own sport is clear. After all, it was he who was wheeled out alongside Bolt to launch the new-for-2026 World Ultimate Championships in Tokyo.

The American-born Swede may not have attained the fame or fortune of the likes of Woods or Jordan, and yet his bank balance is beginning to feel the positive effects. His World Championships gold, combined with the world record, pocketed him $170,000 in Tokyo and a bonus from sponsors Puma – not bad for a night's work.

And he's clearly popular. He has 1.6 million followers on *Instagram*, and rising. Plus, there's appeal outside of the sport, too. He has released his own music – his first single, Bop, reached 31 in the Swedish music charts on its release – and then there's the small matter of his impending marriage next year.

As an athlete, what is it that makes him so good? In the simplest terms, he is electrically quick on the runway. Last year he ran the 100m in 10.37 in a showdown with Karsten Warholm. At take-off, his speed of 10.3m per second is about a metre better than a lot of his rivals. Unlike his peers, he also places his pole just before the box, enabling it to slide into place and just look at his take-off technique and the manner in which he is vertical at the point the bar straightens. Again, it is contrasting to those he competes against week in, week out.

There is also the innovation. Puma provides him with a shoe called the Claw, which he only uses in attempting records and gives him an extra speed. If he wears them regularly, he often catches himself on them and draws blood. As he puts it, "When they come out, you know it's business time."

In the Tokyo final, shod with the Claw, he was 30cm clear of his closest rival. In contrast, 25cm separated second to ninth place. For all of Karoulis' progress in particular, that gap looks unlikely to be bridged any time soon. Duplantis has Sergey Bubka's tally of 17 world records in his sights and the motivation looks undiminished. More than five-and-a-half years since his first world record, one wonders how many more will follow and how high can he go? AW



RIGHT: Mondo Duplantis celebrates yet another world record at the World Championships

INTERNATIONAL FEMALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

HIGHER PURPOSE

Faith Kipyegon won a record-breaking fourth world 1500m title in Tokyo, but the Kenyan was intent on aiming for a target that would have an even wider impact on her sport, **writes Euan Crumley**

"I still feel like 2023 was the most special year for me," says Faith Kipyegon as she considers where the last 12 months rank in the exceptional body of work she has put together since first representing her country back in 2010. "Breaking three world records [1500m, mile and 5000m] and winning two gold medals [world 1500m and 5000m] in a championship was really amazing."

But 2025 has been different. For the 31-year-old, it represented more than just the sport, and was about using her athletic talents as a vehicle to spread a wider message. "It was really [about] bigger goals, like: 'What else can I do in this sport? What else can I achieve to still be inspirational to young girls around the world and be a role model?'," she says. "This year was to think big, to think outside the box."

Kipyegon certainly didn't have anything to prove. Heading into this year, along with her serial world record-breaking habit she was a three-time Olympic and four-time world champion on the track – achievements that have cemented her place as one of the finest ever to lace up a pair of spikes.

With that in mind, what else could she do that would make an even bigger impact? Yes, she would defend her 1500m and 5000m world titles in Tokyo but she wanted to reach further – to aim for a target that would really get the wider world talking.

And so it was that, in April, her sponsors Nike revealed the plan for Kipyegon to take on the seemingly impossible and attempt to become the first woman to break the four-minute barrier for the mile. The closest she had come was her 4:07:64 from that imperious 2023 summer but tackling the tallest of orders was entirely the point.

PHOTO BY NIKE



Every element – from her shoes, to her singlet and the male and female pacemakers – was controlled to such a degree that any attempt would not count as a legal record but, much like her good friend Eliud Kipchoge and his pursuit of the sub two-hour marathon, the symbolism of proving what might be achievable was too tempting a possibility to pass up. The initial reaction was a mix of excitement and scepticism. Few onlookers thought the aim to be realistically achievable but only Kipyegon would truly know just how much of a leap it involved taking, both physically and mentally. So what did she think when the idea was first floated to her?

"When my team started talking about Breaking Four I was like: 'What am I thinking of?' I was just putting myself into so much pressure and what I wanted to do was not easy," she laughs. "We sat down and we were like: 'Can we try this?' and I was like: 'Oh my god, am I going to make it?' But, at the same time I saw Eliud, how he started with Breaking Two and I thought: 'If Eliud tried in Monza for the first time, and he was not successful [he ran 2:00:25 for the marathon in Italy in 2017], why don't I also try?'

"I might be successful, I might not, but I know one day, one time, I am going to be successful. Or maybe someone else will be successful, but I will have shown them the way. We have to do this as women. We have to try what is impossible and make it possible."

June 26 was the day chosen for the attempt, the Stade Charléty in Paris the chosen venue.

Now fewer than 13 pacemakers – a squad of 11 men and two women including the likes of America's Grant Fisher and Britain's Elliot Giles, Georgia Hunter Bell and Jemma Reekie – were on hand to aid the star of the show.

"The attention is all about you and you are in another world," says Kipyegon as she reflects on the experience. "I was not thinking: 'What is going to happen?' but I was thinking: 'How am I going to tackle this?', because it is not easy to run 60 seconds every lap and that was really super quick.

"So I was like: 'I have to just be myself and just let the whole team do the work. I was so happy to have the whole team around me. I was given an opportunity and I was like: 'Let me go for this. Let me do what I have to do to make the world proud'."

Kipyegon ultimately did make history in producing the fastest mile ever run by a



PHOTOS BY GETTY IAMGES

ABOVE: Faith Kipyegon celebrates her fourth world 1500m title

> **I would love to go for it again – it's only that I'm not getting any younger and I want to do other things. But I will not lose hope**

woman, but her time of 4:06.42 – 1.22 faster than her world record – was not quite the result she had dreamed of.

"I learned a lot myself through Breaking Four," says *AW*'s International Female Athlete of the Year. "The first thing was all about being patient about what you want to achieve in the future. I would love to go for it again – it's only that I'm not getting any younger and I want to do other things. But I will not lose hope. I will still keep trying before I do other things like go to the road or go to the half marathon and marathon. So I will try. I will keep on trying to show the other girls that it is possible."

It did not take long, though, for Kipyegon to make another global statement. All of that mile training had left her in brilliant shape and, rather than feeling jaded by her efforts in Paris, she arrived at the 1500m start line at the 50th Anniversary Prefontaine Classic nine days later energised. The result was spectacular as she clocked 3:48.68 to take down her own world record of 3:49.04.

There was just one more race – Kipyegon in fact only raced 10 times in 2025 – before the world championships and at the Silesia Diamond League the long-standing 3000m world record almost fell into her grasp, a run of 8:07.04 missing it by just one second and representing the second-fastest time in history. All of the above meant that confidence levels were high ahead of the pursuit of what would be a record-breaking fourth 1500m world title in Tokyo, although nothing was being taken for granted.

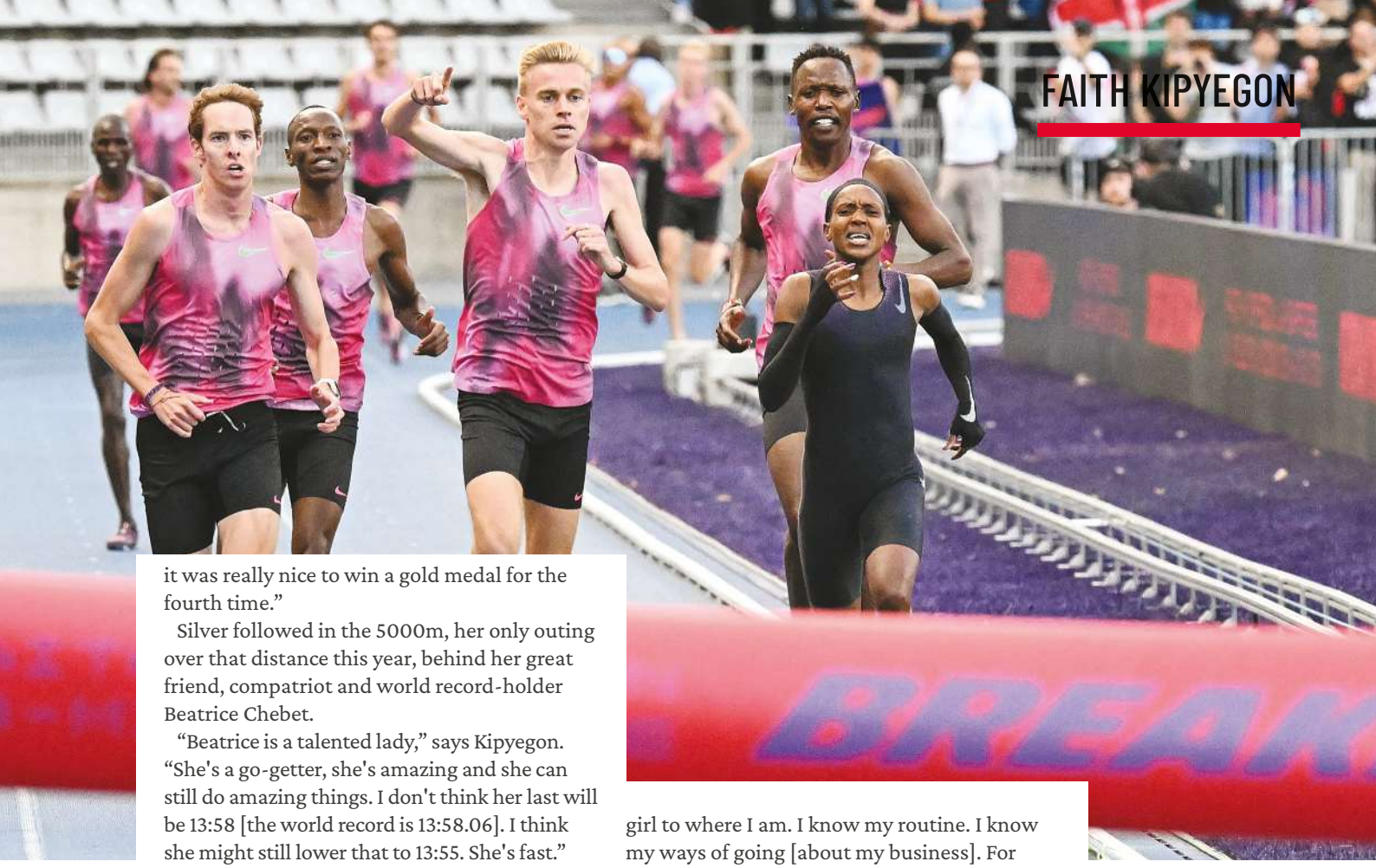
"It was like: 'I'm the fastest. I have the world record but I have to still be the strongest'," says Kipyegon. "When you have the world record, you still have to be the best of the best."

In the final, the Kenyan duly proved that she is with a truly masterful display.

It is telling that she is beloved by her opponents but she must be excruciatingly difficult to race against. As if to underline just how difficult the Breaking Four assignment of attempting to run four consecutive laps of 60 seconds or less was, the effect of Kipyegon producing 60.73 in the third lap of the 1500m final was stark. Leading the way, she glanced at the big screen, assessed the race situation and turned the screw.

"I was just enjoying the race," she tells *AW* of her 3:52.15 win. "I was like: 'I don't want to be pushed or make mistakes', but I wanted to enjoy the race and make it faster and faster. Afterwards, I went back and watched it and I was like: 'Oh, I went 60 on the third lap'. The toughest lap in the 1500m is always the third lap. You have to be strong.

"I thought that 60 [at that point] was the best thing to do. If you have legs of 3:55, you are in a position to win a medal. I was like: 'I am the world record-holder and this is possible', so



ABOVE: Kipyegon strains for the finish line at the end of her Breaking Four attempt

it was really nice to win a gold medal for the fourth time."

Silver followed in the 5000m, her only outing over that distance this year, behind her great friend, compatriot and world record-holder Beatrice Chebet.

"Beatrice is a talented lady," says Kipyegon. "She's a go-getter, she's amazing and she can still do amazing things. I don't think her last will be 13:58 [the world record is 13:58.06]. I think she might still lower that to 13:55. She's fast."

Both returned to a rapturous welcome in Kenya, as did their fellow world gold medallists Emmanuel Wanyonyi (men's 800m), Lilian Odira (women's 800m), Peres Jepchirchir (women's marathon) and Faith Cherotich (women's 3000m steeplechase).

"When I go anywhere nowadays I'm being celebrated like a champion, a home girl, like: 'This is our girl who has shown our country in an amazing way, representing us in a super way'," says Kipyegon. "I'm so grateful that [people at] home are really celebrating us as athletes and appreciate us."

However, the headlines have not all been positive for Kenyan athletes in 2025. At the time of writing 20 from the East African nation – including women's marathon world record-holder Ruth Chepngetich – have been banned for doping offences this year. In September, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) declared the National Anti-Doping Organisation of Kenya (ADAK) as being non-compliant with the World Anti-Doping Code.

Though WADA say they have seen progress since and the non-compliant status has been eased, ADAK have been placed on a watch list – far from the impression the nation wants to create given its stated ambition of hosting either the 2029 or 2031 World Championships.

It's certainly not the way Kipyegon wishes to see her country represented. Her hope is that her example can help create change.

"It's not easy," she says. "But I try to be myself and just be who I have been, from being a small girl to where I am. I know my routine. I know my ways of going [about my business]. For something like doping issues, I just hope so many athletes could learn from us, the bigger athletes, and myself.

"I hope others can follow my footsteps or can follow my story, like 'she started barefoot and she's now here', and they can just stay out of those things. That will be the best image of our country rather than destroying the image of our country by getting into those stories of doping scandals. It is not helping and it is not giving you end results. It will just damage the image of the whole country."

She adds: "Knowing that we have the big athletes... The likes of Eliud Kipchoge is a role model for our country. He's the greatest of all time and the small athletes have to learn from the bigger athletes. I'm also a big athlete, but I still learn from Eliud.

"I have learned from retired athletes, knowing that this is how they started and this is where they finished. I try to learn from them and find ways. That is my bigger goal. I hope the younger generation can follow that as well.

"I tried to focus on myself and not to just get into other people's business. It's all about who you are. It's all about what you want to achieve. You have to motivate the young ones and tell them to follow the right way and not the wrong way."

To Kipyegon, setting the standards and showing the way is crucial. As it was in 2025, it will be at the forefront of her mind as she returns to training, and considers the many options of what she might do next. AW

BRITISH MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Repair kit

Euan Crumley discovers how the work put in by Jake Wightman's support team helped take him from the depths of despair to within fractions of another 1500m world title

It was a school pick-up to remember in September. Andy Kay had gone to collect his daughter but had been sure to arrive early. There was something he wanted to watch while he waited in the car.

Kay is a firefighter but also a strength and conditioning specialist who works with some of the world's best athletes, including Jake Wightman. The latter was about to contest the men's 1500m final at the World Championships in Tokyo and the former had his iPad at the ready. He didn't want to miss a step.

That the 2022 world champion stood on the start line at all was testament to a tireless team effort from his support group – including his fiancee Georgie Hartigan, future father-in-law and now coach John, physio Alex O'Gorman and Kay – that had helped piece him back together after what were some of the darkest days of Wightman's long career.

Having been repeatedly beset by injuries since standing on top of the middle distance world in Eugene three years previously – from the fractured foot that denied him the chance to defend his title in 2023 to the hamstring problem that whipped the Olympic rug out from under him at the last minute in 2024 – he was no stranger to the rehab process. But this time it felt different.

In February of this year, he underwent meniscus surgery in his knee. At every turn, and always just as he was on the verge of a return to racing, Wightman's body would let him down. The setbacks were starting to take a toll.

"Jake doesn't really get low. He's not a negative athlete," says Kay. "He is the most motivated, positive, optimistic person I've ever met. So to see him genuinely up against it, doubting himself, it was a shock.

"For the first time that I can remember there were a lot of points where he was over-sensitised. Every ache, every little twinge, every feeling of discomfort was an alarm bell. I think a big part of the process, towards the end especially, was getting him beyond that and trusting his body, trusting the process because, rightly, he'd learned that he'd get reinjured and that it wouldn't work out."

Wightman concurs. "There were so many doubts – over the last year, especially," he says.

It wasn't time to call it a day just yet, though, and the back room team were leaned upon. Changes were made, too. In March, Wightman took the difficult decision to stop being coached by his father Geoff, while even the flow of how he received information from the team was altered, with the agreed way forward largely relayed through Georgie. With the question of whether or not this might be the 31-year-old's last chance hanging heavy in the air, they set about their work.



PHOTOS BY DAN VERNON


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PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Jake Wightman celebrates with British supporters after his silver medal in Tokyo

"We went right back to the drawing board," says Kay. "Jake is a very, very intelligent athlete and he manages his team and the people around him really well. What he wanted was to put the right people together and then step away and just have one set of instructions, one contact a week and we all agreed to it."

Each member was fully invested.

