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FEBRUARY 2026



WHY THE WORLD
CROSS COUNTRY
CAN'T GO TO WASTE

GEORDIE BEAMISH'S
BIRD'S EYE VIEW
OF ATHLETICS

JOE FRANKLIN'S
COACHING WISDOM

EILISH McCOLGAN

POWERS OF RECOVERY
AND PASSION PROJECTS



GOING THE DISTANCE

Europe's finest have
unfinished business
on the roads

EMILE CAIRESS

"LONDON'S THE ONE
RACE I'D LOVE TO WIN"

ANDREAS ALMGREN

"NOW I FEEL LIKE I'M
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A COMMON THREAD



Euan Crumley
AW Editorial Director

If a reminder were needed as to how broad a church the sport of athletics is, then perhaps this issue of AW is it. Going through these pages, it is striking to see how rich and varied the disciplines and events are, as well as what is involved in being good at them.

On the roads, Eilish McColgan and Andreas Almgren have begun 2026 with a bang thanks to their European records, while Emile Cairess is plotting London Marathon success after a year of setbacks.

The indoor season hasn't taken long to hot up, either, and world steeplechase champion Geordie Beamish has the pursuit of another global gold – this time over 3000m – firmly in his sights. So, too, do Britain's two reigning world indoor champions – Jeremiah Azu and Amber Anning – as they make preparations to defend their 60m and 400m titles next month.

At the other end of the running spectrum, there are features on ultra marathon athletes Sophie Power and Allie Bailey, with the latter having just recently completed the Spine Race – a mid-winter, 268-mile endurance test that is enough to give anyone a serious case of the shivers.

Then there's Katie Moon, the dominant force in the women's pole vault this decade, who has made big changes in her approach to stay at the top. So, too, has Aled Davies – the highly decorated Paralympic thrower who is trying to give himself the best possible chance of getting to another Games in 2028.

For each of the above, the targets – and training methods – are very different but there is a common thread that binds each of them together. All of them have experienced success and all of them have had points in their career when things weren't going to script, be that through injury or ill fortune. But not one of them has chosen to stand still. Instead, the focus has been on the hard graft of recovery, improvement, a change in mindset, implementing the lessons learned.

As I write this, there is so much going on in the sport but, as you enjoy taking it all in, remember the stories behind the individuals who have put themselves in the heat of battle. We've done our best to tell a few of them this month and they all underline what it takes simply to be a contender in the first place. **AW**

AW, Iconic Magazines Ltd, 22 Princes Street,
London, W1B2LU

athleticsweekly.com
x@athleticsweekly
facebook.com/athleticsweekly
instagram/athletics.weekly

Editorial director **Euan Crumley**
euan.crumley@athleticsweekly.com
Head of digital **Jason Henderson**
jason.henderson@athleticsweekly.com
Product reviewer **Paul Freary**
paul.freary@athleticsweekly.com
Editorial and digital assistant **Jasmine Collett**
jasmine.collett@athleticsweekly.com
Multi-media producer **Tim Adams**
tim.adams@athleticsweekly.com
Photographer **Mark Shearman MBE**
mark@athleticsjmaees.com

Design: Duncan Jackson

Editorial contributors: Katy Barden, Ben Bloom, Cathal Dennehy, Martin Duff, David Holmes, Katharine Merry, Verity Ockenden, Denis Shepherd, Jerry Sun, Stuart Weir, Mark Woods

Head of Sales Paul Bramley
07976 471245 / paul.bramley@athleticsweekly.com

Managing Director Wendy Sly MBE
wendy.sly@athleticsweekly.com

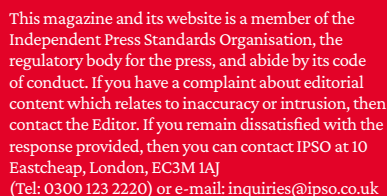
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AW

OPINION

WORLD COUNTRY CROSS

TOO GOOD TO WASTE

by
Jesse
Gibson

by
Jesse
Gibson

The World Cross Country Championships are in trouble, writes **Cathal Dennehy**, and the best way to stop the event from withering on the vine is to persuade the biggest names in distance running to get involved

The best way to bring a sport back to life is to get a few of its biggest names involved. The World Cross Country Championships are in trouble, and the best way to bring it back to life is to get a few of its biggest names involved. The World Cross Country Championships are in trouble, and the best way to bring it back to life is to get a few of its biggest names involved.

In Toulouse for the year's edition, who by all accounts had a fantastic race, and then the World Cross Country Championships are in trouble, and the best way to bring it back to life is to get a few of its biggest names involved.

Jesse Gibson
is a writer and
commentator on
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Photo: Getty Images

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It's a shame that the World Cross Country Championships are in trouble, and the best way to bring it back to life is to get a few of its biggest names involved.

he case for a world championship, even when it's as brilliant as England. Working from afar, we've had a long question about the broadcast when the picture was that it had the best of a dramatic event, not a global one.

Given that the world is so large, the world is apparently more than a single place. It's a global event, and it's a global event. It's a global event, and it's a global event. It's a global event, and it's a global event.

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**NEXT MONTH
WORLD INDOOR
CHAMPIONSHIPS
PREVIEW
ON SALE
MARCH 6**



PICTURE THIS

LINING UP FOR A RECORD

Grant Fisher leads the way in the men's 2000m at the New Balance Indoor Grand Prix in Boston on January 24 but it was Hobbs Kessler (second from left) who ultimately won the race from his fellow American with 4:48.79 to break Kenenisa Bekele's world indoor best of 4:49.99, set almost 19 years ago.

World 3000m record-holder Fisher also dipped under the old mark, finishing second in 4:49.48. Jake Wightman (second from right) impressed in his season opener, finishing fourth and setting a British indoor record of 4:53.79. **AW**





THE MONTH IN NUMBERS

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

1:42.50

Josh Hoey produced the standout performance of the New Balance Indoor Grand Prix in Boston on January 24 as he broke the men's indoor 800m world record.

The American delivered a perfectly judged run to shatter the long-standing mark, clocking 1:42.50 to slice 0.17 off Wilson Kipketer's time of 1:42.67, which had stood since the 1997 World Indoor Championships in Paris. It marked another historic moment for the reigning world indoor champion, just seven weeks after he set a world best over 600m on the same track.

Already the second-fastest indoor 800m runner in history thanks to his 1:43.24 North American record from last year's US Indoor Championships, Hoey was paced expertly by his brother Jaxson and surged to the top of the all-time list, winning by more than two seconds.

ABOVE: Josh Hoey produced a superb performance to break the world indoor 800m record in Boston

4:52.92

Cole Hocker began his indoor season by running an American record for 2000m on January 23. Racing at the Hokie Invitational in Virginia, the Olympic 1500m and 5000m world champion clocked 4:52.92, overtaking Bernard Lagat's long-standing 4:54.74 from 2014. Hocker's training partner Cooper Teare was second,



BELOW: Cole Hocker kicked off his indoor season by breaking the American 2000m record

matching Lagat's old record, while another member of their group – Britain's George Couttie – ran 4:57.81 to smash the previous collegiate record of 5:03.74 set by Drew Bosley.

1:44.65

Mark English broke his own Irish indoor 800m record with a run of 1:44.65 at the CMCM Luxembourg Indoor Meeting on January 18. The time also represents a meeting record and came thanks to an impressive closing surge from the 32-year-old, who lowered his national mark of 1:45.15, set at the Millrose Games in New York last year.

10:37.53

Clare Elms regained the world W60 3000m record at the British Masters Championships in Cardiff on January 24. Her time of 10:37.53, with her first indoor run of the year, took over four seconds off the existing mark and was faster than the men's M60 winner.

Elms wasn't the only Kent AC athlete setting a world record on the same day as fellow world champion Joe Appiah set a 60m hurdles record of 8.39 in the London Indoor Games at Lee Valley in his M55 debut.

3:49.81

Australian teenager Cameron Myers laid down a brilliant marker on January 17 by setting a world lead over the mile. Racing at



the Washington Indoor Preview in Seattle, the 19-year-old led the way in a race that saw eight competitors break four minutes, clocking 3:49.81 to win by nearly five seconds from American duo Sam Prakel and Brannon Kidder.

It is the fastest indoor mile ever run in the month of January and broke Yomif Kejelcha's meeting record of 3:52.61.

3:53.83

New Zealand's teenage talent Sam Ruthe clocked an age-16 world record on January 24, running 3:53.83 for the mile and overtaking Cameron Myers' mark of 3:55.44 from 2023. The time also puts Ruthe inside the top 20 on the under-20 mile all-time list.



ABOVE: Jake Odey-Jordan was in record-breaking form, as was Kiwi Sam Ruthe, below

RIGHT: Houston Marathon winner Calli Haugher-Thackery

BELOW: Brigid Kosgei

32.65

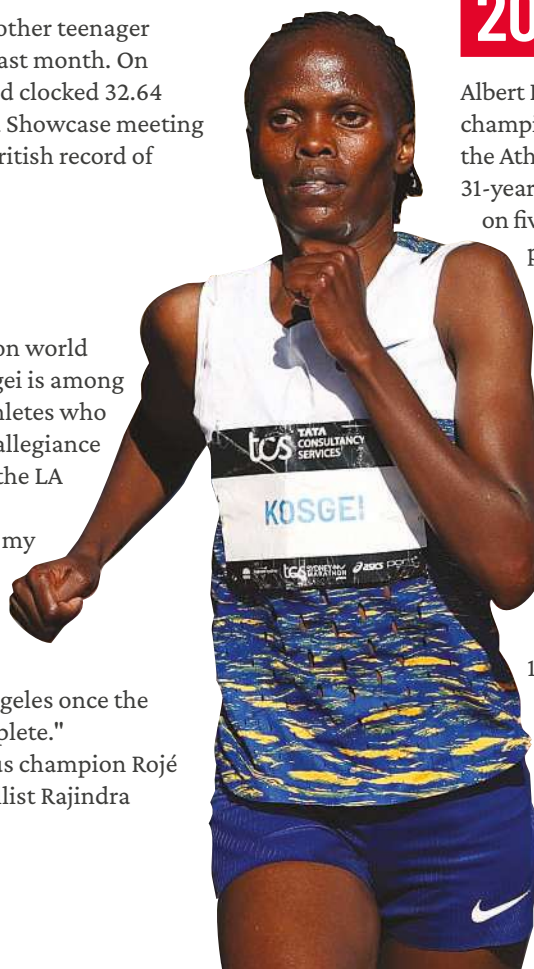
Jake Odey-Jordan was another teenager in record-breaking form last month. On January 14, the 18-year-old clocked 32.64 over 300m at the Virginia Showcase meeting to lower Robert Tobin's British record of 32.76 from 2006.

5

Former women's marathon world record-holder Brigid Kosgei is among a group of five Kenyan athletes who are reportedly switching allegiance to compete for Turkey at the LA Olympic Games in 2028.

"Yes, it's true, I changed my nationality to Turkish," she told *AFP*. "It was my decision, and I'm happy to compete under the Turkish flag in Los Angeles once the allegiance process is complete."

Jamaica's Olympic discus champion Rojé Stona and shot put medallist Rajindra



2:24:17

Less than a month after winning the Honolulu Marathon in challenging conditions, Calli Haugher-Thackery won the Houston Marathon on January 11.

The Briton certainly likes to keep busy and has now run eight marathons in the past 27 months, although her best time remains the 2:21:24 she ran in Berlin in September 2024.

The last runner from Britain to win the women's marathon in Houston was Veronique Marot, who won three times in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Runner-up Sara Hall of the United States ran 2:26:26 at the age of 42 with Biruktayit Degefa of the United States third in 2:28:07.



PHOTO BY KEVIN MORRIS

20

Albert Korir, the 2021 New York City Marathon champion, was provisionally suspended by the Athletics Integrity Unit on January 12. The 31-year-old Kenyan, who has made the podium on five occasions in the Big Apple, tested positive for the prohibited substance CERA.

CERA is an acronym for Continuous Erythropoietin Receptor Activator and it is a third-generation of Erythropoietin (EPO). It's banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency because it enhances athletic performance by increasing red blood cell production, which improves the blood's oxygen-carrying capacity and endurance.

Korir is a marathon specialist and has competed in 20 races over 26.2 miles, winning six of them and making 15 podiums. His biggest victory came at the 2021 New York City Marathon and finished third there last year, edging out Britain's Patrick Dever by just one second. **AW**



WRONG DIRECTION

Reece Prescod's decision to join the Enhanced Games has rightly been condemned by many, but it also raises some big questions and there is a way that it could serve an important purpose, writes **Katharine Merry**

We're only just into February and already 2026 has been a topsy turvy year. On one hand, the early stages of the indoor season have provided lots to get excited about, while records have tumbled on the roads, too.

However, sadly the biggest headline grabber – certainly in the UK – has been Reece Prescod's saddening and maddening decision to sign up for the Enhanced Games. I was in two minds about whether or not to even write about this subject, as it galls me to give this event any form of publicity. Yet I think this case raises some important points and questions, so please bear with me.

A quick reminder, in case you've managed to erase the Enhanced Games from your mind, as to what they are. This is a competition being staged in Las Vegas in May, at which athletes are allowed to take performance-enhancing drugs that are banned in mainstream sport. Competitors are being paid handsomely to take part, too.

I'm not surprised there has been such a significant backlash to Reece's decision but, with something like this, I also think

it's important to take a step back when considering it all.

When athletes make announcements or make decisions – whether it be deciding to retire, switching to a different event or changing allegiance to another country – the first question I ask myself is: "Why would somebody do that? What are the reasons behind it?"

In Reece's case, it's perfectly natural for the first reaction to be: "I wouldn't do that. That's crazy". That was my first reaction, too, but I also like to try to come at things from a place of understanding.

He has spoken at length about how difficult it was financially to support his career as a top level sprinter, without sponsorship, which is one of the reasons why he decided to call it a day last year at just 29.

I know he was still connected to the sport through coaching and some athletes find the transition from competing into retirement a tough one, so I can understand if he's struggling to shake off that routine, the discipline or the identity of being an athlete. With that in mind, when an opportunity like this comes along it might be tempting because it gives you the chance to keep living that life.

ABOVE: Reece Prescod has shocked many by signing up to the Enhanced Games

RIGHT: Femke Bol's step up to the 800m is highly anticipated



IS HIS BIGGEST MOTIVATION WANTING TO CONTINUE THE LIFESTYLE OF BEING AN ATHLETE? PROBABLY NOT. THE BIGGEST MOTIVATION IS MORE LIKELY TO BE PAYING THE BILLS

I get that side of it, and it's an illustration of how tough athletics is that the fourth-fastest Briton in history over 100m – with a PB of 9.93 – has found it so difficult to make a living from the sport. But he isn't the first to come across that issue, and there have been plenty of others who haven't resorted to this kind of answer as a way of solving the problem. In my view, this isn't the right way to do it. There are other options for staying in the sport that are far better than this one.

He told *AW* last year that he wanted to “inspire more children and stay involved in athletics” but this whole sorry affair could be damaging for him in so many ways. He says he has been clean throughout his career – and there is certainly no evidence to suggest otherwise – so why on earth would he jump into an event of this nature?

He also says that he is not intending to take any drugs at the Enhanced Games – competitors are allowed to choose whether they do so or not – but I also find that, in itself, baffling. As a concept, the clue is in the title, so if you're then going to have competitors who aren't enhanced, then what's the point? Most people look at that and say: “Well, that's track and field anyway”. It just makes it confusing and, to me, that's one huge flaw in an already hugely flawed plan.

Ironically, though, those rules and caveats do actually give Reece a little bit of a lifeline in being able to emerge from this with a shred of credibility, if he plays it right. If the whole thing was fully enhanced then there's no way of him coming back from that. But if he continues with his policy of “I'm not taking the drugs” and then gets his backside kicked by people that have been taking them, then he can say: “I did it my way, and look how much the people who've taken drugs have an advantage. This is the difference that drugs make in sport.”

He can easily put a spin on it, make a case study of it, start what could be an important discussion about the more uncomfortable aspects of our sport, and then potentially serve some sort of purpose. The problem is

that he hasn't pitched it correctly, right from the start. On the other hand, if he goes out and runs 9.8, then he's dead – because no-one will believe he's done it clean.

From the outside, it looks like someone dangling money in front of him was just too hard to resist. Is his biggest motivation wanting to continue the lifestyle, the routine and be an athlete? Probably not. The biggest motivation is probably paying his bills and earning money. You can't criticise someone for that, but choosing to do it this way is just plain wrong and not the way to inspire kids.

Anyway, enough said on all of that, so let's end on a more positive note. I was already excited about this year and the opening weeks of the indoor season have done nothing to temper my expectations. We've seen Dina Asher-Smith getting off to a solid start with her new coaching regime, the men's 800m indoor world record has been broken, Yaroslava Mahuchikh is jumping well again and we'll see Keely Hodgkinson back on an indoor track again at the Novuna British Championships this month. Oh and we're also about to get our first glimpse of Femke Bol tackling the 800m. The Enhanced Games might be lurking in the shadows, but there are still so many bright spots on the horizon. **AW**



Katharine Merry

Olympic medallist and broadcaster



@KatharineMerry



@katharine.merry



MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Mark Woods looks at why the cost of the Commonwealth Games not being shown primarily on the BBC could be significant for athletics

It was an upset result. Except, within the world of broadcasting, it really wasn't. The news that the Commonwealth Games – for the first

time since television emerged kicking and screaming into a black and white existence – will not be screened primarily by the BBC when its slimmed-down incarnation is held in Glasgow this coming summer caused a fair degree of uproar, not least in Scotland.

In truth, the pivot was long expected. It's widely known that the corporation's current director of sport, Alex Kay-Jelski, has pinned his editorial mast to Premier League football. Look at its website and the raft of dedicated reporters and the consequences are not hard to spot. The "Other Sports" section can feel threadbare on a daily basis. The BBC's respected parasport correspondent quit in what is understood to be a state of exasperation. The focus can feel slim beyond the big guns coming up on Match of the Day.

None of which is a criticism of the Beeb. It has a reduced pot of cash and did not view the Commonwealths as offering good enough value. Warner Brothers Discovery, aka TNT Sports, aka the soon-to-launch (HBO) Max, brought proper money to the table and have done a solid job since acquiring the Olympic rights in the UK.



There will be, I am assured, a deal struck to put some of the Commonwealths on free-to-air TV. All is not lost. Watch this space, we're told. However, the defection away from the BBC does maintain the debate over whether the Games has relevance and currency in the modern age.

Glasgow was able to save it from extinction due to a generous £100 million subsidy from the compensation paid out by the Australian state of Victoria who withdrew from hosting – spooked immensely by how the 2022 edition pushed the City of Birmingham towards financial collapse. India has signed up for 2030 – the event's centenary. It can afford a loss leader and has eyes on the big prize of an Olympics. Beyond then, who knows what lies in store, despite claims of interest in 2034.

Still, the loss of mass exposure is a net loss for athletics. More Brits line up at the gathering of the old Empire because the four home nations field separate teams and can include some developmental hopes. Northern Ireland gets to borrow its best back from Ireland – of huge

ABOVE: The 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham attracted millions of viewers on the BBC



THERE IS A TIPPING POINT WHERE SPORTS BECOME MERE 'OLYMPIC SPORTS' AND DISAPPEAR FOR THE FOUR YEARS IN BETWEEN. SWIMMING HAS GONE THAT WAY AND ATHLETICS IS IN THE RED ZONE OF FOLLOWING SUIT



value when there's TV time on offer to inspire a new generation to run, jump or throw.

These windows of opportunity have shrunk massively over the past three decades. There is a tipping point where sports become mere "Olympic sports" and disappear for the four years in between. Swimming has sadly gone that way. Others are long departed. But athletics is in the red zone of following suit. It is reliant on the continuing goodwill of the BBC to show its major championships to stay in plain sight. Only just, though, and sometimes it's not enough.

AW has learned that the BBC will show August's European Championships in Birmingham in full and on regular TV. Ditto for the Diamond League meeting in London. Probably likewise for next month's World Indoor Championships and the inaugural Ultimate Championships, with the London Marathon and Great North Run retaining their spots.

The British Championships, indoors and out, remain banished to the red button. The rest of the Diamond League is the barest of productions – voiceover, world feed, out. That's great for the established fanatics, but uninspiring for the casual viewer. The stories of the stars are placed in front of the nation all too rarely. It is not a sales pitch to grow popularity, merely to hold on to what is already there. Social media may mop up Gen Z but athletics doesn't lend itself easily to ten-second highlights on a vertical screen.

Talking with one sportswriting colleague, the fear factor for the sport extends beyond the small screen. Look at darts, they said, where Luke Littler has become a behemoth and a ratings machine, even though his world championship successes are on Sky. He is available to chat regularly – an open door that drives clicks and web traffic. Contrast that, they bemoaned, with athletics where the top stars are hidden away. "How are people supposed to care about a sport when they have no idea who an athlete is, never mind when they're competing?"

And that's why not having the track and field from Scotstoun at the Commonwealths in front of eight million on a nightly basis does pinch. After all, its potential power was exemplified by how Eilish McColgan's emotional triumph in Birmingham four years ago resonated far beyond her native Dundee.

Whether you think the Games are old hat or a feather in the cap for Glasgow, chances for young and old alike to sit on the sofa and appreciate the twists and turns of the sport are invaluable. Shifting it behind a paywall has generated significant income for Commonwealth Sport. But at what cost? **AW**

ABOVE: Eilish McColgan will be one of the home nation stars as the Games return to Glasgow



BRIAN WHITTLE

MY GREATEST RACE

European Indoor Championships, Budapest, March 6, 1988

Men's 400m, silver, 45.98 (the then Scottish record)

During an era rich in British 400m running talent, the future politician became part of many relay successes. However, a fresh training approach paid off in Hungary as he edged a photo finish for silver and set a Scottish best that stood for 37 years

The big breakthrough year for me was 1986, going to the European Championships and going full-time as an athlete. But then 1987 was the first year I didn't feel I progressed, despite going to the World Championships in Rome. It was a real struggle.

So, when I went into the following winter, knowing it was an Olympic year, I trained like a beast. I took all of that frustration and just trained and that's when I really learned to be an

athlete at the upper level. Even between training sessions, I was absolutely on top of things.

We decided to run indoors, because of what happened in 1987. I wanted to get into a better race mode. I couldn't work out how I'd run 45.9 until I looked at my training diaries, because I knew I hadn't done any speed work.

When I looked back, one of my big sessions used to be five sets of 300m, one minute recovery, then 150m with six minutes recovery. That was one of my core sessions repeated through the winter.

To get the target time for your 150m, you

ABOVE: Brian Whittle was one of Britain's top 400m athletes during a period packed with one-lap talents



I WAS NOT VERY QUICK, BUT I LEARNED THEN WHAT MY STRENGTH WAS: MY ABILITY TO RUN IN LACTIC. I DIDN'T HAVE SPEED TO BURN, BUT I COULD RUN CLOSE TO THE RED LINE

would take two seconds off the 300m time and half it. I was running 36 seconds for the 300m and 16 for the 150m, which is 48 seconds 400m pace. Then, a minute later, I was running 46 seconds pace. I was rocking.

I was not very quick, but I learned then what my strength was: my ability to run in lactic. I wasn't like some of the really great athletes, like Roger Black and Derek Redmond, who had speed to burn. I didn't have that, but I could run close to the red line and so my training had increased my speed endurance with an intense tempo. That's really what I was doing across 12-15 training sessions a week – I just had Saturday off – and it was because '87 was such a shock to me.

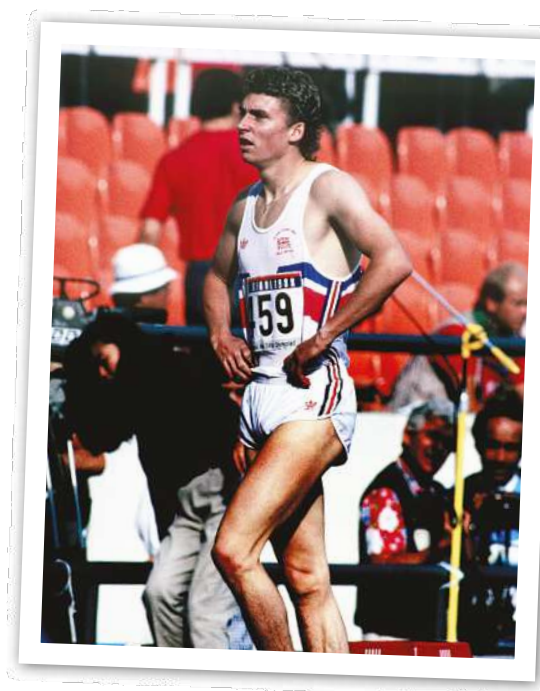
I started the indoor season by opening up at the Kelvin Hall in Glasgow at an international between Great Britain and France. It was the first time an individual Scottish record had been broken in the Kelvin Hall. I didn't dare not win that race. I think if I'd lost that, they might have invaded the pitch!

I then went down to the UK Championships with a cold and ended up getting beaten. Fortunately, I still got picked for the European Indoors but, when I went out to Budapest, we hadn't interrupted winter training at all. We just kept ploughing through what we were doing. We were racing off training, using the races themselves as the speed work.

Budapest had incredible architecture and it was a wonderful place but, when you went behind the Iron Curtain, it was very different. When you went to these championships, they'd have big buffets and all sorts of different types of food in there, but it was freezing cold – wet, dark, dank. We basically went back and forth to the indoor arena for training but we never went outside, just because we were not sure how safe it was.

