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WORLD INDOORS PREVIEW

KEELY'S MISSING MEDAL

PLUS JOSH HOEY, DITAJI KAMBUNDJI, NICOLA OLYSLAGERS, SCOTT LINCOLN AND ALL THE VITAL STATISTICS



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EXCLUSIVE

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PLUS

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PROMISE OF YOUTH



Euan Crumley
AW Editorial Director

"It's beyond me," said Hobbs Kessler. "Sam Ruthe, Cooper [Lutkenhaus] and all those. I don't even know what to make of it. I know I've been the benefactor of this, but this fixation with the prodigy seems to be a really big thing."

The American isn't wrong. In a recent interview with *Track and Field News*, he was discussing the emergence of athletes who are still in their mid-teens but already doing extraordinary things. Not so long ago, Kessler was one of them – his US high school record-breaking exploits marking him down as one to watch – and when a particularly youthful athlete clears a barrier well ahead of schedule, the media clamour can certainly be intense.

Ruthe, our cover star this month, and Lutkenhaus have been experiencing that for themselves. The New Zealander has been on a record-breaking spree but it was his mile of 3:48.88 to destroy the world under-18 indoor mark – and break John Walker's outright New Zealand record – aged 16 that really stood out. Lutkenhaus, the youngest American ever to compete at the World Championships and setter of the under-18 800m record last summer, has followed up with an indoor under-20 world record.

This kind of thing isn't just happening in middle distance running, though. From sprinting through to high jump, the next generation is already having an impact. Even at last month's UK Indoor Championships alone – albeit an event not awash with the biggest names – 11 of the medallists were younger than 20.

"I feel like I got almost more attention in high school when I had the promise to do what I'm doing now," added Kessler, a world indoor medallist and also the road mile world champion. "The people that have medal prospects are more exciting to fans than people that are actually medalling. I think it's kind of weird and I don't think it's super healthy to be focused on what you run at any given age."

Across sport, there has always been a fascination about finding the next big thing – the outlier who is going to change the game. It's that "promise" of what might happen that attracts the attention and presents a fascinating story to tell.

It's also natural to feel protective towards these youngsters. For this issue, my colleague Tim Adams sat down for a chat not just with Sam Ruthe, but also his father Ben, about how they are navigating their way through it all. Happily they seem to be following a healthy philosophy, where winning certainly isn't everything. They are keeping their heads, while those all around them might be losing theirs. AW

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800m
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ARENA
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6



PICTURE THIS

KEELY'S CORONATION

Keely Hodgkinson celebrates after fulfilling her destiny when she smashed Jolanda Čeplak's world record of 1:55.82 with 1:54.87 at the World Indoor Tour Gold in Liévin on February 19.

The 24-year-old Olympic champion was born on the same day – March 3, 2002 – that Čeplak set the mark and has felt for a while that it was her fate to claim the record.

After improving her own British record to 1:56.33 at the UK Indoor Championships five days previously, she looked in the shape of her life and ripped the record apart during a masterclass of 800m running in the French town. AW

The sweet spot: p46



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

THE MONTH IN NUMBERS

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

44.52

Khaleb McRae beat Kerron Clement's world indoor 400m record of 44.57 with 44.52 at the World Indoor Tour Silver meeting in Fayetteville on February 13.

The 25-year-old, who was part of the United States' silver medal-winning 4x400m team at the World Championships in Tokyo last year, passed 200m in 21.24 before going on to win by just over a second from William Jones.

If ratified, McRae's time would lower the mark set by Clement on the same track back in 2005. Michael Norman (44.52) and Christoper Morales Williams (44.49) have posted quicker times, but neither were ratified for record purposes.

45.01

Attila Molnar stormed to 45.01 in the men's 400m at the World Athletics Indoor Tour Gold meeting in Ostrava on February to beat a European record that had been held jointly by Thomas Schönlebe and Karsten Warholm.

The Hungarian was chased around the circuit by Jonas Phijffers but he held on to win as he beat the mark of 45.05 which was set by Schönlebe in 1988 and matched by Warholm in 2019.



TOP: Khaleb McRae

ABOVE: Faith Kipyegon

RIGHT: Cole Hocker

3:45.94

Reigning 1500m Olympic champion Cole Hocker shattered the American indoor mile record at the Asics Sound Invite in North Carolina on February 14, running 3:45.94. It was the second-fastest time in history behind only Jakob Ingebrigtsen's 3:45.14 from last year.

29:46

Faith Kipyegon clocked 29:46 when making her 10km debut at the Monaco Run on February 15. The 1500m and mile world record-holder, a three-time 1500m Olympic champion, has made no secret of her plans to race the marathon in future and was racing the furthest distance of her career so far.





ABOVE: Megan Keith

BELOW: Laura Muir wins in Falkirk

RIGHT: English National champion Hugo Milner

30:07/26:43

Megan Keith has shown a fine return to form this winter and her great results continued in Castellón on February 22 when she took one second off Eilish McColgan's European 10km record for women with 30:07.

The Spanish road race has a reputation for producing fast times and there was also a men's European record from Yann Schrub of France as he clocked 26:43 to beat Andreas Almgren's mark by two seconds.

6.68

Divine Iheme set a European under-18 indoor 60m record of 6.68 on February 7 at the England Athletics U20/U17/U15 Indoor Champs in Sheffield. The 16-year-old broke the 27-year-old record of 6.69 set by Mark Lewis-Francis in 1999.

7.05

Racing at the UK Indoor Championships for the first time since 2015 on February 14, Dina Asher-Smith broke the championship 60m record with a run of 7.05, just 0.02 shy of her personal best – the British record set in the same Birmingham arena in 2023.

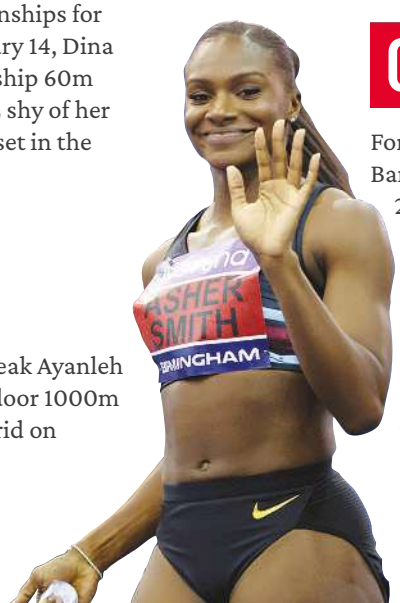
2:14.20

Mohamed Attaoui's attempt to break Ayanleh Souleiman's decade-old world indoor 1000m record of 2:14.20 fell short in Madrid on February 6. The Spaniard clocked 2:14.52 to go third on the world all-time rankings and ahead of European record-holder Wilson Kipketer's 2:14.96. Attaoui sat behind pacemaker Filip Ostrowski and went through 800m in 1:45.58 before struggling a little on the final lap.



PHOTO BY BOBBY GAVIN

BELOW: Dina Asher-Smith



3800

A total of 3800 competitors descended on Sedgefield as the English National Cross Country Championships returned to County Durham for the first time in 25 years on February 21. The 2024 champion Hugo Milner reclaimed the senior men's title, while Lucy Jones beat Amelia Quirk to the women's crown.



PHOTO BY GRAHAM SMITH/ SPORTSSHOES

14

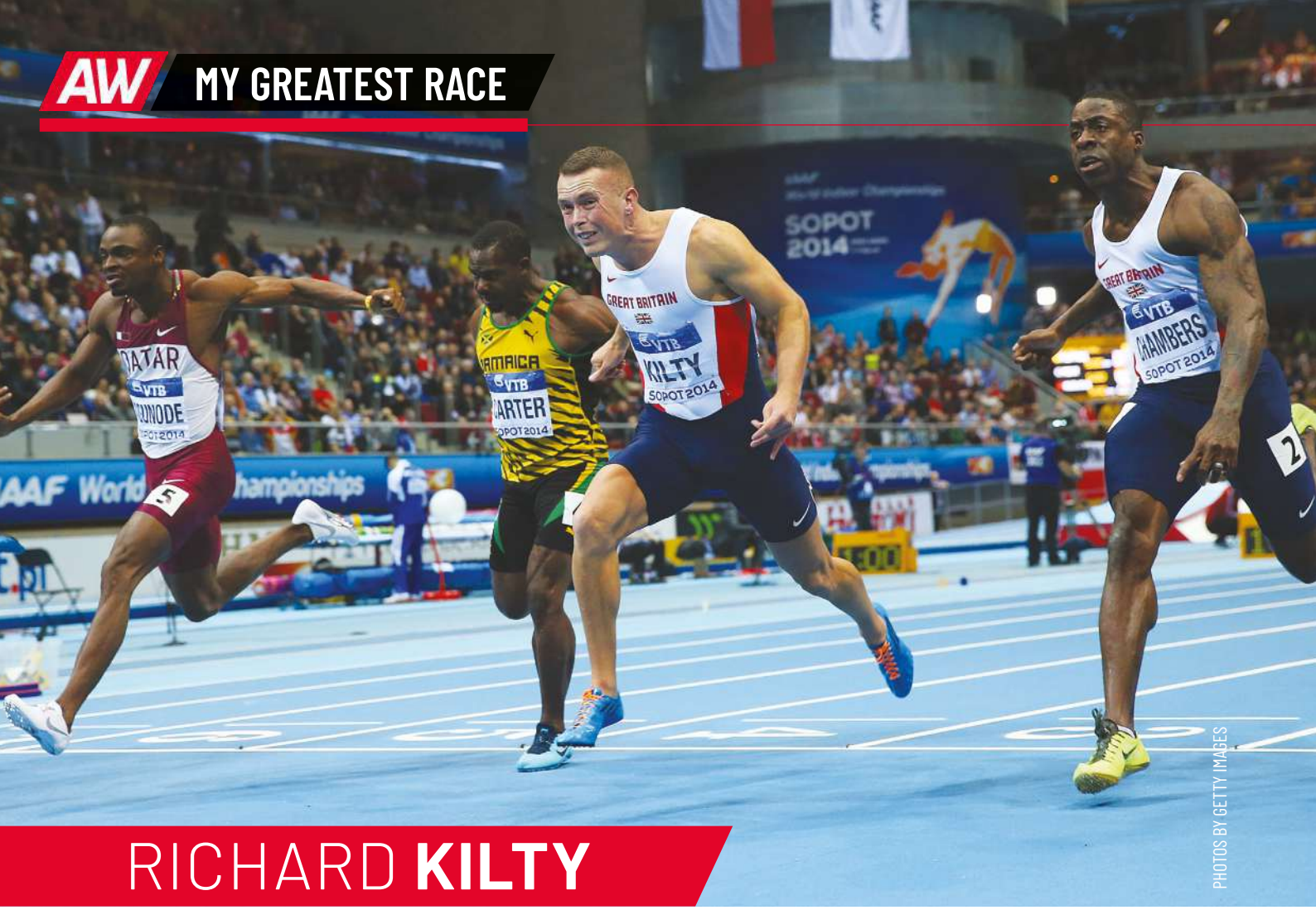
No fewer than 14 years after winning the under-20 title, Laura Muir returned to the Scottish National Cross Country Championships at Callander Park in Falkirk to win a brilliant senior women's race. The Olympic 1500m silver medallist took victory by 13 seconds after a battle with international hill runners Scout Adkin and Naomi Lang.