"They're like friends rather than colleagues," says Wightman. "I've worked with Andy since 2017 and I don't speak to him as if it was just speaking to a coach. It's the same with everyone in our team and I hope that means that they have a bit more care about me, as much as I have more care about them. It means that even though there have been points where it hasn't looked like being that happy an ending, potentially, everyone still persevered and believed that there could be."

Kay certainly admits to employing a different set of skills this time around.

"[Earlier in my career] I did personal training originally and worked with the general population," he says. "That's much more about someone paying you to motivate them, to keep them accountable and to show them that things are possible.

"In athletics, particularly, I don't often have to tap into that. Athletes just do it. That is their job. Someone that runs 80 miles a week doesn't need me convincing them that they need to exercise. But, definitely, there was more of the soft skills, being a friend and relating to the situation. During my military career, I spent a year in rehab with three or four different injuries, and I had the same experience of when one thing's better, then you get back to it and it's gone again, or something else has gone, and you're right back to square one, and it's soul destroying.

"I can't relate to being a world champion, but I get that it sucks and I know what the grind's like, so it definitely tapped into a different part of the relationship.

"Especially with someone as positive as Jake, sometimes you do need someone to just sit with you and say: 'Yes, this is shit. Let's not sugarcoat it, but it will be okay, and this is how', and that goes a long way. It's way beyond prescribing sets and reps and exercises. That's another big part where Jake's physio, Alex, was really helpful."

Diving into the detail became the order of the day, as the inter-team phone calls, zoom chats and meetings increased in regularity behind the scenes. Communication was key.

"It was very hands-on and a lot more labour intensive than before," says Kay. "We were putting everything under the microscope and planning every week individually, which you don't often do. Everyone had their say, we would all contribute and we would tweak and change [as we went along]. It was very athlete focused, which I'm a big fan of.

"It was very proactive and reactive. Any issue whatsoever, within 24 hours things were changed and a new plan was in place. It was real micro scale stuff and I think that, to get out of that rut that Jake was in, it was really important.

"Every minute detail we could monitor and measure, we were. It was actually a really good example of interdisciplinary team working."

The "unsung hero" in it all, says Kay, was Georgie. It's not so long ago that she was an



elite athlete herself but she immersed herself in a new role.

"She managed a lot of the data, directly helping her dad, and she plans an awful lot of stuff," says Kay. "We would call her team manager, doing all of this work that no one sees, and for Jake you can see how much her support keeps him going as well. They are a really good team and an amazing couple.

"But, the reality is that every ounce of work that was done was him. We were just planning things and telling him what to do, so it really is testament to his resolve."

The new approach and careful management began to work, with Wightman regaining his fitness powers, but that development actually raised another question.

"When you haven't got an injury, then it's all about: 'Are you still good enough?'," admits the European and Commonwealth medallist. "Every other year it's been these injuries that have stopped me from showing it, but now it was just me. I was fit. Everyone had done their jobs, therefore I just had to go out there and prove that I still could do it, which was pretty daunting."

> **Everyone had done their jobs, so I just had to go out there and prove that I still could do it, which was pretty daunting**

The first big test arrived with the opening qualifying heat in Tokyo – a stage that proved to be chaotic as the likes of then 1500m world leader Azeddine Habz and former Olympic champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen crashed out.

"I hadn't raced a championship race for three years, and I hadn't raced that well during the season," says Wightman. "I'd done the work so it was: 'Can I still race the champs?'. But as soon as I was midway through that heat, I knew I felt alright, and I felt good.

"The heat was stressful, and then the semi and the final were enjoyable because I was able just to go out relaxed and do what I wanted. I didn't have any pressure at all, so it was a pretty freeing position to be in. And that's what I kept telling myself before – there was no expectation. I was able to go under the radar."

Wightman had looked very comfortable in the semi-final too, but the majority of the attention still fell on the likes of young Dutchman Niels Laros and Josh Kerr. In the final the defending champion's ruptured calf soon ruled him out of contention and opened up the medal fight. His British team-mate strode forward.

With 200m to go Wightman went for broke and, until the final strides of Isaac Nader's searing finish, appeared to be about to clinch his second world title. The crowd in Japan's National Stadium roared and, thousands of miles away, so did Kay.

"I was screaming in my car like a maniac," he says. "I watched him break and as soon as he did that you could just see that he was going to win a medal. And then I thought he was going to [win gold]. I was convinced."

Nader ultimately won the fight to hit the line first. Just.

"For a second, I was a bit gutted for Jake because he didn't get gold," adds Kay. "But, really, it was a huge, huge win. I was sat in my car screaming and then, two minutes later, had to put down the iPad, compose myself and go and pick up my daughter. It was quite a strange afternoon! But I was so happy for him.

"If anyone deserves it, it really is Jake. And you can see it and hear it already, he's completely changed his outlook now. He's looking forwards again. I think that's probably the best moment of my coaching career."

Snow has been falling heavily outside of Wightman's window as *AW's* British Male Athlete of the Year chews the fat from a training stint in Flagstaff, Arizona.

He admits getting back into winter training has been a "slog" but there's a sweetness about being able to run at this time of year, rather than finding himself in rehab or on the cross trainer. There's another busy year, with a potential farewell to the European Championships and the Commonwealth Games, to prepare for.

"Having the ball in my own court these next few years is what I'm going to aim to do," he says. "And it just be in my hands as to how my body is. I was stuck in a bad cycle of those problems and I feel like I've got off it. Hopefully that is what I need to be able to make sure that I can get the most out of my body." AW

ABOVE: Isaac Nader pips Wightman to gold on the line in Tokyo

BRITISH FEMALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

A tale of two cities

Amy Hunt excelled on the global stage with 200m silver in Tokyo but, as she explains to **Euan Crumley**, it was a run in London which provided one of the most pivotal moments of her career

It was the performance that kept her going in the darkest of times – the proof that there was something worth fighting for as the impact of serious injury hit hard. Yet, with fitness fully restored in the early stages of this outdoor season, it also began to weigh more heavily. A source of frustration as much as inspiration.

Amy Hunt was just 17 in the summer of 2019 when she covered 200m in 22.42, an under-18 world record that marked her out as an exceptional young sprinting talent. For a variety of reasons in the intervening years – be it Covid, the challenge of combining top level athletics with an English literature degree at Cambridge or a ruptured left quadriceps that required surgery – the now 23-year-old went into this year with that mark still representing her personal best. To her mind, however, it certainly no longer represented the ceiling of her abilities.

"When I went through my surgery, I thought: 'I ran faster than all of my idols did at 17 so I clearly have something'," she says of that record. "I had this intangible, intrinsic sense of: 'I'm supposed to be good. I have that ability inside of me', and I knew that that wasn't going to disappear. That run happened for a reason. You can't just get that quick through pure fluke or chance.

"It was starting to be frustrating as we moved into this year, because I kept saying: 'I can't believe 17-year-old me is quicker than I'm running right now. She was really quick!'."

After graduating from university and teaming up with coach Marco Airale in the Italian city of Padua in the summer of 2023, Hunt had spent much of that time rebuilding herself. "When I first joined this group, there was still such a big disparity between left and right [legs]," she says. "Because the injury was so traumatic, it killed off a lot of my nerves. It took quite a while to reconfigure everything, strengthen that side and rebuild that whole neural connection.

"A lot of what we were doing the first year was just reaching an equilibrium and then, when we started again a year ago, it was like: 'Right. We're finally on a clean slate'."

Hunt has been one of the most raced athletes in the world in 2025 and, after a full indoor season where she dropped her 60m PB from 7.21 to 7.09 and finished fifth at the World Indoor Championships, the time felt right to start rewriting her outdoor marks.

Everything was coming together, and a then 100m PB of 11.03 (her best is now 11.02) promptly arrived at the Doha Diamond League in early May, but it was the 200m time that was the most significant – and the one that was proving to be elusive.

A run of 22.44, albeit with an illegal tailwind of 2.5, put it under threat in mid-May, while she clocked 22.67 at June's Rome Diamond League while suffering with what turned out to be shingles and 22.45 at the Paris Diamond League was in part due to an unkind lane draw. "The conditions were there in so many races, but it wasn't quite happening," she says.

Hunt's next opportunity, it turned out, would



AMY HUNT

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



> **In a sense, it was like saying farewell to the younger version of Amy, and stepping into the next stage of my life and my career**

come in London. A broad smile spreads across her face as she recalls that Diamond League meeting.

"It was in front of 60,000 home fans and my whole family, my coaches, my agents were there. My best friend Julie was there taking pictures so I got to run over and hug her at the end," she says. The embrace was very much celebratory, too. Hunt had clocked 22.31 – a run that represented so much.

"In a sense, it was like saying farewell to the younger version of Amy, and stepping into the next stage of my life and my career," she says. "The process of growing up, almost. It's like that turned over a new leaf for me and gave me that confidence of 'I'm finally my own sprinter again. I don't have that 17-year old sitting on my back'.

"I ran 22.31 and, after the race, coach said to me: 'You know, you're going to run that in [something like] two years' time, and you're going to turn around to me and be really, really annoyed'. It's so funny but a month later, at the Silesia Diamond League, I ran exactly the same time and I was so annoyed. I remember storming back to the warm-up area and he was like: 'Do you remember what I said to you in London?'. I'd gone from this person that was sobbing about having broken 22.42 to now being so angry with myself at what was such a messy race that had actually still been 22.31. I think it shows my progress as an athlete."

An even bigger indication of Hunt's development came at the World Championships. She had reached the 100m semi-finals in Tokyo but had high hopes of making a bigger impact over the half lap event, fully aware that her finishing strength and speed could take her a long way.

Heading to Japan, her PB now stood at 22.14 from a photo finish final at the British Championships which had just gone the way of Dina Asher-Smith but proved to be another big moment of the summer.

Another chunk was removed from Hunt's PB in the World Championships semi-finals, when she clocked 22.08. In the final, America's Melissa Jefferson-Wooden strode away to gold but, behind her, the medals were up for grabs and the Briton promptly seized hers as she flew to silver. It was testament to her being able to stay relaxed in the most heightened of circumstances.

"My parents got me a little compact mirror that lights up and sometimes, in the call room, I'll actually be using that to top up my make-up, which may sound quite vain, but it's a tactic to calm yourself down," says Hunt of her pre-race preparation. "You can't really have a shaky hand while you're doing your lip liner so it's a tactic to bring yourself back to that moment and remember that you're here, you're in the present. Just feel it, and don't be worrying about



BELOW: Amy Hunt surges through to take the silver medal in the 200m in Tokyo

what's about to happen. I enjoy the feeling of being in the call room, being sat there and feeling on the precipice of something."

Stepping out on to the track, familiarity was Hunt's friend.

"[At the World Championships] I was always in lane five [for the 200m]," she adds. "When I got to the final, I was like: 'This is the exact same pair of blocks, this is the exact lane, the angles, curves, trajectories are the same'. And I'd run a PB the day before so I was thinking: 'You just have to run exactly the same as that'.

"I remember standing on the start line, really taking in the moment, looking into the crowd, and thinking: 'All these people have turned up just to cheer us on, and they're so excited to watch the race. And I'm so excited to race'. I was so ready to go."

Bahamian sprinter Anthonique Strachan's false start added to the challenge but, when the final did get underway, the thoughts rushed in for Hunt.

"I can definitely hear the crowd [when I'm racing] but it's like the crowd noise that you hear in films, where it's more background noise," she says. "I'm trying to listen to my thoughts, the race plan, trying to work out where I am in the race and if I need to change tactics. There's so much flashing through your mind in that moment.

"Because I was in lane five and Marie-Josée Ta Lou-Smith was in lane four, we had said that: 'As long as you don't see her, or she doesn't come past you, by the time it gets to 100m to go, you will be absolutely fine'. She's a magnificent starter so I was like: 'If I can stay ahead of her around the bend, I know I'm going to be alright because I'm a lot stronger than the other girls, so I just need to put myself in a position where I can then cause damage'.

"When I got to 100m I realised that we were all in one line and I was just trying so hard to stay focused. I was swearing in my head non-stop and thinking: 'Oh my gosh, it's on. It's really on. I'm about to do this!

"I don't remember anything about that middle part of the race. I just remember hitting the edge of the turn and thinking: 'Oh my God, I'm gonna do this' and then about 20m out [from the line] is the next memory I have. I'm just trying to think: 'Hold your form'.

"This year I experienced a couple of races that set me up incredibly well for Tokyo. At the British Championships, for example, in the 200m final I probably dipped for the line a little bit too early but that was so, so helpful, because when we got to Tokyo I didn't do the same thing. In the 200m, as soon as you start dipping early, it's horrible and it's unrecoverable. You have to time the dip quite well.

"So all these lessons were going through my mind and then I crossed the line, and I threw myself at it. I knew there were two or three of us in the mix, and I thought I was ahead, but I was never sure."

Confirmation soon arrived that Hunt had secured second place, ahead of the reigning champion Shericka Jackson. After the celebrations, there was some tourist time with her mum in Japan following the championships, then a holiday in Saint Lucia. When Hunt speaks to *AW* she is doing so from her home in Padua. Training has resumed and there are multiple targets to aim for next year, from the World Indoors, to the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, European Championships in Birmingham and World Athletics' new Ultimate Championships.

"We're not afraid to go for everything," she says. "In the 60m, I was fifth in the world this year and that's now the expectation for next year. That's the benchmark.

"We're starting to encroach more on the British records and that's another big target. I'm just a very competitive person, so I'm quite looking forward to the many competitions that we have coming up next year."

Should she achieve some of her aims in 2026, Hunt might find herself finishing another year being named as *AW's* British Female Athlete of the Year. For now, she'll enjoy this one, though.

"I think we forget how strong a nation we are in track and field," she says. "When we talk to people from other countries and obviously when I talk to other people in my training group, they really respect the UK in terms of its track and field legacy, its history, its athletes. We have such a rich track and field culture so [the award] is actually a very big deal." AW



ABOVE: Hunt celebrates her silver at the World Championships





INTERNATIONAL MALE U20 ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

The world awaits

With his school days now over, Gout Gout is starting to focus fully on making more progress as an elite international sprinter. **Nicole Jeffery** examines what's coming next for this sporting phenomenon



School's out for Gout Gout. The 17-year-old Australian sprinter graduated from historic Ipswich Grammar School, just 40km south-west of 2032 Olympic Games host city Brisbane, late last month, marking the end of his time as a schoolboy phenomenon

And what a phenomenon. A silver medallist at the World Under-20 Championships in Lima last year, aged just 16, he officially became the fastest 200m runner Australia and Oceania has ever produced earlier this year. His outstanding performances mean he has finished 2025 by being voted AW's International Male U20 Athlete of the year.

Gout's domestic season took off when he ran 20.05 in the heats at the Queensland Championships in March, which bettered 1968 Olympic silver medallist Peter Norman's 57-year-old Australian benchmark and area record (20.06), and the qualifying standard for the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo in September. He followed that up the same day with his first sub-20-second clocking (19.98, albeit with a 3.6m/sec tailwind) in the state final.

Gout improved to 19.84 to win the Australian senior title in Perth in April. Again there was an illegal tailwind but only just (2.2). On the same weekend, he also recorded his first two sub-10-second 100m races (both 9.99, both windy) to win the national under 20 title.

The demands of his final year of school kept him largely off the international circuit in 2025, apart from a quick school holiday excursion to Europe in June and July, where he improved his national 200m record to 20.02 to win at the Golden Spike meet in Ostrava, and won the under 23 200m at the Diamond League meeting in Monaco, running 20.10 into a stiff headwind of -1.9m.

He was not sighted again internationally until his arrival in Tokyo in September, to the type of fanfare that is seldom accorded to a teenager ranked outside the top 10 in the world. His shoe sponsor, Adidas, organised a pre-event media conference for him, which was well-attended not only by Australian media but international reporters who are also tracking his stunning progress.