Running the heats, semis and finals of the Europeans, I lowered the Scottish record in each round – 46.93 seconds in the heat, then 46.86 in the semi-final when I beat out the world record-holder, Thomas Schönlebe.

I didn't know he wasn't going to run in the final. I like to think I scared him. It's probably



highly unlikely but that's my story. I think he tweaked something in the warm-up. That's the story that came round. But I was always going to run the way I ran. I was blood and thunder indoors because you have to get to the break line in a good spot.

I still got beaten by Jens Carlowitz, another East German – enough said, given the era – but 45.98 was quick and there were good athletes behind me. It was the seventh-fastest time ever.

The rest of the boys in the British squad, including Kriss Akabusi and Roger Black, were in America training in California at the time. When the news got over to them that I'd done 45.9, everybody was checking it to make sure it was right. That was the run that really catapulted me into the top rungs of the sport.

I remember saying to my coach, Hugh Muir: "We did it." It was actually him and me and my training partners.

"As much as I loved the other British guys, loved running with them and I love the fact I've got relay medals, it was nice to get something as an individual. We did that, and my team did that. **AW**

As told to Mark Woods

FACTFILE

Born: April 26, 1964

Events: 400m/800m

PBs: 45.22/1:45.47

Honours:

1994: European Championships
4x400m relay gold

1990: European Championships
4x400m relay gold

1989: European Indoor
Championships 400m silver

1988: European Indoor
Championships 400m silver

1986: European Championships
4x400m relay gold

LEFT: Whittle went on to the Seoul Olympics later in 1988

RISING STAR

LUKE DUNHAM

FACTFILE

Age: 18

Club: Herts Phoenix

Coach: Andy Hobdell

Events:

1500m/3000m/5000m

PBs: 3:55.90/8:00.80/14:09.95

Jasmine Collett talks to the age group international who chose to leave tennis for distance running and hasn't looked back since

A highly promising tennis player, Luke Dunham was forced to choose between pursuing the sport full-time or committing to running. Wanting to continue his A-levels and take school seriously, Dunham opted for the latter, a decision that has already paid off.

In January, Dunham impressed at the World Cross Country Championships in Tallahassee, Florida, finishing 24th in the under-20 race and emerging as the second-fastest Briton home. That race was not his first time pulling on a Great Britain and Northern Ireland vest. Just a month earlier, he was called up as a reserve for the European Cross Country Championships, eventually earning his place on the team. Suffering a heavy fall at the start, he battled through to finish 55th.

Earlier in 2025, he also placed 11th in the 3000m at the European Under-20 Championships in Tampere – all achieved while still only 17, with several years of age group competition ahead of him.

Central to his development has been coach Andy Hobdell, best known for leading Hoka's Team Makou, which includes athletes such



PHOTOS BY JOHN NEPOLITAN

as Scott Beattie and Rory Leonard. Through Hobdell, Dunham has had the benefit of being able to train alongside these elite performers too.

How did you first get into running?

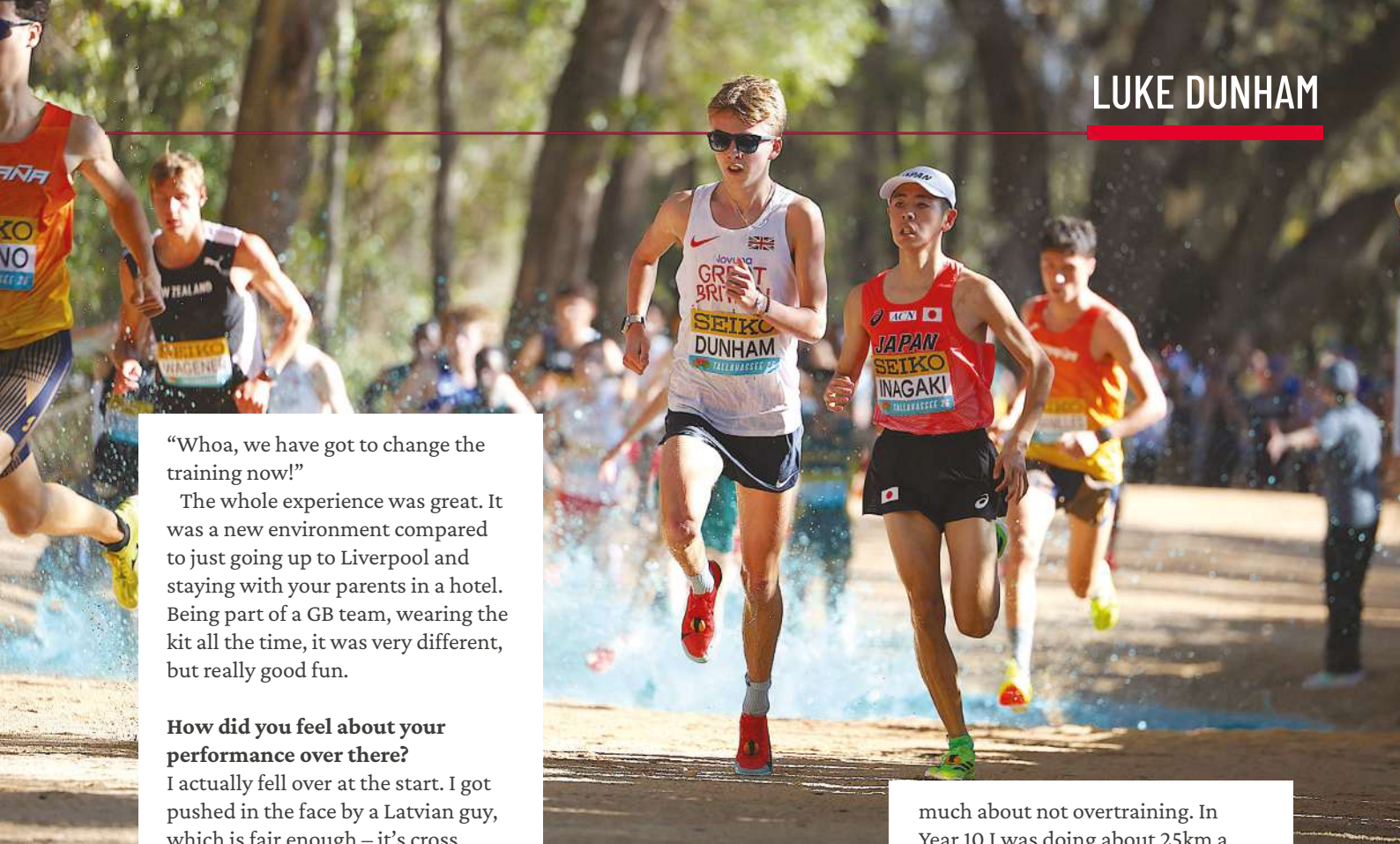
Originally I was a tennis player. I used to play a lot more tennis than I did running, but my parents were both runners, so I always did parkrun from when I was about seven. Then I joined the school running club in Year Seven and ran cross country for them. After lockdown, I joined Herts Phoenix AC and I began training with Andy [Hobdell], and it just went from there.

How has the last year been for you?

It's been pretty incredible, really. It's a bit surreal going from thinking back to when I was in Year Seven, finishing 180th at the nationals, to now running for Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It's been great and I can't wait for the track season now.

When did you find out you had made the European Cross team and how was that experience?

I was a bit gutted when I first got the call saying I was a reserve, because I wasn't really expecting it. I know Andy wasn't very happy, either. Then, about a week before, I got told I was in, and it was a bit like:



“Whoa, we have got to change the training now!”

The whole experience was great. It was a new environment compared to just going up to Liverpool and staying with your parents in a hotel. Being part of a GB team, wearing the kit all the time, it was very different, but really good fun.

How did you feel about your performance over there?

I actually fell over at the start. I got pushed in the face by a Latvian guy, which is fair enough – it’s cross country. Then a Polish guy jumped in front of me and I fell over him. It wasn’t the course to fall over on because it was so thin, and I struggled to get back up. But I’m not disappointed because I gave it my all and I couldn’t really have done much differently.

When you found out you had made the World Cross team after that, how did you feel?

I was over the moon. I didn’t actually get the call myself – my dad did – and then he rang me and said: “Guess what? You’ve been selected.” I was buzzing. It was a much nicer way of doing it. I wasn’t sitting there angry for a week and then suddenly very happy.

Why do you think you performed so well in Florida?

It was a big jump from how I performed at the European Cross. Well, I didn’t fall over, which always helps! We only had three weeks between races, so it’s not like I had a massive training block and I was actually ill the week after the Euros, so I didn’t train that much. I don’t know exactly what worked but it just ended up being my day. I don’t mind the heat, so maybe that helped a bit, too.

// IT’S A BIT SURREAL GOING FROM YEAR SEVEN, FINISHING 180TH AT THE NATIONALS, TO NOW RUNNING FOR GREAT BRITAIN

When did you first start being coached by Andy Hobdell and how is that set-up going?

I started training with Andy as soon as I joined Herts Phoenix. My parents used to train there years ago, so we joined that club. I think I got quite lucky. When I joined, the club wasn’t very strong, so I got noticed by Andy, but now there are loads of good runners, and it’s much harder to get that attention.

He is very matter-of-fact. He tells you what to do and you do it – there’s not really another option. He gives you paces and you just hit them. It makes things simple. When I was younger, it was very

much about not overtraining. In Year 10 I was doing about 25km a week, which I think really helped me develop without burning out.

Andy also coaches elite athletes through Team Makou. Does that give you role models to look up to?

Definitely. We train with them sometimes on Saturdays, and it gives you faith in the training. You see them doing the same sessions on *Strava*, just at different paces. You think: “If I carry on, maybe I’ll get that good one day.” It’s also fun watching their videos and seeing Andy there and thinking: “He’s my coach too.”

Tell us about your tennis background

I started playing tennis when I was three, and by Year Six I was playing around 15 hours a week. I played at Wimbledon Juniors twice, not as a top-10 player, I was probably around 25th in the country, but the qualification system meant I was able to play.

It was a great experience. I loved tennis, but I stopped because of running. To be a pro tennis player, you have to go almost full-time from Year 10, and I wasn’t willing to do that. With running, you can train an hour a day and still do A-levels properly. **AW**

TOO GOOD TO WASTE

PHOTOS BY WORLD ATHLETICS



The World Cross Country Championships are in trouble, writes **Cathal Dennehy**, and the best way to stop the event from withering on the vine is to persuade the biggest names in distance running to get involved

The first step in fixing a problem is accepting there is one. The World Cross Country Championships are in trouble, and there's no point pretending otherwise. To do so would only push the event further along on the slide towards irrelevance.

That may be contentious for those who were

in Tallahassee for this year's edition, who by all accounts had a thoroughly enjoyable experience — and hats off to the hosts for that. An impressive crowd of close to 10,000 saw peerless displays by two of the world's best distance runners: Agnes Ngetich and Jacob Kiplimo. But the unfortunate reality is that most of the sporting world didn't even know this was happening, and most of the distance devotees watching on TV or online were left unimpressed.

ABOVE: The men's under-20 race sets off in Tallahassee



Hannah England was alone on commentary on the world feed but, as per usual, she did an outstanding job. She was insightful, informative and entertaining, weaving in local knowledge as a former alumna of Florida State University, including how her former coach used to refer to training in the local humidity as a “poor man’s altitude”.

It was a 10-out-of-10 display, but she shouldn’t have been left to carry the can alone. A second person alongside should be mandatory for an event of this stature as it intermittently frees up each commentator to get up to speed on lap splits, team scores and spot something the other might have missed. It also allows for a natural back-and-forth chat, debate and banter – the kind that’s difficult to have when you’re alone. One commentator is fine for lower-tier events, but it should never

be the case for a world championship, even when it’s one as brilliant as England.

Watching from afar, many had the same question about the broadcast: why are the pictures so bad? It had the feel of a domestic event, not a global one.

Given part of the course ran through the woods, it apparently wasn’t feasible to have a parallel lane to film athletes from a quad bike, so instead we got a deluge of drone shots from behind the athletes with poor resolution and were often left looking at the tops of trees with no idea what was happening below. Again, this is the World Cross Country, not the Liverpool Cross Challenge.

The shot of athletes crossing the line was also strangely distant, well beyond where it needed to be to frame the event branding. As such, it all just had the feel of a scaled-back, low-budget production, but if World Athletics president Seb Coe is serious about getting cross country into the Winter Olympics, that’s not the kind of output you’d put on the table to convince the International Olympic Committee.

Still, the issues facing the World Cross go far beyond its broadcast. It’s now 25 years since a non-African athlete made the senior men’s individual podium, and 15 years since a non-African woman did. The superiority of East African nations has led to declining interest outside of that region but, even within the last two decades of African dominance, the event has still lost something.

I’m thinking here of how great it was back in 2007, when Eritrea’s Zersenay Tadese ran the legs off Kenenisa Bekele in the sweltering heat of Mombasa and tens of thousands of Kenyans erupted in celebration as the Ethiopian great stepped off the course. Just because no American or European was in contention didn’t make it any less captivating. Kampala in 2017 was another great edition, the crowds and atmosphere in Uganda truly befitting the event.

Maybe it needs to return to East Africa. Or to Aarhus in Denmark, which did a fine job in 2019, one that was followed by a mediocre edition in Australia and then an undeniably poor one in Serbia – organised at short notice having originally been slated for Croatia.

Cities willing to bid for it are often hard to come by, but huge focus should be placed on ensuring it goes where it will have several thousand fans – Tallahassee and Aarhus smartly ensured that by staging other races on the same weekend.

But the biggest problem for the World Cross is not the venue or the TV broadcast



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Jacob Kiplimo, Berihu Aregawi and Daniel Ebenyo on the podium in Florida

or whether purists consider the course to be “real cross country” – a term I always find small-minded, given “real cross country” is very different whether you’re living in Nairobi, Edinburgh, Oslo or Madrid.

On this, let’s not homogenise courses to a default setting. The sport’s very nature is that you adjust to the terrain of the host country, whether that’s flat, fairway-like grass, climbing soul-crushing hills or going knee-deep through a muddy quagmire.

No, the biggest issue the World Cross Country has is getting the best athletes to show up. Road races have exploded in quantity and quality over the last two decades and many athletes prioritised them this year over a tilt at the World Cross.

None of the Paris Olympic medallists over 5000m or 10,000m raced in Tallahassee. Just one of the nine athletes to win a medal at those distances at the world championships in Tokyo last year lined up. Out of the 54 athletes who raced over 10,000m in Japan, just 15 raced the World Cross four months later.

The new January slot for the World Cross should, on paper, have made athletes more

interested, but it seems it did not. So many European nations have thrown in the towel, seeing it as an unnecessary expense when there’s almost no chance of making an impact.

That attitude runs from federations down to athletes, many of whom are understandably not keen to take an unmerciful beating, feeling the World Cross is no place to be unless you’re firing at full capacity which, let’s face it, no one is in January – not even Kiplimo or Ngetich. Those who do get on the line and risk finishing half a lap behind the world’s best are to be utterly commended.

In recent times, there’s been a growing number of gimmicks on the course like water/sand/mud pits. They’re interesting for viewers, welcomed by photographers, but organisers should tread with caution as a course that starts to look like a recipe for injury is one the world’s best track athletes will dodge.

On the track right now, European and US distance runners have closed the gap substantially on their African rivals, but most of them still didn’t want to take them on on a flat, (mostly) dry cross country course. Why?

Maybe it’s time for World Athletics to initiate



TOO MANY ATHLETES PREFER TO RACE A GLORIFIED TIME TRIAL ON THE STREETS OF VALENCIA OR AROUND AN INDOOR TRACK IN BOSTON THAN REPRESENT THEIR COUNTRY AT A GLOBAL CHAMPIONSHIP. THAT IS NOT HOW IT SHOULD BE



a consultation process with the likes of Jakob Ingebrigtsen, Nadia Battocletti, Cole Hocker, Grant Fisher, Andreas Almgren and others like them, along with their coaches and managers, asking what date on the calendar, financial incentives and course requirements would need to be met for them to show up and take their shot when the next edition rolls around in 2029.

Because for this event to survive, and thrive, it needs the majority of the world's best 10km runners on that line and, right now, that's not happening.

On the Podium Athletics podcast, Hannah England put forward two good suggestions: changing the team scoring from four to three, thereby encouraging smaller nations (and lowering their costs); and offering automatic qualification for the World Championships 10,000m to the top-20 across the line.

For Tokyo last year, 14 of the 16 relay qualifying spots were awarded at the World Relays, forcing the hand of nations that otherwise would not have sent teams to China. In 2029, why not give 20 of the 27 spots in the

10,000m away at the World Cross, then fill up the remainder based on world rankings. That – you can be sure – will result in a lot more getting on the start line.

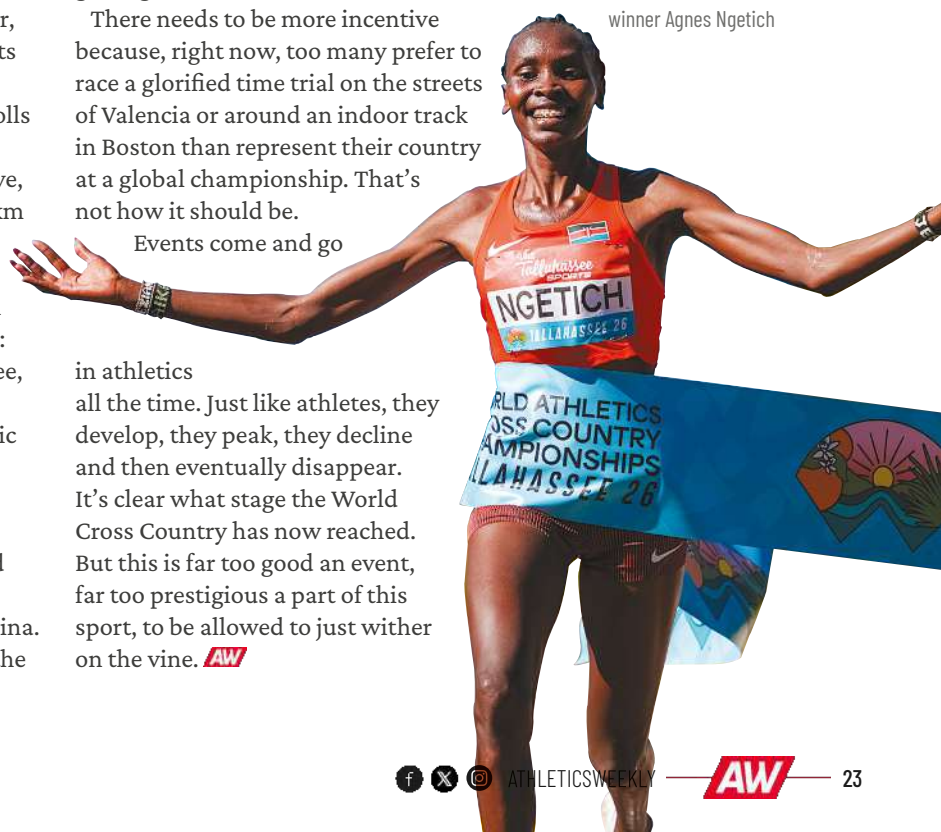
There needs to be more incentive because, right now, too many prefer to race a glorified time trial on the streets of Valencia or around an indoor track in Boston than represent their country at a global championship. That's not how it should be.

Events come and go

in athletics all the time. Just like athletes, they develop, they peak, they decline and then eventually disappear. It's clear what stage the World Cross Country has now reached. But this is far too good an event, far too prestigious a part of this sport, to be allowed to just wither on the vine. **AW**

ABOVE: The 2007 event in Kenya

BELOW: Women's winner Agnes Ngetich





RACE FOR SURVIVAL

Verity Ockenden provides an athlete's view of what it was like to compete at the World Cross Country Championships, as the weather proved to be the toughest opponent of all

Running has an incredibly persistent way of teaching us lessons, sometimes the same one repeatedly. One of those lessons is that, just when you think, “it can’t get more difficult than this”... it can, and it will.

There is, as even the most weathered veteran of the sport will testify, no upper limit to how much you can hurt just trying to put one foot in front of the other as fast as possible.

When I first qualified for the World Cross Country Championships in Tallahassee via a decent result at the European Cross Country Championships in Lagoa, that’s exactly what

I thought – it couldn’t get more difficult than that. I couldn’t imagine a more testing course than the one conjured up for us by the Portuguese, and I’d survived it, so surely I could handle anything Florida might think to throw at me?

On first inspection through a *YouTube* simulation of the course so regularly used in domestic competition by NCAA athletes, the broad swathes of clipped grass and densely packed sand, only gently undulating and sheltered in parts by trees, looked like a walk in the park. Apalachee Regional Park however, was to present us with a few thus-far undocumented surprises by the time we arrived across the Atlantic to walk it

ABOVE: Verity Ockenden battles the conditions at the World Cross Country Championships in Florida



THE HEAT MADE IT FEEL AS IF I WAS IN SOME KIND OF STUPOR, LOSING CONTROL OF MY MIND AS WELL AS MY BODY

ourselves. Even after we'd seen all of it – five two-kilometre laps that included an astroturf “rollercoaster” ramp, a sandpit complete with surfboards and flamingos, an unnaturally blue water feature, five alligator themed log jumps, and one fairly innocuous looking hill through the woods up to a mud pit – I still thought it looked pretty friendly compared to the relentless twisting and turning we'd had to navigate in Lagoa.

Though the World Championship course would challenge us over 10km rather than 7.5km this time, I felt comforted by the fact that this gave us more space to find our rhythm in between all of the obstacles. We practiced jumping the logs which we'd end up hurdling 25 times, and our team leader Liz Yelling did the honourable thing of taking her shoes and socks off to wade in and measure the depth of the watery stretch for us. This was before we learned that snakes had been spotted languishing around the area both in and out of the water.

We had expected it to be a balmy 17 degrees celsius and, true to predictions, we shook out in shorts and sports bras, enjoying the lack of layering required compared to British temperatures. As race day beckoned, however, the forecast was to become the focal point of almost every athlete's strategy.

With our race starting at 11.30am, it soon became clear that there was to be a seventh obstacle to navigate in the form of some unseasonal 24-degree heat but, unlike the other obstacles, it would be a constant factor throughout the race with little to no respite.

We prepared ourselves well for it, upping our electrolyte intake, shortening our warm-ups and converting our hotel hand-towels into ice wraps held together with tape. My game plan had always been to start the race conservatively and work my way through the pack once I'd settled in and developed a feel for the course, and it had worked pretty well for me back in Portugal.

I knew that neither the Africans or the Australians were likely to be as fazed by the heat as we were, having had the fortune to

get themselves acclimatised to it naturally at home, and I had expected a pack of at least 20 to show me a clean set of heels from the off.

It didn't take long for a rainbow arrow of women to disappear over the horizon, spearheaded by world 10km record-holder Agnes Ngetich, who immediately strung even her fellow countrywomen out with her blistering pace. I kept my focus on my own running, aware that I was packing well with my team-mates Phoebe and Poppy in the early stages, which I thought meant we were probably all gauging our efforts well, but it still didn't take long for the course and the conditions to start taking their toll on me. It was a strange sensation.

Time seemed to pass very slowly and, though my muscles did not seem to strain as they moved slowly over the ground, they did not respond either and I could not lift them. The heat made it feel as if I was in some kind of stupor, losing control of my mind as well as my body. I looked forward to the water pit as it provided momentary refreshment each lap, but I could feel myself wavering. This was indeed very much more difficult than Lagoa had been. As my room-mate Phoebe put it after the race: “It didn't feel like running, it felt like survival.”

Not everybody made it to the finish line, so I'm glad at least that I did, despite having to spend a good half hour writhing under a duvet of ice packs in the medical tent.

After the race, I wished that I could have exercised the kind of fitness I had felt in my penultimate workout of eight times one mile off one minute, cruising with confidence through frost-spangled English lanes, able to surge on demand.

I felt cheated out of the opportunity to discover what that feeling of fitness could mean in a competitive context by something so annoyingly simple yet immovable as the sun. We all concluded that the event as a whole had been a fun experience, but we very much hoped for the next edition to be held somewhere a little less toasty, particularly if cross-country is really ever to gain inclusion to the Winter Olympics. **AW**

FORWARD THINKING

JOMA Sport's influence across athletics is growing, from the brand's strong relationships with federations through to athlete partnerships and footwear innovation

JOMA Sport is a family-owned performance sportswear brand with almost 60 years of experience in the design and manufacture of technical footwear and apparel. Founded in Spain in 1965, the company has grown steadily into one of Europe's leading sports brands, with athletics remaining central to its identity alongside football and other high-performance sports.

The brand's family ownership continues to shape its long-term approach. Rather than following short-term trends, JOMA focuses on product durability, technical performance and building lasting relationships with athletes, federations and partners.

EUROPEAN STRENGTH

JOMA holds a strong and established position across continental Europe. Within athletics, the brand is widely recognised for its federation partnerships, elite athlete sponsorships and performance-led approach



to footwear and apparel development. Product innovation and technology is driven by real competition demands and athlete feedback, with an emphasis on function, reliability, and longevity.