12:19:34

American Ashley Paulson broke the women's 100-mile world record on February 20 by running 12:19:34 at the Jackpot 100 Mile in Nevada. The event, held close to the Las Vegas strip, served as the USATF 100 Mile National Championships. Paulson beat the mark of 12:37:04, set by Ireland's Caitriona Jennings last year.

0

For the second year in a row, the infamous Barkley Marathons had no finishers. It is the 26th time in the gruelling event's 40-year history that the course in Frozen Head State Park, Tennessee has defeated all participants. Brutal conditions – including intense rain, cold and thick fog – caused all 40 starters to fail at completing all five, 20-mile-plus loops within the 60-hour time limit. AW



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

RICHARD **KILTY**

MY GREATEST RACE

World Indoor Championships, Sopot, March 8, 2014, men's 60m, gold, 6.49

The Teesside Tornado nearly quit the sport to join the Army after Olympic rejection in 2012 and was only added to the 2014 world indoor squad when trials winner James Dasaolu pulled out due to injury. However, he seized his opportunity in Poland

I had never run a full indoor season before 2014. I was more focused on the 200m. I felt like I was wrongly not selected for the London 2012 Olympics. I had the 200m standard but [selectors] Charles van Commenee and Tony Lester decided not to take me and just leave a spot open, which was bizarre at our home Games. Then, in 2013, I had the qualification standard, was ranked number one in the UK, and I finished second at the trials, but they still didn't select me for the 200m at the World Championships in Moscow.

In preparation for 2014, during that winter season I teamed up with long jumper Chris Tomlinson in Teesside and he said to me: "You should do a season at the 60m because, in your 100m races, you're flying." A few years before that, Linford Christie had also told me I could do well in the 60m but I just did the odd race here and there.

I had a great training camp in South Africa, and I was running really fast. Then my first race was a 6.68 and my second was 6.63. I was like: "Maybe I'll just forget this indoor season."

But then I went to the British Championships, ran 6.53 and eventually got selected for the World Indoor Championships. I still went in as a 66-1 underdog since I'd lost most of my

ABOVE: Richard Kilty crosses the line to become 60m world indoor champion in Sopot

IT WAS JUST PHENOMENAL – THE FEELING THAT I GOT FROM THE FACT THAT EVERYBODY HAD COUNTED ME OUT, THAT THE ODDS WERE COMPLETELY STACKED AGAINST ME

races that year. Dwain Chambers, who was the European record-holder, had beaten me a few times. Nesta Carter had beaten me. Kim Collins had beaten me.

Some of the greatest 60m runners of all time were in the field in Sopot. Su Bingtian, the fastest man ever to travel through 60m when he clocked 6.29 in the Olympics, Marvin Bracy, a world 100m silver medallist – it was an insane line-up.

But I was getting quicker with every race. I was finishing ridiculously strong between 30m and 60m and running people down. Carter beat me in the semi-final after I beat him in the heat but I knew I had more. What helped me massively was the biomechanist Paul Brice, who I think is the best in the world and one of the huge reasons behind the British relay success that we had from 2016.

I felt that, between 30m and 40m, I was getting stuck in my drive phase and not coming out of my transition quickly enough. He pulled out the numbers from the heats for zero to 30m and 30m to 60m. Between 30m and 60m was Richard Kilty: 2.62 seconds. Marvin Bracy: 2.65. Dwain Chambers: 2.65 ... and then everyone else. However, from zero to 30m Marvin was 3.87, Su 3.87, Dwain 3.8 but Richard Kilty 3.90.

He said: "Richard, if you get to 30m quicker, you're going to run away with it in the last 30m." It completely changed my perspective on what I was going to focus on in the race. Because of this amazing data, he told me and my coach: "If you could get out the blocks a little bit quicker, you're going to be world champion."

Some of the greatest starters of all time were in that race but, if I was with them at 30m, I was going to win. I remember just being so confident that I was going to deliver my fastest time ever. I'd run 6.52 in the semi, but I knew that I was capable of running under 6.50.

The gun went and, as soon as I put my first foot down, Nesta disappeared. He just didn't react. I was laser-focused driving to 30m. I could see Su's red vest to my left and Bracy's to the right, with Dwain's white vest directly to the left of me. As I got up into my running at about 40m, I just felt them slowly go behind.

As I leant towards the line, I dipped and looked towards my left and I knew I'd beaten Dwain and Su because I couldn't see them. When I hit the boards at the end, I looked up and I could see British flags waving everywhere. And the commentator in Poland was shouting, "Richard Kilty!"

I went to celebrate, and then I thought: "No, maybe someone dipped me to the right. Do I celebrate? Do I not?" Then it flashed up on the big screen: "Richard Kilty, world champion". Tina Turner's Simply The Best started booming out, and I dropped to my knees and closed my eyes. When I opened them, the cameras were around me. It's surreal how it all happened in less than six-and-a-half seconds.

There were so many times where I almost walked away from the sport. I nearly made a few decisions where my life would have gone sideways and then, when I won that, it was just phenomenal – the feeling that I got from the fact that everybody had counted me out, that the odds were completely stacked against me in every way possible. I was 66-1 and I haven't heard of anyone yet who won a lot of money on me that night. I felt like it was me against the world at that stage.

It was also a huge win for people who come from my type of background. I grew up on one of the roughest council estates in the north east of England. The majority of my family members had been in and out of jail. There wasn't really much success within touching distance to me, so I had to rely on my own character.

I was a street kid and athletics was my way out, the way of changing my life. I always knew that I had a talent. I always knew that I had a very tough, resilient character, and that night showcased it all. It's a night that I'll never, ever forget. AW

The Richard Kilty Athletics Academy runs the Sprint to Success programme with funding from Allwyn and UK Sport's ChangeMakers Fund

FACTFILE

Born: September 2, 1989

Events: 60m/100m/200m

PBs: 6.49/10.01/20.34

Honours

2024: Olympic Games 4x100m bronze

2019: World Championships 4x100m silver

2018: Commonwealth Games 4x100m gold

2017: European Indoor Championships 60m gold

2015: European Indoor Championships 60m gold



BELOW: Kilty with silver medallist Marvin Bracy and bronze medallist Femi Ogunode

RISK MANAGEMENT

The furore around Lindsey Vonn's decision to compete at the Winter Olympics is not only a reminder that danger is inherent in elite sport, but that there is a deep contradiction in the court of public opinion when it comes to how athletes are supposed to behave, writes **Verity Ockenden**

Recently, as I set out for a 90-minute progressive long run, I threw caution to the wind – quite literally. A seasoned local had warned me the evening before that I would be wiser to postpone the session. Torrential rain and high winds were forecast for the entirety of the day. It would be a hiding to nothing to attempt to run fast in such conditions.

I weighed his advice carefully as I laid out my kit before bed that night. I told myself I would make a sensible decision in the morning and set my alarm with a kind of conditional optimism: if the rain was biblical, I would roll over and reclaim the duvet before heading to the gym to train indoors instead. Of course, when the sun rose, although it wasn't at all obvious that it actually had, I was always going to lace up.

Within two minutes I was soaked to the skin. The rain wasn't falling so much as travelling horizontally, driven by gusts that seemed personally offended by my presence. My head was angled awkwardly downward for the entire 13 miles to keep my cap from taking flight. Passing motorists slowed incredulously and shouted: "It's raining, you know!" Others muttered darkly about "colpo d'aria" as they drove off.

Colpo d'aria is the Italian conviction that being "hit by cold air", particularly while sweating, will lead to a catalogue of ailments ranging from stiff necks to near-certain pneumonia. The small part of me that has culturally adapted to Italy, this place I now call home, had acknowledged this grave possibility by donning a turtle-neck to protect my apparently most vulnerable region. I politely declined two separate offers of a lift home from concerned strangers and told myself that Great Britain would never have won a single medal if we were a nation afraid of going out in the rain. By the final progression, shoes squelching like sponges, I couldn't entirely say whether the decision had been wise. Physiologically, perhaps the session was sub-optimal. Mentally, however, it felt like something far more valuable had been tested.

As I ticked off each sodden mile, my thoughts drifted to a much grander stage than the flooded back roads of northern Italy's Pianura Padana: the slopes of the Winter Olympics taking place not so very far away in Milano-Cortina and the scrutiny faced by American ski legend Lindsey Vonn. Her decision to compete despite serious injury had been voraciously



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

dissected by anybody and everybody over the past week. From official commentators and event journalists to instagram influencers and armchair experts, she was alternately diagnosed by some as reckless and delusional, and by others as heroically determined.