Gout's primary ambition, he told those in attendance, was to get a legal sub-20 clocking under his belt. Unfortunately, the Tokyo weather did not oblige. He did reach the semi-

GOUT GOUT



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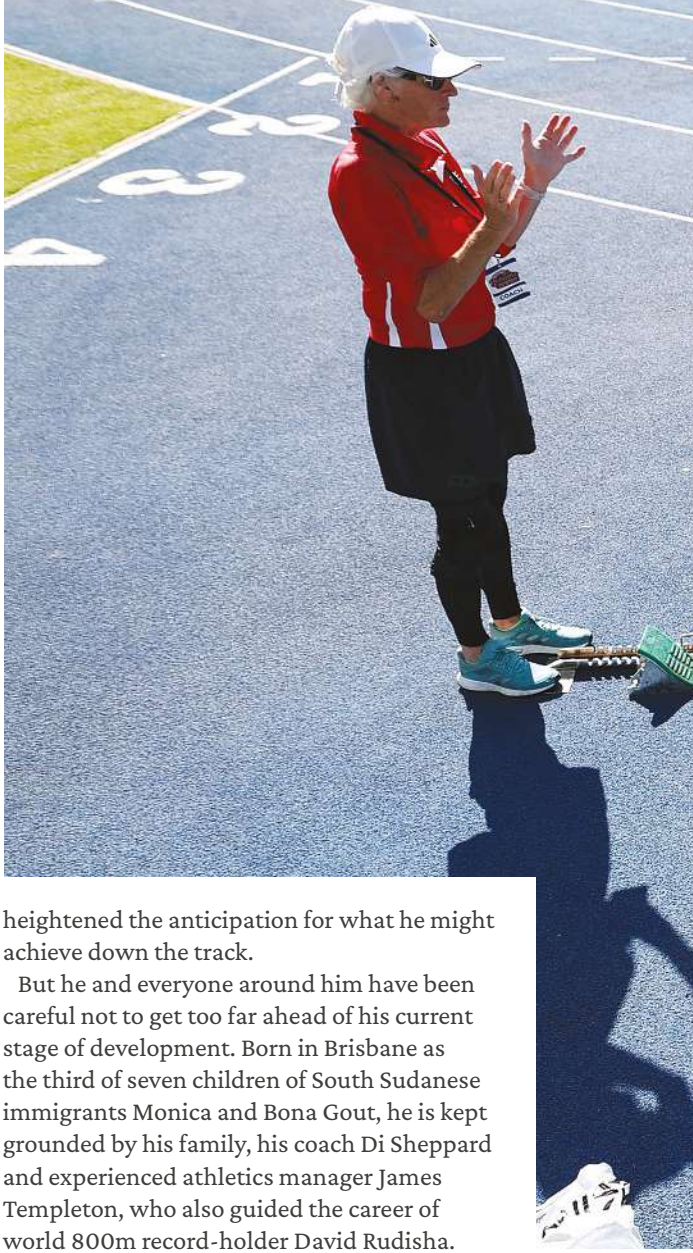
ABOVE: Gout Gout competes in the 200m semi-finals in Tokyo

finals with a 20.23 effort for third in his heat, but that left him in a highly-competitive semi-final where his fourth-place finish (20.36) was not enough to advance to the final.

The result was pretty much as expected by experienced judges of athletics who had not been swayed by the hype surrounding the long-striding teenager, and figured his inexperience would become a factor at the big show. However, there was no denying his appeal to the Australian public. The television ratings showed that more than three million of his compatriots tuned in to watch him run both his heat and his semi-final.

There has not been as much fascination for a young athlete in Australia since a 15-year-old Ian Thorpe won the 400m freestyle title at the 1998 World Swimming Championships in Perth, on the way to becoming a triple Olympic gold medallist in Sydney in 2000.

Gout is already one of Australia's most recognisable athletes and the fortunate timing that will deliver him to a home Olympic Games aged 24, and in his sprinting prime, has only heightened the anticipation for what he might achieve down the track.



But he and everyone around him have been careful not to get too far ahead of his current stage of development. Born in Brisbane as the third of seven children of South Sudanese immigrants Monica and Bona Gout, he is kept grounded by his family, his coach Di Sheppard and experienced athletics manager James Templeton, who also guided the career of world 800m record-holder David Rudisha.

Sheppard, the long-standing coach at Ipswich Grammar School, first spied Gout as a 13-year-old, tagging along with one of his mates to try out for the school athletics team.

"I saw him running on the oval and there was just something about him and the way he moved," she recalls. "I couldn't pinpoint it, but gut instinct just screamed at me: Who's that kid?"

The no-nonsense veteran and the easygoing kid have since formed a powerful bond. They brought in Templeton when Gout's profile exploded off the back of grainy YouTube videos of him destroying his rivals in inter-school competition, his gait eerily reminiscent of that of the young Usain Bolt.

> **There has not been as much fascination for a young athlete in Australia since a 15-year-old Ian Thorpe won the 400m freestyle title at the 1998 World Swimming Championships in Perth**



ABOVE: Gout trains under the watchful eye of coach Di Sheppard

Templeton's primary responsibility has been to keep the world at bay and allow coach and athlete the space to work on his development. That means "saying no to 95 per cent of everything that's asked of him". One of the few exceptions was signing a long-term contract with Adidas last year, which may well continue right through until the Brisbane Olympics.

Gout said goodbye to school athletics in October – winning the 400m in a meeting record of 46.14, and helping Ipswich Grammar to win the 4x100m relay, at the Greater Public Schools Championships in Queensland – then dialled back his training to sit his final exams.

Now the big wide world awaits, and the task of moving up the senior ranks to become one of the world's best sprinters (he's currently ranked No.17 in the world).

He's had a taste of what's in front of him, with his debut in Tokyo, but there is much more to savour, and much more to learn in the years ahead.

Templeton marks Gout's athletics report card this year as an "eight out of ten" – a ten would have required a top four finish in Tokyo – but the manager remains confident that they are on the right trajectory to join the world elite.

Without the distraction of school, Gout's training load and competition exposure will increase next year, but steadily. Templeton believes "having patience'' is key.

They are likely to announce a couple of new commercial partners by the end of the year to help offset the costs of an international career, but these will be selected strategically.

Templeton is conscious of "not overloading him" on or off the track. Gout will continue to race sparingly next year. The competitions earmarked in his schedule so far include the Maurie Plant Meet in Melbourne (March 28) and the Australian Championships from April 9-12 in Sydney (the qualifying competition for the Glasgow Commonwealth Games and the World U20 Championships in Eugene); the adidas City Games in the US in May, the Golden Spike in Ostrava, and perhaps a couple of other one-day meetings.

He is unlikely to take on a full schedule at the Commonwealth Games (July 27-August 2), because of the proximity of the World U20 Championships in Eugene (August 5-9), where he wants to win the gold medal that eluded him in Lima, but the approach to that double has yet to be determined.

If he continues to develop at the same express pace, Gout won't be short on opportunities. The trick now is deciding on the right ones. AW



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

Rapid progress

INTERNATIONAL FEMALE U20 ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Jasmine Collett takes a closer look at the exploits of Kelly Doualla, the Italian teenager whose sprinting performances belie her tender years

Kelly Doualla turned 16 last month, another celebration to add into a year that on one hand must almost feel like dream and, on the other, entirely earned. Named AW's International Female Under-20 Athlete of the Year, she has spent 2025 exceeding expectations, collecting medals, breaking records and demonstrating a talent on the track far beyond her years.

Born in Pavia to Cameroonian parents, Doualla's path in athletics seems to have almost been pre-destined. Her full name – Kelly Ann Maevane Doualla Edimo – and middle name, "Ann," honors Jamaican sprint legend Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, a hero she has followed since childhood thanks to her mother's admiration for the sprinter.

By the time she was 12, Doualla had already made her mark, running the outdoor 60m in 7.94 seconds – an early sign of the talent that would soon explode onto the European stage.

Now based in Milan and coached by Walter

ABOVE: Kelly Doualla celebrates her gold in the 100m at the European Under-20 Championships



ABOVE: Kelly Doualla crosses in first place tao take gold in Finland

Monti at elite club CUS Pro Patria Milano, she has continued to refine her speed and technique. Watching her this year, it's impossible not to notice just how naturally she carries herself on the track. There's a quiet confidence in her stride that suggests she knows she belongs, even when racing against athletes older than herself.

Her performances in 2025 have also been impossible to ignore. She began the indoor season with a European under-18 best in the 60m, running 7.23 and later improving it to 7.19 – a time that makes her the second-fastest Italian woman ever over the distance.

Even a muscle injury that cut short her indoor campaign couldn't stop her momentum.

By June, she was back outdoors, setting Italian U18 and U20 100m records with times of 11.37 and 11.36, before lowering that mark to 11.21 in July.

But what really stood out to the wider athletics world was her performance at the European Under-20 Championships in Tampere. Despite being younger than nearly all of her competitors, Doualla approached the heats and semi-finals with ease, then made the final look almost effortless. She surged ahead to finish in 11.22, comfortably beating Great Britain's Mabel Akande, and became the youngest-ever European under-20 100m champion.

"I really hoped I could achieve something big," Doualla told European Athletics at the time. "And I can say I've done it. This was what I had set for myself since the start of the year. On the track I was quite calm, at the blocks there was a bit of anxiety, but that was good because it helped me run faster. Without the support of the Italian team I don't think I could have done it. I've dreamed of this victory many times."

Doualla's success didn't stop with the individual sprint. Returning to anchor Italy's 4x100m relay, she helped her team claim gold in 43.72, another national under-20 record.

Beyond sprinting, Doualla has experimented with the long jump this year, too, reaching 6.42m – a distance that speaks volumes about her natural athleticism. Seeing someone so young with this much talent, it's exciting to think about what the future might hold, provided she continues to have the right support and environment. That support seems to be in place. After the European Championships, there were whispers about whether or not Doualla might compete for her country in the 4x100m relay at the World Championships in Tokyo. On paper, she looked more than ready but Monti ruled it out immediately, choosing instead to protect her development.

Despite being an European under-20 champion, Doualla is still very much an under-18 athlete. Born in 2009, she has another year at that level, which could culminate in a European Under-18 Championships in Rieti next year. That opportunity alone makes her 2026 season one to watch closely.

Even at this early stage, Doualla's times are remarkable on a senior level. Her personal best of 11.21 now ranks her as the joint third-fastest Italian woman ever over 100m, alongside Irene Siragusa and behind only Zaynab Dosso (11.01) and Manuela Levorato (11.14). Yet, while the numbers are impressive, what strikes me most is her attitude. She isn't chasing the senior ranks recklessly; she's building deliberately and steadily without risking burnout or pressure too soon.

"For the future I want to keep going this way... improving more and more." she says. AW

> **I really hoped I could achieve something big. This was what I had set for myself since the start of the year**



Levelling up

Innes FitzGerald talks to **Jasmine Collett** about a year in which she landed continental gold medals, set new standards and got her first taste of competing on the senior world stage

BRITISH FEMALE U20 ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

At the beginning of the year, Innes FitzGerald was looking at British Milers Club (BMC) race options, planning the season in the way she usually did. Even though she was already a double European under-20 cross country champion and one of Britain's most established young middle-distance talents, the early structure of her season felt familiar: choose the BMCs, build the rhythm, sharpen for the summer. But, this time, her coach Gavin Pavey wasn't offering the usual guidance.

"I remember I was trying to plan out what races I was doing," she says. "I was saying to my coach: 'Should I enter these BMCs?' And he was keeping quite quiet. I was like: 'What's going on? Surely we need to have a bit more of a plan'. And now I know he didn't want me to sell myself a bit short."

Only later did FitzGerald realise that Pavey had been steering her towards something different. Instead of local meets, he envisioned her stepping out on to the Diamond League stage. The shift made sense as the year unfolded: her progression from an established junior athlete to world-level senior competitor happened not by surprise, but through a season that kept levelling up – from national bronze in the 5000m to double European under-20 gold, to taking her place on a senior World Championships start line.

"Going into 2025, I didn't really know what I was in for," says the 19-year-old. "I wasn't expecting the season to work out how it did, but I'm incredibly grateful for all the opportunities and I gained so much experience."

FitzGerald is only now beginning to comprehend the scale of what she achieved on the track. The first major step came at the European Indoor Championships, competing in the 3000m thanks to her third place at the

ABOVE: Innes FitzGerald on her way to 3000m gold in the European Under-20 Championships

RIGHT: Competing at the World Championships in Tokyo





PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



> I didn't really know what I was in for but I'm incredibly grateful for all the opportunities and I gained so much experience

British Indoors. Apeldoorn marked her debut in a senior British vest.

"Jake Smith was giving me a lift back from training and I remember him saying to me: 'What's the European Indoor standard?' and I said: 'Oh, I'm never going to get that'. Then suddenly I made the senior team. It's different when you get to the senior level as everyone seems a bit more focused and in their element."

Despite the shift, FitzGerald achieved her goal of simply making the final, going on to finish eighth in 8:57.00.

"Rarely, as athletes, do we come away from races feeling pleased with ourselves. But the overwhelming feeling was pride," she says. "That champs was important going into the summer, especially going into those Diamond League races where you're suddenly in a different country by yourself. It was important to have experiences like that."

Pavey's reluctance to encourage the BMC plan suddenly made sense as Diamond League opportunities began to emerge. That setting allowed the University of Exeter Sport and Exercise Science student to compete at a high level without the tactical pressure of a championship environment, finishing third in Stockholm (3000m), 12th in London and 15th in Brussels (both in the 5000m).

London was the standout moment and the standout race of the year for FitzGerald. In front of a packed home crowd, she broke the European under-20 5000m record with 14:39.56, surpassing Zola Budd's 1985 mark of 14:48.07. After that aforementioned third place in the 5000m at the British Championships – winning her first outdoor national senior medal – she was then whisked away to Tampere for the European Under-20 Championships.

The change in environment required a different mindset, but she welcomed the shift.

"It's a completely different atmosphere," she says. "More of a team thing. More chatty. More relaxed."

But there was a clear target. After finishing fourth at last year's World U20 Championships in the 3000m, she was aiming for gold in both the 3000m and 5000m. The Briton delivered exactly what she intended: two commanding, winning performances and a championship record of 8:46.39 in the 3000m.

If London was the emotional peak and the under-20 double gold her expected triumph, then the World Championships in Tokyo proved the most formative experience of all. Making the British senior team at such a tender age was a major achievement.

FitzGerald might not have reached the 5000m final there but she says: "Just being there, racing at that level, was something I was really grateful for. The whole experience was so different. The call rooms, the timings, the structure... everything feels like a step up. I left feeling like I understood so much more about what it takes to be competitive at that level. It's made me really excited for the future. I left everything out there and I came away feeling satisfied that I made it to the champs. I know there's a lot more to come in future years."

FitzGerald's competitive year still isn't over, though. She went straight into the cross-country season, winning both the Cross Challenge events in both Cardiff and Liverpool, with the latter booking her spot to the European Cross Country Championships in the Algarve, where she will hope to win her third under-20 title.

With all the travelling FitzGerald has done this year to compete at senior levels, sustainability has become an increasingly important consideration – something she has spoken about openly.

"I guess it's something that's still very close to my heart and always has been," she says. "I think there's always more that can be done."

Next year the UK will host both the European Championships and the Commonwealth Games, which brings more than just logistical convenience.

"I think that's going to be great for us as Brits," she says. "But, also, it's an area where lots of European countries can come over quite easily."

Being closer to home also opens the door for her family and friends to witness her competitions without the environmental impact of long-haul flights.

"I never want to encourage my family or friends to have to fly to come and see me race, because I don't think that's necessarily the right decision to make," she says. "But, having them in the UK next year is just going to be extra special, because I can hopefully have lots of family and friends there watching. And I think the rest of the GB team that end up going will probably be thinking the same." AW



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

Staying power

BRITISH MALE U20 ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Jasmine Collett talks to Tom Waterworth about how he used the experience of disappointment at a major championships as motivation to help him reach the podium with his follow-up attempt

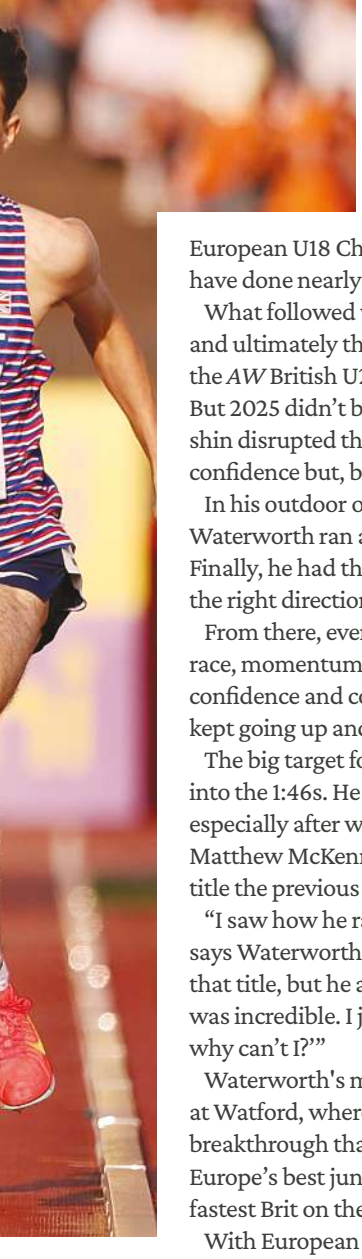
It's a truth in this sport that some of your biggest breakthroughs often grow out of your biggest disappointments. For Tom Waterworth, that moment arrived at the European U18 Championships last year. He went into the race confident, fully aware of what he was capable of and ready to make a mark on the international stage. But, when it was all over, he was fifth – outside of the medals and left with the feeling that months of work hadn't translated into the result he'd hoped for.