COMMITMENT TO UK AND IRELAND

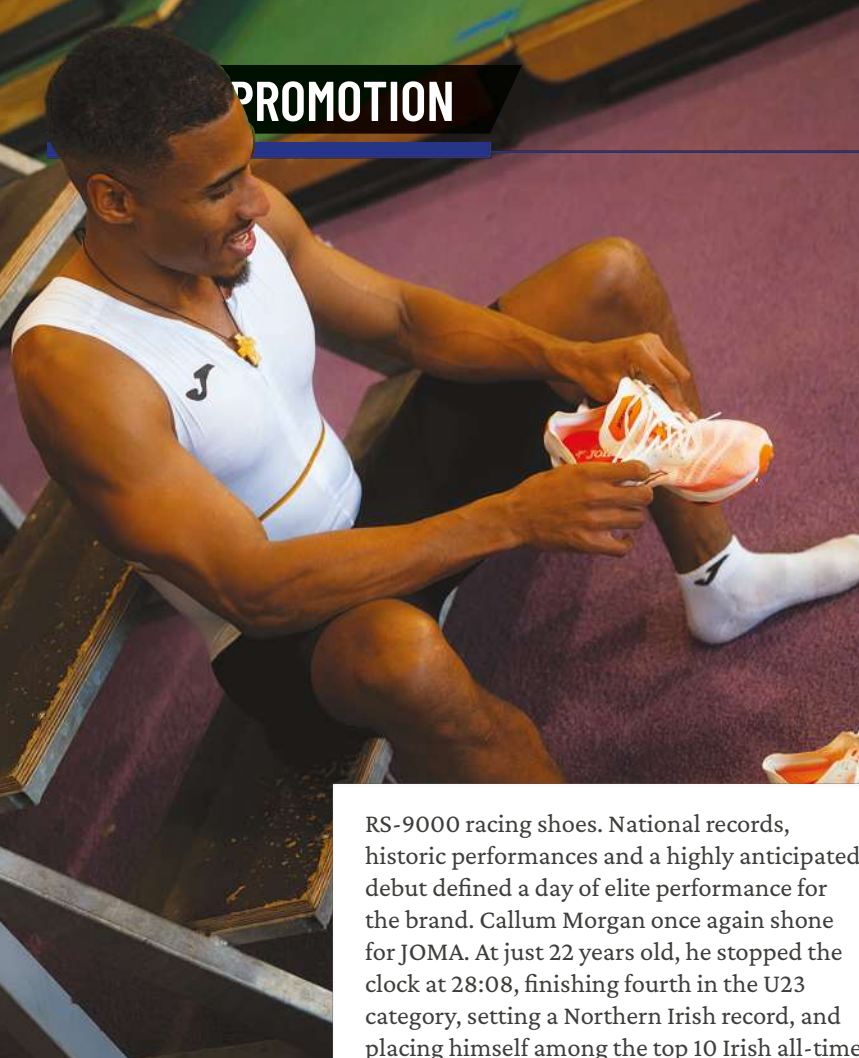
JOMA has an active and growing role within athletics in the UK. The brand is the technical sponsor of Scottish Athletics and Welsh Athletics, supplying competition and training kit across both the federations, as well as many athletics clubs nationally.

In addition, JOMA sponsors a number of athletes across the UK and Ireland, including Alex Haydock-Wilson, Joshua Faulds, Weynay Ghebresilasie and Callum Morgan. These partnerships reflect JOMA's commitment to long-term athlete collaboration and support across different disciplines and stages of development.

The recent Valencia 10K provided the stage for an outstanding performance by JOMA athletes, who once again competed at the highest international level wearing the

 **Joma**





RS-9000 racing shoes. National records, historic performances and a highly anticipated debut defined a day of elite performance for the brand. Callum Morgan once again shone for JOMA. At just 22 years old, he stopped the clock at 28:08, finishing fourth in the U23 category, setting a Northern Irish record, and placing himself among the top 10 Irish all-time performances at this distance.

PLANS FOR 2026

JOMA's presence in the UK and Ireland will continue to expand through major events and championship involvement. In 2026, the brand was present at the National Running Show and will be at the London Marathon Event Show, engaging directly with the running and athletics community.

JOMA will also design and supply the official competition kit for Wales and Scotland at the 2026 Commonwealth Games, further strengthening its relationship with home nation federations. Alongside this, the brand will continue its involvement within the European Athletics partnership, including presence at the European Championships in Birmingham.

Beyond major events, JOMA will establish its own UK and Ireland running calendar in 2026, sponsoring a diverse programme of races to promote participation and grassroots competition across the region. This includes the Run Norwich 10k, delivered as part of its partnership with Norwich City Football Club and the Community Sports Foundation.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

JOMA continues to invest significantly in research and development across its athletics footwear and apparel ranges. Key areas of focus

include durability for high-mileage training, performance engineering through responsive cushioning and lightweight construction, and the increased use of sustainable and recycled materials.

Design remains functional and performance-led, with products developed to support athletes throughout full training and competition cycles.

A clear example of the brand's technical evolution is the new RS-9000 model, which was born with a clear goal – to be the lightest competition shoe on the market. It was an ambitious target but it has been reached and the shoe weighs only 126 grams, but it would not have been possible without the meticulous development process.

JOMA's team worked on every detail to ensure each part of the shoe is characterised by maximum lightness. At the same time, efficiency and performance were evaluated in laboratory tests under extreme conditions of exertion.

FEDERATION PARTNERSHIPS AND AUTHENTICITY

Long-term federation partnerships remain a cornerstone of JOMA's athletics strategy to really build on the brand's family ethos. Working closely with national governing bodies allows the brand to maintain authenticity, support the sport at multiple levels and ensure product development is grounded in real competition environments.

ESTABLISHED UK RECOGNITION AND MULTI-SPORT GROWTH

JOMA is already well established in football as the technical sponsor to Brentford FC, Norwich City FC, Swansea City AFC and Hibernian FC. This foundation provides a strong platform as the brand continues to expand awareness of its global athletics programme. Alongside athletics, JOMA is also growing its presence internationally in other performance sports, including padel and tennis, applying the same athlete-focused, performance-first philosophy.

LONG-TERM VISION

JOMA views the UK and Ireland as strategically important markets aligned with its values of performance, participation and competition. The brand's objective is sustainable, long-term growth built on federation partnerships, athlete collaboration, event engagement and product credibility.



JOMA'S R LINE- WHICH SHOE WILL SUIT YOU?

JOMA's R line is composed of the R-1000, R-2000, R-3000, R-4000 and R-5000 models, all equipped with cutting-edge technology. The origins of the first R go back over 10 years to the R-4000, which was created as a versatile competition shoe for fast runners. Then came the R-5000, a much lighter evolution and the first racing shoe, until the R-3000 saw JOMA venture into carbon-plated running shoes.

INTERVAL TRAINING

The best model in this case is the R-4000, super lightweight and offering good ground contact. Weighing only 177g, the lightness helps reduce effort and facilitates quick and agile movements during speed intervals. Additionally, it

has a secure fit, neutral support and the STABILIS midfoot system prevents twists when making sudden changes in direction or pace. Its moderate 6mm drop allows for a balance between speed and tendon protection, even if it means sacrificing cushioning.

DAILY TRAINING

Shoes for daily training should stand out for their versatility, and that is precisely what sets the R-2000 apart. Suitable for various distances

and paces, it works perfectly for both light runs and long sessions. The R-2000 offers high levels of comfort thanks to the wider toe box, as well as the FLY REACTIVE technology in the rear, which cushions impact while providing good energy return. Similarly, the midsole design with a 10mm drop provides a smooth transition, resulting in less effort.

TEMPO RUNNING

The goal here is to use shoes that maximise stride efficiency while helping to meet athletes' demands without compromising comfort. The R-1000 model fits into this perfectly, as its carbon plate is less "aggressive", more flexible and of a lower density. The shoe features a midsole made entirely of FLY REACTIVE, a lightweight material that absorbs impact, protects and returns energy with each stride. Its 7mm drop is ideal for tempo runs, as it helps with an efficient transition from heel to toe.

COMPETITION

The two star models for competition are the R-5000 and the R-3000, both featuring a carbon plate and a 6 mm drop. Although at first glance they may seem similar, there is an essential aspect that makes the difference: the weight. The R-5000, weighing 247g, is lighter than the R-3000, which is 260g.

This means they are recommended for different distances. While the R-5000 is perfect for reaching high speeds in short distance competitions without feeling limited by the weight, the R-3000 covers medium and long distances and has more cushioning.

In both cases, it is proven by our professional athletes that the carbon plate increases efficiency in running and energy savings to maximise performance. **AW**



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PHOTO BY LONDON MARATHON EVENTS



READY TO RACE

After a combination of ill fortune, illness and injury combined to halt his impressive progress, Emile Cairess talks to **Ben Bloom** about how he is planning to fulfil his potential and become a force on the global distance running stage again



Emile Cairess has some lofty goals over the next few months. If the London Marathon goes well in April, he sees no reason why he cannot run “a good bit faster” than Mo Farah’s British record. Then comes a double 10,000m bid this summer at the Glasgow Commonwealth Games and Birmingham European Championships, where medals are not out of the question.

But, when Cairess really whittles down his core ambition and identifies what he truly desires from athletics in 2026, it is simple: he just wants to race.

“That’s the point of the sport,” he says. “To race, get results and enjoy it, which is the opposite to what happened to me last year. I just want to be out there competing regularly. If I’m doing that I think it will go well.”

For some time, the 28-year-old has been touted as Britain’s next male distance running star; the man primed to take Farah’s mantle as a truly world-class athlete. After an impressive sixth-place marathon debut in London in 2023, it was his performances over 26.2 miles the following year that suggested this was a runner capable of breaking into the mainstream.

In only his second year specialising over the distance, he finished third at the London Marathon – clocking 2:06:46 to move behind Farah on the British all-time list – before then finishing fourth in Paris when posting Britain’s best men’s Olympic marathon performance for two decades.

When Cairess was announced for the 2025 London Marathon, the expectation was that Farah’s national mark of 2:05:11 would soon be consigned to history. But then came a wretched run of luck that cropped up with frustrating frequency. “It was,” says Cairess, “a pretty disappointing year.”

The issues had actually begun at the tail end of 2024, when he caught tonsillitis while at a training camp in Kenya. When he returned to action after a break, his Achilles then started causing him problems, and the knock-on effect was soreness in his posterior tibial tendon – the part of the body that, in simplistic terms, connects the calf muscle to the bones in the foot. “I tend to get niggles when I take breaks and then come back,” says Cairess.

The problem took longer to heal than initially expected and, unable to run throughout January, February and into the start of March,

it became clear that his hopes of contesting a third London Marathon were over.

The unencumbered months that followed included a 10km race in Laredo, Spain, and a 10,000m victory at the British Championships, where he clocked a personal best 27:27.95 despite running much of the race solo. Then followed a freak elbow infection, which knocked him out for a number of prime summer training weeks. By the time he arrived on the marathon startline for the Tokyo World Championships in September, he suspected he was under-prepared.

“I didn’t really have the background because I’d missed the build-up for London [Marathon],” he explains. “The marathon training ended up being squeezed into a really short period of time. I think, by the time I got

ABOVE: Emile Cairess pushes towards the finish line as he took fourth place at the Paris Olympics





to Worlds, I'd done good sessions and was in pretty good shape. But, for a marathon, you need to have a long build-up. Once I got past 20 miles, I didn't have the background I'd normally have."

The result was the first DNF of his athletics career, as he ground to a halt just 2km from the finish line, overwhelmed by Japan's stifling hot temperatures and humidity.

"If it had been a cool race I think I would



have maybe done okay," he says. "But the heat, combined with the lack of marathon-specific training sessions, got to me. So it didn't end well. I'd never not finished a race in my whole life. I was just really hot, so I wanted to stop more than I wanted to finish. I was more disappointed about not doing well than not finishing."

In spite of that big-stage disappointment, which brought an end to a "really frustrating year", Cairess believes the tricky 12-month period should nonetheless prove beneficial in the long term.

"It was difficult, but it's not the worst-case scenario where I've had a stress fracture or been really set back with stuff," he says. "The injury at the beginning of last year wasn't ideal, but apart from that I've been really consistent. I've still got many months of pretty good training under me, and most weeks have gone well. Even though I haven't got good results, I definitely feel like I've progressed. I feel like I just need a bit of luck."

Making his first public outing since failing to

ABOVE: Cairess struggled in the World Championships in Tokyo, eventually having to retire

“

Even though I haven't got good results, I definitely feel like I've progressed. I feel like I just need a bit of luck

finish in Tokyo, Cairess again stopped early at December's Valencia Marathon. This time, the premature ending was planned, with Cairess employed to pace a group of athletes targeting a 2:06 finish to 30km. Feeling so good at that point, he then slowed slightly to allow fellow British athletes Alex Yee and Phil Sesemann to latch onto his coattails, guiding them through 36km before calling it a day.

His exploits helped push Olympic triathlon champion Yee to a remarkable time of 2:06:38, shunting Cairess down to third on the British all-time standings.

"We're the same school year so we've raced against each other since we were 13 or 14," says Cairess, of Yee. "I've known him for a long time. For only his second marathon, it was really impressive. There's obviously more there."

Most importantly for Cairess, the run provided a major boost ahead of his own upcoming marathon comeback in London.

"I was pleased because it felt pretty comfortable," he says. "I knew that if I was in pretty good shape in Valencia, I can build on that for London. That was the rationale behind it – making sure that my specific marathon fitness is close to where it needs to be, before starting the real training."

"Basically, I just didn't want to run the whole thing because I thought it would affect my training afterwards. I could have done more, but I wanted to be consistent with my training. I didn't want to get carried away."

With illness having thwarted his plan to race last month's Valencia 10km, his competitive return is scheduled for the Malaga Half-Marathon in March, before finally launching a much-delayed assault on Farah's marathon mark over the streets of London.

With pacing times yet to be confirmed, he expects to join a race-day group aiming to go through halfway somewhere between 61:40 and 62 minutes. Continue on such a pace and he should be capable of taking a chunk off Farah's best time, set when winning the Chicago Marathon in 2018.

"I feel like I can run a good bit faster [than the British record]," says Cairess. "My previous

runs at London have been completely solo. I've had pacemakers, but haven't actually run with any other athletes, which isn't the most enjoyable or the optimum way to run. Hopefully, this year, I can be in a good group and run as fast as I plan.

"You just have to hope the training comes together. If it all does then I can look beyond the British record by a fair way."

A regular in the London Mini Marathon during his teenage years, the race retains a special place in Cairess' heart: "It's the one race in my career I'd really love to win. Apart from the Olympics, London is definitely the race that any British athlete who does marathons really aspires to. I'd rather win London far beyond all the other [marathon] majors."

Whether that is a realistic aim this year likely depends on the strength of his rivals, with 16 men running a marathon quicker than 2:04:30 throughout 2025. Cairess says it is "a good few years before I'm really at my peak", suggesting



ABOVE: Cairess celebrates his third-place finish at the London Marathon two years ago

“

Hopefully I can be in a good group and run as fast as I plan to in London. You just have to hope the training comes together. If it does then I can look beyond the British record by a fair way



PHOTO BY LONDON MARATHON EVENTS

31 or 32 could prove his optimum age. Yet he insists he is “developed enough in my training that I can start performing really well now”.

His average of 215km to 230km (roughly 130 to 140 miles) each week is unlikely to rise much more over the remainder of his career, but he believes scope for improvement comes from a capacity for greater consistency over fast long training runs.

Since 2022, sessions have been set by Renato Canova, the Italian octogenarian, who has guided dozens of athletes to Olympic and world medals. While Canova’s poor health means the relationship is mainly now conducted over the phone, Cairess still sees his coach when he travels to Italy and, invariably, on Kenyan camps. Otherwise, Cairess undertakes the bulk of his training in his home town of Leeds – where he often runs alongside



athletes from the Leeds Talent Hub – while he sleeps every night in an altitude tent to ensure he “feels more relaxed that I’m not missing out compared to people at altitude”.

No stone is left unturned in the bid for improvement. Now – after last year’s infuriating standstill – Cairess is just desperate to show the fruits of his labours. “I don’t do all the training just for the training. I do it to get good results.”

The racer is ready to compete. **AW**

ABOVE: Cairess and Alex Yee have been racing each other since they were teenagers

Passion projects

Whether it be choosing what to do beyond her running career or breaking records and setting lofty goals, Eilish McColgan explains to **Euan Crumley** why she will be paying attention to what's close to her heart



PHOTO BY ASICS

Eilish McColgan is thinking about the future. Not just about her upcoming return to the London Marathon in April, or any ambitions she might have to defend her Commonwealth 10,000m title in Glasgow this summer, but beyond that and to a time when she will no longer be one of the world's elite distance runners.

The Scot turned 35 last year – she now qualifies in the first of the veteran categories – and won't deny she is very much aware that time is marching on.

She is savouring every moment of being a professional sportswoman, with a pervading sense of gratitude and pride at still being able to run for a living following an incredibly challenging recovery from the surgery to her left knee that she underwent in 2023. It's only natural that she considers what might come next and it would seem that, thankfully, accountancy's loss will be athletics' gain.

"If you'd asked me years ago, I would have assumed it would be something to do with my degree," she tells AW. "I studied maths and accountancy, and I just thought that one day I would use that. But the last time I even remotely looked at anything to do with that was 2012. I feel so far removed from it and I just can't see myself not being in the sport in some capacity."

There are a few thoughts on what that capacity might be. She is no stranger to coaching, while she and her fiancée Michael Rimmer (a former Olympic 800m runner) founded the *Giving Back to Track* initiative to support young athletes through scholarships and by providing free after-school clubs to deprived areas in Scotland, as well helping clubs through funding. McColgan's has been a lengthy career and the four-time Olympian certainly doesn't want everything she has learned to go to waste.

"I've coached for a very long time now," she says. "It's all online at the moment because I'm in the midst of my own career, but that's an element that I would like to go down more deeply."

"I've also thought about going into the agent side of things, because I've seen a lot, experienced a lot and I think there are so many young athletes that could do with a female agent – there are not many female agents about at all – but also just someone that is there to purely look after the athletes."

"It wouldn't be a money-making scheme for me. I'd want to do it because it's a passion



project. Maybe it would be helping young female athletes to get into races, help them with sponsorships, brand deals, things like that. Michael agrees.

"I think we've accumulated so much knowledge over the years and it would be a waste not to try and help the younger generation coming through – not just with coaching, but more of an overall package."

She adds: "I'd like to continue to support young female athletes, try and get more free after-school clubs up and running – at no cost for primary schools – because PE continues to get cut. Week after week, there are fewer hours for kids being active and it's just silly – we know the benefits, not just for physical health, but mental health too."

"I'd like to commit a bit more time to that side of things and really, really try and make an impact. Those kinds of passion projects would be what I'm looking at post my own athletics career."

And would that passion extend to governance? McColgan has never been scared to speak up about issues that she feels need to be addressed within the sport. An articulate, engaging individual like her would surely bring a lot to the table when it comes to decision-making and policy.

"Less so," she smiles diplomatically, when asked if that route would be of interest to her. "I want to stay in love with the sport and I think, if I went down those avenues, maybe I'd see stuff I wouldn't want to see. I still like the grassroots, up and coming, the purest side of it. The elite side of things is so much more complicated."

RIGHT: Eilish McColgan sprints for the finish line as she breaks the European 10km record in Valencia, and celebrates her achievement, above

“

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experienced a lot and
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a female agent



“Ultimately, I enjoy young kids just enjoying our sport and the sport that I love. It definitely gets more challenging the further up the ladder you go, so I think I’d probably like to stay more grassroots and development.

“Never say never. I’m always there to have a conversation, I’ll always be honest and give my opinions and my views, but I think I might get frustrated with that side of things. For me, the real basic basics, kids in sport and youngsters coming through in sport is what I’m most passionate about.”

Regardless of which path she ultimately chooses to follow, it’s safe to say that McColgan won’t be short of things to do. For now, though, happily she is still occupied with another of her passion projects – namely the sporting ambitions she hopes to fulfil in 2026 and at which she is coming from a position of real strength.

Last September’s Great North Run was the first time she can remember feeling that her body – and particularly her knee – was starting to respond how she wanted it to. Since that operation in 2023, which resulted in months away from running, there had been an underlying anxiety that she might never reach the medal-winning, record-breaking heights of the past. Her run of 30:08, a European 10km record, in Valencia last month therefore meant a great deal and provided not just reassurance but an enormous boost of encouragement.

“It’s been nice to feel like all the training that we’ve put in over those last three years has been towards something,” she says. “Because you do start to question: ‘Is it going to be for nothing at all? Is it just going to be a post-surgery PB and a post-surgery training time or vet 35 PB?’

“I’m not stupid, I know at some point those goals will have to change, I will have to start looking at different things and the goals might not be as grand or extreme as they are now, but I feel really lucky to be in a position where I have had such a long career, I’ve come back from a lot of serious injuries, but yet still been able to come back to being my best again.

“It’s been a three-year slog, and it’s been tough at times, but it has paid off for me. Even just that one PB – it’s been worth it. That’s the bonus I get out of it.”



It has been a busy start to the year. A record in Valencia last month, a half marathon appointment in Japan that took place on February 1 and being announced in the elite fields for London.

McColgan’s 26.2-mile debut in London, delayed twice because of injury, resulted in an eighth-place finish and a Scottish record of 2:24:25 that beat the PB of her mother Liz (a former London winner). Eilish admits that the preparation for that race was rushed, though, as she went “chasing fitness” to make it. This year already feels different.

“With the marathon, I feel like there’s such a huge chunk that can come off of that [time],” she says. “Deep down, I’d love to break through 2:20. There are not a huge amount of European women, or even American women, who have ever been sub 2:20 so it seems like that’s a bit of a barrier. I’d love to be one of those women moving towards that and ultimately, getting as close as I can to the very, very best.”

There is certainly likely to be plenty of attention and support coming her way in the months ahead. McColgan has noticed that her return to form isn’t just helping her.



ABOVE: McColgan during her marathon debut in London

RIGHT: All smiles with Commonwealth gold



It’s been a three-year slog, and it’s been tough at times, but it has paid off for me. Even just that one PB – it’s been worth it



PHOTOS BY LONDON MARATHON EVENTS AND GETTY IMAGES

“Some of the young kids that have messaged me off the back of [Valencia], especially some of the young women I work with through *Giving Back To Track...* they've all suffered injuries, they all have problems that they're going through. The messages that they've sent me, saying: 'It's been amazing to see you run a PB after three years', because then they start thinking: 'Actually, my two weeks off really wasn't too bad'. In

the grand scheme of things, they're going to be okay, they can recover and it gives them a bit of hope that they've got plenty of time.

“I think that, when you're young, you have one injury and then you panic and think: 'Oh, God, this is it now – I've missed a month. I'm never going to get back'. But for them to see me at my age, at this point in my career, and still able to get back to that level of performance, I think it just gives them a little bit of breathing space, perhaps, to think: 'Okay, don't go crazy. I've got time on my side, and I'll be able to get back if I do it properly'.”

Is that the advice she would have passed on to her younger self, at the time she was starting to make her way in the sport?

“When you're younger, you're very robust and I just always thought: 'I'll get back, I'm young'. There was never that same doubt,” she says. “As you get older it does take longer [to come back]. When you're younger, you can twist your ankle and, an hour later, you're off and running again but if you do that when you're in your 30s – I'm sure it's even more when you're in your 40s and your 50s and your 60s – the recovery side of things is different.

“But I'd say to be more patient. I think when I was younger, I would always try and rush back for the next race. You were always just looking for the next race, the next race, the next race and trying to get ready for it. You're probably doing races that you weren't quite ready for and that does have a knock-on effect for the next thing.

“Obviously, there's an element of it that is my job now so, yes, you rush into races because [something like] the Olympics is a big deal. But I'd say that, since London, we've been a bit more specific on: 'Right, we do this race because this is specifically for training', or there's a reason behind every race you're doing, rather than when you're a kid, you just want to do everything. I'd say just be a bit more patient. That's probably something that would have benefitted me a lot in my younger years.” **AW**





PHOTO BY ANDREAS RECORTADO

Fast learner

European 10km record-holder Andreas Almgren talks to **Tim Adams** about moving up in the world, making history, training with Jakob Ingebrigtsen and targeting Birmingham gold

Andreas Almgren feels like he is only just getting started. “If I can get the perfect race with good pacers, there’s a lot more in my body to go quicker,” he says. Less than a month has passed since the Swede knocked eight seconds off his own European 10km record, running 26:45 to win in Valencia and moving himself up to sixth on the all-time list. It was just his fourth competitive race over the distance on the roads.

The 30-year-old has now swapped the flat and fast tarmac of Valencia with the mountainous terrain of Sierra Nevada, a high-altitude training base – situated 2320m/7611 feet above sea level – in the Andalusian province of Granada.

His plan is to stay there for a few more weeks before travelling to Castellón to race over 10km on February 22. Yomif Kejelcha ran 26:31 to win last year’s edition, a mark which put the Ethiopian second on the all-time list, and Almgren is viewing the race as an opportunity to go even faster once again – especially given his assertion that Valencia wasn’t perfect.

“The pacer only managed three to four kilometres, so that was a little bit of a

disappointment,” he tells AW. “I had to run six kilometres by myself. The conditions were really good, though.”

His final workout ahead of the race was an indoor 10x1km interval session, which totalled 25:37, four seconds quicker than what the 30-year-old managed in the same session before last year’s edition.

“Using bike pace on an indoor track is a bit of a cheat code,” Almgren jokes. “So I was sure that I was capable of improving my record. It’s only been two years since my first ever 10km race [27:38 in Valencia] so right now I feel like I’m harvesting the seeds that I planted a few years ago. For any endurance sport you just need time to develop. It’s quite natural that I’m improving now.