My long run, by comparison, was inconsequential. Any negative repercussions would be judged by perhaps six people at most – three of whom were complete strangers whose opinions I could theoretically discount. Yet as the rain lashed at my face, I felt the trickle-down effect of Lindsey's tabloid judgment arrive in a messy puddle of feelings at my feet. Why, even as a seasoned professional accustomed to filtering out such noise, did it still hit such a nerve to watch another athlete's choices be torn apart?

I'm conscious of my own hypocrisy here in adding to the melting pot by writing about it, but part of the answer, I suspect, lies in the peculiar contradiction at the heart of elite sport. The public appetite for athletic performance is insatiable. We celebrate those who push beyond perceived human limits, who race through pain barriers, who return from injury sooner than seems reasonable, who toe the line when logic says rest. We elevate them to hero status precisely because they defy normal parameters. Yet we also expect them to conform to conventional standards of prudence. We demand transcendence, but only within boundaries we ourselves deem acceptable. We want athletes to be extraordinary, but not inconveniently so, and definitely not uncomfortably so. Risk-taking is applauded only in retrospect, provided it culminates in a medal. If it ends in defeat, it is reframed as folly.

The very nature of professional sport requires us to inhabit a space that most people will never fully understand. We will always be a niche community of anomalous outliers. Of course there will be misunderstanding. Of course there will be judgement.

What I hope for – perhaps naively – is a deeper appreciation of the calculus behind our choices. When an athlete steps on to a start line injured, or heads out into a storm to complete a session, it is rarely done lightly. We are not thrill-seekers courting disaster for the drama of it. We are individuals who have already reconciled ourselves with the risk of failure and we understand all of the potential costs. But, for most of us, the greatest cost would be in failing to try.

As athletes, we also become adept at managing external narratives. We curate





> **ELITE SPORT IS OFTEN ROMANTICISED AS A PROCESSION OF PODIUMS AND PERSONAL BESTS. IN REALITY, IT IS A MOSAIC OF SMALL, SOMETIMES QUESTIONABLE, DECISIONS MADE IN SOLITUDE**

ABOVE: Lindsey Vonn received criticism for competing at the Winter Olympics with a serious injury

social media with caution; we develop polite, practised responses to probing questions; we learn to compartmentalise criticism. And yet, watching someone like Lindsey Vonn have her motives dissected so publicly still unsettles me. Perhaps because it reminds me that vulnerability is inherent in what we do.

When we compete – or even when we train – we are making a statement of intent. We are saying: "This matters enough to me to risk discomfort, embarrassment, even failure." That is an inherently vulnerable position. To strive publicly is to accept that the outcome will be judged publicly, too.

As my own miles accumulated that day and the wind changed its direction just as I did, thus depriving me of the tailwind I had been so looking forward to on my way home, I considered what success actually meant in such moments. Had I opted for the treadmill or taken the day off, I would have been warm, dry and arguably sensible. But I would also have known, quietly, that I had chosen comfort over commitment. The session might not have been textbook perfect, but it reaffirmed something essential: that resilience is not built in ideal conditions.

Elite sport is often romanticised as a procession of podiums and personal bests. In reality, it is a mosaic of small, sometimes questionable, decisions made in solitude. It is the alarm that goes off when the rain is hammering the windows. It is the choice to train when motivation flickers. It is the calculation – sometimes imperfect – about whether or not to step on to a start line.

Public discourse tends to flatten these complexities into binary verdicts: brave or foolish, tough or reckless, but inside the athlete's mind the terrain is far more nuanced. There is consultation with coaches and physios, a weighing of long-term goals against short-term gains, an honest interrogation of one's own motives. And yes, occasionally, behind it all is just the sheer stubbornness that some of us, for our sins, are born with.

By the time I reached home, I had had no grand epiphany. I had simply been reminded that our profession demands an unusual relationship with discomfort and risk. To outsiders, that can look irrational. To us, it is often the only way forward and we also know that one day, the next step forward is going to be the last.

The rain eventually stopped. My shoes dried out and the world moved on. But the question lingers, far beyond a single stormy long run: if we celebrate athletes for daring greatly, can we also allow them the dignity of making their own calculations about when and how to do so? Because in the heart of every competitor – whether on a snowy Olympic slope or a wind-swept agricultural plain – there is an understanding that cuts deeper than any public opinion. The greatest failure is rarely losing but in not making an attempt in the first place, and that intrinsic knowledge will also be far harder to live with than any external outcome. AW



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

SOLVING THE PUZZLE

After Femke Bol's debut over 800m, **Cathal Dennehy** analyses what that run could tell us about the Dutchwoman's potential – and what it's likely to take for her to become a contender at the top level in her new discipline

As Femke Bol floated across the line in Metz – her loping stride seemingly untroubled by the wicked acidosis of the 800m – commentator Tim Hutchings cast his judgement on one of the most fascinating pivots in the sport's history.

"This has been a wonderful debut," he said. "Job done. She will learn and she will build on that."

Only the harshest of critics could have been left unimpressed by Bol's first senior outing over 800m – winning in a Dutch indoor record of 1:59.07 – and Hutchings has been around the sport's top tier long enough not to be drawn into hyperbole. "She's in the pack now, and building," he added. "She will be a real threat."

How much of a threat? That should become clear in the summer.

While there was the usual mixed bag of reactions to her run, most observers were in the same category: We didn't see enough to predict that she will conquer the world over 800m. But we certainly saw enough to know it's possible.

The genesis of this move can be traced back to 2024. Exactly 18 months before Bol toed the line over 800m in Metz, she was third in the Olympic 400m hurdles final, her attempt to match Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone's scorching pace backfiring as she faded late in the race, clocking 52.15 – a result that left her smacking her head in frustration while trackside in the Stade de France.

Bol soon expressed to her long-time coach Laurent Meuwly that she wanted to switch to the 800m in 2025 but, as Meuwly explains elsewhere in this issue, he convinced her to give it one more year in the 400m hurdles. She duly went unbeaten in her specialist event in 2025, capped with her second world title in 51.54.

The 800m move was announced last October and the athletics world was quickly ablaze with speculation, with sceptics doubtful that

THE BREAKDOWN OF BOL'S 800M DEBUT

LAP 1	LAP 2	LAP 3	LAP 4
27.4 seconds	30.0 seconds	30.9 seconds	30.8 seconds

she'd ever win a global medal, while the true Bol-ievers predicted a world record down the line.

But the chasm she's crossing is a big one, the doubling in distance tipping the balance of performance demands towards the aerobic, with Bol still needing to maintain similar sprinting speed capability to enable efficient race pace.

Findings vary regarding the respective energy system contribution in the 400m and 800m, and that can be highly individual, though in this department the 400m hurdles is notably closer than the 400m to the 800m.

A 2010 study in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* found the aerobic contribution was 43 per cent in the 400m hurdles versus 37 per cent in the 400m, meaning Bol should find the transition easier than a true 400m specialist.

The 800m sits at a key inflection point on the athletics spectrum, with Bol essentially crossing the divide between sprinter and middle-distance runner – two worlds with very different coaching philosophies and skill sets. It may only be double the distance, but it's not like a 100m specialist switching their focus to the 200m or a half marathoner moving up to the marathon.

Bol has spent the past decade specialising in one-lap running and now, at 26, she's attempting to recalibrate her highly trained engine. Yet much of the foundational work is already done. For someone who's run under 51 for 400m hurdles and a world indoor 400m record of 49.17, her 200m PB of 22.64 is comparatively weak. But that suggests Bol had a far stronger aerobic capacity than most of her former rivals. Meuwly's group is also known to take a higher-volume approach to 400m training.

At the highest level, the 800m is a fiendishly tricky puzzle, one that typically requires significant trial and error before it's solved. Talk to world-class operators in this realm and it's clear that most have experimented with their training over the years, sprinkling varying amounts of specific work before figuring out what recipe worked best.

In addition to an adjusted blend of metabolic conditioning, Bol will need to develop the mechanical and neuromuscular proficiency that's specific to the 800m. With great variance between the profiles of 800m runners, there's a need for an individualised approach.

"400-800m transitions are governed by constraints created by an athlete's existing profile, not simply intent or preparation," says Performance Consultant Gareth Sandford, who works with a range of top-level coaches to develop support systems around 800m runners from speed to endurance and everything in between.

"The challenge is adapting to the event from the reality of the athlete's profile, not from models built around other runners," he adds. "At this level, athletes aren't building new engines. They're changing how the same engine is expressed. Two athletes can do similar work and arrive at very different outcomes because the event is asking different questions of their profile."

It's why there's such a wide spectrum – perhaps the widest of any event – in how world-class athletes train for it. Those with a speed profile might only log 40-60km a week, while those with an endurance profile might do 100-120km.

For Bol, the key will be to strengthen her weaknesses without weakening her strengths. Meuwly has suggested the bulk of her aerobic



ABOVE: Femke Bol makes her debut over 800m in Metz

> **AT THIS LEVEL, ATHLETES AREN'T BUILDING NEW ENGINES. THEY'RE CHANGING HOW THE SAME ENGINE IS EXPRESSED**





ABOVE: Eveline Saalberg has also transitioned from 400m to 800m

work will be done by cross training, with running kept for more specific sessions. He will undoubtedly have learned much from coaching Eveline Saalberg, a 50.95-second 400m runner who spent last year transitioning to 800m, clocking a best of 2:02.97.

In Metz, Bol coasted through the opening lap in 27.4 and the second in 30.0. The third lap was mistakenly listed as 32.2 on the race splits, but French stats guru PJ Vazel calculated that it was actually 30.9, with Bol closing in 30.8. Meuwly said the third lap being the slowest showed that she had "a little too much respect" for the 800m and, given how strongly she finished, it's likely she'll attack that section a lot more outdoors.

There's also the matter of mechanics. It's very early days in her transition, but in Metz Bol looked to be running much the same way as she did over 400m, with a low arm carriage, hands out from her body – similar to McLaughlin-Levrone. It's a notable difference to the likes of Keely Hodgkinson or Mary Moraa, who run with their arms tucked higher, their hands closer to the body. Getting Bol to move more like a middle-distance runner could also be a factor in this transition.