The 18-year-old chose not to dwell on it, though. Instead, he used it as a springboard. One year later, he was standing on the podium at the European U20 Championships, a silver medal around his neck and a 1:46.73 personal best to close out the season.

"I lost all confidence," Waterworth recalls of the under-18 experience. "I came into that thinking and knowing that I could have won, so coming away with fifth was very upsetting.

"I left feeling dejected and I thought that maybe this was it. I wasn't going to make GB teams any more. But it also sparked more motivation and determination to work much harder and stay on the right path. If I had done really well at those

ABOVE: Tom Waterworth battles with British team-mates Will Rabjohns and Rafferty Mirfin at the European Under-20 Championships



European U18 Champs then I don't think I would have done nearly as well as I did this year."

What followed was a new year, a fresh start, and ultimately the season that has earned him the *AW* British U20 Athlete of the Year award. But 2025 didn't begin smoothly. Tendinitis in his shin disrupted the indoor season and shook his confidence but, by May, things shifted.

In his outdoor opener at the Watford BMC, Waterworth ran a then personal best of 1:48.16. Finally, he had the proof that he was heading in the right direction.

From there, everything started to build. Race by race, momentum was gained, sharpening both confidence and consistency. "From there, it just kept going up and up and up," he says.

The big target for the year was simple: break into the 1:46s. He knew it was possible, especially after watching British team-mate Matthew McKenna win the European under-18 title the previous season.

"I saw how he ran in the same race as me," says Waterworth. "And not only did he win that title, but he also ran 1:46 last year which was incredible. I just thought: 'If he can do it, why can't I?'"

Waterworth's moment came in June, back at Watford, where he clocked 1:46.73 – a breakthrough that solidified his place among Europe's best juniors and put him as the second-fastest Brit on the under-20 list for 2025.

With European U20 qualification achieved, he approached the championships with a noticeably different mindset compared to the year before. Ranking fifth on paper, he went in clear-headed and realistic. The aim was straightforward: make the final, run well and let the race unfold.

The heats brought one of the most surprising performances of his season. Waterworth ran 1:47.83 – the fastest heat ever recorded in European Under-20 Championship history.

"I did not think I'd be able to run the time that I did, let alone have it be the fastest heat ever. That was a bit bonkers when I saw that pop up on social media afterwards," he says.

The final became a standout moment not just for Waterworth, but for British middle-distance running as a whole. Three British athletes crossed the line in the medal positions – Waterworth in third, Rafferty Mirfin second, and Will Rabjohns taking gold. But that celebration was short-lived, with Rabjohns disqualified shortly afterwards.

"I was over the moon that we all managed to get one, two, three," says Waterworth. "It was almost a joke after the heats, people saying, "imagine if..."

"It was a bit nuts. Will told me as we crossed the line that he had gone off track but I had absolutely no clue, so I thought he would be okay."

Waterworth's bronze became silver, but the excitement of a British sweep disappeared instantly.

"I go from being so happy with a bronze, to then having Will getting the gold taken from him and honestly feeling quite upset for him," he adds. "There was a whole dark cloud around it, with lots of stuff on social media about that race, too.

"I was more disappointed by the fact that we didn't get one, two, three than anything else."

Another major step in Waterworth's development this year has been his move to Loughborough University. The choice was shaped by the coaching set-up, the training environment and the depth of athletes he could work alongside.

"I'd always heard Loughborough was the place to go for really strong development and nurturing athletes. The States was never an option, I'd heard too many stories of overtraining," Waterworth says.

His relationship with coach Kyle Bennett helped make the decision even more straightforward.

"I met Kyle at European Under 18s and he was really supportive leading up to the heats, the semi and after the final. He helped me so much after that, so it was almost a no-brainer," he adds.

Two months into his time at Loughborough, the change has already made an impact.

"It's definitely been different, but a change that needed to happen," says Waterworth. "I'm doing completely different stuff to what I used to. I'm now doing strength and conditioning twice a week, which I'd never done prior to uni. Hopefully it will help me dip into the 1:45, 1:44 sort of range in a year or so."

Now, as the year winds down, Waterworth is already looking ahead to the next major milestone: the 2025 World Under-20 Championships in Oregon.

Alongside that, he's dabbling with cross country this winter – not his favourite terrain, but part of the broader challenge that comes with developing as an athlete.



LEFT: Waterworth on the podium in Tampere with his silver medal



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

The hardest act to follow

Hannah Cockroft writes about the challenges of coming off the back of a Paralympic year and the work that went into adding to her substantial collection of World Para Athletics Championships gold medals

Last year was always going to be a hard one to follow. Boasting both a World Para Athletics Championships and the Paris Paralympic Games, 2024 was a season bursting with opportunity, challenge and a unique chance to complete "the double" within a year. Throw in a wedding and a honeymoon, the once in a lifetime moments just kept coming.

So, it should come as no surprise that I found it difficult to motivate myself for the 2025 season. With the promise of another World Para Athletics Championships only being confirmed in December last year, I had to pull myself away from the festivities and push myself back into the harsh realities of winter training.

Due to playing catch-up after the disruption of the pandemic, we have seen three World Para Athletics Championships in three consecutive years, along with other major championships still sticking to their original schedule. New Delhi this summer marked the end of a long run of high-pressure events and throughout the year I felt myself counting down to a proper break from what has been a demanding cycle.

The carrot throughout the year was the offer of a 400m for my T34 classification, which hasn't been included in a World

ABOVE: Hannah Cockroft on her way to gold in the T34 100m in New Delhi



Championships schedule since 2015. The 400m is probably my favourite event – not as intense as the 100m, and happily not as far as the 800m. It was my first event when we got to India, and it felt a relief not to be thrown straight into my competitive Paralympic events. I had time to check out my competition, the track, the call room and the crowd so I knew what to expect later.

When the race came around, frustratingly there were only four girls on the start line, including myself. I'm unsure why more didn't enter and it was disappointing to see our opportunity for an extra event on the Paralympic schedule be taken away as quickly as it was added.

This opportunity did, however, give me the chance to race for and win three gold medals, taking my World Championships gold medal to 19, and I enjoyed the training throughout the year for it.

My highlight of the whole championships, though, was seeing my husband, Nathan Maguire, bring home a hard-fought bronze medal in the T54 1500m, and getting to watch trackside with his parents and coaches. Everyone hangs medals around my neck before the race has even begun, but, as Nathan is just breaking onto the podiums, he reminds me of the excitement that success brings.

After the hype of Paris and being back in front of 60,000 people, it was quite a contrast and quite discouraging to see no more than 500 people sparsely filling a stadium of the same size in India. I'm always hopeful after a Paralympic year that the interest will continue to follow us, at least into the following year. When the announcement of the championships came at the end of 2024, after the Paris excitement had died down, and being taken to a city that had poor ticket sales for the last athletics event it held; the Commonwealth Games in 2010, I think we were all worried it was not going to be well attended.

Whilst I understand the importance of taking Para Sport outside of Europe for its global development, I do hope that this is another reminder to organisers that they need to work harder to fill the stadiums and give us the crowds we deserve.

What did lift my spirits was the amount of support the team received online. It was such a boost to see people asking where they could watch and sending their congratulations and I can only hope that World Para Athletics also saw those messages and give fans more opportunities to come and support us in the future.

A major focus for me this year has been working on my push technique in the 800m,

> **New Delhi is another reminder to organisers that they need to work harder to fill the stadiums and give us the crowds we deserve**

for it to be smoother and to bring my arms higher in every push. Altering a push technique is similar to changing how you run, it's so deeply ingrained that it's still a work in progress, but the work showed throughout the season. After pushing my second-fastest 800m ever, 1:45.87 in Switzerland in May, I was proud of my push in India where I broke 1:50.00 for the first time at a major championships. It gave me some much-needed confidence that the work we've been doing this year was heading in the right direction.

Now I look ahead to a year that I have never experienced in my career, a year with no major championship on offer. With my event not included in the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow next summer, and no host announced for a Para athletics European Championships, I find myself in a place of freedom.

I have seen 2026 coming for a long time, and for most of that time I have feared its arrival but I am now optimistic that what is on offer to me is an opportunity to get creative. Instead of following the same blueprint because we have something to be ready for, I can get stronger and I can spend summer with family and friends for the first time in nearly 15 years. So, you may not see me on as many start lines next year but, be assured, I'll be quietly laying the groundwork for LA 2028. AW



PHOTO BY ROGER KELLER

BELOW: Cockroft celebrates her medal haul in New Delhi

Bullet train

MALE PARA ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Marcel Hug talks to **Tim Adams** about his ever-growing tally of marathon wins, the role of technology in wheelchair racing and what the future might hold

Marcel Hug isn't planning on retiring any time soon. The "Swiss Silver Bullet" has had another extraordinary season, with success on both the track and roads.

At the World Para Athletics Championships in New Delhi, he secured his 13th world title with T54 5000m gold in the Indian capital. The 39-year-old once again dominated on the roads, with major marathon victories in Boston, London, Berlin, Sydney, Chicago and New York City.

Voted as AW's Male Para Athlete of the Year, Hug is already plotting more domination in 2026 and, even though he will be turning 40, still has an insatiable appetite for more.

How would you sum up 2025?

This year was a really intense season with the World Para Athletics Championships in New Delhi, as well as a lot of marathons. I had a lot of new experiences, including being out in India and then in Australia for the Sydney Marathon. It was incredible to win the 5000m and so many of these prestigious marathons once again.

You won Boston Marathon for an eighth time, took



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



LEFT: Marcel Hug celebrates his fifth win in the London Marathon

your London tally to five, secured victory in Sydney, made it 10 wins in Berlin, triumphed in Chicago on a sixth occasion and made it seven in New York City. How do you reflect on those numbers?
To be honest, it is rather incredible. If I look at those statistics, though, it makes me feel pretty old! As an athlete, I don't like to look back too much. Usually I'm looking to the future and always have the next competition in my mind. I try to be more present and enjoy every single marathon. But I think the time to really reflect is when I stop my career.

What do you make of the current elite wheelchair set-up in marathons and how would you improve it?
I think it's good that we've now got a major marathon in Australia and that will expand to Africa soon. From an organisational view as well, we are in a great way. It's perfect. There are a lot of opportunities and we are included.

Inclusion is so important in marathons and that includes the mass participation element as well. The fact that marathons are continuing to grow is brilliant for the sport.

I would say though that, for us wheelchair athletes, it maybe should be more regulated as, compared to the runners, there aren't too many of us in the field. So instead of spreading the fields over a lot of marathons, we should just try to focus on a few. More generally, I'm also a bit worried about the numbers of younger athletes coming through. I think there's a lot of potential to grow in this area, especially in the build-up to LA 2028.

Do you see yourself competing at LA 2028?
It's not decided yet. I'm just planning year on year right now. I'm 39 right now so we will see what transpires.

How influential has technology been to you in recent years and are there many noticeable differences when competing?
It's firstly very important to have this technology because every sport has to evolve over time. I think it makes us more attractive to watch and it also helps us with our performance.

For example, the aerodynamics on chairs now are so much better and it means that there is far less loss of energy when we're racing. When you are at such a high level, you need to find every single per cent to improve as it could impact the result of the race. From a commercial standpoint, it's also wonderful that big brands and companies are involved in para sport.

You've achieved so much in your career so what still keeps you motivated?
There are so many things that keep me motivated. I just love the sport. I like the training, being outside and the health aspect of moving my body.

I want to keep pushing the boundaries and seeing what's possible. I'm always looking for marginal gains and to keep improving day by day.

Eliud Kipchoge has announced a World Tour of running seven marathons on all seven continents over two years. Would you want to try and do something similar in para sport at some point?
I have not thought about a plan like this! But one of the main reasons I went to race at the Sydney Marathon was because it was their first edition as a major and I wanted to support them by being there. It was so exciting to have a new course and challenge.

I hope to do this with Cape Town and Shanghai over the next few years as well but it's not decided yet.

In terms of legacy, I want to inspire the next generation. I've already organised, along with my coach, the "Swiss Silver Bullet Training Camp" in Nottwil, Switzerland. Young athletes from around the world can come here and we train together for one week. That is so important. AW

> **There are so many things that keep me motivated. I want to keep pushing the boundaries and seeing what's possible**



PHOTO BY JONTY MITCHELL

Golden year

BRITISH MALE MASTERS ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Euan Crumley talks to Colin Spivey, the 91-year-old record-breaker who came to running late but is well and truly making up for lost time

The French 400m runner and his Italian counterpart were left rather disappointed. As they prepared to start the M90 age group contest at the European Masters Championships in Madeira in October, they were under the impression that it would be a straight shootout between the two of them for gold. But they had reckoned without the arrival of Colin Spivey.

The 91-year-old was trying something new. Having become a regular at his local parkrun in Huddersfield since 2012 after being persuaded



We're only here once so make hay while the sun shines. Do it as long as you can

by his daughter to head along, he went on to discover that he was one of the fastest athletes in his age group.

Last year he represented Great Britain for the first time at the World Masters Championships in Gothenburg over 5000m – the first track race of his life and his first journey abroad since being a teenager. He came fourth and his competitive appetite was whetted.

It was suggested that he then think about taking on the decathlon. "The mind said yes but my fitness and ability said no," says Spivey, but he did begin to contemplate growing his athletics vocabulary.

"I thought I could do the shorter distances after I came back from Sweden last year," he tells *AW*. "I just thought if I could do 5000m then I could do 3000m easily – it would be a doddle – so I went to Sheffield to do a 3000m indoors earlier this year and ran a world record, which absolutely amazed me. I had no idea. It's just gone on from there."

And so it was that Spivey headed to the European Masters with four races on his agenda – the 400m, 800m, 1500m and 5000m. He won them all, breaking British M90 records in the first three.

"I felt sorry for the Frenchman," he admits. "In my first race, the 400m, there were just the two of them – him and an Italian chap – and so they thought: 'We're the only two so we'll get gold and silver between us'. They were nice chaps. I competed with the French guy in the 800m and 1500m, too, but he got a silver each time, which isn't too bad, is it?"

There is a hearty chuckle as Spivey tells the tale but there is not a trace of boastfulness. In fact, if anything he seems as surprised as anyone by his success, despite the mounting honours. "It's just one thing after another. I'm a little embarrassed," he says at the news of being named AW's British Masters Male Athlete of the Year.

But his performances are making an impact. He is speaking the day after winning his age category at a 5km road race and adds: "There were so many people wanting photographs taken with me, congratulating me and saying: 'My dad is 95 and he wouldn't go out and do anything, but he's inspired by you, and he's going to try' and all this sort of thing. It's nice to hear."

It's over the shorter distances where Spivey feels most content and comfortable: "Because it's more competitive and I'm running with other similar age groups." And it was his 800m win, in a time of 4:17.60, in Madeira that stands out from his European medal haul.

"That was really good, especially coming around on to the straight on the last lap," he says. "The crowd was so noisy, and just pipping the other chap in front who was in a category lower than me... I enjoyed that."

Spivey insists "he's been lucky" but the secret of his success has been simply to keep moving. The parkrun has become a weekly fixture but, over and above that, what does the rest of his regime look like?

"I do 30 or 40 press-ups and sit-ups every morning and a few stretching exercises," he says. "I go for a walk of one or two hours most days and I go to Edgerton tennis club in Huddersfield to do sponge ball tennis for about 90 minutes each week. Once every couple of weeks, I'll go for a jog on the canal from my house up to Slathwaite, which is about a couple of miles away, and back. That's about as much as I do running wise, apart from the parkrun."

He is already thinking about what comes next. Spivey acknowledges that he's in a privileged position to be able to afford to compete for his country – there is no funding support for masters athletes – but the World Masters in Daegu, South Korea, in August of next year is a definite target. "I've got to carry on now."

He suspects, too, that there are plenty of other older adults out there with untapped athletic potential. So what would his message be to anyone who might be thinking about following his example into the sport?

"We're only here once so make hay while the sun shines, as it were," says Spivey. "They've got to make a start somewhere, rather than just sitting at home, and one of the best places, I think, is the parkruns, because you can just walk and meet other people to get out and enjoy the fresh air."

As for his own endeavours, he adds: "It's a new career now. I've got to the stage where [it's a case of] what the hell – do it as long as you can." AW

LEFT: Colin Spivey on his way to another gold medal at the European Masters Championships

BRITISH FEMALE MASTERS ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

"My life has completely changed"

Sarah Roberts talks to **Ben Bloom** about discovering a love of running that has led to medal-winning and record-breaking sprees in this extraordinary year

Less than a decade ago, Sarah Roberts had an entirely different vision of what life at 75 would entail. The grandmother of five had always been an irregular gym goer during her days working as a solicitor and raising two children, before then increasing to daily exercise sessions in retirement – anything from boxing to zumba, and yoga to legs, bums and tums. But organised sport was not something she had ever considered, least of all running, which she had never done beyond chasing her friends around the playground at primary school.