“It’s hard to say if I can target the world record [Rhonex Kipruto’s 26:24 from 2020] as I still have to shave off over 20 seconds. I think I can run in the 26:30s soon, though. Hopefully I have a shot of running well in Castellón.”

Last year, Almgren proved his versatility across multiple distances, setting European records in the 5000m (12:44.27) and half-marathon (58:41), as well as national marks over 3000m, 5km and 10,000m.

Perhaps most memorably, though, he secured the first senior global medal of his career at the

LEFT: Andreas Almgren on his way to smashing his own European 10km record on the streets of Valencia



ABOVE: Almgren crosses the finish line in Valencia

World Championships in Tokyo, with bronze behind Jimmy Gressier and Kejelcha. It was the first time that two European male athletes had made the world 10,000m podium since 1987.

"I'm finally at the level that I want to be," he says. "In 2024 I felt like a bit of an outsider. Now I feel like I'm one of the top guys and I have the confidence to just go to the front of a race and control it."

"I had prepared for 'sit-and-kick' tactics at the Olympics but I missed the Games due to a stress fracture. I then got back into full training in October 2024 and, since then, I've barely had any breaks in my preparation. My form now is just proof of what can happen when you finally get some consistency."

"I did some serious heat training ahead of the championships in Tokyo. I knew the humidity would be high. I also worked a lot on my kick and pace changes during the summer, which I hadn't done in previous years."

Almgren is coached by Urban Aruhn, who just last month was voted as coach of the year at the Swedish Athletics Gala. The pair have worked with each other since 2012 and their relationship has steadily evolved over 14 years.

Almgren competed in the 800m and claimed a bronze medal at the 2014 World Junior Championships in 1:45.65, a time that still stands as the Swedish under-20 record. He lowered that two-lap PB to 1:45.59 in 2015 but was then dogged by multiple injuries over a number of years.

In 2019, while sitting on a training bike as part of rehabilitation from a stress fracture in his sacrum, he watched compatriot Kalle

Berglund make the world 1500m final in Doha. That moment was a turning point. After returning from injury Almgren added two double threshold sessions to his training week – the Norwegian method that inspired Berglund – and, to test out his new training schedule, competed in the 3000m at the 2020 Swedish Indoor Championships.

Almgren not only broke the Swedish indoor 3000m record with 7:48.34 but beat Berglund by almost 10 seconds. He has since prioritised the longer distances and never looked back.

"The type of training that I now do means that I can essentially build a base anywhere from the 1500m to the half-marathon," Almgren says. "Urban was like a 'pure coach' when I was younger but it's more of a two-way street now where we discuss base training. So I usually write the programme and then ask him what he thinks about it."

"He makes me question things. For example, he'll say: 'Do you really think this is the optimal thing for this session?'. If we're getting near a race, I've done well in the session and we're approaching the last workout, he'll also say: 'Are you sure you need to do this last interval?'. I really like this set-up."

Asked about his current training in Sierra Nevada, Almgren says: "I usually run around 200km per week. On Mondays and Wednesdays I've got two easy runs and some strides, which is kind of prehab training. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I do double thresholds."

"Friday is the easiest day, where it's one easy run of about 10-12km and there's some strength work as well. On Saturday I have my toughest workout and it's a mix of hill work and half-marathon training. Then, in the afternoon, it's an easy run. On Sunday it's a long run, around 25-30km right now, and some strength work in the afternoon."

"For my easy runs I always go by feel. So if I feel fatigued I'll go more slowly and then, if I'm feeling good, I can run them pretty fast. On my long runs I can average anywhere from 3:30 to 4:10/km."

Training inspiration isn't in short supply, either. Almgren has spent a lot of time with Jakob Ingebrigtsen and being up close with the Norwegian during sessions has been invaluable.

"Training with Jakob is definitely motivating," he says. "We ran a lot together last winter and he was insanely strong. Everyone saw that when he broke both the world indoor 1500m (3:29.63) and mile (3:49.15) records in Liévin. He was then



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



I'm finally at the level that I want to be. In 2024 I felt like a bit of an outsider. Now I feel like I'm one of the top guys

so impressive winning double gold at the European and World Indoor Championships.

"We've discussed training quite a bit but it's more the general philosophy than any specific thing like gym routines or nutrition. He's been very open to me about what he believes in. I think he's also appreciated training with me as we're quite similar doing thresholds.

"It's more when you get to the faster, more specific, workouts that he's at a different level. I've been humbled by him in a lot of them. He can just run so fast without feeling the effects of lactate. I get quite jealous of that."

So which areas of training does Almgren

ABOVE: Almgren celebrates World Championship bronze in Tokyo with gold medallist Jimmy Gressier

believe he can improve in? "Everywhere," he laughs. "I can obviously be faster in sit-and-kick races but I also see myself getting stronger in those 'semi-hard' areas in training – so not when you're going full lactic and not when you're doing thresholds. I've developed a lot in that 'middle ground' area over the past year but there's still a long way to go.

"I'm still learning new things when it comes to thresholds and I also want my body to handle lactate a lot better in the future. I haven't actually competed in that many longer distance races. I've only run two half-marathons [Barcelona 2024 and Valencia 2025], for example. I've matured a lot over the past few years and that just comes with experience. I've been a lot better at listening to my body."

Almgren will train in Sierra Nevada in the spring before switching to use St Moritz as a base in the summer months. His main goal this year is to secure European 10,000m gold in Birmingham.

"I haven't stood on the top of the podium at a major championships yet," he says. "I also want to improve my 5000m best of 12:44.27 and lay down a mark of 12:3-something this season [Joshua Cheptegei's world record of 12:35.36 has stood since 2020]."

He is undecided on whether to compete in the 5000m at the inaugural World Ultimate Championships in Budapest or the half-marathon at the World Athletics Road Running Championships in Copenhagen. Just six days separate the events in September.

"The main thing for me this season, above anything else, is staying injury-free," adds Almgren. "I suffered from them over so many years and that stays with you. I feel like I'm in a much better position in my career now so the future will be very interesting." **AW**

PHOTO BY ON RUNNING



MAN OF ACTION

Geordie Beamish is an athlete who makes things happen. The 3000m steeplechaser talks to **Euan Crumley** about striking gold, getting his timing right and why he finds it helpful to take a bird's eye view of athletics



hen Geordie Beamish is involved, more often than not the race is worth watching. Take the men's 1500m final at the 2024 World

Indoor Championships in Glasgow as our first example. Coming off the final bend, he sat fifth as Hobbs Kessler, Isaac Nader and Cole Hocker looked set to fight it out for the medals. Yet the New Zealander engaged what has become a trademark kick (it has its own name), flying down the outside to seize a dramatic victory.

Fast forward to last year's outdoor world championships in Tokyo and he was in the thick of the action again. This time, it was the qualifying heats of the 3000m steeplechase where he came to the crowd's attention after falling in the closing stages of the race.

Having cleared a hurdle, Beamish hit the deck, the spike of Canada's Jean-Simon Desgagnes grazing his face mid-tumble. There was no hint of panic, however, as he got to his feet, closed the gap and secured his "safe" passage with a wide grin on his face.

The final itself was even more eventful. In his report for *athleticsweekly.com* from the evening of September 15, my colleague Jason Henderson described the 29-year-old's performance: "Approaching the bell, he was in 11th place and seemingly out of contention. Yet he moved into eighth down the back straight,

then fourth at the final water jump and, into the home straight, he still had to get past Soufiane El Bakkali, the two-time Olympic and two-time world champion from Morocco.

"Beamish didn't take the final hurdle perfectly but once he gets into sprint finish mode he is unstoppable. Surging past El Bakkali, he stormed to a brilliantly unexpected gold. It was, as keen track fans might say, a genuine 'from the depths of hell' moment."

In a championships crammed with unforgettable finishes, here was a final flourish that truly stood out.

"I seem to have found a bit of a knack for timing it right, at least sometimes," smiles Beamish in rather understated fashion, as he reflects on it all with AW from his training camp in Phoenix, Arizona.

"It's not going to work every time but hopefully that's also what people will want to watch me race for – just to see if it might work this time. I'd love to leave a bit of a legacy for being someone that people look forward to seeing out on the track, just knowing that something might happen."

If he has his way, there will be plenty of chances to see him in action in 2026. At the time of writing, Beamish was due to open his year over two miles alongside Jake Wightman and Josh Kerr at the Millrose Games in New York, while a crack at 3000m gold at next month's World Indoors is his "Plan A".



“I’ll just see how many different events I can win a world title in,” he laughs. But there’s more. “The mile at the Commonwealth Games is not out of the picture. I’ve got some good memories from Glasgow so I’d love to go back. The schedule looks like it would be conducive to a steeplechase/mile double, so that’s in the back of my mind. I could have a crack at something like that.

“Copenhagen [the world road racing championships] at the end of the year also seems like a fun thing to close out the season, and it’s probably a good year to have a crack at a properly fast steeple. It’s a fun year for some different stuff.”

That feeling of being able to experiment even more freely is further accentuated by the fact that the 3000m steeplechase is not one of the events included for World Athletics’ Ultimate Championships, the new three-day extravaganza that will bring the season to a close in Budapest.

“I’m not taking it personally,” says the Oceania record-holder, whose best is 8:09.64 from 2024. “Too many people have told me that the steeple was one of their favourite races from Tokyo. Too many people have said it was good enough and entertaining enough that there’s definitely a place for it [in the Ultimate Champs]. But obviously this is a new event and it sounds like the host country has quite a say in what they put on. I hope the event is a

success and maybe we’ll see [the steeplechase included] down the line.”

More performances like the one Beamish produced in Japan certainly wouldn’t harm the cause. To dethrone an athlete like El Bakkali is no mean feat in the first place, but it becomes all the more remarkable when you consider it was done by an athlete who only really began learning the event in the spring of 2023. Struggling to get what he wanted out of either the 1500m or 5000m, he was nudged in a different direction by his coach at On Athletics Club (OAC), Dathan Ritzenhein.

“Watching my skill set and the way I run, he said: ‘I think you could steeple,’” says Beamish. “That wasn’t the first time I’d been told that I looked like I could jump over things.

“I bounce a lot when I run. It’s probably pretty inefficient, but it’s good for jumping over things, but I hadn’t been able to stay healthy long enough to consider it, to add that

ABOVE: Geordie Beamish wins the 1500m gold medal at the World Indoor Championships in Glasgow in 2024



It’s not going to work every time but hopefully that’s also what people will want to watch me race for – to see if it might work this time



extra risk or the extra bit of training that it required to become a steeplechaser.

"It just hadn't really been realistic until a couple of years working with Dathan and finding a bit more consistency. [I was also] finding some frustration and trying to run the 5000m in the middle of summer was just something I was not enjoying. It was similar with the 1500m and I was kind of stuck between the two events. Neither were going as well as I thought they could and so we thought 2023 was the year to try it."

There was, Beamish discovered, a lot to learn.

"I think the biggest adjustment is the mental part of running up to a barrier and jumping it smoothly," he says.

"I honestly think that the steeplechase is way more about rhythm than it is about hurdle technique. If you can't sight the barrier and run at it without stuttering, it doesn't matter how good your hurdle form is.

"Learning how to run smoothly into a barrier and clear it, no matter what leg comes up, then run out of it is, I think, the biggest challenge to being good at the steeple. That didn't click immediately."

He adds: "I've always been someone that thrived on learning something new and challenging myself like that. It was frustrating for a while just being bad at something. Honestly, after a long time in the sport, I was suddenly just really bad at a new skill, which was a frustrating experience.

"There were moments where I was like: 'Am I cut out for this or not?', but I stuck with it and



GEORDIE BEAMISH

I just had to get through a couple of months of that before it started to click."

Beamish made a more than encouraging start, placing fifth in the 2023 World Championships final in Budapest, and was supported through the process by Ritzenhein, not to mention his OAC team-mates. Having first moved to the US to take up a college scholarship in Arizona, in 2021 the New Zealander was one of the first intake in the then brand new group based in Colorado.

"We've had some really great results and had some really tough ones as well together," says Beamish, who hosts the *Coffee Club* podcast with fellow OAC athletes Olli Hoare and Morgan McDonald. "Dathan is a coach that feels all of that."

The path to a second global gold certainly wasn't a straight line. After that indoor success in 2024, Beamish struggled with various injuries in the lead-up to the Paris Olympics, where he failed to make it beyond the heats. His build-up to Tokyo was hampered, too, this time by an ankle issue and a stress reaction in

ABOVE: Beamish takes steeplechase gold in Tokyo, and, below, celebrates with coach Dathan Ritzenhein



his femur that put him in a race against time to be ready.

“We’ve created a relationship where we can have harder conversations and bring stuff up that either of us feels needs to be raised,” he says of working with Ritzenheim. “I think that’s been an important part of learning from the setbacks, and I think that was a really important piece of the two to three months leading up to Tokyo – having a real sit down after that injury and taking a look at some things that we felt we needed to do better. I feel like I can bring stuff to him that I want out of training and he can do the same for me.

“And to have the rest of the team on board, such a solid group of guys to train with, as well as the support of On for the last five years, has been instrumental in my success. Of the original team, I was the last to join and probably the lowest profile signing at the time. To be On’s first indoor world champion and On’s first world outdoor champ as well has been pretty surreal.”

Not that Beamish is showing any signs of being overwhelmed by what has unfolded. He is the most laidback of characters who gives the impression of being able to take everything in his bouncy stride. Ahead of our interview, I watched the performance in Tokyo again.

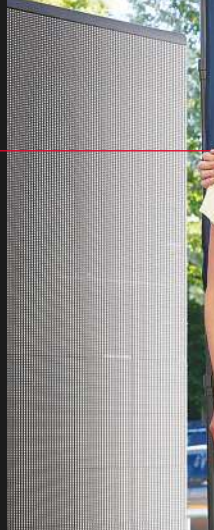
Even with the distance of a few months, it still brought goosebumps, so goodness knows what it was like to be the man in the middle, making it all happen. So I ask him. Doing that takes us back to the slow early laps of a race that allowed him to unleash that ferocious kick known as “textbook George”.

“I find myself doing a lot of reacting to what’s going on around me, just because I prefer to leave things late, so that lends itself more to doing as little as possible, at least in the first half the race,” he says. “I’m not going to do something that’s going to shock anyone in the first few laps – that’s just not conducive to how I want to win races.

“But I have this technique, in some of those races where it is slower, of mentally trying to take a bird’s eye view of the race while you’re in it. I find that, if you visualise everything close to you, the hurdles feel close and it feels stressful when people are right around you. But if I can just visualise the whole pack of 10 or 15 people and try to picture the race as a whole, it’s more relaxing in my mind.

“If I’m able to step away from my immediate surroundings, especially in the first two thirds of a race where we’re running that slow, I find I’m able to really relax and not get caught up in what’s happening so close to me. That’s





LEFT: Beamish sits back in the pack during the steeplechase final in Tokyo



RIGHT: Lining up with fellow OAC training group members

something I've used a bit in that kind of race and I find it helpful when you're on a big stage like that, to make it relaxing and you're able to enjoy those few laps of the race."

And what of that closing 400m?

"It's hard to put myself back in that last lap," he says. "But I remember the crowd being right on top of us. [Japanese athlete Ryuji] Miura was making moves towards the front and the crowd was loving that. You can feel that on the track and you know what the crowd's thinking, which is a cool experience.

"I felt surprisingly in control in that last lap, apart from a really bad water jump. And you only get so many shots at a last lap like that. Those opportunities don't come around very often. It's not a feeling you can recreate in training or on a day-to-day basis. You just have to remember: 'This is what we're doing it for and this is why we've been training for this many years', so [you have to remember] just to enjoy that last bit.

"That's part of the race I look for.

"[Championships racing] is like no other part of running and I think it's why people love watching it. It's just such a pure expression of racing and something that I think makes athletics pretty special. It's just instinct at that point."

There are elements of his time in Japan that Beamish is trying to hold on to.

"I love the culture of respect," he says. "We

have a new OAC gym on the way, so we've been saying we're going to have Japanese rules on indoor shoes in the gym and stuff like that. It was an incredible place to kind of have that kind of experience in."

His is now a well-known face in the land of the rising sun, while his name is also very much in the conversation when it comes to New Zealand's distance running greats. There is plenty of time to raise that profile even higher, too.

"I have learned a lot – over the last few years, especially – and I'm enjoying it more than I ever have," says Beamish. "Part of that might be due to finding a bit of success near the top of the sport but I honestly don't think that's all of it. I've been able to have a view of training where I can go out and enjoy it without feeling like any one day is going to make or break a year or a week or a month.

"I know what it now takes to be good, and that you don't have to crush everything all the time. I just have a bit more gratitude towards the sport and I think the skill of running is more important than I ever did. I think it's an underrated part of running. A huge aerobic system can get you a long way, but I think the skill of running is something that separates the really good people at the top of the sport."

Beamish, it seems, is planning to stay there. **AW**



If I'm able to step away from my immediate surroundings, especially in the early part of a race, I find I'm able to really relax

THRILL OF THE CHASE

Dave Holmes delves into the history of an event that blends speed, stamina and skill

The steeplechase is one of track and field's most striking and often misunderstood events. To the casual spectator it might look like a quirky mix of distance running and obstacles, or a human version of the Grand National, but it is far more than that. Beneath the hurdles and water jumps lies a rich, centuries-old history.

The blend of speed, stamina and tactical skill has thrilled athletes and fans for generations, and the journey from rural horse races to a fully-fledged Olympic spectacle is as fascinating as the race itself.

Long before it became a staple of modern athletics, steeplechase belonged to the countryside. In the 18th century, horsemen in Ireland and Britain raced from one town's church steeple to the next, using them as markers across unpredictable terrain. Obstacles defined the course: riders jumped fences and gates, splashed through streams and crossed ditches in contests of speed and courage. Over time, these informal races, inspired by fox-hunting and rural pastimes, gradually evolved into a more structured form of competition.

It was only a matter of time before men sought to recreate the horse steeplechase on foot. The earliest known human steeplechase took place at an athletics meeting in Edinburgh in May 1827, a friendly contest held in the grounds adjoining a local pub. By the 1830s, schoolboys

at Rugby School organised informal races across open country, chasing each other over fields and obstacles, much as horses had done before. Though unstructured, these early contests revealed the thrill of negotiating barriers and laid the imaginative groundwork for more formal competition.

The evolution from informal countryside runs to organised athletics began in the mid-19th century. The modern 3000m steeplechase traces its roots to cross-country races staged at Oxford University around 1850, where competitors negotiated uneven ground and natural obstacles that tested both stamina and agility.

As the sport developed, these challenges were gradually adapted to purpose-built courses: fixed barriers replaced hedges and walls, and water pits simulated streams. By the 1860s, artificial steeplechase courses were being constructed, providing a controlled environment while preserving the event's original spirit. In 1879, the



ABOVE: The steeplechase at the 1924 Olympics in Paris

THE EARLIEST KNOWN HUMAN STEEPLECHASE TOOK PLACE IN EDINBURGH IN MAY 1827, IN THE GROUNDS ADJOINING A LOCAL PUB

steeplechase made its debut at organised English athletics championships, firmly establishing itself within track and field and setting the stage for international competition.

Steeplechase made its Olympic debut at the 1900 Paris Games, stepping on to the world stage in decidedly unconventional style. Six athletes ran a 2500m race on a now-forgotten 500m track, with Canada's George Orton taking the win. The following day, a 4000m contest followed, and Britain's John Rimmer emerged victorious.

The early years of Olympic steeplechase were marked by experimentation: in 1904 American James Lightbody won over 2590m, and in 1908 Britain's Arthur Russell claimed gold over 3200m. It was only at the 1920 Antwerp Games that the 3000m format became standard, with 28 fixed barriers and seven water pits around the track – the structure that has endured ever since.

Even as steeplechase found a formal footing in the Olympic programme, its competitive landscape was far from settled. Scandinavian runners such as Volmari Iso-Hollo of Finland dominated the event through much of the inter-war era, and the discipline was still emerging in countries outside of Europe. It was only after the Second World War that the event moved toward consistent global presence and deeper international competition.

A major shift in steeplechase history occurred in the 1960s, with Africa emerging as a dominant force, and Kenya in particular establishing itself as the sport's most successful nation.

Kenyan athletes claimed their first Olympic gold in 1968, and have produced now fewer than 10 men's 3000m steeplechase gold medallists since. The nation's dominance has been remarkable, highlighted by complete podium sweeps in 1992 and 2004.

This era produced some of the sport's greatest Kenyan names. Moses Kiptanui became the first man to break eight minutes for the steeplechase in 1995, paving the way for a generation of champions. Brimin Kipruto, Conseslus Kipruto, and the incomparable Ezekiel Kemboi followed, their tactical brilliance and finishing kicks thrilling audiences. Kenya's influence extends the World Championships, with its athletes winning a succession of titles and setting multiple championship records along the way.

As the men's steeplechase solidified its global reach, a parallel transformation was taking place

in the women's event. Although women had trained and competed in steeplechase informally for decades, the first official women's world record wasn't recognised until 2000. The women's steeplechase made its debut at the World Championships in 2005 and was included in the Olympic programme at the 2008 Beijing Games, finally giving female steeplechasers the same global stage that men had enjoyed for more than a century.

The inaugural Olympic women's steeplechase final was historic. Russia's Gulnara Galkina won gold in a blistering 8:58.81, becoming the first woman to break nine minutes at the Games and setting the Olympic record that still stands. Since then, the competitive landscape has broadened dramatically. Athletes from Africa, Europe, Asia and the Middle East have claimed global titles, and the event has become one of the most internationally diverse disciplines in athletics.

Recent Olympic and World Championship finals underscore how far the women's steeplechase has come. At the 2024 Paris Olympics, Winfred Yavi of Bahrain surged for gold in a spectacular final, clocking an 8:52.76 Olympic record and reaffirming the event's growing depth. In 2025 at the World Championships, Kenya's Faith Cherotich produced one of the fastest steeplechase performances in history, overtaking Yavi on the final lap to win in 8:51.59, the quickest time ever recorded at a World Championships.

From its less formal beginnings, today the 3000m steeplechase stands as a striking showcase of speed, stamina and skill. It has evolved into a precise, technical event on the world stage. Every barrier and water jump tests an athlete's fitness, timing, technique and courage, where a single mis-step can change the outcome. It demands not only endurance and speed, but also the nerve to attack each obstacle at pace and the skill to recover when mistakes happen. It is a race of tension and unpredictability, where moments of triumph sit alongside stumbles and setbacks, and every jump shapes the story of the contest. **AW**

David A. Holmes (PhD, UNSW) is a historian who specialises in the history and politics of athletics. Email: drathletics776@gmail.com

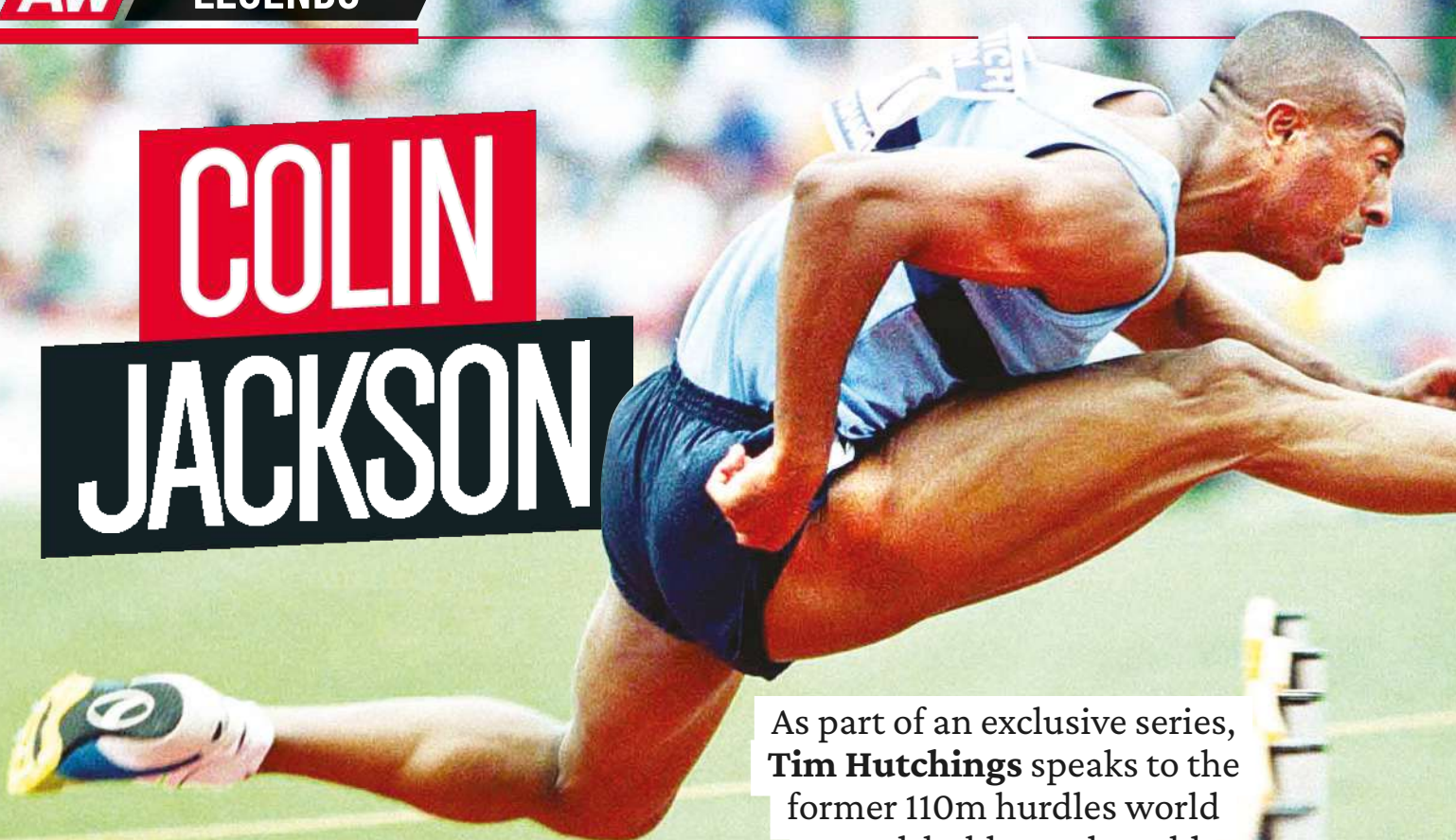


ABOVE: Russia's Gulnara Galkina-Samitova and Kenya's Eunice Jepkorir compete during the first women's 3000m steeplechase Olympic final in Beijing



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

COLIN JACKSON



As part of an exclusive series, **Tim Hutchings** speaks to the former 110m hurdles world record-holder and world champion about his career on the track, partying with Prince and life after athletics

A

W's Legends Series shines the spotlight on some of the biggest stars ever to have competed on the track and in the field.