But how far can she go? It will be a shock if Bol challenges Hodgkinson this season but the goal, of course, is not to do that in 2026, but in 2028. The potential is clearly there. Bol is two seconds quicker than Hodgkinson over 400m but obviously has a huge river to cross to match the Briton and world champion Lilian Odira over 800m. Still, she has the raw materials to make it happen.

Late last year, she told European Athletics she "had a full year to really think about it" before making the switch and "mentally to say goodbye to my hurdles".

But is this really a final goodbye? It's too early to know where Bol's ceiling might be over 800m, but we'll know much more after the Europeans in August and especially after next year's World Championships in Beijing. If Bol can't win an 800m medal at the latter, we could see her drop back down in distance ahead of Los Angeles 2028.

After all, the 400m-400m hurdles double is not feasible in LA and it seems likely that McLaughlin-Levrone will opt for the flat race. If the US superstar is no longer competing in the 400m hurdles – an event which she has now essentially completed – the path could be clear for Bol to win the one thing missing in her stellar career: an individual Olympic gold.

That remains the overarching goal and, in another 18 months, could be realistic in either event. But, whatever way this goes, her journey will be fascinating to follow. AW

Coaching conversations with Laurent Meuwly – p86

Artist at work

Euan Crumley hears all about a new documentary and passion project that aims to showcase the ups and downs – as well as the skill – of being a race walker



"It didn't begin with a commissioning editor or a funding pitch," says Tom Ruddock. "It began with my dad. Len Ruddock – Ilford AC member, former training partner of European Games bronze medallist Roger Mills – has lived and breathed race walking for as long as I can remember."

The filmmaker is discussing his new project, The Art of Walking, a documentary that brings the triumphs, tribulations and toil of two-time Olympian Callum Wilkinson into sharp focus. It just recently premiered on Athletics Weekly's YouTube channel – a fitting collaboration for a few reasons.

"As a teenager, having a dad who race walked wasn't exactly a social asset," continues Ruddock. "But what stayed with me was the discipline. The quiet stubbornness. The kind of commitment only niche sports seem to demand.

"My dad has always been one of my biggest supporters and I'd long wanted to collaborate on something meaningful with him so when he launched his *YouTube* channel, *Race Walking Extra*, and mentioned he had a connection to Callum, it felt like an opportunity.

"Then he sent me an *AW* interview with Callum, in which he described race walking as an art form. He spoke candidly about the effort it took to reach Paris 2024. I watched the clip of him qualifying for the Olympics at the British Championships. The emotion. The relief. The years condensed into a single moment. I knew immediately: this was a film."

That national record-breaking performance from Manchester almost two summers ago features in the film, as does Wilkinson's release of pure emotion at the finish line that becomes all the more understandable the more you learn about the circumstances in which it was achieved.

That 10,000m race had been set up with the express purpose of giving the now 28-year-old what he needed to qualify for Paris. "It was the last day of the qualifying window, the last chance," says Wilkinson.

He seized it and his lengthy injury struggles, the surgeries, the monotonous hours of rehab exercises, became a thing of the past. Given the sport's ongoing battle to keep its place at the athletics table, it takes great character simply to be a racewalker but even more so to compete at the highest level.

"Once you qualify for the Olympics, and you can call yourself an Olympian, you have that





for life," says Wilkinson. "No-one can take that away from you. To do that a second time, when you could have left the sport or had it taken away from you – and you've managed to keep that childhood dream alive and be back in a place where you could really enjoy it – my journey to the [Paris] Olympics was a success before I even stepped on the start line. As much as I came 10th in Tokyo [in 2021] and 16th in Paris, it was almost certainly a better performance to get there and get back. It meant so much more to me than I ever thought was possible."

The emotional challenges of being a competitor, and the comeback story, were only part of what Ruddock wanted to capture with the film, however. He had other things in mind, too. Within minutes of first speaking with Wilkinson about the project, he says: "I felt the clarity, the resilience, the depth behind the performance."

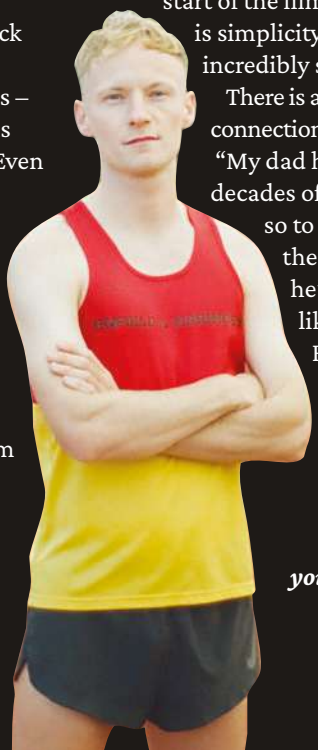
Soon he, producing partner Shelley Ruddock, cinematographer Yannick Hausler and Len Ruddock were on a plane to Wilkinson's training base in Cork for a 48-hour filming shoot.

"The aim was simple – treat race walking as art," says Tom. "Not just document it, frame it. Capture the rhythm of the hips, the precision of foot contact, the economy of movement. We shot sections on 16mm film to give the training sequences texture and grit.

"There's something about film grain that honours repetition and labour. It felt right for a discipline built on both. What we hadn't fully prepared for was the speed.

"I've filmed runners before – Yannick and I had just come off a television drama involving full chase sequences – but filming an Olympic race walker is different. The cadence is relentless. Even at 'steady pace', Callum was moving faster than expected and we were a four-person crew.

At one point, at the university track, we found a trolley and that led to me sprinting while pushing Yannick, camera in hand, trying to keep level with Callum's stride. Later, in a gym car park, we shot from the back of a rental car. Unorthodox solutions but necessary ones. If the audience feels the speed, we've done our job."



As a teenager, having a dad who race walked wasn't exactly a social asset. But what stayed with me was the discipline. The quiet stubbornness. The commitment

Wilkinson is hoping that that speed can carry him all the way to another Olympics, where he intends to be a medal contender. That goal has not been made any easier by the fact that he is no longer on World Class Programme funding.

"Race walkers train like marathoners, but without the same infrastructure or sponsorship security," says Ruddock. "Callum's story is one of persistence not just physically, but financially and emotionally. And it's ongoing.

"As he builds toward LA 2028, our hope is that this short documentary is just the beginning to a full-length feature film – that it helps raise support to follow the next chapter, and shines a light on a sport that thrives globally yet fights for visibility in the UK.

"Race walking is often misunderstood, but when you look closely – really look – there's beauty in the constraint. Precision in the rules. Art in the repetition. As Callum says at the start of the film: 'The greatest sophistication is simplicity and race walking is an incredibly simple thing'."

There is also that very personal connection for the man leading the project. "My dad has shelves lined with five decades of *Athletics Weekly* magazines, so to premiere this film here – in the pages and on the platform he's respected for so long – feels like a full circle moment," says Ruddock. "From Ilford AC to the Olympics. From father to son. That's where The Art of Walking truly began." AW

The Art of Walking by View 35 Films is out now. Watch it at youtube.com/@AthleticsWeekly1

ABOVE, LEFT: The film crew try their best to keep up with Callum Wilkinson

ABOVE (left to right): Len Ruddock, Callum Wilkinson, Tom Ruddock, Yannick Hausler and Shelley Ruddock



SALLY GUNNELL

As part of *AW's* exclusive Legends Series, **Tim Hutchings** speaks to the multiple gold medal-winning hurdler about her career and what gives her purpose now

AW's Legends Series shines the spotlight on some of the biggest stars ever to have competed on the track and in the field. The in-depth video interviews will educate and inspire you as each legend takes us through their personal journey in the sport.

Few have achieved more than Sally Gunnell, who enjoyed remarkable success in the 400m hurdles. Coached by the late Bruce Longden, the now 59-year-old is the only female British athlete to have won the Olympic, world, European and Commonwealth titles, securing them all between 1992 and 1994.

Her world title win in Stuttgart in 1993, where she memorably beat Sandra Farmer Patrick of the USA, was also achieved with a then world record of 52.74 that still stands as the British record.

How did it all start?

I loved all sports but gymnastics and athletics were my main two and I nearly went to the gymnastics club. I wouldn't be sitting here today if I had and it was only because a friend was going to Essex Ladies Athletics Club [that I went along]. And that was it.

Initially, you were looking at the heptathlon?

I actually started off as a long jumper, and then Bruce spotted me when I was 14 years old. He was coaching Daley Thompson at the time, so multi-events was his thing, and he asked me to come and join the group.

How quickly did you recognise that you wanted to focus on the hurdles?

I wasn't an outstanding junior. I remember not getting picked for the 1984 Olympics in LA in the heptathlon. I was third in the trials, but I didn't get the qualifying [standard]. But then I was also third in the 100m hurdles, and they didn't pick me because I was 18 years old. I think they didn't want to take a youngster. It made me realise that the 100m hurdles was my forte.





BRUCE REALLY MADE US THINK ABOUT WHAT WE WERE DOING OUT THERE, AND I LOVED IT

You were renowned for being very good technically. Were you naturally gifted in that way?
Learning seven different events from a very young age made me have to think quickly, adjust and take on board. Bruce was a really incredible coach in that he really engaged us in "what do you think? How can you improve?" and, right from day one, I remember him always saying that he wanted the feedback of what it felt like.

He really made us think about what we were doing out there. And I loved it. When I look back at my whole career, the bit I loved was just how good this body could get, and a lot of that came from the technical side of it. That's what really drove me.

In 1986 you became Commonwealth 100m hurdles champion at the age of 21.
I had a real progression to be able to do that. We also had a European Championships, which I didn't do particularly well in. I was good but, even though I was breaking British records and I was the best in the Commonwealth, I was way back in [terms of] the rest of the world. Getting to that first hurdle, I was nowhere near those girls.

Bruce threw out: "What about the 400m hurdles?". It hadn't even entered my head, because it just looked horrible.

By the next summer, you were fifth at the 1988 Olympics.
I trained hard and it was a bit of a gamble. In my first race, I think I either broke the British record or I wasn't far off, so we knew it wasn't a million miles away. Getting fifth [in the 400m hurdles] in that Games was probably the first time where I had a little bit of confidence and a little bit of belief. That was the first time that I started to think about Olympic golds, standing on rostrums, and where this could actually take me.