So, for Roberts to now be crowned *AW's* British Female Masters Athlete of the Year is a quite extraordinary change of course.

"Running had never occurred to me," she says. "I'd never thought of doing it. I thought I would just plod along in the same sort of way as I had been doing, but my life has completely changed because everything now is about running."

Her recently accumulated collection of medals and records is staggering. Over the past 12 months, Roberts has set W75 outdoor world records at 800m, 1500m, one mile, 3000m, 5000m and 10,000m, indoor world records over 800m, 1500m, 3000m, and road world bests at 5km and 10km. A haul of four world indoor titles preceded an unrivalled bounty of eight European gold medals and four silvers. Not bad for someone who had never raced internationally until last year.

It was an unexpected parkrun while on holiday in Cape Town eight years ago that so altered the course of Roberts' life. Encouraged by a local friend to take part, she ambled round the 5km course at the foot of Table Mountain, before returning a week later and running small segments. Upon flying home to Hertfordshire, she soon became a parkrun regular, steadily lowering her best time to less than 23 minutes over the next couple of years.

Buoyed by her improvement, she joined her local athletics club, Dacorum, a few weeks after her 70th birthday and signed up for an 800m race at the end of the 2019 summer. Lining up against teenagers, it was the first time she had ever set foot on a track.

Delayed by the Covid pandemic, it was not until 2022 that she was able to race regularly again. By 2023, she was a double British champion in the 70-74 age group. The following year she won three world titles at her first international competition.

With masters athletics divided into age groups of five-year chunks, Roberts knew just how significant this year could be after turning 75 last October and entering a new category for women aged between 75 and 79. As the youngest in her cohort, she was determined to strike at the opportune time.



PHOTO BY JONTY MITCHELL



"I have worked quite hard at it this year because I was trying to get all the records that I could," she explains. "I actually haven't done that much training because I've been racing so much, but it's been fantastic – a lovely year.

"I got all the world records that I'm probably capable of and I think my records are quite good. I kept breaking my 5000m world record by very small amounts but I wasn't happy with it, so I spent a long time trying to improve it until finally I got down to the speeds that I do in parkrun and set a record of 21:25.8.

"I think most of my records are rather good now. I doubt whether I can beat them – obviously I will keep trying, but I don't expect that I will be able to."

The biggest yield of Roberts' year came at October's European Masters Championships in Madeira, where she finished as the most decorated athlete from any nation, winning gold in the 800m, 1500m, 5000m, 10,000m, 10km individual, 10km team, cross country team and 4x100m.

She also claimed silver over 400m, cross country individual, 4x400m and 4x400m mixed, as well as finishing fourth over 200m.

It sounds utterly exhausting. "It was quite intense," she concedes. "I really covered all the distances I was capable of. On the day of the 200m, I had to do the heat and final of that before running 10km on the road that evening.

"The day I did the cross country [the first cross country race of her life], we had to get a bus at 6.45am, which took us up to an altitude of 4000 feet for the race. I didn't realise I would be so affected by the altitude. But later that day I did the 1,500m down at sea level as well."

Such exploits have, admits Roberts, ensured she is now well known in the world of masters athletics – something she says is "very flattering". Of winning this AW award, she adds: "I think it's fabulous and I feel very honoured. I know the competition is very stiff, so I'm thrilled."

After a hectic year of record-chasing, the immediate future looks a little more sedate. Her success is mostly built on daily gym visits and she undertakes only two regular weekly running training sessions, in addition to the trusty Saturday morning parkrun. She has no intention of changing her programme.

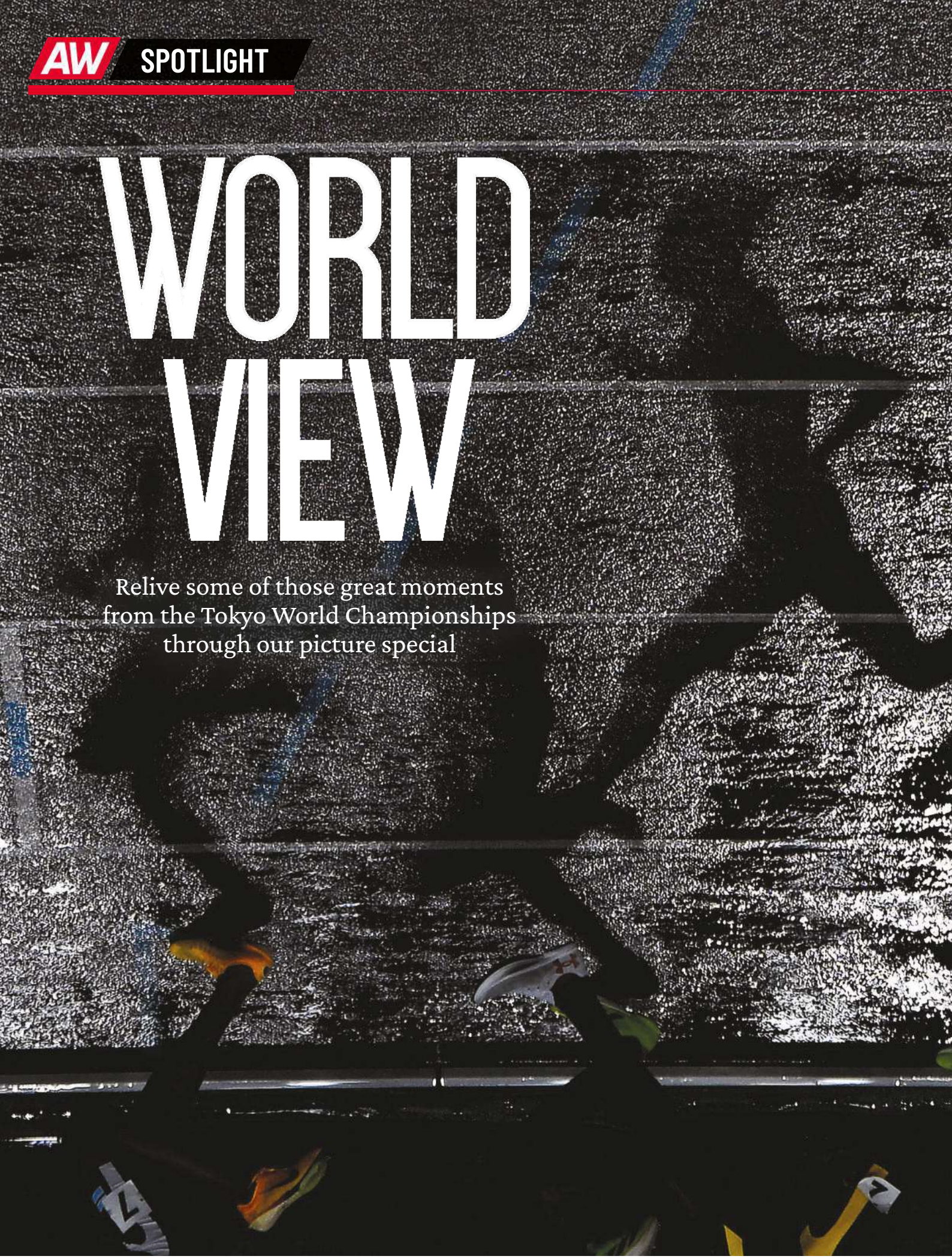
"I enjoy competing so I'm not going to stop," says Roberts, looking ahead to the European Indoor Masters Championships in Torun, Poland, next March. "But I won't be looking quite so much at different distances to get a record as I have been this year.

"I think I'll try to do some cross country for my club because I have steered clear of those in the past as I was always a bit worried about getting injured. Because I wanted to try for records, I certainly didn't want to get injured, but the pressure is off a bit now."

Gobbling up every world record and title available is a surefire way of doing that. AW

WORLD VIEW

Relive some of those great moments from the Tokyo World Championships through our picture special





PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



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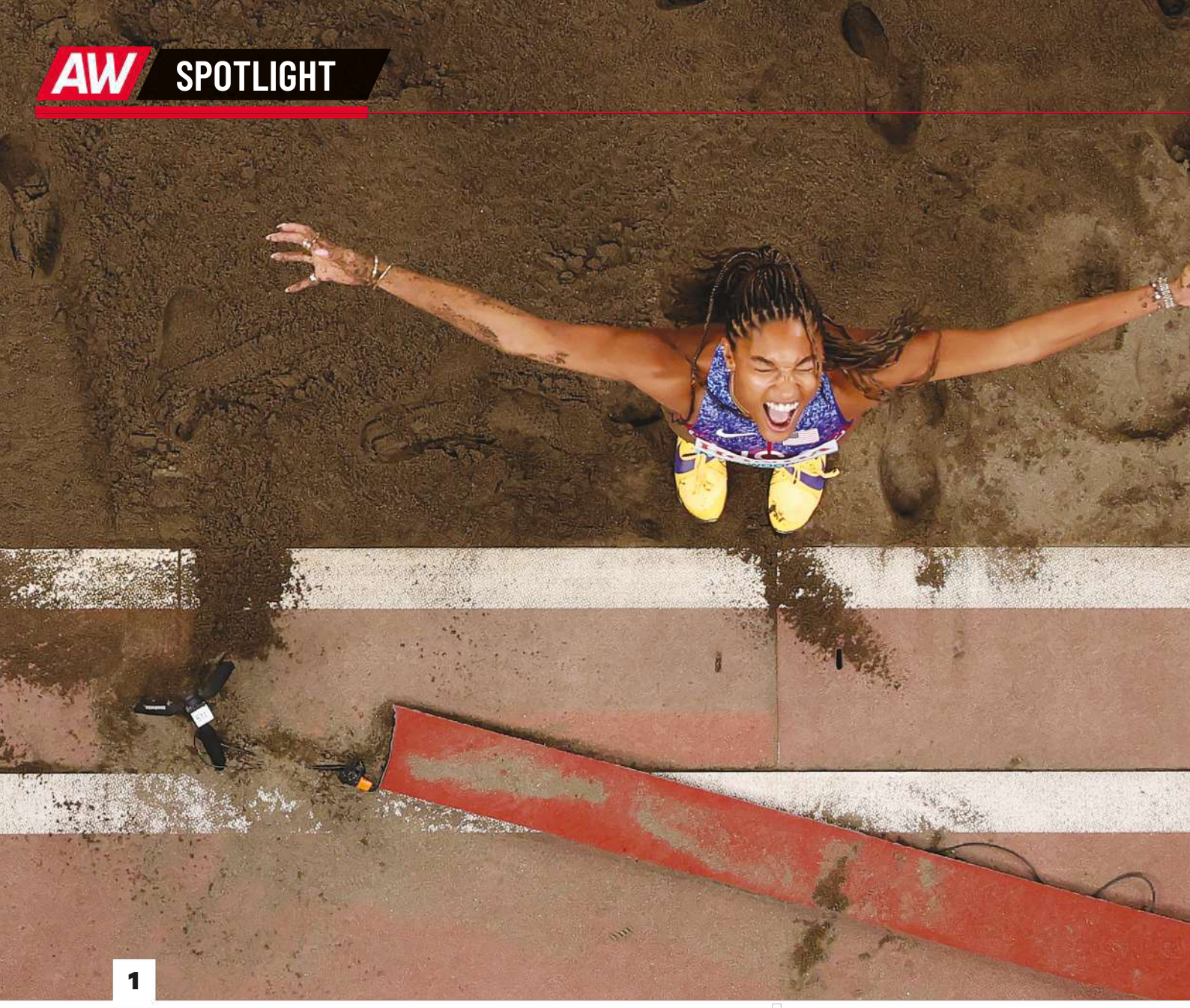
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1. Shunsuke Izumiya crashes out in the 110m hurdles semi-finals
2. Kenya's Lilian Odira comes through to win 800m gold
3. Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce says an emotional farewell to her fans
4. Oblique Seville savours the winning feeling in the men's 100m
5. Valarie Allman gets her hands on world discus gold at last
6. Ditaji Kambundji flies to a superb 100m hurdles victory
7. The women's 100m title goes to Melissa Jefferson-Wooden


WORLD ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS
NISHI
BRASIL
TDK
TOKYO25


6
JAMAICA
HONDA
WILLIAMS
HONDA


7



1


HONDA
CHEROTICH
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ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHI
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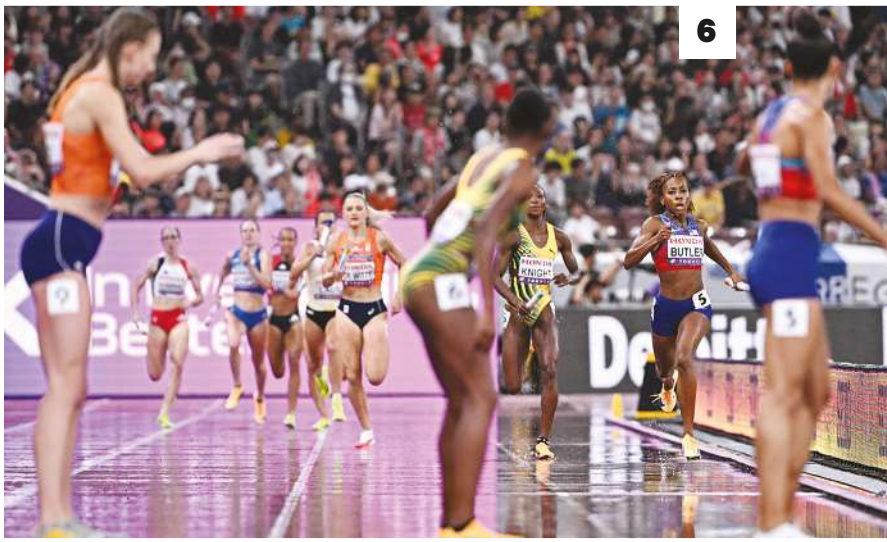
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1. Tara Davis-Woodhall came out on top in the long jump
2. Faith Cherotich and Winfred Yavi in sync in the women's 3000m steeplechase
3. All of the eventual medallists set off in the 800m to finish off the heptathlon
4. Botswana's team are singing in the rain after their 4x400m relay triumph
5. Noah Lyles takes the acclaim of the Tokyo crowd
6. The anchor leg runners get ready for action in the women's 4x400m relay



6


HONDA
WORLD ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS TOKYO 25
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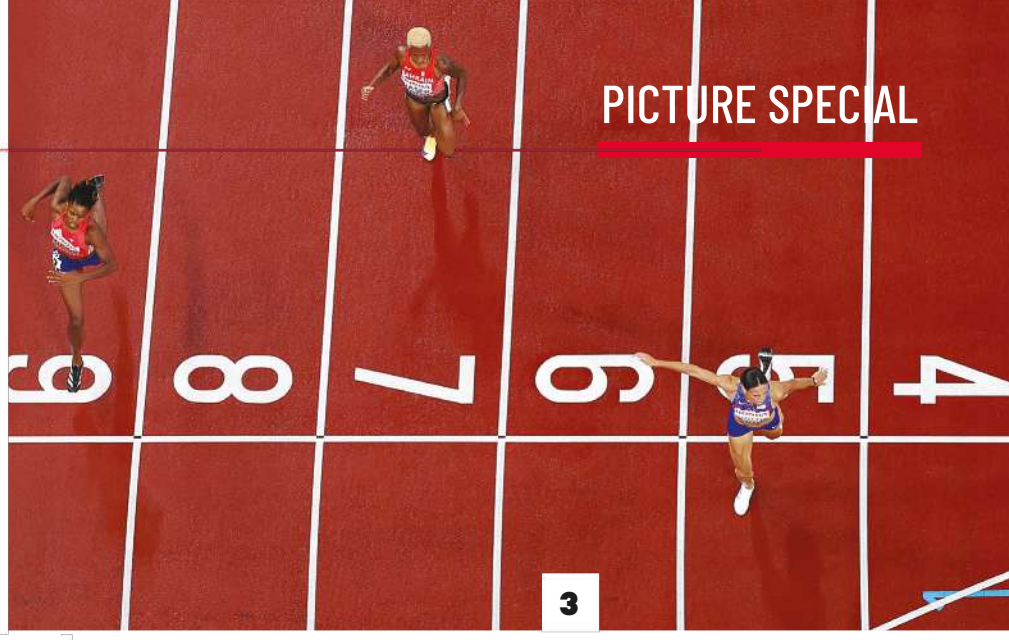
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FURLANI
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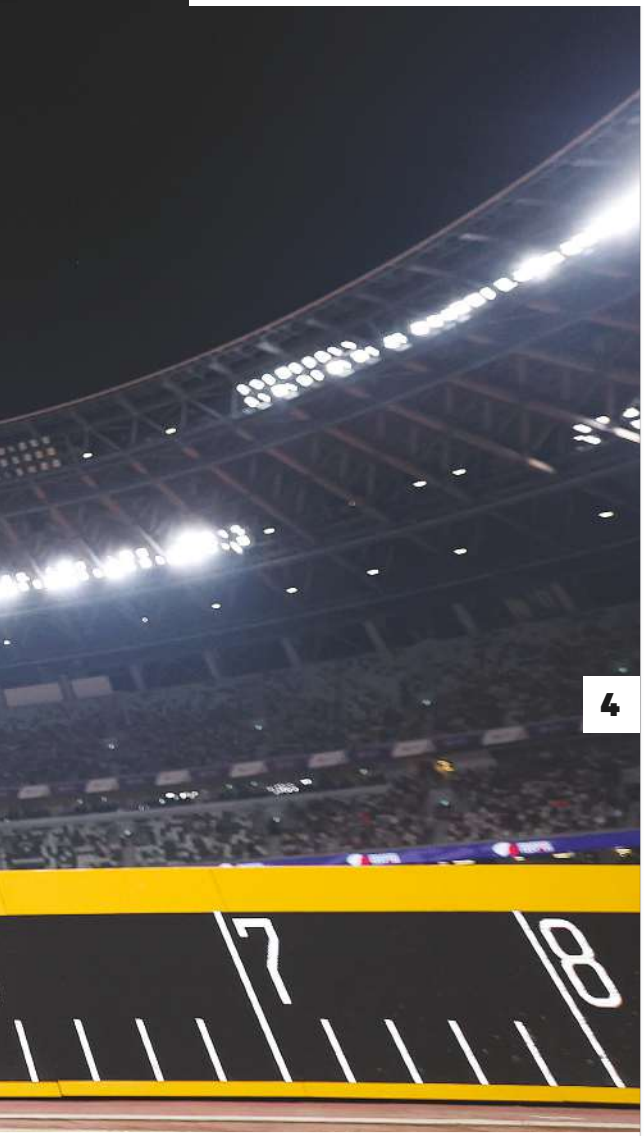