From Brendan Foster to

Kelly Holmes, Steve Cram to Sally Gunnell – the in-depth video interviews will educate and inspire you as each legend takes us through their personal journey in the sport.

The first in the series is Colin Jackson, the two-time world champion, four-time European champion and two-time Commonwealth champion over 110m hurdles. He also became the world record-holder in 1993, until his time of 12.91 was equalled by Liu Xiang in 2004 and then beaten by the Chinese two years later.

The 58-year-old Welsh Olympic silver medallist was also prolific indoors – his time of 7.30 for the 60m hurdles stood as the world record from 1994 until 2021 – and he won the world indoor title in 1999 to add to his four European indoor titles, one of which came in the flat 60m.

Since his retirement in 2003, he has become a well-known broadcaster with the BBC, particularly as an athletics analyst and pundit. He has also taken part in shows such as *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Dancing on Ice*, while maintaining a further connection to athletics via his coaching work.

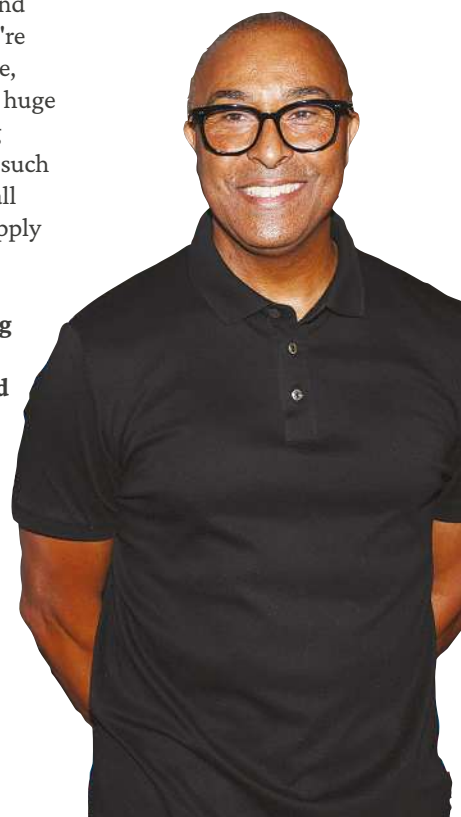
You retired in 2003 and you've kept yourself pretty busy and very relevant. What are your real passions these days?

I was a professional athlete from the age of 18 to 36 and I've now been retired longer, and when people see me, they still go: "Oh, you're an athlete, right?" but I'll say: "No. Trust me, that's a long time ago". Athletics gave me a huge foundation of where I could go, of stepping stones and life experience. When you have such a long career, you experience all sorts and all those things you take on board, then you apply them to your new life, your new world.

Do you think that the discipline of being an elite athlete all those years and the rhythms of that lifestyle actually helped prepare you for that next period?

Added to that, I was given lots of opportunities and, when you have a lot of opportunities, then you can really shine. It'll give you time to work your way through a process. Expectations weren't huge at the beginning, and people invested in me. Once I saw people

BELOW: Colin Jackson says athletics gave him a huge foundation in his life after sport



THERE WAS A TEAM OF PEOPLE THAT WERE GETTING ME ON THE START LINE, SO MY JOB WAS THE SIMPLE ONE

invested in me, I invested in myself.

Do you think the success you achieved on the track was something you were able to translate very easily into the rest of your life?

No! When you're achieving things like [world records and world titles], the chances of you doing it outside [of that world] are non-existent. You're defined as being the best at something at that moment in time. There's no other industry where you can go: 'I'm the best'.

When people talk about football, there are always questions about who's the best. Is it Messi or Ronaldo? But when you break the world record and become a world champion or Olympic champion, you are the best on this planet at what you do, and that is it. There are no arguments. Now, I just try to do the best I can possibly do, and I hope that's enough.

There were periods when you hardly lost a race. Where did that ability to win come from?

I worked hard and I was truly focused on the game. Marry that with my abilities, with my good training partners, with a great coach, with good medical back-up and then you've really got the dream team.

It was really important that I did the best I could for my team. There was a team of people that were getting me on the start line, so my job was the simple one. I used to say to my coach, Malcolm Arnold: "My job is easy. I've only got to go and race. The difficult thing is preparing me and getting me ready to race, because that takes a long time". Malcolm would say to me: "I wish more athletes thought that way, and thought that the competition side was really the easy bit", but I generally did.

Are you sentimental about your career? Is there anything you've kept?

I've still got my spikes that I broke the world record in, but that would be about it. If you came to my house, you wouldn't realise I was a former athlete. I haven't got a shrine of medals or anything.



But I think lots of people from my generation would say that, if you were young in the 90s, you lived the dream. From the end of the 80s, if you were in your teens and going into your 20s, it was the best time in the world. There was money, there was genuine happiness, it was just a great time to be alive. I remember some of the parties I used to go to. We used to hang out with the supermodels and with the biggest stars. I remember going to Prince's party. I was an athlete going to a party with Prince! It was an incredible period.

What kept your feet on the ground during that time?

Family would always keep me grounded. But, also, when you're in a family of successful people and in the public eye, there's nothing special about you or your performances. I couldn't walk down the street with my sister [actress Suzanne Packer], because she was on the telly every Saturday, with 10-12 million people watching, so she was probably getting more accolades than I was.

It also keeps you really grounded when you're in that environment of everyday normality. My mum and dad were really cool – they really didn't fuss about anything – and when you did badly they were the ones who put their arm around you. They'd never criticise, they were always supportive and I think that's really important. They never looked for any excuses for me – if I lost, I lost – but they would never go: 'What happened?' There wasn't one occasion when they did that. **AW**

CAREER MEDAL RECORD

Olympic Games

0 1 0

World Championships

2 2 1

World Indoor Championships

1 3 0

European Championships

4 0 0

European Indoor Championships

4 1 0

Commonwealth Games

2 2 0

SEE THE FULL INTERVIEW ONLINE

To view the full video interview with Colin Jackson, discover more AW Legends episodes and more AW premium video content, visit athleticsweekly.com. Access to AW's premium video is available to all subscribers. If you aren't a subscriber, then why not take advantage of our latest offer by scanning the QR code below?



“People are expecting things now”

Jeremiah Azu talks to **Ben Bloom** about his perfect indoor season in 2025, preparing to defend his world title, fatherhood and looking to mix things up on the track this summer

At a glance at Jeremiah Azu's last indoor season suggests he enjoyed the perfect winter.

Four championships – Welsh, British, European and world – yielded four 60m gold medals. He was never once beaten, not even in the preliminaries. Perhaps most remarkably, he improved his times through every round at all four championships: the same formula of opening up steadily in the heats, stepping up a gear in the semi-finals and going all out to top the podium in the final.

It is only the gaps in his racing calendar that hint at just how impressively unlikely those career breakthrough few months in early 2025 were – the absence of a single race outside of those four competitions.

Azu had, in fact, been within days of pulling out of the British Championships – a sliding doors moment that would have ended his indoor season when it had barely even begun. International meets were confirmed and flights booked for a whirlwind tour of the European circuit, only for a minor injury to cause him to withdraw and try his luck in Birmingham with minimal preparation.

Then, just two days after the British triumph that almost never happened, his first child Azaire was born, ruling him out of any further races in the build-up to the Europeans, causing a sudden and significant lack of sleep, halting his efforts to properly rehabilitate his body. It was, therefore, all a bit of a bumpy ride. Not that his medal collection gives any indication.

“The combination of becoming a dad and the setbacks I was facing, all those things combined helped me just leave it all on the track,” he says. “Honestly, I think I was running on adrenaline the whole time. I definitely think it’s a physiological response. In that moment, when you have a child, everything is so heightened. You’re so alert. I think that contributed to my performance success.”

One of the beautiful things about athletics is the full array of characters the sport attracts – one startline can feature the showmen, the poker-faced, the deadly focused and the demure. Then there is Azu, the son of a preacher, who might sometimes smile and other times shout, but always exudes unwavering self-belief.

“At the forefront of my mind I’m just being myself,” says the 24-year-old. “I think it’s really important for people to be themselves in those environments. I’m so blessed with this talent that I get to use it to entertain and inspire people. In those moments you have to just tap into yourself because that’s how you get the best out of yourself.”

“I’m quite a chatty, charismatic person. I’m confident. How you see me on the track is how I am behind closed doors. It’s a privilege to be in those situations so I just try to enjoy it as much as I can. It was instilled in me from before I even knew it – I’ve been hearing the word of God and the positivity that comes from it. That shows through my life.”

Azu’s confidence that he can successfully defend his 60m crown at next month’s World Indoor Championships is not without



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



foundation. In addition to the mid-winter niggle and Azaire's arrival, Azu's 2025 medal rush also came amid the upheaval of relocating to a different country.

Having been based with Marco Airale in Italy for two years – a period that saw him break 10 seconds over 100m for the first time and make his Olympic debut – he decided to return to his hometown of Cardiff and rejoin his previous coach Helen James, who had originally lured him from football to athletics when he was 16.

"Starting a family was the biggest factor," explains Azu. "It wouldn't have been too easy travelling back and forth between Italy and the UK with a child. So I decided to put my family first. I think it helps me have a better balance. You can call athletics a job, but becoming someone's father is forever. It's bigger than anything. I had to put that first."

"Because of all those things, last year's indoors wasn't really on the radar. If I was able to achieve everything I did with how little I trained, that's why I feel so confident in myself going into 2026. My training last year was so up and down with all the life changes, getting a house, becoming a father. There was so much more I prioritised off the track. This winter I've been able to really focus on training."

Short in stature and powerful out of the blocks, Azu possesses what might be deemed



the ideal physique for a 60m sprinter. But he does not want to be pigeon-holed over the shorter distance, nor do performances suggest he should be.

His identical 6.49 winning time at both last year's European and World Indoor Championships put him into elite company as

TOP: Jeremiah Azu powering to European 60m gold

ABOVE: Azu chatting with coach Helen James

one of only five British sprinters to have run below 6.50 for 60m and 10 for 100m.

It was why he was disappointed to exit last summer's World Championships 100m at the semi-final stage, where he clocked 10.05. "All things considered, to even get there was a massive positive," he says. "But I don't like to look at things with perspective – my goal was to make the final and I didn't make it."

This summer presents the dual targets of a home Commonwealth Games and European Championships, the first of which offers the rare opportunity to wear the red vest of his home nation. Should they qualify, the aim is for a quartet of sprinters from James' training group – which also includes the likes of Sam Gordon, Josh Brown and Azu's younger brother Alex – to compete as the Wales 4x100m team.

"I can't wait to run for Wales," he says. "It's a completely different vibe. It's a family and it's a community, especially because a lot of us train out of the same facility in Cardiff. Hearing the Welsh national anthem, I think I'd struggle to stay composed. We hear the British national anthem so much in sport, but to hear the Welsh national anthem from an athletics point of view would be massive."

With a view to doubling up over 100m and 200m at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics, Azu also intends on testing himself more over the longer sprint distance this summer, having rarely contested 200m as a senior athlete.

"One of the things I think was a positive for me was coming to athletics quite late because I didn't really understand what I was doing," he explains. "I was just racing. I think that helped because once you start to over-complicate it, you can see a lot of people are so great throughout the year but when they come to the championships they struggle."

"But one of the drawbacks is the amount of running years that other people have compared to me, so I need to get those 200s in. I need to get that distance under my belt."

Before that is the defence of his world 60m crown – a burden that Azu takes seriously as one of the spearheads of the British team this winter.

"There's that Spider-Man quote: 'With



great power comes great responsibility," he says. "People are expecting things now. I'm always someone that's going to back myself. I know I've put the work in, but I've also been given this talent by God. I can stand on the startline with confidence that he's put me in this position. When I'm being myself like that, that combination is quite dangerous. The indoors this year has the potential to be a big spectacle."

Last winter, he says, "the hardest part was leaving" his partner and newborn at home to head around the world to race. Having now followed his father to half a dozen different countries in his first year of life, Azu will be in the stands wherever Azu competes this year.

It is all part of a more settled family life – because if last year's indoor season was a happy accident, now Azu wants to show what he can do without distractions. **AW**

ABOVE: Azu celebrating world gold in Nanjing with fellow medallists Lachlan Kennedy and Akani Simbine



The combination of becoming a dad and the setbacks I was facing, all those things helped me just leave it all on the track

Recipe for success

World indoor 400m champion Amber Anning talks **Katy Barden** through the steps that have taken her to the highest level – and outlines her ambition to seize every opportunity in 2026

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



T

hroughout an athlete's career, there will always be defining moments; pivotal decisions or notable events that lead to fundamental change.

For Amber Anning, leaving the UK in 2019 to study at Louisiana State University (LSU) was a significant first step, but it was her 2022 switch to the University of Arkansas – driven by her desire to improve over 400m – that proved transformational, leading to multiple NCAA titles and British records, two Olympic relay bronze medals and, most recently, world indoor 400m gold.

“Track hasn’t been exciting for me over the last couple of years,” she told AW in 2023. “Now I’m around people who have similar goals and it pushes you to want greatness.”

That’s not to say she didn’t enjoy herself at LSU – “I probably had a little too much fun,” she laughs – but she was the only 400m

runner on the team. Arkansas, by contrast, had multiple athletes making major finals.

“For me to reach that next level and progress, Arkansas was the right move,” says the 25-year-old. “Coach [Chris] Johnson didn’t sugarcoat anything. He was very honest. He said: ‘You’re going to work hard here. We’re going to push you. Not every day will be glamorous, but I strongly believe that you’ll achieve what you want.’”

Anning ran 50.68 at the 2023 Southeastern Conference (SEC) Indoor Championships, a massive breakthrough after “struggling to break 52 seconds”. Less than a year later she ran 22.60 to smash Katharine Merry’s 25-year-old British indoor 200m record (22.83) before ending her collegiate indoor career as 2024 NCAA 400m champion.

That summer, having dipped under 50 seconds for the first time with 49.51 at the SEC Outdoor Championships, she went on to make history as part of Arkansas’ “Fantastic



Four". The record-breaking quartet of Anning, plus Jamaican record-holder Nickisha Pryce and USA duo Kaylyn Brown and Rosey Effiong, Olympic and world indoor 4x400m gold medallists respectively, dominated the two major conferences and became the first college team to place first to fourth individually at the NCAA Outdoor Championships (Anning ran 49.59 for third). In the 4x400m relay – her final collegiate race – the quartet spectacularly broke their own NCAA record and went fourth on the world all-time list with 3:17.96.

While Anning's move to Arkansas had been a conscious decision to improve as an athlete, graduating in 2024 represented an unconscious change and a fresh start. At the Paris Olympic Games – where she signed her first professional contract with Nike – she won two relay bronze medals and finished fifth in the 400m final in a British record of 49.29. She also joined Mary Rand (1964) as only the second British woman to break three national records at a single Games.

Seven months later she claimed her first global title, winning gold at the 2025 World Indoor Championships in China, a mentally and physically demanding achievement following her disqualification at the European Indoors earlier that month.

Building towards the World Championships in Tokyo in September, Anning recorded two more sub-50 performances (49.96 in Paris and 49.75 in Zurich). She then reinforced her reputation as a "championship performer", producing two of the three fastest times of her career in Japan with 49.38 in the semi-final and 49.36 for fifth in the final. She now holds the top three places on the British all-time list.

"The biggest factor in my success was staying in Arkansas with Coach after graduation and training with a group of such talented 400m women who continue to push me, both on and off the track," says the Brighton & Hove AC

ABOVE: Amber Anning with her 400m gold medal in Nanjing



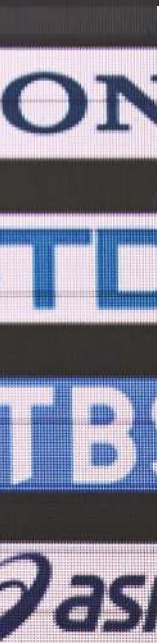
athlete, who was previously coached by the late Lloyd Cowan MBE.

"While it was amazing to have that group in school, turning pro allowed me to be more intentional with everything – my eating, my training and my recovery – and I didn't have to rush off after sessions to finish coursework. That definitely paid dividends in how I performed.

"Coming off the Olympics, it also gave me a lot of confidence. I wanted to keep everything pretty similar to how it was in college, so it was a good set-up for me."



The event has moved on; 47 seconds is now the gold standard, so that's what we have to work towards



AMBER ANNING

With greater belief in herself and a growing international profile, Anning is increasingly focused on impact beyond performance. She speaks openly about supporting the next generation and creating better structures for women in sport, whether that's discussing taboo issues or motivating them to try athletics for the first time.

She has taken inspiration from athletes including Allyson Felix, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Shaunae Miller-Uibo, Faith Kipyegon and British team-mate Bianca Williams, who have returned to the track stronger after becoming mothers.

"Motherhood is so beautiful, and the fact they've been able to come back to elite-level sport is incredible," she says, while in a recent panel discussion at Nike's "After Dark Tour", she joined Paula Radcliffe, Keely Hodgkinson and Georgia Hunter Bell to discuss progress in women's sport, from kit design to research.

"These are the discussions I'd love to keep having," she says; "in particular around education on periods and their impact on training and performance, and what we need to keep competing at the highest level. I've been inspired by the generosity of British athletes to me, and now I want to give something back."

Mentored by Olympic and world champion Christine Ohuruogu, Anning is already delivering on that promise. When she signed with Nike she made "an unusual request" to include ring-fenced support for the Lloyd Cowan Bursary which provides annual grants to qualified coaches and unfunded athletes aged 16-23 who are facing financial barriers while pursuing developmental opportunities

in athletics. "I wanted to honour Lloyd and give recipients access to Nike kit and equipment to make their journeys slightly easier," she explains. To date, more than 200 athletes and coaches have benefited from her support.

In the short term, her focus remains on performance; she loves indoor athletics – no adverse weather conditions, a more intimate environment and the thrill of getting to the break – and she's aiming to defend her world indoor title in Poland next month, as well as targeting Nicola Sanders' British indoor record of 50.02, a mark that has stood since 2007. Anning doesn't have to look far for inspiration, either, having seen her training partner Bella Whittaker run a US indoor record of 49.24 in 2025.

Positive change is happening, and this summer – an exciting one for British athletes with two major home championships – could provide yet another series of defining moments in Anning's career as she also bids to go quicker over one lap outdoors.

"I've been running roughly the same times over 400m for the last two years and I need to make that transition," she says.

"The event has moved on; 47 seconds is now the gold standard, so that's what we have to work towards. I've run enough 49s. I want to move into the 48s and I want to push the British record as low as I possibly can.

"It's a summer full of opportunities for me to do that and winning gold at the Europeans in Birmingham would be the icing on the cake.

"I'll have my family and friends in the stands, so if I was able to come away with 400m gold and then another in the 4x400m, it would be very special." **AW**

ABOVE: Anning with Keely Hodgkinson, Georgia Hunter Bell and Paula Radcliffe as the discuss women's sport at Nike's After Dark event

Vanishing act

This month's national championships will be the only televised British athletics meeting of this indoor season. Despite an ever expanding calendar across the world, **Jason Henderson** looks at the shrinking top-class indoor offerings in the UK

PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES



F

or many years the annual indoor grand prix meeting in Birmingham was one of the biggest events of the winter. Such was the quality of the fields, it was compared to the brilliant Zurich Diamond League and dubbed “the Weltklasse of the indoor season”. Sadly, though, that showpiece is one of several events that have now vanished from the British athletics calendar.

When the meeting was last held, in February 2023, it enjoyed the status of being the final of the World Athletics Indoor Tour Gold series. Highlights that day included Gudaf Tsegay narrowly missing the world indoor 3000m record with 8:16.69, while British records fell to Dina Asher-Smith (7.03 in the 60m), Keely Hodgkinson (1:57.18 in the 800m) and Neil Gourley (3:32.48 in the 1500m).

What’s more, the event gave vital experience to up-and-coming athletes such as Charlie Dobson (60m winner that day) and Sam Reardon (last in the 400m). Such was the standard of competition, Josh Kerr finished only fifth in the 1500m.

Over the years, athletes who have graced the

boards at the Birmingham meeting include Haile Gebrselassie, Wilson Kipketer, Mondo Duplantis, Mo Farah, Laura Muir, Jessica Ennis-Hill and Katarina Johnson-Thompson, to name just a handful. Televised on BBC, it was one of the jewels in the British athletics crown.

In 2025 it was effectively replaced in the domestic calendar by the Keely Klassic, an event that enjoyed a fine debut but didn’t quite produce the world-class quality of its predecessor. After originally being pencilled into the 2026 calendar, the Keely Klassic will no longer take place this year.

From staging the World Athletics Indoor Tour Gold final in 2023, Britain doesn’t have a presence in the current list of eight Gold status meetings. Instead, the series kicked off this year in Boston, New York and Ostrava and continues in Madrid, Karlsruhe, Belgrade, Lievin and Torun.

Another British indoor meeting that used to be shown on BBC and which attracted world-class athletes was the annual indoor international match in Glasgow, usually held at the end of January and staged at the Kelvin Hall until it moved to the Emirates Arena in the east of the city in 2012.

BELOW: The annual meeting in Birmingham was considered one of the highlights of the global indoor calendar



From 2016, what then became known as the Indoor Grand Prix was shared between Glasgow and Birmingham on alternate years, the meeting last taking place in Scotland in 2020, when Duplantis broke the pole vault world record with 6.19m and a young Amy Hunt raced alongside Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce in the 60m.

The 'EAP' international match has now arrived in the late January slot, also in Glasgow but minus the television interest and deep world-class line-ups.

It means the only indoor meeting in Britain to be televised this year is the Novuna UK Indoor Championships in Birmingham on February 14-15 – unlikely to be shown on the main BBC channels, either.

This dearth of world-class televised indoor athletics in Britain is similar to the gradual erosion of top-class cross-country races. Most notably, the Great Edinburgh Cross Country International, which was often televised live on BBC1 on a Saturday lunchtime, has not been held since the pandemic. Prior to being staged in Edinburgh, it was held in various venues across the North East of England, too, with star names like Paula Radcliffe taking to the turf in front of BBC cameras that were probably taken for granted at the time.

We delved into the AW archives to see how busy the domestic indoor athletics season was in 1985 and during every subsequent 10 years.

1985 – MAIN DOMESTIC EVENTS

January 11-12 Arrow Cosford Games

January 25-26 Pearl Assurance AAA/WAAA Indoor Games, Cosford

February 9 Peugeot Talbot Indoor Games (GB vs West Germany), Cosford

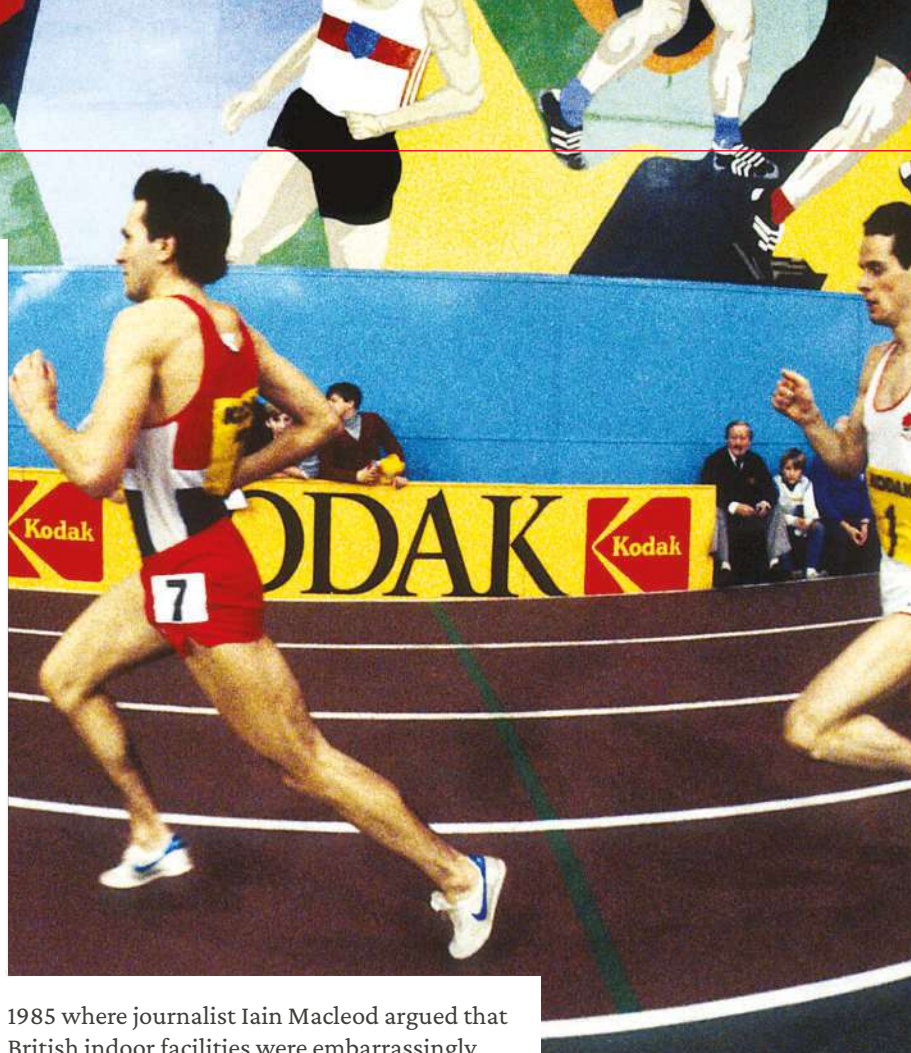
March 9 Kodak Classic, England vs USA, Cosford

All of these events were televised, in addition to the European Indoor Championships in Athens and fledgling World Indoor Games in Paris that winter.