You had incredible success and incredible races in 1992, 1993 and 1994. Which one stands out for you?
It has to be Stuttgart, coming back as an Olympic champion with the pressure and the expectation. [At the 1992 Olympics] In Barcelona, I was a bit of an underdog and you feel like you're doing it for yourself, your family, your coach and your team. But, for the worlds, I felt like I was doing it for everybody else and that's tough.

That year after the Olympics I was scared of failure, so I trained really hard. I was so scared of not being that athlete I was the year before, but then I got ill just before the championships so there were lots of doubts.

To win it and break a world record... I wasn't planning on that world record. It's just what Sandra pushed me to.

Is there anything you would change about your career? And do you think you'd be competitive in the 400m hurdles now?
I would like to think so. I think the spikes would have made a big difference. I think sports science would have made a big difference and I would have liked to have experimented with altitude training more for my event.

I also think the whole area around preventing injuries [is different now]. When I got injured in 1995, it took nearly six months to find out what was wrong and that wouldn't happen now.

What are you up to now?
I've got to the point in my life that I only want to do things that I enjoy, that still give me meaning and purpose. I enjoy being a keynote speaker and I've set up a business with my middle son, called *Life's Hurdles*. We work with women of 45 plus that lack confidence, have never done exercise before, want to get fitter, healthier, lose weight, are going through the menopause. Yes, maybe the exercise side of things comes easier for me, but I'm still going through the lack of confidence that can come with changing hormones, having elderly parents that you're still trying to support, as well as kids.

I often draw on what I would have done as an athlete and being active and looking after yourself can make such a big difference to confidence. That's where I want to support as many women as I can. AW

CAREER MEDAL RECORD

Olympic Games
1 0 1

World Championships
1 1 1

IAAF World Cup
2 0 1

European Championships
1 0 1

European Indoor Championships
1 0 0

Commonwealth Games
5 1 0

SEE THE FULL INTERVIEW ONLINE

To view the full video interview with Sally Gunnell, 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?

RISING STAR

TITO ODUNAIKE

FACTFILE

Age: 16

Club: Milton Keynes

Coach: Dave Johnson

Events: Triple Jump/60m

PBs: 16.01m/7.03

Jasmine Collett speaks to the triple jumper who made history by leaping to gold at the British Indoor Championships

At one point in the men's triple jump at the British Indoor Athletics Championships, the podium had a combined age of just 50.

The 16-year-old Tito Odunaike stood alongside 17-year-olds Harley Henry and Sean-Connor Atafo – a striking snapshot of the new generation coming through.

By the end of the competition, it was Odunaike who had made history after claiming gold with a best of 15.75m in the final round and replacing the 1979 200m winner Phil Brown as the youngest male ever to win a senior national title.

The Milton Keynes jumper has risen through the ranks consistently, having already impressed at English Schools and age-group level, including a breakthrough 16.01m performance at the England U20 indoor championships, which set a British under-18 best.

A pupil at Harrow School, Odunaike's rapid development in this technical event marks him out as one of Britain's most exciting young talents. With European Under-18 and World Under-20 championships on the calendar, his 2026 season promises to be one to watch.

> **AT THE EUROPEAN UNDER-18S, I WANT TO WIN. I BELIEVE I HAVE A STRONG CHANCE OF DOING VERY WELL THERE**

How did you first get into athletics?

I played a lot of football when I was younger, but I was always naturally quite fast. At school sports days and in PE there was a lot of running and I enjoyed that. Around Year Seven, my dad signed me up for an athletics club in Milton Keynes, and that's when things became more serious. At first, I actually focused on distance events. I competed in cross country, 800m and 1500m races, and did some sprinting on the side.

How did triple jump enter the picture?

In Year Seven, I picked up long jump after trying it at school sports days. In my first proper athletics season, I did surprisingly well. I finished joint sixth in the country at under-13 level.

Soon after that, I developed Osgood-Schlatter disease in both knees, particularly my left, which was my take-off leg for long jump. That injury meant I couldn't continue with the event. The following season, I started exploring other options.

I didn't try triple jump until Year Nine. I first competed in it at a school competition, did reasonably well and decided to stick with it for the rest of the season. That year I reached the English Schools Championships and finished seventh.

What was your overall experience at the British Indoor Championships like?

As a young athlete, I haven't competed at major European events or competitions like the Loughborough International, so I'm not used to large stadium crowds. Seeing a proper stadium atmosphere was special. I also saw some huge names in athletics – Keely [Hodgkinson] running the 800m, Dina [Asher-Smith] warming up – and that was inspiring. The runway itself felt amazing. It was more responsive than what I'm used to, and the track felt great underfoot.

The crowd getting involved and clapping added to the whole experience. Normally I wait until the fourth round to clap but, with that

crowd, I brought it forward to the second.

Were you surprised by the result, or did you believe it was possible?
I knew I had a strong chance going in because I had the leading mark in the field for that season. But I was also aware that some of the other athletes had jumped much further in previous years. I knew they had the potential to produce something big. I felt confident, but I also knew I needed to be at my best.

What does a typical week of training look like?
I'm at boarding school at Harrow. When I'm there, I train about 20 minutes away with coach Dave Johnson. There are several talented jumpers in the group, which creates a strong training environment.

I train with the group once or twice a week and for the rest of the week I follow a programme Dave writes for me. My school has its own track and gym, which makes everything convenient. I usually train four to five times a week, combining technical sessions, track work and strength training.

How do you find balancing athletics with boarding school life?
I actually find it easier than when I'm at home. At school, everything is within a five-minute walk – the track, the gym, even physio if I need it. That convenience makes a big difference. At home, I'd have to drive to the gym or track, which adds time and effort. Being surrounded by the facilities I need really helps me stay consistent.

What are your big goals for this year?
The two main competitions are the European Under-18 Championships in July and the World Under-20 Championships in Oregon, in August. At the European Under-18s, I want to win. I believe I have a strong chance of doing very well there. If I qualify for the World Under-20 Championships, I'd love to come away with a medal. AW



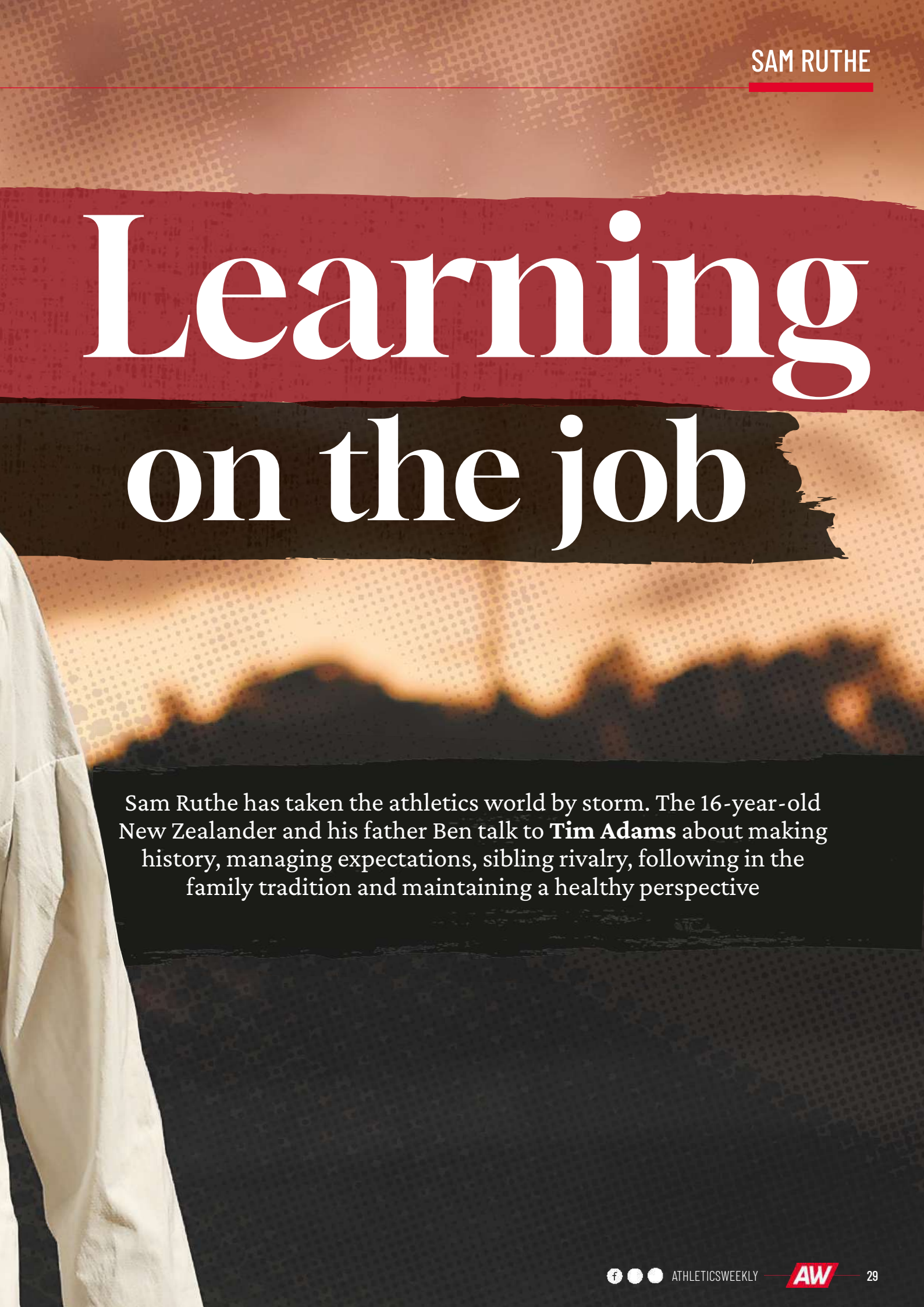
PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

Learning on the job

Sam Ruthe has taken the athletics world by storm. The 16-year-old New Zealander and his father Ben talk to **Tim Adams** about making history, managing expectations, sibling rivalry, following in the family tradition and maintaining a healthy perspective



He might only be 16 years old, but Sam Ruthe certainly isn't ignorant to one of the great truths of elite athletics – especially when a young talent is concerned. "With running fast definitely comes more pressure," admits the New Zealander. There is plenty of that, and no little attention, surrounding this young man whenever he runs – and with good reason. His performances are making the sport sit up and take notice.