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1. Alphonce Simbu wins the battle for the line in the men's marathon
2. Peres Jepchirchir and Tigist Assefa battle it out on Tokyo's streets
3. In the women's 400m final, Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone was in her own world
4. Mattia Furlani leaps to men's long jump gold
5. Geordie Beamish (left) and Soufiane El Bakkali celebrate after the men's steeplechase
6. The race walkers make an impression



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6

THE EVENT THAT ENDURES

Dave Holmes delves into the rich and lengthy history of cross-country running



ABOVE: Participants crossing a ditch during the North of Thames Cross Country Championships in 1920

Of all forms of running, cross country arguably remains the most elemental. Away from the roads and synthetic tracks, it's a return to nature. While running itself stretches back to antiquity, cross-country competitions only emerged in early 19th century England.

Their origins lie in the Victorian public school system. In 1819, students at Shrewsbury School, barred from forming a fox-hunting club, created their own alternative: a running club that mimicked the chase on foot. Two boys acted as "hares" or "foxes", setting off ahead and dropping paper scraps as a trail, while the rest – the "hounds" – gave chase across the countryside. Andrew Hutchinson, author of the definitive history of cross-country, described it as a sport born "out of imitation" – boys imitating their fathers hunting.

By the mid-19th century, these "hare-and-hound" races had spread across schools and universities and the first national schools cross-country championships were held on December 7, 1867. Notwithstanding, the famous cross-country event at Rugby School ("The Crick Run"), described in Thomas Hughes's immensely popular *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), is thought to date to the late 1830s.

Cross country also found a home within London's rowing community. During the winter months, members of the Thames Rowing Club began running on Wimbledon Common to stay fit. These events became formalised in 1868, and the club's founder, Walter Rye, later became the first president of the English Cross Country Union in 1883. After the run, members enjoyed beer and "sing-song", a tradition upheld by many running clubs today.

The first national cross-country championship was held in 1876 at Buckhurst Hill in Epping Forest in north London. This event proved so chaotic that, according to reports, everyone got lost in the cold depths of the forest. When one wretched individual finally made it back to headquarters, his body was rubbed with brandy in an attempt to warm him. "But personally," he admitted, "I



THE FIRST NATIONAL CROSS-COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIP WAS SO CHAOTIC THAT, ACCORDING TO REPORTS, EVERYONE GOT LOST IN THE COLD DEPTHS OF THE FOREST

thought internal application would be better and I snatched the glass."

A year later, at Roehampton, a properly marked course brought order, and this is generally recognised as the true starting point of the championships, since the previous race had been declared void. In 1883, the National Cross Country Union was formed, staging its first official National the following year at Sutton Coldfield, with hosting duties rotating between the northern, midlands and southern associations.

Cross country soon spread beyond Britain. It reached the United States by 1878 and developed formal structures there by the 1890s through national and collegiate championships. The first international cross-country championship took place in France in 1898, followed by the founding of the International Cross-Country Union (ICCU) in 1903.

Whilst many athletes used the cross-country season to build strength and stamina for their own specialised events, others dedicated themselves solely to cross country. As Sebastian Coe said, it became the "bedrock of endurance running".

Cross country briefly featured on the Olympic programme in 1912, 1920 and 1924, before being dropped after the infamous Paris race. Run over 10km in a searing heatwave, the event turned into both an ordeal and a spectacle. Only 15 of the 38 starters finished and eight needed stretchers. Officials and spectators were aghast. The legendary "Flying Finn" Paavo Nurmi weathered the conditions and claimed victory by just over a minute.

After the Second World War, the ICCU Championships became increasingly global, with nations such as South Africa (1962), New Zealand (1965) and the USA (1966) joining the fold. The event soon established itself as the world's premier annual footrace, bringing together the best milers, steeplechasers, marathoners and road runners on a single, unforgiving course.

The terrain itself became part of the spectacle – from the sandy tracks of Rabat in 1975 to the precipitous, mud-laden course at Glasgow in 1978. In 1967, women were finally admitted to international competition at the championships in Wales, marking a significant step forward for the sport.

The IAAF World Cross Country Championships began on March 17, 1973 in Belgium, replacing the ICCU era and formally marking the sport's transition into the modern international age. A decisive shift came in 1981, when Ethiopia and Kenya entered teams for the first time. Their impact was immediate and lasting. In 1986, Kenya's John Ngugi captured the nation's first senior men's title, and in 1994 Helen Chepngeno delivered its first senior women's crown.

What followed was an era of African dominance. Kenyan men swept the podium in 1988, and in 2010 the country achieved one of the most comprehensive clean sweeps in athletics history, winning all four individual races and all four team titles. Other nations also emerged as major forces. Uganda, in particular, signalled a new competitive balance in 2019 by finishing one-two in the senior men's race and collecting further individual and team medals across the championships.

Some runners have taken the idea of cross country to the nth degree, traversing entire countries and continents, a testament to the sport's enduring appeal and versatility. Today, cross country is a global phenomenon, with dozens of nations regularly showcasing talent on the world stage. Its name, originally "cross-countryside", nods to its pastoral origins, yet modern courses now range from rolling rural fields to urban parklands, racecourses and lesser-known regional towns such as Bathurst in Australia (2023), which arguably hosted one of the toughest courses.

The sport's adaptability, combining endurance, strategy and connection with the natural environment, ensures it continues to capture the imagination of runners of all ages and abilities. Far from fading, cross country remains a vibrant and accessible test of fitness, resilience and spirit. AW

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HOW THEY TRAIN

PATRICK DEVER

AGE: 29 **COACHES:** ALISTAIR AND AMY CRAGG

Katy Barden speaks to the Olympian who took some hugely encouraging first steps in his marathon career with fourth place in New York

Patrick Dever made a conscious effort to prioritise consistency over perfection in 2025 and it paid off with a fourth place at the TCS New York City Marathon, his time of 2:08:58 good enough for 10th on the UK all-time list.

An experienced international athlete – in 2022 he competed for Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the World Championships (10,000m) and European Championships (5000m), as well as England at the Commonwealth Games (5000m), while in 2024 he donned the British vest again at the European Championships (10,000m) and Olympic Games (5000m) – he was frustrated that he hadn't delivered against his own high expectations at such high profile events.

"One of the biggest lessons I learned [in 2024] was not to get too high or low after a particular race or workout," said the Preston Harrier at the time. "I think just trying to keep a bit more level-headed is going to allow me to really peak when it matters and not be burned out emotionally."

As it happened, marathon training – when the decision eventually came to step up in distance – lent itself perfectly to such a rational approach.

While Dever modestly claims his build-up was "pretty good", the main thing, he says, was that he didn't have to miss anything.

"I think that was why I did so well in New York," he says. "It probably didn't all go as well as it could have done, but it's looking at the body of work over a longer time period. I'd definitely trained as well as I ever had done in the nine to 10 months prior to that, so it's not just the sessions that you do close to the race, it's consistency over a longer period."

Dever, a member of the PUMA Elite Running Team coached by Alistair and Amy Cragg in North Carolina, USA, had obvious marathon potential; he ran 60:11 at Houston Half Marathon in January (fourth on the UK all-time list), then 60:19 at the New York City Half Marathon in March.

Once marathon training was underway, his consistency continued with a 60:17 clocking at the Copenhagen Half Marathon in September. By the time he took on pacing duties at the Chicago Marathon in October – he went through halfway in 60:16, using the opportunity to practice running at pace while grabbing drinks – he knew he was ready.

"Alistair had been wanting me to do a marathon for quite a while," says the 29-year-old, who admits that opting to debut in New York, a notoriously tough course, removed his potentially destructive fixation with time.

"I guess the way we looked at it was that if it [the marathon] was a possibility for the '28 Olympics it would be better to do it sooner rather than later, because I couldn't expect to come in and run an Olympic qualifying time on the first go. I really wanted to respect the event and make sure that I gave myself enough time to prepare.

"The race itself was pretty incredible. Growing up in the sport, I'd always thought that being in a stadium on a track was the biggest stage – and I guess it still is, in a way – but when you're around a major marathon it's such a spectacle in the city.

"I can remember the number of spectators out on the course... at some points the noise was deafening. I definitely knew it would be big but, when I was in it, it was pretty cool." AW



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

A TYPICAL TRAINING WEEK
(AT ALTITUDE IN PARK CITY, UTAH, OCTOBER 2025)

Dever's New York City Marathon build was over 12 weeks. Easy runs were to feel rather than pace (with evening runs usually at a slower pace than those in the morning), while the Friday session – described as a "turnover session" with the aim of cleaning out the legs – was introduced during the second half of the build and was rarely run quicker than 5km pace. Gym workouts were done three times per week after the morning run on non-session days (including one optional session during the marathon block). "We did a lot of body weight stuff, general conditioning and mobility," he says, "although once we were into the thick of marathon training it was more about getting done what we needed to do and getting back home as quickly as possible to focus on recovery."

- Monday: (am) 75min; (pm) 35min
- Tuesday: (am) 75min; (pm) 35min
- Wednesday: (am) track session e.g., 5 x (2km-3min recovery-1km-2min recovery); (pm) 35min
- Thursday: (am) 75min
- Friday: (am) turnover session e.g., 16 x 400m off 60sec on the track or 2 x (8 x 300m) on a Park City bike path (alternating downhill/uphill); (pm) 35min
- Saturday: (am) 60min
- Sunday: (am) this would be either a long run for time. "The max we did was 2:30," says Dever. "It didn't matter about pace, although we'd naturally get quicker towards the end." Or a long run workout e.g., 2-2.5-mile warm-up – 3-mile tempo – 10 miles (alternating between marathon pace and 45sec slower than marathon pace) – 3-mile tempo (standing recovery of about 3min between) – 2-mile (max) cool down, or 2.5 miles warm-up – 5 x 4 miles at marathon pace off 3min – 2 miles cool down. "I actually did 4 x 4 miles then 2 miles of the fifth set that day, so that was an example of where things didn't go exactly go to plan!"

Favourite session: "Probably the turnover day. Because I'm not that far removed from the track it's still nice to feel somewhat quick and I definitely think as a marathon runner it's still important to train that stuff. The way some of the Kenyan guys were racing in New York, it was a little bit fartleky – at some points we were running 65 seconds 400m pace for a short period of time – so it's definitely good to do that track stuff."

Least favourite session: "The long run for time. Even in the marathon you're finished in a bit over two hours... so having to keep going to 2:30, it was just getting used to running for such a long period of time."

“Either you develop or you die”

YANNICK TREGARO

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: Morgan Lake is now being coached by Yannick Tregaro, right

COACHING CONVERSATIONS

Katy Barden speaks to the Swede who took Christian Olsson to global triple jump success and is now guiding British high jump record-holder Morgan Lake



Yannick Tregaro was inspired to become a high jumper after watching Sweden's Patrik Sjöberg break the world record in 1987 (2.42m). He took up athletics at the age of 11, and at 18 – after jumping a personal best of 2.17m – he represented Sweden at the 1996 World Junior Championships in Sydney, Australia.

Tregaro left school with a goal "to make the world or European elite as a senior athlete"; instead, he made his name as a successful and well-respected coach, guiding Sweden's triple jump national record-holder Christian Olsson to Olympic, world and European titles.

He currently coaches a group of athletes based in Gothenburg including former world and European under-20 triple jump champion and Swedish junior record-holder Gabriel Wallmark, former European under-20 100m hurdles champion and long jump silver medallist Tilda Johansson of Sweden and Great Britain's former world and European under-20 high jump champion Morgan Lake, who set a national record of 2.00m in 2025.

What was one of your most memorable moments as a young athlete?

My friend and I both wanted to try athletics and I can still remember the first time we called the club. The coach told us to come to the arena; there was a fence around it and we were looking in, we were a little bit nervous, then we saw Patrik...it was just so cool to see my idol for real for the first time.

Once we were inside the arena we could see Patrik doing his stuff close up, so it was difficult for us to focus on our meeting with the coach! That was my first love in some way of athletics, that you could so easily get into an environment that was so inspiring. I still get goosebumps now and that's something that has stayed with me still, that inspiration and that feeling inside.

One year later I had the same coach as Patrik, Viljo Nousiainen, and Patrik became almost like a big brother to me.

How did you get into coaching?

Viljo died in June 1999. It was a shock, but before that I was already really curious about training and why we did things. I was always asking: "Why do we do this?" and looking at Patrik as well as Viljo's other good athletes and trying to understand the reasoning behind doing certain things. I loved to watch old high jump and triple jump movies, and when I was 17 I did a course to lead young athletes in summer holiday camps run by the club.

I think I was really lucky in a way because my best friend was Christian Olsson. He's two years younger than me and we were training together.



> To have an athlete like Christian as my first athlete was so beneficial for me. He was a super talent

ABOVE: Yannick Tregaro coached Christian Olsson to European, World and Olympic titles

I was better than him at that time, but he was developing fast. When Viljo died I didn't see that there was another coach who could give me what I wanted, so I felt like I wanted to coach myself. Then Christian asked me if he could train together with me, so that was the start of my coaching career.

At the beginning of that summer I beat him, but he just became better and better and improved so much. He qualified for the European Juniors, won two medals, and all of a sudden I was this really young high jumper who coached his friend who was now the European champion in high jump and silver medallist in triple jump.

At the start, Christian was still asking: "Is Yannick the right coach for me?" and I remember there were discussions with the Swedish Olympic Committee and the athletics federation – they thought because Christian was such a good talent he might need a more experienced or better coach. They were sceptical, and Christian was also sceptical, always asking a lot of questions about why we did things. But it was so important for me because he was trying to test me, to see if I knew what I was doing, and I think that was a really good thing.

I have so many memories when I think about this, but of course, to have an athlete like Christian as my first athlete was so beneficial for me. He was a super talent – he was so co-ordinated and good technically (that was Viljo's strong side, working with co-ordination, technique and rhythm) – and he kept on developing really fast.

Who has been your greatest coaching influence?