These meetings saw athletes such as Zola Budd take to the indoor circuit, plus stars like Linford Christie beginning a rise that would culminate in world and Olympic 100m titles in the early 1990s.

Ironically, Britain only had one indoor arena at the time. RAF Cosford was a dusty air hangar that housed a 200m track and was described in AW at the time as "spartan and isolated" but it was busy pretty much every weekend from January to March with meetings of various quality.

Indeed, AW published a feature at the start of



1985 where journalist Iain Macleod argued that British indoor facilities were embarrassingly poor compared to, say, France, which had four good indoor tracks in Paris alone.

1995 – MAIN DOMESTIC EVENTS

January 27 McDonald's International, GB vs Russia, Birmingham

February 3-4 AAA Indoor Champs, Birmingham

February 11 Interflora Valentine's Classic, Great Britain vs France, Glasgow

February 25 KP Invitation, Birmingham

Once again, these events were televised along with the World Indoor Championships in Barcelona. It is fair to say the indoor season in Britain got busier around this time, too, as the National Indoor Arena in Birmingham began to be used.

2005 – MAIN DOMESTIC EVENTS

January 29 Norwich Union International, Glasgow

February 29-30 Birmingham Games

February 12-13 Norwich Union AAA Champs, Sheffield

February 18 Norwich Union Indoor Grand Prix, Birmingham

With the exception of the Birmingham Games, these events were shown on television. The Birmingham Games has also incidentally disappeared from the calendar despite attracting good fields over a busy two-day programme.

ABOVE: For years, RAF Cosford was home to the UK's only indoor athletics track



The 2005 indoor season also featured TV coverage of the European Indoor Championships in Madrid, whereas there were attempts to improve the indoor season domestically with a UK Indoor City Cup competition where regional teams of largely borderline elite athletes would compete for honours, although that, too, has long since vanished.

More indoor facilities were becoming available as well, with Sheffield and Lee Valley now organising events. With London winning the bid in July 2005 to stage the 2012 Olympics, it led to more money and interest coming into the sport and, in addition, 200m tracks were opened in Cardiff (2000) and Manchester (2002).

2015 - MAIN DOMESTIC EVENTS

January 24 British Athletics International, Glasgow

February 7-8 Birmingham Games

February 14-15 British Athletics Champs, Sheffield

February 21 Sainsbury's Grand Prix, Birmingham

This winter included the European Indoor Championships in Prague and the “triple crown” of domestic indoor televised meetings were still going strong with the UK Championships, indoor grand prix in Birmingham and international match in Glasgow continuing to attract BBC coverage.

Since then, though, the invitational grand prix meetings and international matches in particular have struggled to maintain a presence – a situation that was exacerbated by the pandemic.

2025 - MAIN DOMESTIC EVENTS

February 15 Keely Klassic, Birmingham

February 22-23 British Athletics Champs, Birmingham

BBC broadcast both events on the red button and iPlayer during a winter that also featured both the European and World Indoor Championships.

This summer the London Diamond League and UK Championships will be televised. The European Athletics Championships in Birmingham is also set to enjoy live coverage on BBC every evening from August 10-16, while the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow is also poised to be shown on TNT Sports.

Still, it is a far cry from a 1985 season which saw BBC cover four indoor meetings at the start of the year before ITV took over coverage



INDOOR EVENTS

of the sport in Britain, subsequently showing 20 British events during the rest of that year. It would have been more, too, if not for an apartheid demonstration in Edinburgh and a technicians' strike.

With regards indoor athletics, on the positive side Britain has never had so many indoor tracks – from Glasgow and Cardiff to Manchester, Sheffield, Lee Valley and Birmingham with further fine indoor facilities in places like Loughborough, Gateshead, Bath and elsewhere.

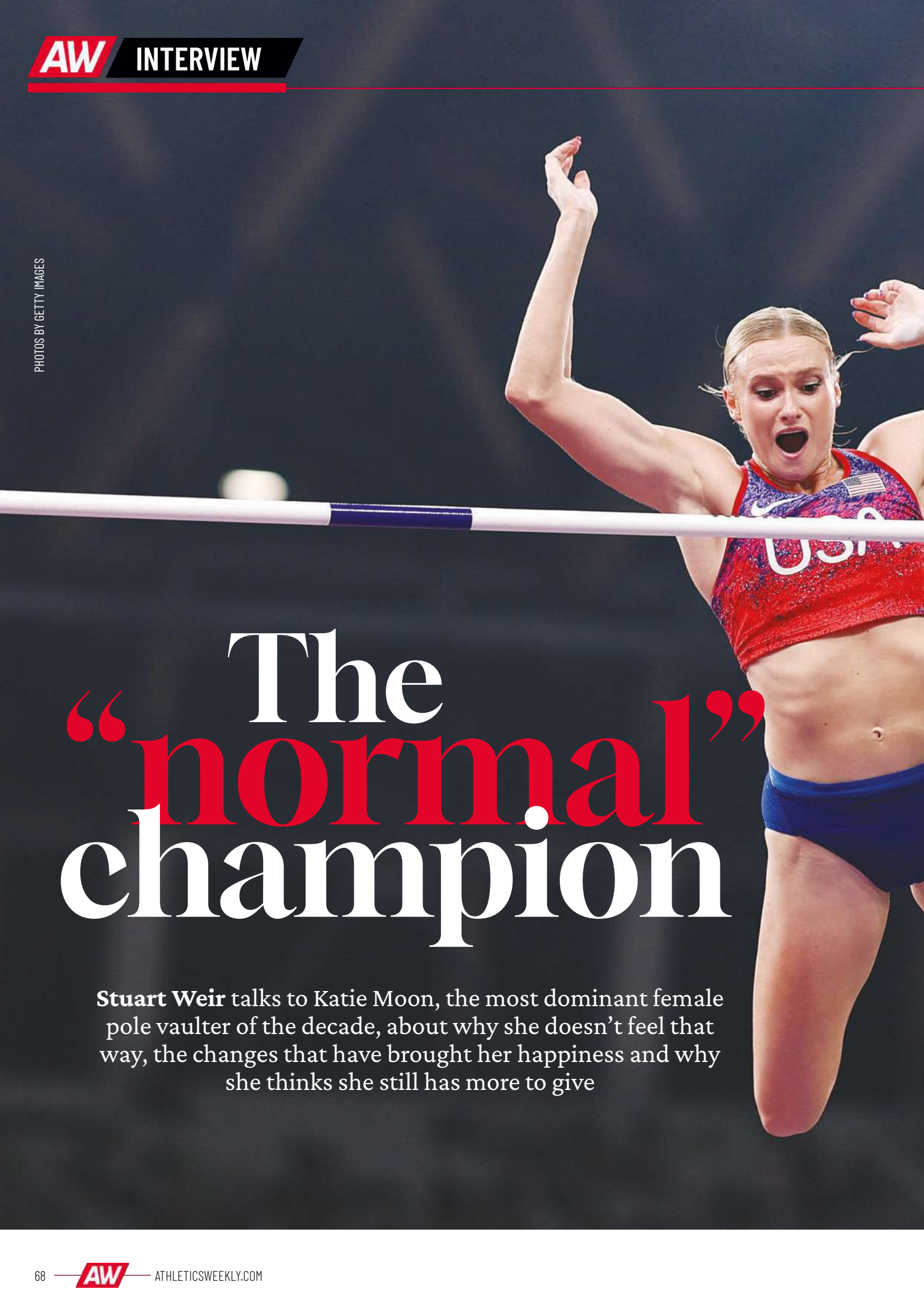
The creaking Cosford track held the British indoor season single-handedly on its dusty shoulders for many years but there are now many other superior venues.

Whereas athletics is drifting off terrestrial television, never before have so many events been available to watch online. World-class meetings such as the Millrose Games in New York and the Meeting Hauts-de-France Pas-de-Calais in Lievin – the latest “Weltklasse of the indoor season” – are just a mouse click away. Social media also brings us news, video highlights and interviews from these events within moments of the action taking place, too. As with so much of the sporting landscape now, it's an ever-changing picture. **AW**

ABOVE: Kelly Holmes competing at the Kelvin Hall, in Glasgow

BELOW: The Sainsbury's Grand Prix took place in Glasgow in 2015



A full-page photograph of pole vaulter Katie Moon in mid-air, clearing a bar. She is wearing a red USA singlet and blue shorts, with her mouth open in a shout. The background is dark and out of focus.

The “normal” champion

Stuart Weir talks to Katie Moon, the most dominant female pole vaulter of the decade, about why she doesn't feel that way, the changes that have brought her happiness and why she thinks she still has more to give

M

ondo Duplantis has completely transformed the art of pole vaulting. With his serial record-breaking and gold medal winning performances,

the American-born Swede is undoubtedly the dominant force in the event on the men's side.

His exploits have deservedly made headlines, but they have also somewhat overshadowed Katie Moon's impressive accumulation of honours in the women's event. The American picked up a pole in training again just last month, having not touched one "since September" – the end point of another successful season in which she secured her third consecutive world title (the first woman to achieve that feat in her event), adding to a list of honours that also features Olympic gold in 2021 and silver from Paris two years ago.

The 34-year-old has begun 2026 from a place of contentment. After those 2024 Olympics, she moved from her previous training base of Atlanta to Tulsa in 2024 to be with her husband Hugo, who is a rowing coach at the University of Tulsa.

She is still coached by Brad Walker, but remotely, and enjoyment is at the forefront of her mind as she plots the year ahead.

What's your assessment of 2025?

It was quite possibly my favourite year of my

career to date. Just everything about it was what I've always wanted my career to be. I was living with my husband full-time for the first time, training away from my coach but using my coach's training plan.

Most of my career has had such a negative stress and anxiety to it and a fear and I just didn't have any of that. It was fun. It was laidback, but still very exciting and I still wanted it. From beginning to end it was just everything that I would have hoped this career would have been sooner. Looking back, it probably still needed that urgency and the stress to get me to this point and appreciate it more.

It was a busy year with 15 events and eight wins, including the world championships and the Diamond League final.

With how long the season was, it made sense to throw more competitions in. It didn't feel like that many, though, because they were spaced out a bit more strategically. I think that was key to staying healthy and staying motivated. I will say there was a period in the middle where I struggled a little bit more than I usually do. There were a couple meets in there where I only jumped, I think, my opening bar so there was a little bit

of just scrapping, just figuring some things out. Thankfully we had the time to do that.

Do you now accept that you are the best female pole vaulter of this decade? You have won three world championships and an Olympic gold.

It's hard for me to accept that and something that helps me to stay motivated is that I don't feel that way. I guess I can't argue with the stats, but it just feels very surreal because when you think of somebody that has a title like that or is that good, you think of Mondo, who wins everything and is larger than life, and I just don't feel that way. I go through my struggles throughout the season and I feel very "normal" if that is the right word. It is a weird thing to say, but I appreciate that. I guess the stats would say you're right and that's pretty cool.

How do you train now compared to when you were younger?

We have kept my training pretty consistent throughout the years but this year is looking a little different as a whole because we ramped up much more slowly. I restarted in November with just an easy roll in. The first week was no running, a bike workout for endurance, ergo workout for endurance, body weight exercises – push-ups, body weight squats, lunges, things like that. Then some endurance running, but maybe not as much volume as we've had in the past. We're really focusing on the prehab things for my Achilles and just making sure things stay nice and healthy. And so I think we're just having a much slower ramp up into the 2026 season. I don't know how that will go because I haven't done it before. But what I will say is that when I've trusted in Brad's training every year it has always gone well. I really feel like he knows what he's doing.

How much have you changed technically over the years?

Quite a bit. My jump still has a lot of what it was before I worked with Brad. But when I was younger – and I want to try and explain this without getting too pole vault technical – I just wasn't vaulting very efficiently. I was fast on the runway but, in the pole vault, if you slow it down, [ideally] you see both arms are straight up overhead to open up the pole, to bend the pole. The body then comes through, goes upside down and [the pole] tosses the athlete.

Well, one of my arms would just collapse right at take-off and, no matter how much speed you have, that is limiting to what size of

“

I can make a five-metre jump happen – it's just that the higher the bar gets, the closer to perfect you have to be



LEFT: Katie Moon says she is capable of breaking the five-metre barrier

RIGHT: Moon celebrating at the World Championships



pole you can get on. The stiffer the pole is, the higher it's going to toss you if you can open it up. It's like a coiled spring and, the stiffer that spring is, if you can push it down, the faster and more explosive it's going to return. The same goes with poles, so I was limiting myself as to what size of pole I could get on.

As well as that I was always a bit afraid. It's a very scary way to pole vault and I didn't know how to think and how to focus and what to tell myself to do on the runway. I would just run down, throw my hands up and hope for the best and rely purely on adrenaline.

Brad tackled my insecurities on the runway and simplified it. We just worked on drills and, when I got to a point where I wasn't afraid of it, then I could actually try to do what he was telling me to do and open up the pole and just charge through aggressively instead of leaning back and being hesitant. The easiest way to explain it is that I just became more confident and more aggressive in the last few steps into take-off and therefore taking that speed that I generated throughout the run into the jump, the way you should.

There's still a lot in my jump that I think coaches wouldn't necessarily teach their athletes. I definitely have some elements to my jump that are not perfect. I still don't have the best take-off from a textbook standpoint, but it's so much better than it was. I think we're marrying what my body naturally wants to do and is good at – and getting closer to what “perfection” is.

Your personal best is 4.95m from 2021. What would it take to get the magic five-metre mark?

It's there. I feel like physically it just comes down to getting on the right pole on the right day in the right conditions and I think it's not far off. There's really nothing that I have to necessarily change to make that happen – it's just that the higher the bar gets, the closer to perfect you have to be. But I do feel like I'm physically capable of jumping five metres plus.

Now, granted, the later I get into my career, [the chances of it happening are] getting less and less – I know that – so, who knows? Maybe this season, all that potential will have gone away, but in previous years, I've definitely had the potential.

In Tokyo, had Sandi cleared that 4.90m bar [she was second with 4.85m] then maybe we'd both have cleared 4.95m and gone to five metres. It's the same with the Paris Olympics, when the stand broke. I truly don't know that the results would have played out any differently in terms of places, but I definitely think we all could have jumped higher.

I think having a competitor still in at 4.90m plus just elevates the rest of the playing field, too. That's no dig at anybody, that's just championships.

Once you're getting into 4.90m plus territory and those really high bars, I think there's a couple of different factors. At the end of the day, I do feel like physically I am capable of that, but everything has to line up. **AW**

MARATHON

101

Richard Whitehead talks to Jasmine Collett about his impressive body of distance running work, and not ruling out another tilt at the Paralympics



A

t first glance, there was nothing ceremonial about it. Richard Whitehead finished the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo in 2:59:26,

collected his medal and moved on, just as he has done at countless races around the world. Only later did the broader context come into focus: this was marathon number 101, completed the day after he had spoken to AW about why numbers have never dictated his career.

Whitehead has been running marathons since 2004, fitting them around a career in para athletics that brought four world titles and two Paralympic gold medals over 200m (T42) on the track. While those achievements remain central to his sporting identity, the marathon has increasingly become the space he chooses to focus on – a way of showing that athletic performance and accessibility do not have to exist in separate spheres.

In Doha, the time mattered, as it always does, but the act of community spirit matters more

to the 49-year-old. “To come here and do my 101st is a real new beginning,” he said before the race. “I want to show the community that we can change together and I want to be part of that change moving forward.”

That sense of continuity helps explain how Whitehead has reached this point. Endurance projects have long been part of his career. In 2013, he ran 40 marathons in 40 days in aid of Sarcoma UK, becoming the first double amputee to run the length of Britain.

The idea of reaching 100 marathons, however, did not start as a fixed target. Instead, it emerged from a broader reassessment of what his career could look like beyond the track. After breaking the world record for the fastest marathon by a double amputee – running 2:41:36 at the 2024 Chicago Marathon – he sat down with his long-time coach, Liz Yelling, to consider what might come

ABOVE: Richard Whitehead on his way to completing his 101st marathon in Doha

next. What followed was an ambitious but deliberately open-ended plan: 20 marathons in a single year.

“We discussed other possibilities through the sport and I then decided that there’s a possibility of doing 20 marathons in the year all over the world. I wanted to spread that message that sport is for everybody and you can achieve anything in life.”

The reaction was predictable. Even among experienced endurance athletes, the idea of racing 20 marathons in a year prompts questions about recovery, longevity and risk.

“At the start of my journey last year it was full of people saying I’m crazy. 20 marathons is a lot and trying to recover is so difficult, which is why a marathon is so challenging.”

No fewer than 14 of the 20 marathons were completed inside three hours. Whitehead raced most of the World Marathon Majors, missing only Tokyo, and returned to cities that have shaped his career.

The year ended where it had begun, in New York. More than two decades earlier, Whitehead had lined up there for his first marathon having never run a mile before, making it a fitting place to reach his 100-marathon milestone.

“To finish in New York really did summarise what I’m really about,” he says.

Since reaching 100 in New York, Whitehead has shown no sign of slowing down – and Doha proved that 101 marathons was just another step. Questions about how he manages the physical demands of such a schedule come up constantly and, as a double amputee, the challenge is different: balance, co-ordination and agility are always part of the equation, alongside covering the 26.2 miles.

“I started my sports journey with swimming and gymnastics and that gave me the skillset to continue. It gave me those pillars of success, such as balance, agility and co-ordination, which really did set me up,” he explains.

“The individuals that supported me when I was younger, my gymnastics and swimming coaches, are still people that I admire and they’ve really supported my success. It’s all about taking baby steps to start off with and not having numbers or performances that you are chasing. You want to enjoy the process.”

Those baby steps carried him to a successful track career, including Paralympic gold on home soil at London 2012. Asked whether he could have imagined this path at the time, he is unequivocal.

“Absolutely not. The 2012 Paralympics in front of 80,000 people were magic moments



The individuals that supported me when I was younger are still people that I admire. They’ve really supported my success

for me. I remember the time – September 1, 12pm – I had so many family and friends there, and it was my moment to encapsulate what I felt like my life was up to at that point. I had so many obstacles and barriers to overcome, but for me it was always about showing resilience, and what resilience looks like is showing the pathway to the next generation around you.”

But while the track delivered medals, the marathon offered something different. Whitehead points to the democratic nature of city marathons: parents running alongside charity fundraisers, spectators in fancy dress, entire communities involved in one shared event.

“There’s so many ways to be involved and it’s about your own personal challenge,” he says. “For me it’s not about looking at what other people are doing and trying to be better than them. It’s about really looking at your life and how you can be better.”

With this outlook, the Richard Whitehead Foundation was established in 2021 to help people with disabilities

lead happier and healthier lives by inspiring them to get active. Whitehead’s own activity levels certainly aren’t on the wane, even after marathon 101. One question keeps coming up: when will he stop?

“People have been asking me for 20 years if I’m going to retire,” he says. “Whether there are other aspirations in the Paralympics, I often think about that. Maybe I’ve got another Paralympics within my locker, but maybe I also want to break my own marathon world record of 2:41.” **AW**

BELOW: Whitehead marks winning the T42 200m gold medal at the London Paralympics with his trademark celebration



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

The power of change

Euan Crumley talks to record-breaking ultra marathon runner **Sophie Power** about learning lessons, advocating for women, changing attitudes and how to help stem the dropout of young girls from sport

When Sophie Power sat down to breastfeed her baby, it didn't occur to her that she might be doing anything out of the ordinary. To her mind, she was a mother doing what came naturally and looking after her child – not to mention relieving some of the pain that had built up during 16 hours of running.

An aid station midway through one of the most well-known and challenging ultra marathon races in the world was perhaps an unusual setting, however, and even though none of her fellow competitors took the slightest bit of notice as they grappled with kit, refuelled or rested aching limbs, this moment of calm and connection amidst the chaos of the Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc (UTMB) caught the eye of photographer Alexis Berg.

When he sought permission to capture the scene in that busy sports hall in the Italian Alps, it crossed Power's mind that this illustration of a multi-tasking mother who was still trying to achieve her own personal goals might make a little bit of noise and perhaps strike a chord with a few other women. However, when the resulting image was published, in no time at all it was being shared across the world. This was 2018, and suddenly Power became known as "that breastfeeding ultra runner". After she crossed the finish line, the messages and media requests poured in. She had gone viral.

The taking of that picture is the second of two

"sliding doors" moments that helped set the now 43-year-old mother of three on the path to numerous racing adventures, international honours with Great Britain and the creation of the sports equity charity, SheRACES.

The first came in 2009 when, having never even thought of herself as a runner, she decided to enter the Marathon des Sables, a six-stage race that covers 250km of the Sahara Desert in Morocco. It kindled a love of pushing her limits, as well as unearthing a talent for running long distances, that has taken Power to places her running-averse teenage self could barely have imagined.

There have been numerous lessons learned in the process of covering all of those miles, too, and she has pulled them together across the course of her new book, *The Power Within*.

"I read a lot of running books, and I want to leave the book having learned something, having felt differently, having had a purpose," she tells AW. "It's great to inspire people to take something on, but what I really want to do is empower them to understand how to do that, to give them the confidence to do that – especially women, especially mothers."

It's the interests, and the barriers still being faced by, female runners that takes up a great deal of Power's time. "SheRACES exists to level the start line," says the website of the charity she founded and that works with event organisers to improve the experience and conditions for women, to consider women more prominently in their policies and marketing, to give women equal opportunities to race.



PHOTO BY JOHN DAVIES



PHOTO BY ALEXIS BERG

The three-month-old baby in that UTMB photo, Cormac, is now seven and in that time Power has seen the landscape change markedly. “We’ve moved so far in just a few years,” she says. Societal attitudes have certainly shifted, in terms of things like training during pregnancy and returning to sport after pregnancy. Another of the biggest signs of progress that Power has seen has, in fact, been the UTMB organisers’ attitudes towards pregnancy, too.

It’s not easy to get into the 106-mile event – competitors have to build up points at a number of races before then taking their chances in the ballot – and Power had first managed to secure a place in 2014. She didn’t make the start line that year after falling pregnant with her first child and was told that she would not be able to defer her place. Event policy stated that athletes were allowed to defer due to injury, but not pregnancy.

It wasn’t until 2018 that she landed a place again, and that photograph helped to spark a campaign for change. “The photo has been very helpful,” says Power. “I think it paints a

ABOVE: This image of Power at the UTMB has had a huge impact

thousand words, maybe a million words. We’ve had a huge impact on the UTMB group. They’ve taken on board so much and they’ve got the best pregnancy deferral policy in the world now. I would never have dreamed that we could have this much impact.”

However, she adds: “I think we could still do so much more. My goal is that SheRACES [eventually] doesn’t exist.

“The SheRACES guidelines are so simple. There are eight points, they’re almost costless, and they’re very much just saying that these are some of the things to consider – such as the language being used, such as pregnancy, such as [the provision of] period products, toilets and changing facilities, making sure that the women’s race is separated from the men’s.

“It’s not: ‘Here’s your first athlete and here’s your first woman’, it’s ‘Here’s your first man and here’s your first woman’. Two completely separate races. The amount of races where there’s a tape for the first man but still no tape for the first woman is shocking. This is one of the few sports where we’re mixing men and women on the same start line.”



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

Power admits that, to some women, mixed starts are not an issue at all but, to others, they can be a challenge. Part of what she is advocating for is event organisers to consider the female perspective much more readily, which is why she finds it so refreshing to see the arrival of events like ATHLOS, the women-only professional track and field series founded by Alex O'Hanlian.

"I think they set standards that we can design the sport in different ways," says Power. "I think it's the same for football. Women's football doesn't want to become like men's. We want to design our own sport that's right for us as athletes, it's right for us as supporters, as spectators – we don't want to be a poor version of the man's sport."

"I think that's what Athlos has done. It opens up the mind that when we design any kind of event, and you're mixing men and women, we need to think about a female lens as well as the male lens. It's another element of diversity. It's exciting to see sport being rethought."

For all the advancements, there can still be moments when things feel like they're going backwards. The online abuse of athletes such as Eilish McColgan – for her appearance rather than her athletic ability – is an issue that the 10,000m Commonwealth champion often highlights and stands up against. As Power points out, though, the impact of others seeing that treatment can be significant.