Breaking records is becoming second nature – and an extremely regular occurrence.

Almost a year has passed since he became the youngest person in history to run a sub-four-minute mile, clocking 3:58.33 in wet conditions at Auckland's Mount Smart Stadium. By that point he had already broken a number of records and become New Zealand's youngest senior national champion – he won the 3000m in an age-group world record of 7:56.18 – but this was different.

Not only did he clear that fabled four-minute barrier aged just 15 years and 341 days but the person he took the record from, at 16 and 350 days, was a certain Jakob Ingebrigtsen.

There is a danger that such a breakthrough could be overwhelming for such a young athlete and, with the media attention that comes with it, even a prodigiously talented one could be unnerved by the increasing intensity of the spotlight. However, with the support of an understanding, knowledgeable and tight-knit network, Ruthe has used that performance as a launchpad.

Fast forward to this winter and over the past few months he has continued to remove chunks from age-group records. In December he set an Oceania under-18 5000m mark of 13:40.48, before becoming the fastest 16-year-old over 1000m with 2:17.82 on January 3.

An Oceania under-18 800m mark of 1:45.86 followed on January 17 and, one week later, he ran a 3:53.83 mile in Whanganui, breaking Cameron Myers' age-16 world record of 3:55.84.

It was then that he, his father Ben and training partner Sam Tanner headed for the East Coast of America and what has proved to be an eventful and educational trip, beginning with a first taste of a US indoor meeting at Boston University on January 31.

On the fast track, Ruthe decimated his personal best in the mile and won the race in 3:48.88, lowering his age-group world record and breaking John Walker's national senior mark of 3:49.08 – set outdoors – from 1982 into the bargain.

More was to come on February 22 at the same venue, with the final race of the "American tour" producing a run over 3000m of 7:43.16 that represented the missing piece of a record-breaking jigsaw and means Ruthe now holds every New Zealand mark from 800m to 5000m across the under-17 to under-20 age groups.

With a professional contract with Nike signed last year and a growing Instagram following, his wider profile is only going in one direction. Yet, having achieved times that most senior athletes would dream of, the person in the middle of it all seems to be taking everything in his stride so far.

"I enjoy running for what it is, so the pressure doesn't really bother me," he says. "Winning a mile in 3:48 does put a lot more pressure on me but my mindset is that, whenever I'm in a field, I need to be ready to race and perform to the best of my ability."

Sam and Ben are talking to *AW* from the US as they continue to navigate their way through uncharted waters. Throughout the conversation, the importance of fun, enjoyment and simplicity is a recurring theme, as is a desire to walk towards challenges rather than shy away from them. Part of the reason for Sam spending time in America was to experience top level athletics outside of New Zealand and to learn – a task that he has fully embraced.

"I mean, it's a different experience than anything you'll find back at home," he explains. "In New Zealand, I'd go into a race and there wouldn't really be anyone around like me. You'd never be in a position where



"Winning a mile in 3:48 does put a lot more pressure on me but my mindset is that, whenever I'm in a field, I need to be ready to race and perform to the best of my ability"



PHOTO BY CHRIS NICKINSON

you're struggling to find your spot around the track. I'd be like, 'I want to be behind Tanner [the double Olympian who has raced Ruthe domestically] or something like that'. It's different to being in an elite field here, though."

Ben has watched closely from the sidelines. A national 1500m and 5000m champion himself, he understands the demands of elite athletics and realises how difficult it is to continue to break barriers in the sport. So when the pair chatted through Sam's race tactics before the John Thomas Terrier Classic in Boston in January, his father was taken aback by his son's confidence.

"We were discussing a best case scenario for the mile and Sam said '3:48'," says Ben. "I replied: 'I don't think you're being respectful enough of a sub-3:50 mile'. I honestly didn't think he was going to be able to do it and he proved me wrong. That was a lesson for me!

"There are enough people in the world that say those sorts of things, so I just need to help him achieve what he wants to achieve and not put limits on him. It was definitely mind-blowing from my perspective."

Ruthe beat the likes of Pieter Sisek, Luke Houser and Adam Fogg in that mile race but his level of competition stepped up another gear two weeks later when he toed the line with Olympic 1500m and world 5000m champion Cole Hocker at the ASICS Sound Invite in North Carolina.

With the steepness of the learning curve increasing by the week, Ruthe placed seventh in 3:52.46, fading from fourth place at 800m. Hocker won the race in a US indoor mile record of 3:45.93, moving to second on the all-time rankings. The fact that Ruthe was not only disappointed with the result but reflects on it with such honesty, speaks volumes.

"I wanted an exceptional race and I wanted to find that sweet spot behind Hocker," he says. "As I was forced to run around the outside a lot in the first half, that place wasn't really up for grabs, so I just kind of panicked and didn't really know what to do. In New Zealand I always expect to find that racing line. So there's always opportunities to learn from experiences like in North Carolina, because now I know that I've got to actually fight for my position in the future."

You don't have to go far to find the post-race analysis. Ben posts cutdowns of the action on

Instagram after Sam competes, with the latest mile race footage including a Q&A with Sam's long-time coach Craig Kirwkood.

It is all part of a carefully thought through approach designed to alleviate some of that aforementioned pressure, with the online content helping to feed the growing media appetite for his son's attention.

"I've had to have a crash course in social media," admits Ben. "The demand for media, especially after his 3:48, went through the roof and so, to some degree, me putting those things on my social media kind of satiates the need for additional media time and requests for Sam. In some ways, it reduces the amount of volume and pressure on him on that front. Part of my job is to try and just make sure that he's got a well balanced life, which includes plenty of rest and recovery time."

That doesn't mean he won't deliberately make life difficult for his son from time to time and there is no better example of this than the race which propelled Sam into the global spotlight.

"When he first ran a sub-four-minute mile, I publicised that he was trying to break it," Ben says. "I organised the meet, the cameras and the pacemakers. Now that generates quite a bit of media. I didn't do it because I wanted him to get a lot of media attention and fame from it. I wanted to do it because it was a rare opportunity for him to face pressure, but be surrounded by people that really care for him and look after him.

"I'd rather him face that sort of pressure when he's got all of the support in the world around him. He's got a great group of mates that take the mick out of him, which is great for the soul, and they were there that night. When you're surrounded by people who care, you can learn to deal with pressure much more easily."

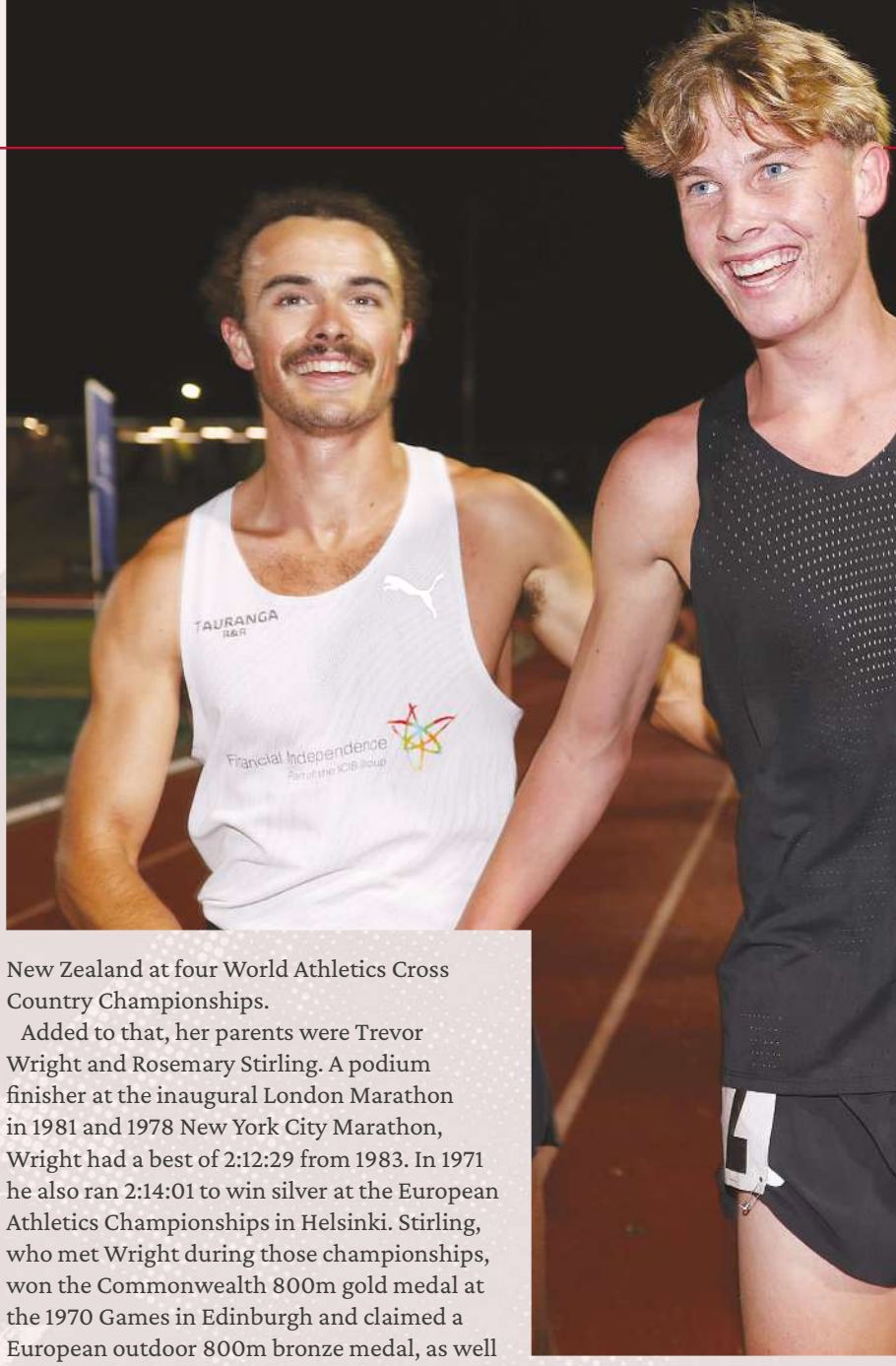
Not only is Sam surrounded by people who care, he is also surrounded by people who have faced the demands of competing at the top level. There is a rich running pedigree in his family that crosses more than one generation.