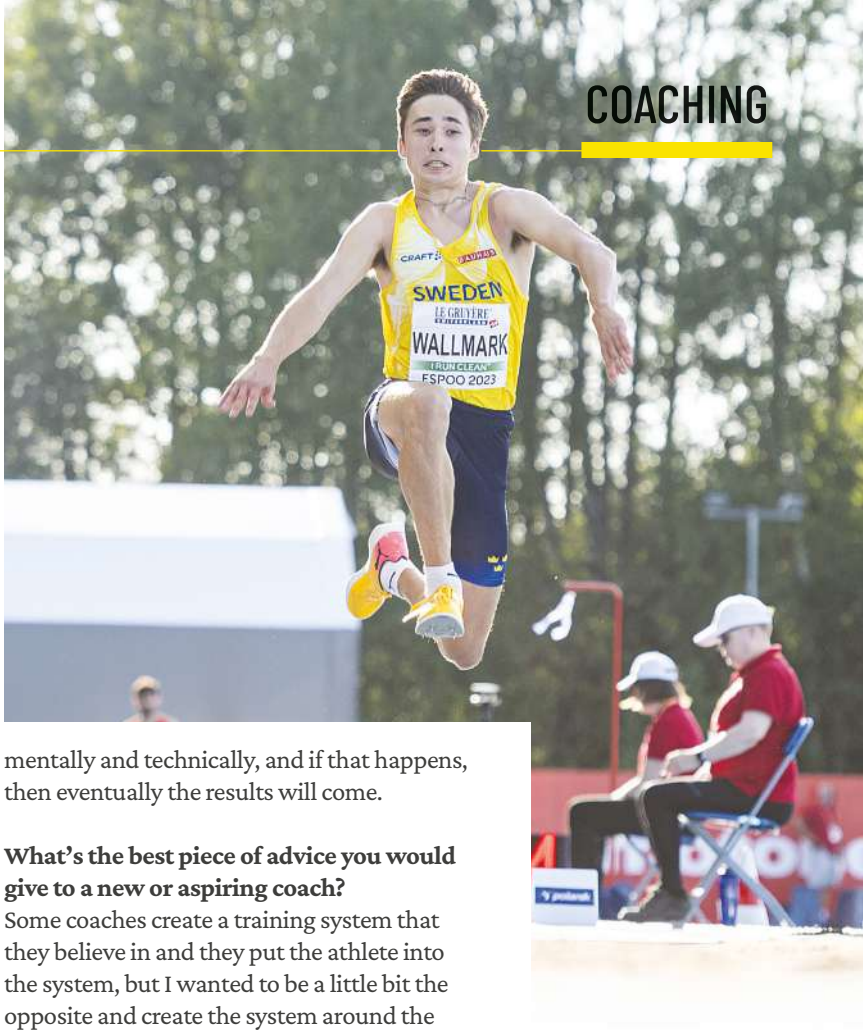
My success with Christian was a mix of skill and what I'd seen Viljo do with Patrik over the years. Because I'd spent a lot of time with them on training camps and at championships, I had this incredible insight into how you coached a world class athlete. Even though I was inexperienced as a coach, the big championships environment was not new to me, and to see how Patrik prepared for those events, that was something I think was really unique.

Viljo was really good at doing diaries. I had diaries of my own training for the last six or seven years, but also what Patrik had been doing, so of course I copied a lot from that and looked back to see, when I was in really good shape, what did I do in the weeks before? Or what led to that performance? That was a goldmine.

I also had a lot of answers just because I'd been in the environment with those athletes and I'd learned what some coaches might take a lifetime to learn.

I still think one of the important things for me was that I was so curious when I was young. Viljo was a really creative coach and I wanted to experience and try new things and be open to different ideas.

When I lecture I talk about the "art" coach and the "excel" coach. Even though he wrote the diaries and did the planning, Viljo was very much the "art" coach. He didn't plan specifically



ABOVE: Gabriel Wallmark is a former world and European under-20 triple jump champion

every exercise; he looked at us and what we needed. That was one of his coaching strengths, and it's mine, too.

Then, of course, I wanted to learn more and I got selected for a super coach programme created by the then-head coach of Swedish Athletics, together with a behaviour scientist and the Swedish Olympic Committee, where they brought together around 20 of the best coaches in Sweden. I think we met six times a year and it was about getting to know each other, opening up, talking about our personal stories, and then of course to educate ourselves. Those coaches, who included Agne Bergvall [Carolina Klüft's coach] and Benke Blomkvist [well-known sprints coach] became my best friends who I could ask anything. I think that programme is the answer to why Swedish athletics was so good in the early 2000s.

How did your coaching set-up evolve?

That first summer, 1999, I only coached Christian, but when the summer ended I decided to take on all of the athletes that Viljo coached who were younger than me.

Then I had a group, and I always think that a strong group is an important tool to develop athletes. There's so much energy in a group, and if everyone gives energy, you automatically get energy back. I really love the environment you can create.

There will always be extroverts and introverts, but it's very important to see everyone for who they are and give them their time in the spotlight. When someone becomes a little bit quiet it's so easy to say: "Come on, join us!" and you become more extrovert and they just become more introverted and close down. To see shy, introverted people grow – not that they need to be extrovert, but just to take part and contribute, and to get the extrovert people to listen more and be more understanding – that was very cool.

When people in a group trust each other and they can be themselves, that's when they perform. That's something that's really important for me in coaching. To get people to perform is not just what you do technically and physically, it's also how you make them feel as a human person. I think maybe that's even more important than what you do, but it can sometimes be difficult to get everyone to buy into that philosophy.

Morgan obviously wants to develop and I always say: "Either you develop or you die", and that's how it is. It's so important that she develops, but it doesn't always need to be the high jump PB that improves. You can feel like you're developing in other areas, physically, mentally and technically, and if that happens, then eventually the results will come.

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

Some coaches create a training system that they believe in and they put the athlete into the system, but I wanted to be a little bit the opposite and create the system around the athlete. So you have to figure out what are the athlete's strengths and weaknesses, how do you develop that athlete, and what does that athlete need to reach their potential? That's always my goal, to get every athlete I coach to reach 100 per cent of their own potential.

Athletics can actually be really unfair at times. Athletes can train perfectly and be so motivated and determined and do everything right and they're still not giving such good performances, while some other athletes can be assholes, like they just show up sometimes and they can perform really well. I think you need to be able to create a person that understands that.

Having balance is important, too – never stop playing. As I learned more about technique and strength and development, I became more and more specific.

I felt like I went from being this open, playful coach to being narrower and narrower. All the education I did pointed to being more specific, but it's important that you still "play" and use the nervous system in different ways.

Finally, if you want to reach 100 per cent of your potential you don't need to become the world's best triple jumper, high jumper or whatever, you need to have a plan and you need to get the plan done. Period. I don't accept "no" for an answer if I can help my athletes. If it's not possible to do what we planned then we need to do the second-best thing and figure it out. Having an elite mindset as a coach and athlete is about finding solutions to get things done. AW

THE BEST OF 2025

With more super shoes and super foams, we've been treated once again to great shoes for every surface from the brands this year. **Paul Freary** selects his favourites



BROOKS GLYCERIN MAX

brooksrunning.com, **£180**

This updated max-cushioned shoe arrived late in the year, but the original version was already a strong contender in this category. The updates in this second-generation model are only minor but they improve the fit and overall feel of the shoe.

The DNA Tuned, nitrogen-infused foam provides great cushioning on impact and a responsive toe-off that makes it a great choice for those steady paced daily miles.

The Glycerin Max delivers exceptional levels of cushioning, absorbing shock for mile after mile without any noticeable loss of impact protection or its smooth toe-off spring. When it comes to a daily training shoe, you want durability and this will keep you going!



ASICS MEGABLAST

asics.com **£210**

Want to pick up the pace on those daily miles? The Megablast is the perfect shoe for doing just that.

Incredibly light and exceptionally bouncy, it transforms your runs, adding an extra spring to every stride. The new FF TURBO SQUARED foam is lighter, softer and springier than ever but it's also well-balanced for a ride that is smooth and encourages speed. Well placed between racing shoe and trainer, you could make this a one-stop solution, such is its comfort and performance. Adding to ASICS' ever-increasing range of 'fast shoes', the Megablast is the most versatile and you'll want to reach for it every day, thanks to its lightweight, fast and easy-going feel.



SAUCONY GUIDE 18

saucony.com **£130**

Need a touch of support? Then the Saucony Guide 18 is a versatile solution at a great value price point. Thanks to its unique midsole geometry, the shoe manages to keep the majority of overpronators in a neutral position in a manner that feels natural and very easy to get along with.

Deep cushioning takes care of the impact and the brand's CentrePath technology makes the shoe one of the most effective on the market right now in providing support to a wide range of runners.

The Guide is a great all-around training option for those requiring some stability and it's the best value model on the market in this category.

MIZUNO WAVE RIDER 29

emea.mizuno.com **£140**

Now in its 29th year, the Wave Rider has always been a reliable daily trainer. Perhaps a little forgotten in recent years, this update transforms and breathes fresh life into the brand's most popular model. With a new nitrogen-infused Mizuno Enerzy NXT midsole, the Wave Rider 29 is softer, plusher and a much springier daily trainer. The updates really have put a spring into the step and ride of the shoe. This update manages to do a great job of retaining a familiar feel yet staying up to date in the era of super foams and performance trainers.



BROOKS GHOST TRAIL

brooksrunning.com **£135**

For most runners, a trail shoe needs to be a do-it-all model that can take you from your front door to the trails. Here, Brooks has taken their best-selling daily training model and given it a tougher upper, as well as a go-anywhere sole that provides a versatile solution for trails as well as winter running.

Cushioning is the same nitrogen-infused midsole as its road-going stablemate and, with 3mm outsole lugs, it can tackle most of the everyday tracks and trails that it should encounter. As a go-anywhere model, with good, responsive cushioning and durability, the Ghost Trail is a great option.





MOUNT TO COAST H1

global.mounttocoast.com **£150**

Still only a couple of years old, Mount to Coast has been slowly making a name for itself with durable shoes featuring cushioning that far exceeds the usual expectations. With ultra-distance race victories, as well as endurance challenges under their belt, the brand is going from strength to strength.

The H1 is their new multi-surface option, designed to tackle a range of surfaces and terrains. Its unique midsole is created with an advanced supercritical foaming process to form the CircleCELL cushioning. The result is a material with the energy return of PEBA but almost twice the lifespan.

With a soft and bouncy yet stable ride and a versatile outsole that can cope with both road and trail, the H1 is a great all-rounder and the best model yet from the brand. If you want to try a shoe that's cushioned, comfortable and durable, as well as being a little different from the usual big-brand options, Mount to Coast is one to explore.

BEST NEW BRAND

PUMA FAST R3

uk.puma.com **£260**

When it comes to racing shoes, the category is as fiercely contested by brands as it is by athletes on the road. This has created a very competitive market and driven the options sky high in terms of technology.

A couple of years ago, the biggest brand names ruled the roost, but now the choice of the best racing shoe can change from one season to the next.

When it comes to road racers, the Fast R3 from Puma took the running world by storm, selling out in its many colour iterations this year.

It's NITROFOAM cushioning, combined with an aggressive carbon plate and research-backed performance data showing it to provide a three per cent boost, ensured it was the choice of many over any distance on the road.

It felt best over shorter distances, with the more aggressive forefoot providing a new level of propulsion that could be optimised up to around 10km.

Of course, many marathoners excelled in the shoe but, with so many options now available, you can tailor your race day shoes according to distance.



BEST RACING SHOE (5-10KM)

BEST RACING SHOE (10KM+)

ASICS METASPEED EDGE TOKYO

asics.com **£240**

Over the marathon distance, the Metaspeed Edge and Sky from ASICS stepped up to the line with models that provide smooth and fast performance that maintains its feel for 26.2 miles.

The difference in the two options is the shape of the carbon plate, with the Sky being slightly flatter and the Edge having more curve in the forefoot. New FF LEAP and FF TURBO PLUS foam layers create a propulsive 'pop' that makes these the springiest feeling ASICS marathon shoes to date.

When racing the marathon, of course you want to go as fast as possible, but comfort also has to play its part and the Metaspeed Edge manages to feel soft and cushioned but with a level of forefoot spring that remains present all the way to the finish line. AW





WINTER WARMER

Enter the Ras Al Khaimah Half Marathon in February to combine a great running challenge with a brilliant break in superb weather

With one of the fastest half-marathon courses in the world and set in the heart of Al Marjan Island in the United Arab Emirates, the 2026 Ras Al Khaimah Half Marathon on February 14 is a must-see event.

If you're planning a break away from the cold and wet weather this winter – maybe even for Valentine's Day – then look no further than the RAK Half, where pleasant weather is almost guaranteed. There are a range of distances on offer at the 19th edition of the event, too. You can choose between 2km, 5km, 10km or the half-marathon.

Away from this festival of running, Ras Al Khaimah is also renowned for its outstanding nature, leisure, adventure and authentic offerings. With an extraordinary history dating back over seven millennia, the northernmost Emirate in the UAE has become one of the most sought after destinations in the Middle East.



Those with a real taste for adventure can take on the longest zipline in the world. At over 2.8km in length, 'flyers' can reach speeds of up-to 150kph. Three minutes of adrenaline-pumping adventure at 1680m above the Arabian Gulf will leave you with a once-in-a-lifetime memory. There is also the Jais Sky Tour, which takes explorers through a complex route of six ziplines that range from just 337m to well over 1km to experience the thrill of 'flying' at an average speed of 60kmph.

It's also easy to combine a visit to the Suwaidi Pearl Farm, while the Al Wadi Equestrian Adventure Centre is nestled amid the rolling red dunes of Ras Al Khaimah's desert lands.

Within easy reach of the many beach front hotels are the highest mountains in the UAE at Jebel Jais and the viewing deck park here provides spectacular views.

The Bear Grylls Explorers Camp is located in Ras Al Khaimah, too, and will equip you with the essential life skills, techniques and attitudes needed to survive the wilds of the mountains and desertlands. AW

Find out more and book your place at rakhalfmarathon.com



SMARTWOOL BEANIE AND GLOVE PACK

Smartwool.co.uk **£66.00**

Made with a luxurious blend of Merino wool and polyester, this hat and glove combo provides highly comfortable warmth and protection, as well as great moisture management regardless of the weather.

The gloves feature a super-soft Merino lining for a great feel against the skin and have silicone grippers to enable phone use while wearing them.

CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE

Paul Freary provides some ideas to suit a range of budgets



TROUBADOUR APEX 4.0 BACKPACK

Troubadourgoods.com

£249.00

The latest update to the popular Apex backpack, the 4.0, is now better than ever. Thanks to improvements made based on customer feedback, this version features new, softer shoulder pads, an integrated luggage sleeve and a stretch pocket built into the shoulder strap to keep your mobile within easy reach.

The pack also features deep external bottle pockets and multiple internal sections to keep essentials separate and protected, while it's also weatherproof and features a waterproof fabric construction that's built to last, with a five-year guarantee. With a 22L capacity, this is perfect for the athlete on the move.

OPEN ROCK OPEN ROCK X

Openrock.com **£129.00**

These open-ear air conduction earbuds offer premium sound quality in a compact design, with an adjustable fit to create the ultimate sports earbud. Offering 12 hours of continuous playback and up to 48 hours via the included case, you'll be covered for sound from Christmas Eve until Boxing Day without charging!

The sound quality is superb, giving a full, surround-like experience and, with built-in noise cancellation, there's no distraction. IPX5 waterproofing means they are okay regardless of the weather, so take your music with you this winter.





DRYROBE

Dryrobe.com

TECH-LITE CHANGING ROBE

£195.00

The most technically advanced lightweight changing robe from the brand, this Dryrobe Tech-Lite robe uses cutting-edge fabrics with great packability. Combining the well-known oversized design with super-roomy sleeves, a durable waterproof outer and an innovative Polartec Alpha lining to protect you from the elements, it packs down easily into its own stuff sack, so you can take it with you on any challenge or adventure. It's also created using around 37 recycled plastic bottles for an environmentally friendlier footprint.



APPLE

APPLE WATCH ULTRA 3

Apple.com **£749.00**

The new Apple Watch Ultra 3 features everything you need to track, monitor and guide your training. With new customer workout control and the Workout Buddy feature, it will even help you stick to pace while on the go. Featuring the best GPS in a sports watch, as well as 5G connectivity, you are always connected and, should you need to, you can contact emergency services via satellite even when out of regular phone signal coverage.

Advanced running metrics are on hand, and every training screen is customisable to help you focus on what's important to you. There's full colour mapping and routing, too, as well as live Strava segments, making this the ultimate running watch.

There are the usual range of sports functions available, too, as well as the Apple Watch functions such as music and round-the-clock health monitoring and tracking.

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athleticsweekly.com

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Uk.wahoofitness.com

KICKR

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FALKE

RU4 ENDURANCE SOCKS

Falke.com

£22.00

With lightweight cushioning and a mild compressive fit, these socks reduce slippage and support the ankles and feet while training. The anatomical design makes for a better fit, and the three-layer knit wicks moisture and helps keep the feet dry and blister-free.

Available in different lengths and colours, there's sure to be something for everyone.



CHILLY'S

Chillys.com

FLIP BOTTLE

£42.00

Available in a range of colours, as well as 500ml and 1L capacities, Chilly's bottles are made to keep your drinks cold for up to 24 hours. Featuring a flip-top sports lid, an easy carry loop and a rubber base, the bottles are built to last, providing top quality performance with stylish design.

POLAR

LOOP

Polar.com

£149.50



The Polar Loop is a screen-free, subscription-free fitness band that helps you sleep better, recover smarter and stay active, without distractions. With 24/7 tracking of heart rate, sleep and daily activity, it delivers meaningful insights to help you enhance your well-being, fitness and daily performance. Designed to be worn around the clock, let it quietly track your metrics in the background, and then check in on your progress when it suits you. The connected app keeps track of all the data to create an ongoing account of your data to provide insights and improvements over time. It's the perfect distraction-free wearable monitor. No screens, no interruptions, no monthly fees.