"I think the answer is, you can't win as a woman. You can look like Eilish, and that's her natural body shape. That's just who she is. There are runners that are taller, shorter, wider, older, younger – but we're all runners."

"But you see the grief that she gets, and the amount of abuse that women get for just lacing up their trainers and going for a run puts so many off, and that's why you see the rise in female running groups."

"You get that sense of judgment. If we could

take that away, we would have so many more people running and not feeling judged and not feeling they've got to run at night or in a gym or on their own at times where there's not going to be anyone around.

"If we look at barriers to participation, it's massive. We're working on an active policy of anti harassment in races, a policy of athlete behaviour, because it happens in races as well. We have so much to do against the culture and what's acceptable, and I think educating a lot of men that this happens [would make a big difference]."

The dropout rates of young girls when it comes to sport is also an area of real concern. It is not a new problem but Power believes part of the answer lies in viewing the situation from a different perspective.

"It's a real passion of mine that we reframe sport, that every girl gets the chance to be involved," she says. "For me, it's about thinking outside of the box as to what the purpose of sport is – and sport is joy. We are often presented it in a very certain way when we're younger – the fast girls got picked and the sports clubs were for the girls who were very good at hockey or good at football, while the rest were ignored."

"Sport is something that is about strengthening our bodies for life. We all have the right to sport and I think there's a sport for everyone. I only wish that part of the PE curriculum was about ensuring that every single girl and boy left school with the knowledge and the passion to move their body in a certain way, no matter what that is."

"Teaching fundamental strength exercises at school is absolutely critical to keeping us strong. Look at the osteoporosis in older women that don't strength train – we need to be learning that at school, so we feel confident about our bodies and confident about what they can do, not what they look like, and feel proud of our muscles." **AW**

ABOVE: ATHLOS female-only events have helped promote women's athletics



The Power Within: Record-breaking, ultrarunning and fighting for change by Sophie Power (Bloomsbury Sport) is available to buy in hardback, audiobook and ebook now

Part of the process

Euan Crumley talks to ultra runner and author **Allie Bailey** about deliberately getting uncomfortable and laying the mental groundwork that can lead to real progress

The wind howled. The snow and rain kept falling. Finding a firm footing on the treacherously icy ground was proving elusive. Last month's Montane Winter Spine Race gave Allie Bailey absolutely everything she wanted.

This annual, non-stop, 268-mile challenge along the Pennine Way in the depths of winter, beginning in Edale in Derbyshire and finishing in the village of Kirk Yetholm in the Scottish Borders, takes pride in describing itself as "one of Britain's most brutal endurance races".

It certainly falls into the category of challenging, especially when you consider it also involves climbing over 10,000m in total. Bailey vividly recalls lying on a church floor as she took some mid-race refuge in temperatures of minus 10 and thinking "this is horrendous". However, she is quick to challenge the notion that the event matches up to its own marketing.

"I think brutal is a word that should be banned because it's not brutal," she says. "We're choosing to do it. We pay to do this and we expect it to be hard. It kept presenting problems the whole time, but that's what I signed up for."

"I signed up for a problem-solving expedition race, and I wanted to see if I could solve the problems. It's not an ultra where it's like: 'How fast can I do it?'. It's: 'Can I survive the elements?'. You're going into a situation you can't control. The only thing you can control is your response and that's the joy of it. 'How do I look after myself? Can I control my response?

Can I stretch sensibility over ego?'. That is key to this race."

Bailey is speaking to AW just a handful of days after she finished seventh female and 33rd overall in a time of 130 hours, 22 minutes and 25 seconds (the time limit is 168 hours). Frenchman Sebastien Raichon (95:43:52) was the overall winner, while fourth-placed Anna Troup was the first female to complete the route, touching the wall of the Border Hotel.

Despite feeling "bereft" that the challenge is over, there is a lingering warmth from the satisfaction of a job well done. "I kept focusing on the process, rather than any result," says Bailey. "I am really, really pleased. Usually I'll really pick holes in it but, this time, I'm like: 'No, you did a good job there, and I got everything I wanted out of it.'"

And what had she wanted?

"To feel like a human being. To get right down to the very bones of the person that I am, and to find out: 'When I'm on my own, how well can I look after myself?'. I was a functioning alcoholic and I tried to use running to mask that alcoholism. When you stop drinking and really have to deal with the emotions of the person that you are, there's nowhere to hide any more."

"You'll meet yourself on the Pennine Way, or anywhere like that, in a way that you won't meet yourself anywhere else. No distractions, no-one's going to help. I wanted to come face to face with myself and to be able to be like: 'You're going to look after yourself now, you're going to choose life. You're going to choose to be kind yourself'. And I got that in spades."



PHOTO BY JAMIE RUTHERFORD



You can't control what's happening around you, but you can control your response, and that's such a special thing

"I cried a lot. I went through periods of 'you can't do this'. But I'm not going to say it was brutal. I'm not going to say it was the hardest thing I've ever done. It was a huge challenge, and you can't control what's happening around you, but you can control your response, and that's such a special thing to be able to do for yourself. It gives you great confidence."

When she isn't running long distances, Bailey is also a running coach, as well as an author. It was from the themes of the final chapter of her first book, *There is No Wall*, that her latest — *31 Days: A zero-bullshit masterclass in mindset training for the modern runner* — has emerged.

Shaped by the recurring issues she has encountered with her own clients, it is designed to help athletes, regardless of whether they favour the trails or the track, with their approach to the sport. There is a modern trend for recreational runners, of all levels, to place unrealistic expectations upon themselves. As the famous saying goes, "comparison is the thief of joy" and,

throughout our conversation, Bailey repeats the word "process" again and again as the key to happiness.

"Our expectations of what running will give us are f***ed because we're fed stories of people that come from nowhere and [do things like] win ultras," she says. "We're shown the elite as if they're normal human beings, and they're not. They're outliers."

"It's as if there's no point in doing anything unless you're going to be the best, but we're not all going to be the best."

"You don't start running to win races, you start running to enjoy the process, which will give you loads if you let it, but it will also sap you dry if you don't. So I think it's just as important to train your mind as it is to train your body."

"To go into races with ridiculous expectations is a hiding to nothing. You'll start to hate it, and you'll start to lose your motivation. You'll start to question yourself, lose confidence in yourself. It's not about other people. It's about



PHOTO BY ANDREW HENDRY

you, and it's about how you see yourself. You can control your mindset.

"I wrote this book because I feel it's so important to do the work through the process, to enjoy what you're doing. When you enjoy it, it's just better. You get better results."

It's hard to get those results, however, without encountering failure at some stage of the journey. Bailey sees, time and again, how a fear of coming up short, of getting something wrong, will block the path towards progress.

"Our brains want to protect us and so, to protect us from failure, they will tell us stories that aren't true to limit our experience, limit our belief. 'You can't do it, it's too hard, you don't look like her, don't try and run fast because you don't look like you can run fast'. It's self preservation, but failure is not something to be scared of. Getting something wrong is brilliant, because then you're like: 'I can tick that off. That's not the right way. Oh, *this* is the right way. That's how you do it.'"

What, then, are the best first steps when it comes to making a change in approach? Bailey recommends starting by establishing a set of personal values – hers are kindness, authenticity and honesty.

"Understanding your value system is really, really important," she says. "If you're acting in line with your values, you feel comfortable. If you're pushing against them, you feel uncomfortable."

"The next stage is to get the process in place and do the basics. First, the boring building of the bricks. It's not just about running, it's about strength and conditioning, education,

watching *YouTube* videos, going to talks, reading some books.

"There's a great writer called Brad Stulberg. He talks about not trying to be the best, but trying to be the best at getting better. Be open-minded, curious and if you're not enjoying the process, the intervals or the long runs or the eating, ask: 'Why am I not enjoying this? Let's work out a way I can enjoy this.'"

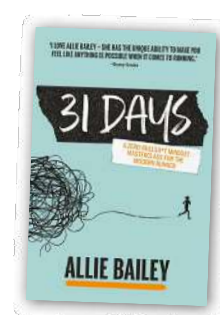
Whether you're immersed in a training plan or contemplating those races in the diary, Bailey points out that it can be easy to add further pressure by worrying about the outcome of it all. There is an alternative train of thought, though, that she insists can be liberating.

"Yes, there will be an outcome but it doesn't matter what it is," she says. "We all have ideal outcomes. But, really, if you finish a race, or if you don't finish a race, what's going to happen? Will your family be murdered? Is your house going to burn down? Will you lose your job? No, it doesn't matter."

"There will be an outcome. That's all we know. We don't know what it'll be, but it's more likely to be an outcome that you find favourable if you enjoy every step of the process and you correct things as they come up. It's not failure. It's just learning. You will get a better outcome, and you'll be thrilled with the outcome, whatever it is, because you've hit your process goals within your control."

And finally, she says: "Do the work. As an addict, I have to do the work every day of my life. It's working and it's a pleasure to do because it enriches your life." **AW**

LEFT: Allie Bailey takes shelter during the Montane Winter Spine Race, as a fellow competitor battles the elements, above



31 Days: A zero-bullshit masterclass in mindset training for the modern runner is out now

POSITION OF STRENGTH

In our new club of the month feature, in partnership with England Athletics, **Jasmine Collett** visits Burton AC to hear a tale of evolution in adversity

There is something quite powerful about an athletics club that knows exactly what it stands for. In an era where so many are facing so many challenges, Burton Athletics Club has been tackling it all head on.

Their journey has now been illustrated through AW's new club documentary series, in partnership with England Athletics, which will feature one club from across the country every month. Burton AC, founded in 1883 and one of the oldest athletics clubs in the UK, is the first to be placed under the spotlight.

When current chairman Jaime Walker joined Burton AC in 2013, he did so as an athlete. Coaching quickly followed and, soon after, leadership. By 2014, Walker had taken on the role of chairman, inheriting an organisation that was rich in history but struggling to keep pace with the modern demands of athletics.



ABOVE: Burton AC can regularly see 120 athletes on the track at training nights

"At that point, the club was run more like a youth club," he explains. "We were always in the red, we had no money and the equipment was from the 1980s. Something had to change."

Change, however, rarely comes quietly. Burton's committee made the decision to modernise almost every aspect of the club: updating the kit and logo for the first time since the 19th century, professionalising finances, improving facilities and introducing clearer structures.

"There were people who were upset – people don't like change," says Walker. "But we had to drag the club into the modern era and run it

properly. Not just for now, but for the future.”

The results have been striking. Membership has grown from around 50-60 athletes to more than 200, with summer training nights regularly seeing 120 athletes on the track. Burton, once a small-town club serving its immediate area, now attracts athletes from across the Midlands, all the way from Chesterfield to Banbury.

And it's not just those with running in mind who come calling. Burton AC has also embraced field events – particularly the throws. Where access to cages, circles and throwing facilities is becoming increasingly difficult, there has been heavy investment in keeping throwing at the heart of the club. A replacement throws cage, installed two years ago following extensive fundraising, stands as a visible symbol of that commitment.

“Not everyone has access to facilities anymore,” says senior thrower Ben Acton, who joined the club seven years ago. “A lot of clubs have lost cages or had circles condemned. We're fortunate here, but that's because the club works for it and invests in it.”

That investment has paid off competitively. Burton's throws squads are now producing national level athletes across disciplines, with representation at English Schools, England Championships and UK Nationals.

“Field events often get overlooked,” says Jenna Galiszewski, a hammer thrower and coach who returned to the sport after a break and chose Burton for her comeback.

“So if someone says they want to jump or throw, we grab them with both hands. We'll make anyone feel at home – and that's why people stay.”

While throws may be a defining strength, Burton is far from a one-event club with a thriving endurance section, strong sprints and jumps groups. Junior middle-distance runner Ewan Whitnall is one of those thriving under that system. A 1500m specialist, he has already earned three England vests and multiple national titles.

“The atmosphere is what makes it,” he says. “We push each other to be our best. Even as people move on, new athletes come through and the standard keeps rising.”

Few people embody Burton AC's history better than Judy Kelsall, who joined the club in



THE ATMOSPHERE IS WHAT MAKES IT. WE PUSH EACH OTHER TO BE OUR BEST. EVEN AS PEOPLE MOVE ON, NEW ATHLETES COME THROUGH AND THE STANDARD KEEPS RISING

ABOVE: Burton AC has invested heavily in facilities for throwing events

1980, long before it had a track of its own.

“We trained on a school field with a 100m strip,” she says. “Everything else was on roads, grass tracks, or travelling to other towns. It's changed beyond belief.”

For Kelsall, the club has also been a constant through life's hardest moments. After losing her husband in 2018, it was Burton that helped carry her forward.

“The support I got from this club was phenomenal,” she says. “I don't know how I would have moved on without them.”

Today, she still volunteers wherever needed, from officiating to helping in the café. Like many clubs, Burton faces rising costs and volunteer pressures but the club has looked outward, creating new revenue streams and lowering barriers to involvement. Reduced membership fees for volunteers dropped for those taking on roles, which have encouraged parents and supporters to share the load. Meanwhile, innovative initiatives like corporate “mini-Olympics” days have brought local businesses onto the track.

“We're in a cost-of-living crisis,” says Walker. “If someone helps the club, we help them. That inclusivity makes a massive difference.”

Burton AC is not claiming to have all the answers, but it is asking the right questions and, nearly 150 years after its founding, the club finds itself in one of its strongest positions yet. **AW**



Scan here to watch the club of the month documentary

HOW THEY TRAIN

ALED DAVIES

AGE: 34 COACH: DALE STEVENSON

Katy Barden speaks to the world champion and world record-holder about big changes and going in search of more Paralympic honours

W

orld record-holder Aled Davies was invigorated after winning his seventh consecutive global title in the F63 shot put at the World Para Athletics Championships in New Delhi last October.

The Welsh athlete made his senior Great Britain and Northern Ireland debut as a teenager at the World Championships in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2011, finishing runner-up in the discus. He has since become a multiple Paralympic, European and world champion.

An unstoppable force in para throws until his silver medal at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, his recent world gold in India (16.44m) meant more than just hardware; it symbolised progress, potential and a point proven.

"After last year's [Paris] heartbreak and the pain I've been in for the last four or five years, I accepted I needed to have a few repairs," said the 34-year-old at the time. "I've done it, I've rebuilt in the silence and darkness on my own, and I just wanted to come back and be able to compete again."

Davies underwent hip reconstruction surgery in October 2024. He'd been experiencing varying degrees of pain since the Paralympics in Tokyo 2021 but was determined to manage it through rehabilitation, Pilates and pubic symphysis injections (used to treat pain from conditions like osteitis pubis).

"I was either masking it or I was feeling the full force of the injury," he says. "As an athlete, you do have a higher pain threshold but, as a para athlete, it's another level. I think because you grow up with aches and pains and things not feeling normal, you just sort of push through. It's a harsh lesson I've learned as a mature athlete."

"By the end of 2023 it had deteriorated to the point where I needed the operation. I had to make a call, it was

like: 'Do I stand my ground, dig in for another six to eight months, and then have it done, or do I just call it on Paris and have it done early?' Hindsight's a wonderful thing, but my stubbornness and wanting to defend my title at any cost then cost me the gold medal. I didn't really do myself justice [in Paris] and it was heartbreaking."

The decision to go ahead with the operation came around the same time as Davies parted ways with coach Ryan Spencer-Jones. Inevitably, retirement crossed his mind, but unfinished business, on and off the field, was a more powerful motivator: "In the back of my mind I was thinking: 'I need to get back out there and put this guy [Kuwait's Paralympic champion Faisal Sorour] in his place,'" says Davies.

"Also, seeing new athletes come in, seeing the way Paralympic sport has evolved, it made me question everything, right down to what kind of training I was doing, my technical focus, the equipment I was using (since summer 2025 Davies has been working on a project with the UK Sports Institute to develop state-of-the-art leg equipment/orthotics for maximal performance). I wanted to make sure there was no stone left unturned. I realised that if I walked away after Paris 2024, I wouldn't be walking away satisfied, so there was no other option. I knew I wasn't done."

Davies self-coached throughout the 2025, but a conversation with Olympian and multiple national shot put champion Scott Lincoln at the British Championships inspired him to contact Dale Stevenson – coach to Lincoln in addition to athletes including Matt Denny, Jacko Gill and Steph Radcliffe – in Australia.

He was invited out for a "compatibility phase" after the world championships and it couldn't have gone any better. Davies returned to the UK at Christmas and thought: 'I want to buy into this': "For a long time I'd had



aspirations of throwing 20m-plus in the shot put and 60m-plus in discus, but I stopped believing in myself when I couldn't build on my 2016/2017 [world record] performances," he says. "Dale's shown me how much I have to learn, and once again, those goals seem very attainable." **AW**



A TYPICAL TRAINING WEEK (CURRENTLY)

UK-based Davies will soon return to Australia to link up with his Melbourne-based training group. The most significant change to his programme since joining Stevenson is a focus on specificity and quality over quantity: "The best part about this new stimulus is that I don't feel tired, and I'm loving that feeling," he says. "Until now, I've never trained to a point where I'm leaving each session with a little bit left in the tank and I'm itching to come back. I feel like I'm training with a purpose. "Technically, Dale has already changed a lot, even down to the way that I hold the shot put, so it's all new, everything's improving. I don't think we're going to see any drastic improvements overnight, but there are so many gains to be made that I think I'll be a totally different beast by LA, which is really exciting."

- ◆ Monday: throws session, lifts session: "I'll do a bit of mobility activation at the track, followed by strength, accessories work e.g. banded wraps, rotational pulls, single arm stuff and core," says Davies. "It's a lot of throw-specific work; it's not like clean, snatch, bench, snatch, back squat - it's not all the big lifts - it's very specific stuff."
- ◆ Tuesday: throws session, lifts session
- ◆ Wednesday: throws session, lifts session (as Monday)
- ◆ Thursday: throws session, lifts session
- ◆ Friday: throws session, lifts session: "This is my key lifts day, so my clean, bench, back, just to keep my strength levels ticking over."
- ◆ Saturday: throws session, lifts session
- ◆ Sunday: rest day

Favourite session: I still love getting back under the bar on a Friday and trying to shift some heavy tin, but I'm really enjoying the one per centers at the moment - all the accessories work I'm doing in the gym, it's all focused on very specific movements and feeling tension all the way through the throw, so I'm loving that.

Least favourite session: The Monday and Wednesday sessions are probably the toughest for me right now because I'm working hard on strengthening my right side. I'm also reminded of my disability in every session, so there are ceilings there that infuriate me, but you don't practice the things that you're good at, right?

PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

“Everyone has
**something
positive**
to give”

JOE FRANKLIN



COACHING

CONVERSATIONS

Katy Barden speaks to the renowned US coach who has achieved great NCAA success and mentored a steady stream of British talent through the years

Joe Franklin is widely regarded as one of the USA's top college coaches, having transformed athletics programmes at Butler University (1994-2007) and the University of New Mexico (2007-2023). Leading his teams to national prominence, the 57-year-old has earned numerous coaching awards, has coached multiple NCAA individual champions including British athletes Josh Kerr (three times) and Lee Emanuel (twice), and has consistently produced All-Americans.

Franklin became Director of Track and Field and Cross Country at the University of Louisville in 2023 and in 2025 he led the men's and women's teams to top-25 finishes at the NCAA Outdoor Championships in the same season for the first time in history.

Continuing the trend of British athletes working under his guidance – a group that has included Hannah Nuttall, Calli Thackery, Elise Thorner, Steve Vernon and Scott Overall over lengthy periods at Butler and New Mexico – European under-20 1500m champion Lyla Belshaw will join fellow GB international Eliza Nicholson at the Cardinals later this year.

How did you first get into coaching?

I was finishing my undergraduate degree at Purdue University, I was a technical writer, writing computer manuals and things like that.

I had an internship that summer and after that I realised that I never wanted to sit in an office cubicle again. I knew I couldn't do it.

In 1991 I got a head coach job at a very small university (DePauw University) right out of college. I got lucky, because my high school team-mate's father was the athletic director at this university and their coach had resigned right before the season. They were literally in a bind and I knew I didn't want to write glossaries the rest of my life. Can you imagine writing glossaries the rest of your life? I had zero coaching experience. I'd had no coaching classes. I was essentially an English major.

How would you describe your coaching philosophy?

It's pretty simple. My parents were high school teachers, grades nine through 12 [ages 14-18]. My mother taught English, my father taught government, so their philosophy as educators was always to embrace the individual and try to help students get to where they want to go.

That's the basis of my philosophy, to make sure that I give athletes every opportunity to be successful, because that's what I saw growing up.

I can give you a great example. I was probably 14 years old and there was a student – he got kicked out of his home for various reasons, none of which were behavioural – and he moved into our house for his senior year in high school. He lived in our basement and my parents put him through his first year of medical school.



That's the type of family that I was brought up with – to embrace who the individual is, accept who the individual is, be accepting of everybody because everybody has something positive to give. That's the way I was brought up.

So, that is the impetus of my coaching philosophy, that if you want to be the best in the world, I know I can help you; I might not be able to get you to be the best in the world, but I can get you going in the right direction.

After transforming the athletics programmes across lengthy periods at Butler and New Mexico, what was the attraction of Louisville?

I've always gone into programmes that were marginally successful at best prior to getting there, so in that regard Louisville was similar to Butler and New Mexico. And each stop had something very unique that was attractive.

At Butler, it was this small kind of quintessential private liberal arts school. You know, it was pretty and everything's limestone buildings, and it attracted a certain type of person. At New Mexico, it was the elevation and at Louisville it's the support across the board from this administration that really wants to be globally elite in the sport of distance running and track and field.

Our athletic director, Josh Heird, is an avid runner himself. He is very dialled in to the sport, which is super rare in the world of US college athletics. I'd say 99.9 per cent of the time those athletic directors do a fantastic job; they're wonderful human beings and wonderful people, but their focus is always football and basketball and that's absolutely a focus here, it's *the* focus here, but he also has an extreme interest in track and field and distance running, more so than any other AD I know.

And it's in a city, so there's little things like the airport is five minutes from the university, the city is world-renowned for the Kentucky Derby to the global music festivals, to the bourbon industry, to all these things that are super unique.

So that was the draw to Louisville and, historically, they've had parts of really good things happen, but they haven't had sustained global or NCAA successes.

They're all very different, but the model has never really changed from Butler to New Mexico to here, it's just that here the support level is completely different. I don't have to worry about some of those little things that just kind of wear on you over the years.

The challenge of the programme is also a draw, but it's never been about that. Sure, I like the challenge of rebuilding, but it's about giving somebody like Eliza Nicholson [the top British finisher in the under-20 race at the World Cross Country Championships] and the other athletes here the same experiences that Lee Emmanuel or Steve Vernon had back in the day.

We're repeating the same process, it's just in a different location. I mean, we've changed a little – we're always tweaking and we're always listening, because if you don't listen and learn, you eventually become obsolete – but the patterns are all very similar to what they have been.

Who has been your greatest coaching influence?

There's nobody in particular. I have a group of friends that I talk to and things like that. All of our training has been developed based

ABOVE: Joe Franklin and Wyatt Rhoads chat with KJ Byrd at a meet

on failures that we'd had in the past going through the early parts of the journey at Butler and New Mexico.

We had a group early on at Butler that was pretty talented – Justin Young, Fraser Thompson and Rob Krar – and we didn't know why they were running so poorly. We started thinking: "Why aren't things working?". Fraser and I started having coffee together and that's what led to changing the training philosophy, because of the failures that we were having. And he was so darn smart (he went to Oxford University on a Rhodes Scholarship).

You hear about it all the time: "Oh, they're ready to run X, and then they run poorly." And that's exactly what was happening, so we changed the way we trained and it hasn't changed a lot since then.

It might be a fault of mine, but I've never read a book on training. If somebody were to ask me an exercise physiology question, I probably couldn't answer that but, in my opinion, science doesn't help you win a gold medal or put you on the start line for a major championship. It plays a role, but the art of coaching is what gets people to that point. If you want somebody that you can sit down and have a conversation with, then I'm the guy for that.

Those athlete conversations are happening right now. I sat down with one of the students on the team yesterday and we're building her training plan together. We have literally two-and-a-half weeks of training written on five lines; it's all very simple, but it's a very simple sport.

As a coach you have to be able to listen, you have to be able to talk and you have to have trust. As an athlete, I want what you want. If you want to be great, I want to help you be great, but to be great there are certain things you have to do and we're going to meet in the middle.

What's one of the most valuable lessons that you've learned in your coaching career so far?

I guess it would be to just lessen the expectation. Every time you say: "I'm going to try to run a world record", it rarely happens.

Even though I might believe an athlete could win the gold medal, my approach to that would be: "Our goal is to get you in position with 150m left to have a chance".

When Josh Kerr ran his first 3:34 pre-super shoes and all that stuff, we never once talked about time. Ever. I just said: "Let me take care of everything else, you just win the race. Just put

yourself in a position to have a chance to win".

We've never really talked about that elite expectation over the years and it's the same way we approach things now. I don't have to add another layer of stress for athletes. They all want to be elite, they've made it this far, so I don't have to sit and talk about it.

I have to provide a sense of clarity or calmness, which is difficult for me to do because I'm naturally hyperactive.

I also want people who will trust the process, although I really hate that saying. What I prefer is "challenge the process and accept the outcome". So the athletes challenge it and we have this back and forth, and now you're part of the process and you/we can accept the outcome.

I want to be able to have those conversations. Some of them aren't always fun; sometimes you get in a bickering match about training, but if you're going to bicker about training, then I need to bicker about sleep. Things like that.