Sam's mother Jessica was a five-time national champion on the track, as well as representing New Zealand at four World Athletics Cross Country Championships.

Added to that, her parents were Trevor Wright and Rosemary Stirling. A podium finisher at the inaugural London Marathon in 1981 and 1978 New York City Marathon, Wright had a best of 2:12:29 from 1983. In 1971 he also ran 2:14:01 to win silver at the European Athletics Championships in Helsinki. Stirling, who met Wright during those championships, won the Commonwealth 800m gold medal at the 1970 Games in Edinburgh and claimed a European outdoor 800m bronze medal, as well as 400m and 800m bronze indoors.

Sam's younger sister Daisy also runs and, aged 14, recently won the 3000m at the New Zealand under-20 Championships, going one better than her brother's first attempt. "She's always having cracks at me, saying 'oh, did you win?' and 'I won this race when you came second'," Sam says. "She'd do anything she could just to be a little bit better than me and to make me know that!"

That healthy sibling rivalry aside, Ruthe didn't actually realise the extent of his family's pedigree in the sport until he was 11, but he



ABOVE: Sam celebrates breaking the four-minute mile with Sam Tanner

> **I did feel like I was quite gifted at running and I'd like to say that it's mostly down to just the genetics from such a long stream of runners in the family**





LEFT: Sam with his grandparents Trevor Wright and Rosemary Stirling, and younger sister Daisy

believes that genetics have been a factor in his success.

"I feel like that has definitely played a big role in how good I am as a runner," he says. "Going through primary school and intermediate athletics, when I was doing no training, I did feel like I was quite gifted at running and I'd like to say that it's mostly down to just the genetics from such a long stream of runners coming down through the family."

However, Ben feels it is only one ingredient to a much larger recipe.

"Clearly, he's genetically had an advantage," he says. "Sam was just amazing to watch at school. He ran in a way that other kids just didn't run. But I think there are so many ingredients that get overlooked. Jess is incredible at providing great, fantastic, healthy meals. The kids have always really been good at going to sleep. We didn't let them train at all until they were 13.

"Then you get a coach that really understands how to nurture and develop young athletes, not training them like adults. They're doing core and strength work, but not lifting any weights at all. So there's just so many factors that just add up to being able to capitalise on talent. You have to start with focus and effort and then go from there. There are a lot of pieces to the puzzle."

Growing up in Tauranga, located in the Bay of Plenty Region on New Zealand's North Island, Ruthe was accustomed to the outdoors. He played rugby for six years – Ben jokes he was "atrocious" at it – and had swimming lessons until he was 14.

"Sam was actually quite little when he was swimming," Ben says. "Some of those 12-year-olds are six foot and he was not. There were times where he'd get absolutely smashed at swimming, but he loved it and it taught him to be really coachable and follow advice. It was also low impact. You can do a lot of it without stress in the body, so it became an easier transition to running, which he also loved."

Under the guidance of Kirkwood, who has coached Hayden Wilde to an Olympic individual triathlon silver and bronze medal, Ruthe has flourished. His weekly mileage is currently limited to 90km and he does three sessions a week, two on the track and one on the road.

"It's all pretty light on my body, to be honest," says Sam, who points out that he uploads every one of his training runs on *Strava*. "If I didn't have Craig as a coach, I'd be absolutely useless. If I was in charge of my own running, I'd be burnt out by now and I'd have no speed in the legs. Craig's a great guy, he's had so many athletes on his roster and he's been doing it for a long time. I wouldn't be here without him."

"I think people will be a bit shocked at how little [Sam] trains," adds Ben. "At the same age, Jakob was famously doing 140km a week or something and he'd been training in large



PHOTO BY DANIEL BARBACK

ABOVE: Sam's family are encouraging their son to enjoy his sport as much as he can as he continues to progress on the track

Sam Ruthe's PBs

800m 1:45.86
1000m 2:17.82
1500m 3:33.25
Mile 3:48.88 (NZ Mile Record)
3000m 7:43.16
5000m 13:40.48

kilometres from the age of 11 or 12, whereas Sam did no training until he was almost 14. At the moment, Daisy is doing 30km a week as an example and that's what Sam started off on."

Upon his return to New Zealand, Ruthe will start his next academic year. With two years left at school – he is currently studying physics, calculus, geography, economics, English and biology – the academic side of life will soon take over quickly. Sport won't be too far away, though. Towards the end of this month, he will compete at New Zealand's Secondary School Triathlon Championships, off the back of no swimming training in the last two years.

"It's basically a bit of fun and a challenge," he says. "When I was swimming growing up I was doing it 12 times a week and, you know, the results just weren't paying off. That's when I made the switch to running. So I'll be swimming 750m in Mount Maunganui, which is where I'm from. There'll be waves. I might end up drowning, but I'll be having fun!"

And it's that sentiment that represents Ben and Jessica's key message to their children – to enjoy their sport. There are no photos of running in the house, no medals on display and no indication of the generational success in the family.

"Jess doesn't like us talking about athletics at the dinner table," Ben says. "I think that kids learn more from seeing what their parents do rather than their parents telling them what they should do. Sam's just a 16-year-old kid, right? He's still finding his feet and eventually, as he has done with running, he'll find a few favoured distances in athletics as well. He's never gone to altitude – and my wife was a really strong responder to altitude training – and he hasn't lifted weights yet."

He adds: "He's running with the handbrake on, because he's competing in the wrong season, basically. For each northern hemisphere summer, he's obviously in the southern hemisphere winter, and he's in the middle of the school year, so to minimise the amount of time away from school, he's got a really small build-up for the track season. [That means he's] racing seasoned pros who have had a full build-up.

"So he does really well handling that and, even just being at school, he's got to train early in the mornings or late in the afternoons in the middle of winter. It's black, it's dark, it's cold and nobody else in New Zealand is doing that work. There's just a lot of those untapped areas for future gains, which is important."

All of that does beg the question about how far Sam can go and the summer will see him stepping up another level again. Having signed up for this year's Bowerman Mile at the Prefontaine Classic in July, the summer plotting has already begun.

Another Diamond League appearance is likely and there is also a possibility that he could compete for New Zealand in the mile – an event returning to the Commonwealth

> "I think that kids learn more from seeing what their parents do rather than their parents telling them what they should do

Games for the first time since 1966 – in Glasgow. It could be the start of many major championships for the teenager.

Nothing will be rushed, though, and this American trip has been invaluable to Sam's development, both in terms of life skills but also as a reference to where he stands in the grand sporting scheme of things.

"I've been asked a few times around pressure and travelling internationally when he's only 16, and he's being put in these big races and all that sort of thing," says Ben. "But I think any athlete on the planet either wants to run faster times or they want to race better people and try and win those races and it's just unfortunate for Sam that he can't do those two things in New Zealand.

"For his 3:48 mile, nobody has run within two seconds of that time in New Zealand in history. As a parent, my choices are, do I keep him in New Zealand running on his own, which I think would make him burn out, because what excitement is there in that? Or do I give him the opportunity to try and run faster against people that are a little bit better than him?

"I think that's the thing he loves – just giving him the opportunity. And taking away the pressure. It's not a case of: 'You need to have the race of your life' [it's rather] 'You're going to learn a ton from this race. The point of this is for you to learn'.

"Cole Hocker ran away and won by five seconds, which is unbelievable. But how good that he gets to get well beaten, and can look ahead and go: 'Man, I've got some work to do'. He just wants to find those people that challenge him.

He adds: "The process is the enjoyable bit. I've had good chats with Daisy as well about: 'There are going to be hard times. You're going to have bad years. You're probably going to plateau for two years at some point, like pretty much all athletes do'.

"I've also talked to Sam around if he gets injured, then he's going to be the best injured person he can be. He's going to excel at being injured."

All of it will be done, though, from a healthy overarching philosophy.

"It's the enjoyment of the challenge," says Ben. "And I think if the enjoyment is in the challenge, then it's a lot easier to go far, whereas if the enjoyment is in the winning, then it's easy to be disheartened. Sam's handled everything so well so far and I'm proud of him. I'm just looking forward to a couple of years when he can take the handbrake off." AW

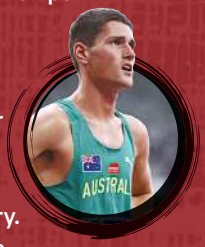
YOUTH CLUB

Six other emerging talents to watch this year



GOUT GOUT AUS

The 18-year-old sprinter began 2026 with a bang with his first race of the year in Brisbane, running the equal-fastest legal 100m run by an Australian on home soil by notching 10.00 (+0.9). His time matched that of Lachlan Kennedy, who achieved the feat in Perth in April 2025. Gout also set an Australian under-20 record, eclipsing the 10.15 set by Jake Doran in 2018. The national 200m record-holder is due to focus on the longer event at the World U20 Championships this summer.



CAMERON MYERS AUS

Another young Australian to begin the year strongly, the 19-year-old clocked 3:49.81 in Seattle in January to record the fastest indoor mile ever run in the month of January. He also won the 3000m at the New Balance Indoor Grand Prix and the Wannamaker Mile at the Millrose Games.



KELLY DOUALLA ITA

At the age of 15, the Italian flew to the European U20 100m title last year. Now 16, the European U18 record-holder will look to test herself on the global stage in the coming year and has already picked up the Italian U18 60m title.