DUSSL

Dussl.com

LIP PROTECTION OIL

£21.00

During the harsh winter months, exposure to the wind, cold and rain can leave your lips vulnerable to dehydration and damage. This hydrating oil formula is designed for quick absorption to nourish them, provide protection and prevent chapping. The subtle watermelon flavour is easy to apply and also provides UVA and UVB protection for complete year-round protection.

A LAP WITH...

MEGAN KEITH

Katy Barden talks to the World Championships 10,000m finalist about her joy of competing and her return from "ground zero"



If there was ever a season to highlight Megan Keith's love of domestic competition and ability to mix it with the global elite it was this one.

A fantastic 10th place at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo in September was the pinnacle of a summer season which included personal best times in the mile (4:26.85) – also a Scottish native record – and 3000m (8:38.37). Just over one month later she anchored Inverness Harriers to an historic victory at the Scottish National Cross Country Relay Championships in Cumbernauld.

Incredibly, those performances came from "ground zero" in January, a period so-called by her coach Ross Cairns following injury-enforced time out after the 2024 Olympics.

"I guess this time a year ago I was probably just getting underway with rehab, but I was living a very normal life which I very much enjoyed," says Keith who is currently studying part-time for a master's degree in Public Health at the University of Edinburgh. "I'd never taken time off and built back up again in that sort of way before, so I had no expectations. I bought myself a new bike and I'd go out with friends or my dad when I fancied getting some fresh air, but I really just took a big step back from it all which, in hindsight, was wonderful.

"Ross had an incredible amount of belief in me that I definitely didn't have in myself. When I actually started properly training again [in mid-January] I was pretty sure I was never going to get anywhere close [to the Worlds] because the paces I'd been running before just felt so out of reach. It was a very humbling experience."

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

A. I'd probably go with Mhairi (fellow Inverness Harrier Mhairi Maclennan). We've not trained together properly for a couple of years now but we try to go for a run every couple of months just to have a life catch-up. She's a very special one to hop in and out of sessions with.

In an interview with *AW* in November, Cairns talked about the importance of patience while they built back through the early summer, before a focus on progress in the weeks leading up to Tokyo. Keith's stunning mile performance at the Monument Mile Classic in Stirling in August was, for him, a great indicator of form pre-Tokyo.

In contrast she, "thought it was a fun little hit out".

"I don't often get the chance, but I really enjoy supporting any of these types of races in Scotland where there's a big showing across the different levels of age and ability,"says the European 10,000m bronze medallist who trained at altitude for the first time this year.

Keith recalls giving her spikes to a little boy after the Stirling race. A few days later the boy's dad messaged to tell her the spikes were framed on his son's bedroom wall. In Cumbernauld, one young athlete commented how inspired she felt and how amazed she was that an athlete she'd watched competing on TV was actually there in person and willing to stop for a picture.

Tokyo could barely be further from Stirling or Cumbernauld, but Keith's 31:33.85 performance earned her the position of top Brit, second European and automatic selection for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow next summer.

"I went into Tokyo really confident," reflects the 23-year-old who is currently preparing for this month's European Cross Country Championships. "It was exciting to be on the start line knowing I could handle whatever was thrown at me. I had better speed than I'd had the last couple of seasons and I'd done a lot of heat training in the physiology lab at Edinburgh Uni, so I knew that I was ready for it.

"I don't want to say I was happy just to be there because I always like to go in and compete the best I can, but I hadn't had the most plain sailing year so it definitely put things into perspective a bit for me.

"I maybe didn't race my smartest, but I was pretty satisfied, given where I'd started and I was just proud of that body of work as a whole." AW



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QUIZ OF THE YEAR 2025



How well can you remember what happened in 2025? Tackle our 25 questions on everything athletics-related from the past 12 months

1. **Name the American who broke the world indoor records for 3000m and 5000m within the space of five days back in February?**

2. **Who were the athletes to break the British women's indoor 300m and men's 1000m records at the Keely Klassic in Birmingham?**

3. **The then 15-year-old New Zealander Sam Ruthe made history on the track in March. What did he do?**

4. **Where were the host venues for the European and World Indoor championships respectively?**

5. **After winning the 1500m and 3000m titles, how many European Indoor gold medals does Jakob Ingebrigtsen now own?**

   a)5 b)6 c)7

6. **Which Norwegian won heptathlon gold at both the European and World Indoor Championships?**

7. **Can you name Great Britain's sole gold medallist at the European Indoor Championships?**

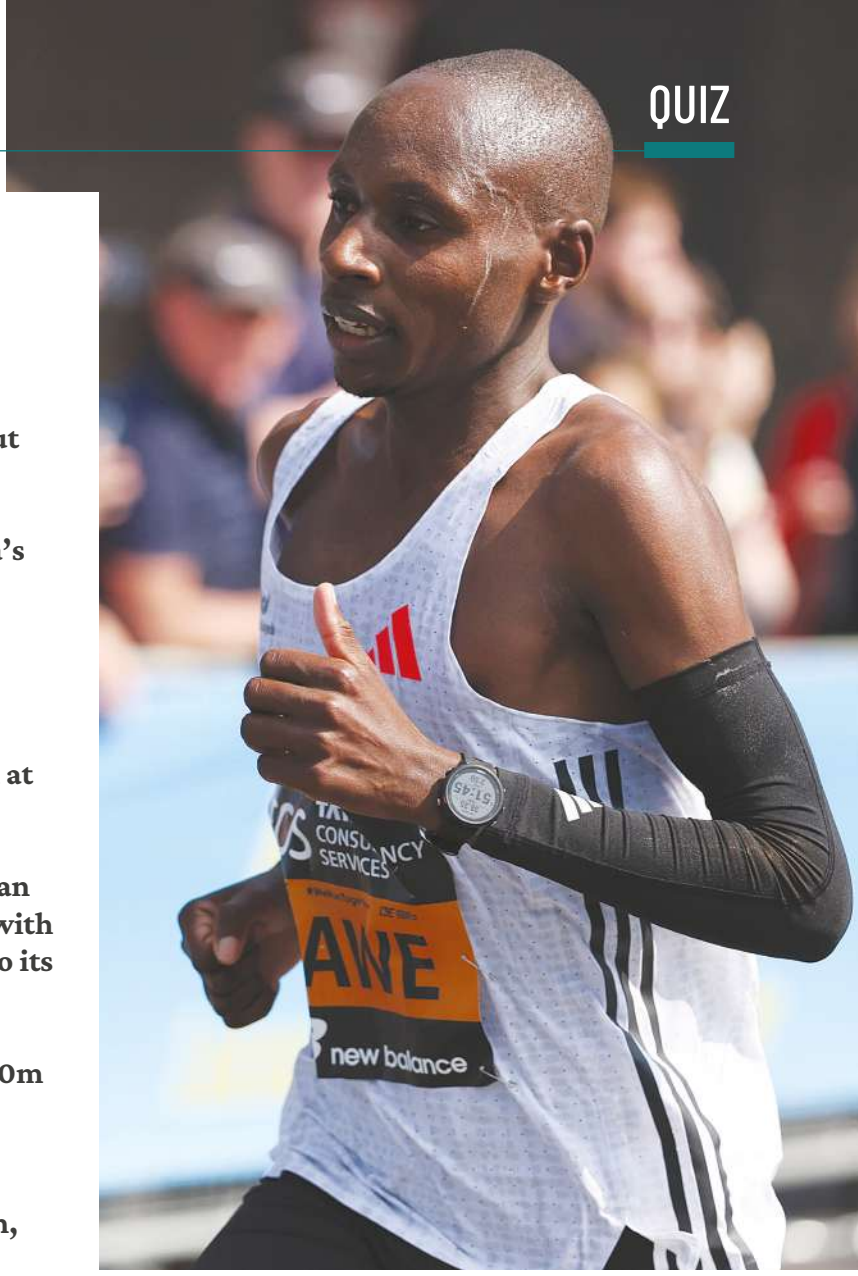
8. **Why did Britain's Amber Anning not contest the European Indoor 400m final, and who did she beat in winning World Indoor gold soon afterwards?**

9. **Only one championships record was set at the World Indoors, in the women's 1500m. Who did it?**

10. **Where was the first ever Grand Slam Track meeting held, back in April?**

11. **In the 1500m at that meeting, all three Olympic medallists from Paris were beaten by an 800m runner. What is his name?**





12. **Which Olympic triathlon champion made his marathon debut in London this year?**

13. **In which two marathon majors did Sabastian Sawe of Kenya come out on top this year?**

14. **What was special about Tigist Assefa's run of 2:15:50 in London?**

15. **Our May issue focused on the legacy and impact made by the late Steve Prefontaine. Can you name the influential coach who mentored him at the University of Oregon?**

16. **What is the name of the small Austrian town that has become synonymous with combined events excellence thanks to its renowned annual Hypomeeting?**

17. **Who did George Mills replace as 5000m British record-holder at the Bislett Games in Oslo in June?**

18. **Melissa Jefferson-Wooden won 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay gold at the World Championships in Tokyo. Who was the last woman to achieve that feat?**

19. **Oblique Seville became Jamaica's first men's 100m world champion since Usain Bolt. When did Bolt last win the title?**

20. **Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce retired from the track in Tokyo. How many World Championships medals did she win during her career?**

    15 b) 17 c) 19

21. **Which athlete holds the 400m world record that America's Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone is closing in on?**

22. **Who is the Swiss European Indoor 60m hurdles champion who also won world 100m hurdles gold in Tokyo?**

23. **Which country do the men's and women's hammer world champions, Ethan Katzberg and Camryn Rogers, represent?**

24. **Whose men's US marathon record did Conner Mantz break in Chicago?**

25. **Which new championships was announced at the end of October and what piece of indoor equipment does it involve?**

Answers below

1 Grant Fisher; 2 Lina Nielsen and Nell Gourley; 3 Became the first 15-year-old to break four minutes for the mile, clocking 3:58.35; 4 Apeldoorn and Nanjing; 5 Seven; 6 Sander Skotheim; 7 Jeremiah Azu in the men's 60m; 8 She was disqualified for stepping out of her lane in the heat and Alexis Holmes of the USA; 9 Gudaf Tsegay with 3:54.86; 10 Kingston, Jamaica; 11 Emmanuel Wanyonyi; 12 Alex Yee; 13 London and Berlin; 14 It broke the women's only world record by 26 seconds; 15 Bill Bowerman; 16 Götzis; 17 Mo Farah; 18 Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce; 19 2015; 20 17; 21 Martta Koch (47.60); 22 Ditaji Kambundji; 23 Canada; 24 Khalid Khannouchi; 25 The World Treadmill Championships

AW LETTERS

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HAVE YOUR SAY



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Double trouble

The release of the athletics schedule for the LA Olympics has thrown up some really interesting talking points and caused quite a stir. It's going to take a bit of getting used to, having the athletics right at the start of the Games, but it's also a big plus in my view that it is being spread right across the full timetable.

I don't have a problem with the idea of starting and finishing the women's 100m in one day – in fact I think it will make for a superb start – plus the idea of making the schedule more conducive to doubles is a very sound one. What I can't get my head around, though, is making life so difficult for one of the sport's biggest stars. The one double that would be exceptionally hard in this timetable is the women's 400m/400m hurdles and, of course we don't know at this stage what Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone's plans might be, but she certainly has the ability to do something extraordinary in both.

An American athlete with that kind of talent, on home soil, should surely be given every opportunity to shine and bring more attention to the sport. Perhaps we'll see some changes to the timetable between now and LA!

Erica Thompson

No secret ingredient

I enjoyed the feature on Team Makou in the November issue of *AW* and the insight it provided into how elite athletes operate. I was really struck, though, by the fact that they don't seem to be doing much that's all that different from most keen amateurs.

Yes, they are operating at a different level but finding good group dynamics, a coach who knows what they're doing and an environment that helps achieve consistent training is what we're all looking for.

We can't forget that there's no secret ingredient and that working hard in good company will take you a long way!

David Boxhall

Mainstays in the marathon

I know they didn't make your shortlists for the AW Awards this year but can we please acknowledge the recent performances of Abbie Donnelly and Jess Warner-Judd? Both are showing great potential over the marathon distance – Abbie running 2:24:11 in Frankfurt and Jess 2:24:45 for seventh place in New York at her first attempt.

They have been mainstays of the British athletics scene for so many years now and, given the health issues Jess has had to battle with more recently, it's wonderful that her move to the roads seems to be working out so well.

Let's hope this will signal great things for both of them in this new chapter and that they make the awards lists in 2026!

Ann Chamberlain

WHAT'S ON



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DECEMBER 6

- USATF Cross Country Championships
  Portland
  usatf.org
- Lanazarote International Marathon
  lanzaroteinternationalmarathon.com
- Northern Athletics December Indoor Open
  Sheffield
  northernathletics.co.uk

DECEMBER 6-7

- Loughborough Indoor Open
  lboro.ac.uk

DECEMBER 7

- Maratón Valencia Trinidad Alfonso Zurich
  valenciaciudaddelrunning.com
- Barbados Marathon
  visitbarbados.org
- Myerscough 10
  Preston
  garstangrc.co.uk

DECEMBER 13

- GAA Yuletide Open Graded Meeting
  Emirates Arena, Glasgow
  glasgowathletics.org.uk
- ADNOC Abu Dhabi Marathon
  adnocabudhabimarathon.com

DECEMBER 13-14

- SEAA Combined Events Championships inc. SEAA Indoor Middle Distance Championships
  Lee Valley
  seaa.org.uk

DECEMBER 14

- 31st SPAR European Athletics Cross Country Championships
  Lagoa, Portugal
  european-athletics.com
- Cardiff Met Indoor Christmas Classic
  cardiffmetathletics.co.uk
- Stockport 10
  stk10.co.uk

DECEMBER 21

- Manchester Indoor Open meeting
  saleharriersmanchester.com

DECEMBER 28

- Ribble Valley 10km
  Clitheroe
  ribblevalley10k.co.uk

JANUARY 3

- GAA Indoor Miler Meet 2026
  Emirates Arena, Glasgow
  glasgowathletics.org.uk

JANUARY 4

- BFTTA Indoor Series London
  Lee Valley
  befittodaytrackacademy.co.uk

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FROM THE AW ARCHIVE

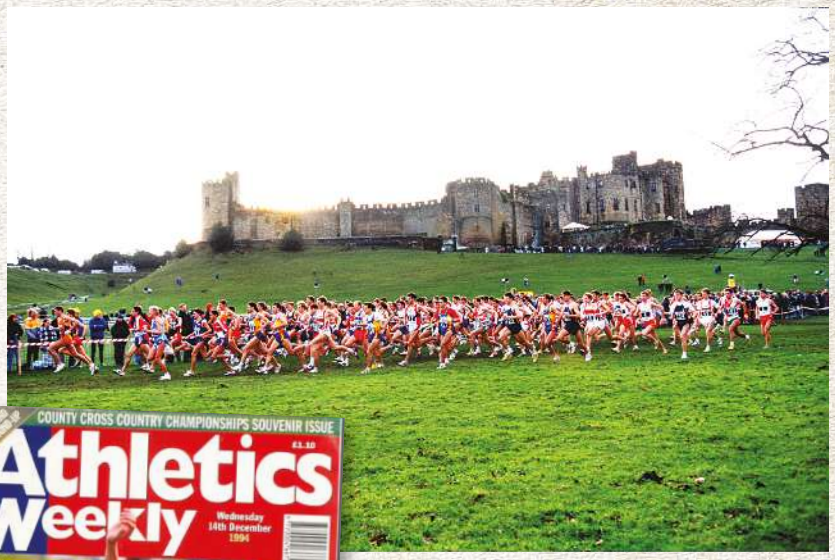
Remembering the first ever European Cross Country Championships

As we prepare for the 31st staging of the European Athletics Cross Country Championships on December 14, a look back to the very same date in 1994 saw the publication of *AW's* coverage of the event's first ever appearance.

The cross country special issue focused on what unfolded in the shadow of Alnwick Castle a little over three decades ago. While the championships now features seven races, back then it was just two – a 9km contest for the senior men and 4.5km for the women.

Portugal's Paul Guerra and Catherina McKiernan of Ireland wrote their names into the history books by becoming the inaugural champions. Guerra finished fully 16 seconds ahead of his fellow countryman Domingos Castro, while Spaniard Antonio Serrano took bronze. Andrew Pearson was the first British finisher in 11th place as Portugal took the team title.

It was a much closer battle in the women's race as McKiernan – who had just missed out on world cross country gold in 1992, 1993 and 1994 – took victory by just one second from Spain's Julio Vaquero. Bronze medallist Elena Fidatov led Romania to the team title. In 26th place, Andrea Wallace was the first Briton home. AW









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