What do you think continues to attract British athletes to the US?

The past successes and the past experiences of students. Let's use Eliza Nicholson as an example. She's having a great time. She now tells her friends: "I'm having the best time, I'm doing great in school, I'm having fun socially". That's how it started years and years ago with one guy at Butler, Nathan Dosanjh.

There's this misconception that comes from coaches globally that, if you go to the US system, you race too much, but they can tell their friends: "Hey, that's not the case here, they're going to put emphasis on your summer success as well as your NCAA success". We may be a little more unique than most in that, but that's how it translates.

The student is happy because they get to represent their country, which is a massive deal, but here they also represent the University of Louisville, a global brand. You just have to create a good balance. **AW**

BELOW: Franklin coached Josh Kerr to three NCAA titles



We've never really talked about that elite expectation. I don't have to add another layer of stress for athletes. I have to provide a sense of clarity or calmness

COMFORT & JOY

The latest shoes take cushioning to the next level. Be it super-foams, high stacks or responsive options, there is something for everyone. **Paul Freary** looks at some of the offerings from the biggest brands

361

361europe.co.uk

MERAKI 7

£130

The all-new Meraki 7 sees revisions from the ground up, making it a high-performing daily training shoe. The brand's Engage and Primo midsole foams combine to provide a well-cushioned, stable and entertaining ride that outperforms the price tag.

The high-performance midsole foams provide a smooth yet stable feel that suits any pace, with an efficiency that soaks up the impact and gives a gentle spring to each step.

As with the rest of the shoe, the upper provides a fit and feel that you would expect from a more expensive model and is as good as anything else on the market right now. The Meraki is a great contender – and great value, too.



PUMA

uk.puma.com

DEVIATE NITRO ELITE 4

£210

Lighter, more responsive and more stable, the new Deviate NITRO Elite 4 from Puma returns as the more runnable race day shoe for the masses from the brand. While the Fast-R 3 was a massive success in 2025, it remains a highly aggressive racing model, performing at its best for stable forefoot strikers who are able to maximise its geometry.

The Deviate resembles a more traditional race day shoe, but at just 170g and with a new A-TPU midsole,

it's a speed demon in disguise. The new foam enhances energy return, complemented by a sculpted plate that contributes to a highly propulsive yet stable ride. This is 30g lighter than its predecessor, the weight saving is noticeable, and the shoe just screams fast! For many, this could

be a "safe bet" in carbon-plated racers, being light and stable with an explosive feel when you put your foot down.



BROOKS

brooksrunning.co.uk

GLYCERIN FLEX

£165

Something a little different, the Glycerin Flex combines the excellent soft yet responsive cushioning of the Brooks Glycerin models with a highly flexible design that aims to facilitate the foot's preferred motion path.

Deep grooves cut into the midsole create the FlexZone technology, making this perhaps the most flexible option on the market right now, yet it has a stable and highly efficient ride.

With soft cushioning on impact, a super-smooth heel-toe transition and energised toe-off, the shoe has race-day propulsion as well as everyday comfort. Yes, it's only February, but this is the shoe of the year so far!



NIKE

nike.com

STRUCTURE PLUS

£165

While the established Structure 26 has long been Nike's go-to support type shoe, the Structure Plus adds ZoomX foam, the brand's super-soft and responsive midsole material, to make this the softest iteration ever.

Combining ZoomX and ReactX foams, this blend offers support and cushioning, with an added midfoot support system, resulting in an incredible springy support shoe.

The high stack results in a slightly heavier model, and the 10mm drop is akin to more traditional support shoes, but it's the added cushioning that gives the overriding running sensation.

The upper is a familiar combination of breathable meshes and supportive elements incorporated into the lacing to secure the foot and complete the package.





SKECHERS

sneakers.skechers.co.uk



AERO BURST

£140

This max-stack daily trainer from Skechers offers masses of cushioning in a stable and highly responsive package.

Designed for daily training, the shoe features a 42mm deep stack of the brand's Hyper Burst Ice cushioning, their proprietary nitrogen-infused foam.

Sitting within the midsole is a carbon-infused H-plate that maximises energy return with a high stiffness-to-weight ratio. All of that adds up to a highly cushioned and long-lasting daily trainer that simply soaks up the miles and adds a spring to your stride.

The shoe also features a Goodyear rubber outsole and Skechers' Archfit insole, but it's the great cushioning that's the standout feature of this good value daily trainer.

SAUCONY

saucony.com

RIDE 19

£140

Lighter, softer and more responsive than ever, the new Ride 19 returns as one of the best value daily trainers in the neutral cushioned category.

A reformulated PWRRUN+ midsole foam is at the heart of the new model, providing plush cushioning, increased energy return and, with a slightly wider platform, a more stable footing.

The overall geometry of the midsole has been tweaked, along with added flex-grooves and a unique outsole design. The upper is a light, breathable and plush engineered mesh which hugs the foot, offering a great fit with soft padding in key areas for all-day wearability. This is a reliable, yet versatile, option.



KARHU

uk.karhu.com

Karhu may be a new name to many, but it is one of the most established running shoe brands, dating back to 1916. The Mestari is their max-cushioned daily trainer, designed for runners seeking a well-cushioned and responsive ride that delivers mile after mile with great consistency.

At its heart, the shoe uses AeroFoam, Karhu's nitrogen-injected midsole foam, combined with the brand's Fulcrum technology –

MESTARI RUN 2.0

£150

engineered to guide the foot forward smoothly and with a stable rolling motion. The result is a shoe that feels effortless to run in.

The Mestari is very versatile, capable of dealing as easily with long daily miles as it is with shorter speed and interval sessions. The ride is very well balanced and will suit a wide range of foot types and runners. For dependability and flexibility, the Mestari Run 2.0 is certainly worthy of consideration this spring.



HYLO

hyloathletics.com

AXIS

£140

The brand's second model, the AXIS, takes the lessons learned from their first shoe, the IMPACT, and adds a touch of stability for a versatile ride that's sure to please a wider audience.

A new, 50 per cent bio-based midsole, Hyperbolt+, uses a supercritical, nitrogen-injected foam alongside some subtle medial support that enhances rearfoot stability without being overly

controlling and provides a smooth and stable ride. A familiar natural rubber outsole displaces water and provides great traction, adding durability in key contact points.

A single-piece knitted upper again uses bio-based materials and offers a great fit with a structured design to suit the shoe's performance potential. This could also be the best performing shoe out there with such eco-friendly credentials.



HOKA

hoka.com

CIELO X1 3.0

£250

Having listened to feedback from Hoka elite athletes, the Cielo X1 3.0 drops weight, improves on cushioning and gets a more stable platform. It might be third time lucky, but this is the Hoka racing shoe we've been waiting for.

Now weighing in at just 217g, the 3.0 sits firmly in elite racing shoe territory. The PEBA midsole is now the brand's most responsive foam and, combined with a carbon plate and remodelled midsole cutaway, the shoe remains stable, cushioned and highly propulsive.

A new textile upper keeps weight down, and a dynamic forefoot vamp adapts to the foot's movement for a secure yet flexible fit. Asymmetrical lacing further improves the fit and reduces pressure on the instep over longer distances for added comfort.



A LAP WITH...

JOE WIGFIELD

Tim Adams speaks to the man who equalled the British 10km record in Valencia about fresh challenges

Joe Wigfield's original aim at last month's Valencia 10km was to break the 28-minute barrier. Even though he had only competed in one official 10km race before – running 28:44 at the 2023 edition – the 26-year-old thought that he could be amongst the top Brits in the field, but expected a couple would still be quicker than him.

"When I saw that the likes of Scott [Beattie] and Alfie [Manthorpe] were in the race, I knew they had the experience," he says.

Wigfield, who started on the sub-elite start line, found himself alongside both when the packs converged and, for most of the race, decided to run alongside the British duo, with the aim of being "dragged around".

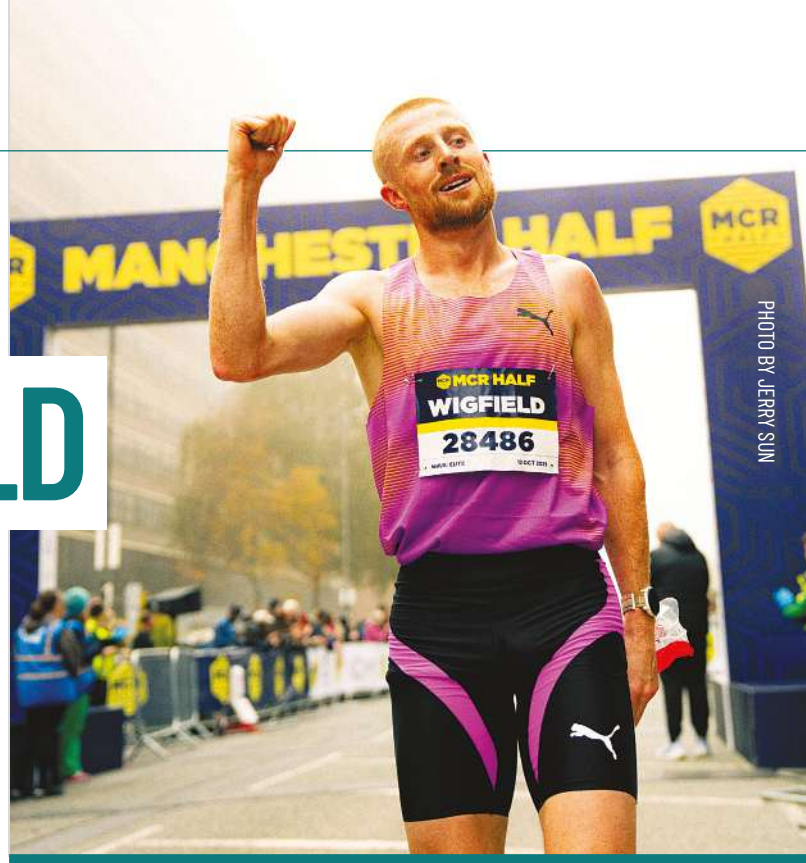
After passing 5km through 13:54, he knew he was on for a quick time but was still keen to preserve some energy for the last 800m. Holding that kick worked and, after passing the likes of Beattie, Manthorpe and Andy Butchart down the home straight, Wigfield crossed the line in an official time of 27:38. He placed 11th overall but also equalled Rory Leonard's 10km national record.

"I wasn't expecting to get that time," Wigfield tells AW. "Now that I've got such a performance behind me, I've got so much more confidence in believing I'll be able to hit certain splits in training."

He has now set his sights on the Barcelona Half Marathon (February 15) and is aiming to run around 61:00, a mark that would catapult him into the top 10 on the UK half-marathon all-time standings.

It would build on the momentum he generated by winning the Westminster Mile (3:59), Manchester Half Marathon (62:04) and FNUL Mizuno New Year's Eve 5km (13:26) in the latter half of last year.

He still views the 1500m as his favourite event but, with



recent successes in the longer distances, is now looking at those much more closely this season.

"I love doing shorter races like the 800m and 1500m," he says. "I knew I was in shape and that I could run these certain times but reality starts setting in when you're not at the front. Towards the end of the summer I was starting to lose my head a bit with track so that's why I focused so much on road running in the autumn."

"Right now I feel like I'm probably better in events like the 5km, 10km and half-marathon. I'll probably do a few 800m races at British Milers Club meetings for example but they will essentially be speed work sessions."

"One of the main aims for this season is to race in the half-marathon at the World Athletics Road Running Championships in Copenhagen in September. So I'll be competing at the Bath Half Marathon (March 15) in order to qualify for it."

Wigfield runs around 75-80 miles per week and is coached by 1996 Olympian Craig Winrow at St Mary's University. Having grown up training at Wirral AC, Wigfield made the move to Teddington in 2018 to study Health and Exercise Science. After graduating, he decided to stay and says it's one of the best moves he's ever made.

"There's around 80 students but you've also got the likes of Jack Rowe and Adam Clarke who train there as well," Wigfield says. "It means you've got a mix of coaches and it's great because they're happy for us to crack on together in sessions on occasions."

"I was actually only really interested in athletics when I went to the university. Just before moving to London I thought about quitting running. When I was 16 and 17, I went through that phase of going out a lot and enjoying life, so I lost my love for running."

"I then spoke to [fellow athlete] Dan Jarvis and he said the set-up at St Mary's would give me a second chance in the sport. If I'd gone anywhere else I don't know if they'd have helped me out in the same way." **AW**



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

Usain Bolt. It's very different but training with him would have been fun. He'd have definitely helped me out on some of my speed sessions, without a doubt!



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PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

Wishing the best for Ciara

I wanted to write in to say how heartening it was to see Ciara Mageean posting on social media recently with an update about her health. She had to step away from the sport to undergo treatment for cancer and has said that she has now been through 12 rounds of chemotherapy.

Her 1500m win at the 2024 European Championships was one of the most deserved gold medals you will ever see, for a woman whose perseverance has set an incredible example for others to follow. Those same qualities are coming to the fore again, off the track, and I would like

to send my warmest wishes to Ciara – a top class athlete and person.

Evelyn McMenamin

Don't go the way of rugby

How disappointing to see the reports of the Kenyan athletes who are planning to switch allegiance to Turkey in time for the LA 2028 Olympics. They are reportedly being offered all kinds of incentives to make the move and would join the Jamaicans who did likewise last year. I had thought World Athletics had been clamping down on the practice and I hope athletics is not about to go the way of sports like rugby

union, where “project players” can be brought to another nation.

Paul Gilmore

Child's play for the mile?

When Elle Down of Border Striders lowered the world 10 years age record for the mile to 5:01.21 at Sydney's Albie Thomas Mile just before Christmas, it occurred to me that perhaps the five-minute barrier for kids is like four minutes was to men in 1954.

Britain's Diane Leather was the first female runner to break five minutes for the mile shortly after Bannister's heroics. Now, 72 years later, we have 10-year-olds closing in on the mark, led by Madison Kindler who took it down to 5:02 last year. Can I take this opportunity to credit Madison for setting a target that Elle could aspire to.

Sure, it's not the sub two-hour marathon nor the women's sub four-minute-mile, but for those thousands involved in junior athletics and who muse over human performance limits it's a real point of interest.

Brian Chapman

Wrong about Ron

In the AW Archive feature with Ron Hill in the January issue of AW, it was stated that he finished fourth in the 1976 Olympic marathon. Hill, in fact, finished fourth at the British trials and didn't make the team for Montreal at all.

Kevin Johnson

Ed: You are absolutely right, Kevin, and we apologise for this error.

WHAT'S ON



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

FEBRUARY 7

- UKA Cross Challenge
London
britishathletics.org.uk

FEBRUARY 7-8

- England U20, U17 and U15 Open
Indoor Championships
Sheffield
englandathletics.org

- Welsh Athletics Senior, U17 and
Para Indoor Championships
Cardiff
welshathletics.org

FEBRUARY 8

- INIT Indoor Meeting Karlsruhe
meeting-karlsruhe.de

FEBRUARY 11

- Belgrade Indoor Meeting
meetings.saf.org.rs

FEBRUARY 13-15

- BUCS Indoor Championships
Sheffield
bucs.org.uk

FEBRUARY 14

- RAK Half Marathon
Ras Al Khaimah
rakhalfmarathon.com

FEBRUARY 14-15

- Novuna UK Athletics Indoor
Championships
Birmingham
britishathletics.org.uk

FEBRUARY 15

- Zurich Maratón de Sevilla
en.zurichmaratonsevilla.es

- Hyundai Mitja Marató de
Barcelona by Brooks
mitjamarato.barcelona/en/

FEBRUARY 19

- Meeting Hauts-de-France Pas-de-
Calais Trophée EDF
Liévin
worldathletics.org

FEBRUARY 21

- English National Cross Country
Championships
Sedgefield
englishcrosscountry.co.uk
- Scottishathletics National Cross
Country Championships
Falkirk
scottishathletics.org.uk
- Ocean Breeze Elite
New York
oceanbreezenyc.org

FEBRUARY 21-22

- Masters BMAF Indoor
Championships
Lee Valley
bmaf.org.uk

FEBRUARY 22

- ORLEN Copernicus Cup
Toruń
worldathletics.org

- All Star Perche
Clermont-Ferrand
allstarperche.net

- Napoli City Half
napolirunning.com

FEBRUARY 22-23

- Athletics Ireland National Indoor
Senior Championships
Belfast
athleticsni.org

FEBRUARY 28

- Vault Manchester
vaultmanchester.com

MARCH 1

- Tokyo Marathon
marathon.tokyo/en

For all the latest athletics news and updates, visit athleticsweekly.com

FROM THE **AW** ARCHIVE

Turning the clock back 10 years to when Mo Farah bounced back in Glasgow

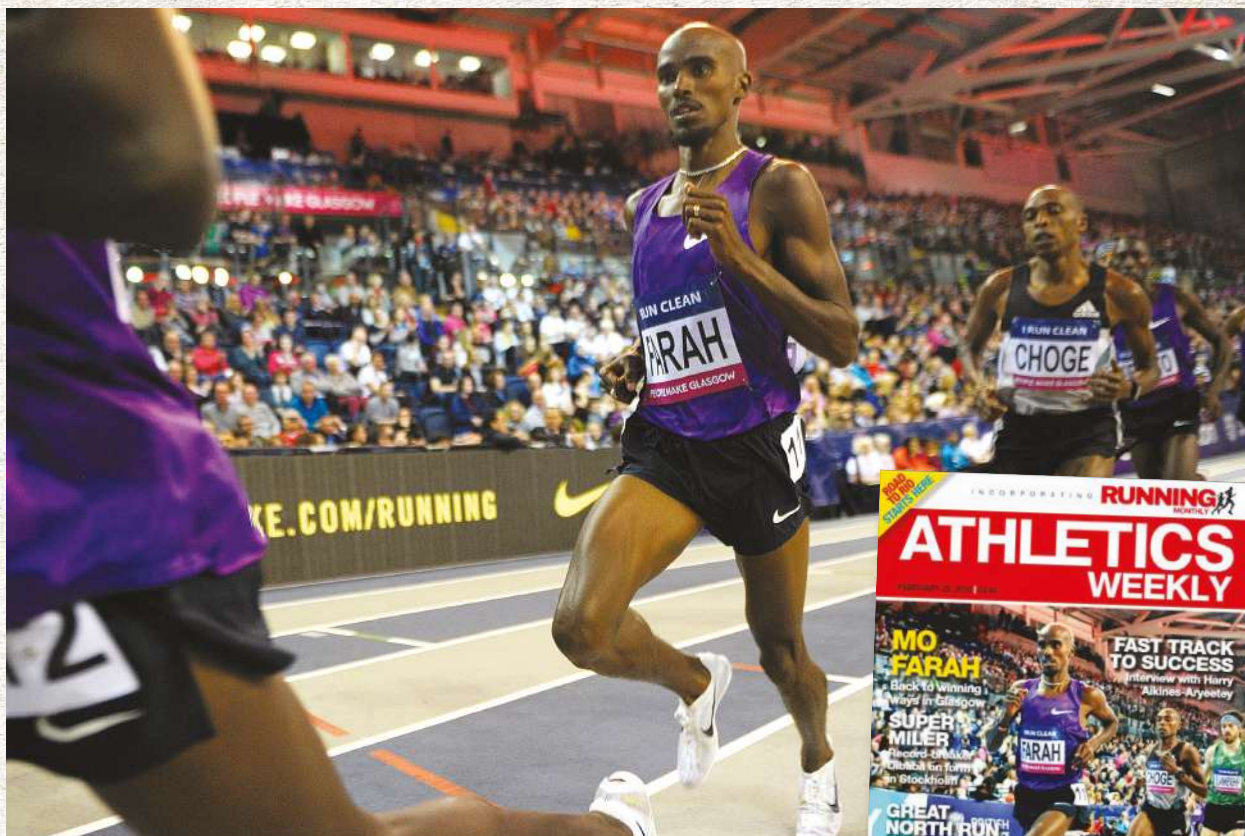


PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

The start of 2016, Olympic year, had not gone perfectly to plan for Mo Farah, who suffered a shock defeat to American Garrett Heath at the Great Edinburgh Cross Country. However, six weeks later, the Briton bounced back at a sold out Emirates Arena in Glasgow, winning the 3000m contest at the Indoor Grand Prix.

As the February 25 issue of *AW* reported: "Despite A-list performers aplenty, the spotlight burned ever more brightly on Mo Farah on his lone track outing of this winter. And the double Olympic champion did

not disappoint the 5000-capacity crowd, bolting out of the pack and into the lead in the 3000m before holding off long-time Kenyan foe Augustine Choge to win in 7:39.55.

"After finishing runner-up at the Great Edinburgh Cross-country six weeks earlier, the 32-year-old headed off to train in Ethiopia with minor concerns. 'It was on my mind,' he said. 'Coming second, I wanted to get a good win here, which is important. As an athlete, you want to keep winning and have that confidence. I felt okay here. I've got a lot of miles in my legs and it's not about completing tapering for

this race. I've got another race with the world half. The most important thing was to come out and win."

Farah was back on British shores again one month later, when he finished third at those world half marathon championships in Cardiff. At the Rio Olympics, of course, he was very much in the winning habit as he successfully completed the 5000m and 10,000m double for the second Games in succession. **AW**

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SWIFT® LT

Ultra-compact, lightweight and rechargeable headlamp. 380 lumens



Ultra-compact and featherlight at 43g, the new SWIFT® LT delivers 380 lumens and also features red lighting. USB-C rechargeable and rain-resistant (IPX4), it's perfect for lightweight adventures or as a reliable backup. The minimal headband is comfortable and features reflective thread for visibility. Find out more at petzl.com

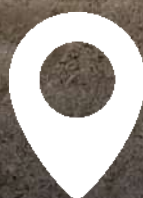
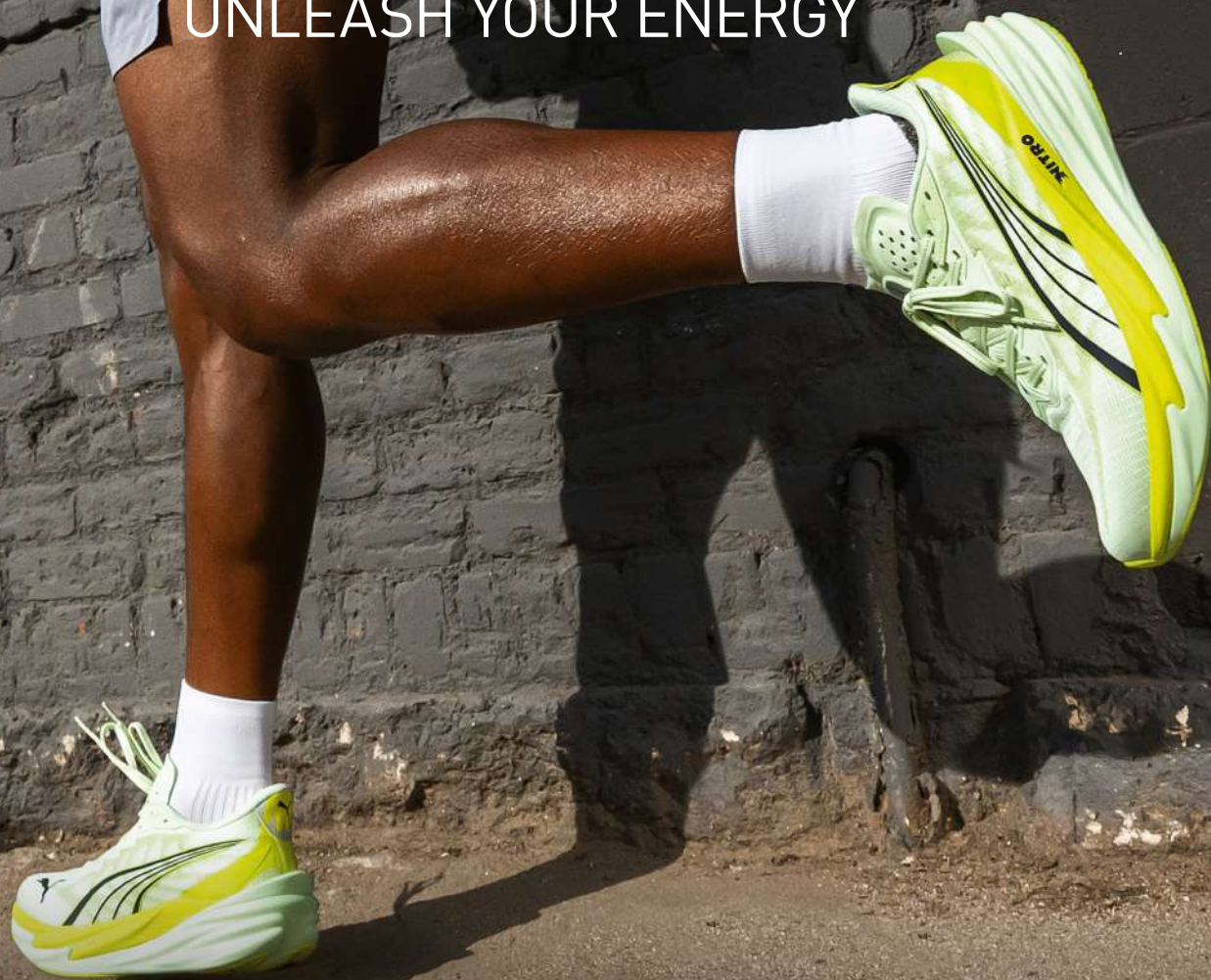


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