COOPER LUTKENHAUS USA

At 16, he became the youngest American ever to compete at the World Championships last summer, having finished second at the US Trials in an U18 800m world best of 1:42.27. He set an indoor U20 world record of 1:44.03 last month.



MARTA ALEMAYO ETH

The 17-year-old won her second under-20 women's title at the World Cross Country Championships in January. On the track, last year she set world U18 bests over 3000m, 5000m and 3000m indoors.



INNES FITZGERALD GBR

The 19-year-old European U20 3000m and 5000m champion also holds the continental records for those distances and won her third consecutive U20 title at December's European Cross Country Championships.

“I feel like a new athlete”

Phoebe Gill talks to **Katy Barden** about big life changes, injury recovery and finally being able to process being thrust into the Olympic spotlight at such a young age



At 5ft 10in, Phoebe Gill cuts a striking figure as she enters the small Edinburgh café. The 18-year-old Olympic semi-finalist orders a coffee, the woman behind the counter oblivious to the accolades that have at times weighed heavy on this teenager’s shoulders.

Taking a seat, Gill momentarily blends into her university surroundings, but she is no average student. As the 2026 outdoor season approaches, this young athlete – a national age-group record-holder who has already gained a lifetime of experiences – will once again negotiate the world of track and field and the contrasting emotions of nervousness and excitement that come with it.

“My main fear right now is of the unknown and where I'm at fitness level-wise,” she says. “I just want to get one race under my belt to show where I’m at and what we have to do.”

Gill’s already eventful career to date has been well documented. In 2022 she won the English Schools 800m title and backed that up with victory and a then personal best of 2:03.34 at the SIAB Schools International. The 2023 English Schools 800m title followed and, later that summer, gold at the Commonwealth Youth Games in Trinidad and Tobago. She ended her season by lowering that personal best to 2:01.50 at the British Milers Club meeting in Watford. In 2024, her profile grew exponentially when she ran a European U18 record of 1:57.86 to win the early season Belfast Irish Milers Meet, backed that up with victory in the UK Championships (1:58.66) and was deservedly selected to represent Team GB at the Olympic Games in Paris – Britain’s youngest track and field Olympian for more than 40 years – where she reached the semi-finals.

The St Albans athlete has raced only once since then – a 53.65 400m at the London Indoor Games at Lee Valley in January of last year. She has also endured two back-to-back stress fractures, sat her A-level exams and, in September 2025, relocated to the Scottish capital as the first major signing for the University of Edinburgh’s ambitious Global Endurance Project led by 1988 Olympic 3000m steeplechase bronze medallist Mark Rowland, a renowned coach who previously headed up Nike’s Oregon Track Club Elite.

After such a lengthy period on the sidelines – albeit one that has run in parallel with a positive move north of the border – Gill now has a solid winter of training behind her. Having made a conscious decision to miss the indoor season, she is looking ahead to the summer with a fresh perspective.



PHOTO BY PUMA RUNNING



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

It was quite a lot for a 17-year-old to go through at the time. I think I'm only just starting to realise that now

"I definitely feel like a new athlete," she says. "I think that being injured teaches you a lot about your body and how you can respond to challenges. It's really motivated me to engage with psychology and talk to people about how I'm feeling, because I'd never really had an injury before.

"Unless you're an athlete, I don't think you really understand how damaging it is to go through an injury and to have something that you love so much be taken away. It just completely disrupts how you live your life. I'm in this for the long game so the likelihood is I will get injured again; I just want to try and prevent that from happening this year."

The university set-up has benefited Gill beyond the coaching expertise of Rowland and the support of her training group. Being catapulted on to the Olympic stage at the age of 17 and the trauma of a subsequent stress fracture ("It was a lot to deal with," she says of the injury) have left their mark, but working with a sports psychologist has helped her process those extreme experiences and prepare her mentally for a return to racing.

"It's funny, because I was actually speaking to my sports psychologist about this the other day, about how I don't really feel like I've properly decompressed after the whole Paris journey," she says. "I went from such an extreme high in the sport to a couple of months later not running at all, and that shift in my life balance was such a weird change and something I'd never really experienced before,.

"It also came in the same year as I had my A-levels, so I never really processed that properly. It's only now that I've come to uni and I've finally settled that I think everything is actually starting to hit me. I've been able to speak to the sports psychologist here and just go through the journey and the emotions and take myself back to that place and try to actually process everything that happened, because it was quite a lot for a 17-year-old to go through at the time. I think I'm only just starting to realise that now."

Gill's return to physical fitness has brought its own challenges. There is an urge to play it safe, the complete antithesis to the internal voice that had urged her to train more and harder as she built towards Paris and then onwards to the indoor season. "I probably trained a bit too hard... I used to hammer every session," she admits.

Naturally, she's scared of that happening again. "Right now I just want to protect myself and be ready for the summer season. I just want to get back racing, but I want to do it right and not risk anything in the process."

She has learned so much and continues to do so. On the track and in the gym - together with Rowland who is also working closely with her physiotherapist and the strength and conditioning team – she has committed to making herself biomechanically robust to ensure longevity in the sport rather than for short-term gain. There are more drills sessions, a greater focus on mileage and threshold runs (heart rate zones and rate of perceived exertion over eyeballs out), and two weights

ABOVE: Phoebe Gill became Great Britain's youngest Olympic track and field athlete in 40 years in Paris

sessions per week. A former swimmer, Gill is also incorporating sessions in the pool into her double-threshold days while her mileage continues to build gradually. The next step is speedwork. “I can't wait,” she laughs. “I’m really eager to get going because I haven't done speed in so long.”

Off the track she’s in the process of switching her degree from sport science to biomedical sciences, a smart decision driven by her need to separate sport from academics. As summer beckons, competition plans are beginning to form. The Commonwealth Games at the end of July was initially a target and she’s talked at length with Rowland and club coach Deborah Steer about whether or not it should remain a focus alongside the World Under-20 Championships at the beginning of August.

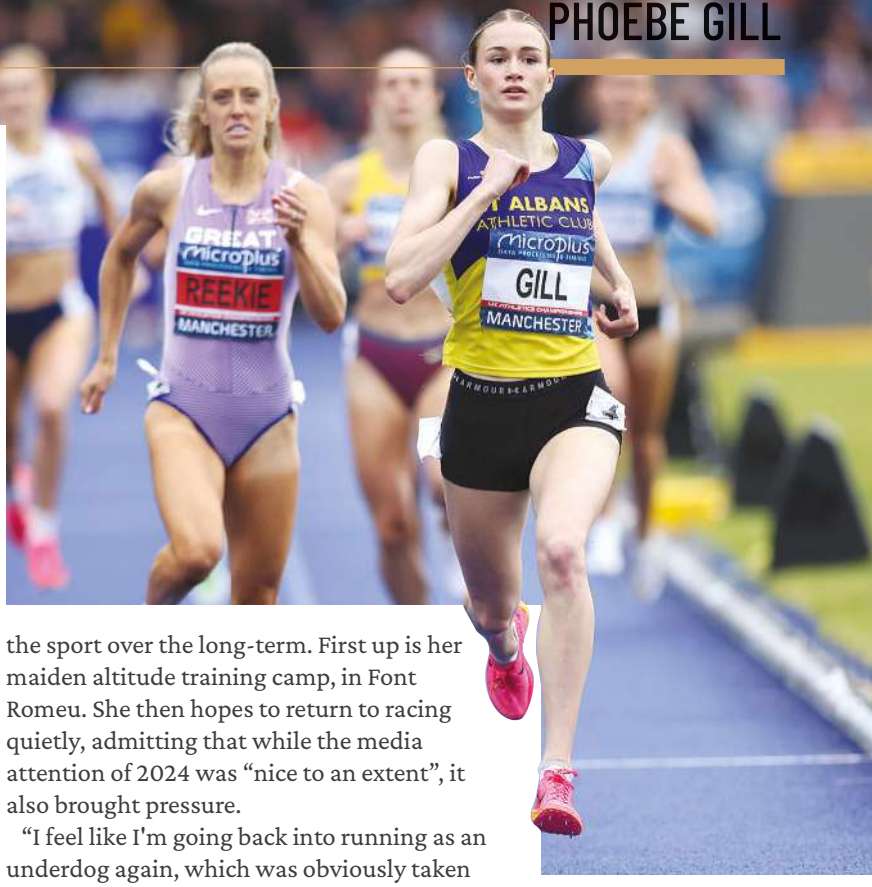
Steer knows her better than anyone; she began coaching Gill when she was 10 years old, they went through the Olympic journey together, and she is, says the athlete: “The reason I love this sport”. Coupled with Rowland’s ambition, the coaching duo have developed a positive working relationship with communication dedicated to managing Gill’s talent and maximising her potential.

Regardless, the reality is that in a summer during which the Commonwealth Games (Glasgow), World Under-20 Championships (Oregon) and European Championships (Birmingham) take place within a month, she can’t do everything.

“Obviously it would be amazing to do the Commonwealth Games, especially in Glasgow, but I’ve never done an age-group championship so we're actually leaning towards the World Under-20s and just trying to get a medal there,” says Gill.

She recalls advice she was given by Olympic 800m champion Keely Hodgkinson when she was 16: “She said to stick with the age groups, and I think I've only just started to realise how important that is. Obviously now I've been to the Olympics, but you get so much experience going to these age group events. I think the only international race I'd done before the Olympics was the Youth Commonwealth Games and that gave me a real taste of what it was like to be on an international team. I was so grateful for that experience going into Paris because, if I hadn't had that, I wouldn't have had anything.”

Paris, of course, changed everything, and when the time comes to toe the line once again she’ll do so as “Phoebe Gill version two”, a young athlete who has re-built herself physically and mentally in a bid to succeed in the sport over the long-term. First up is her maiden altitude training camp, in Font Romeu. She then hopes to return to racing quietly, admitting that while the media attention of 2024 was “nice to an extent”, it also brought pressure.



ABOVE: Gill on her way to winning the British 800m title in 2024

“I feel like I'm going back into running as an underdog again, which was obviously taken away from me after I ran 1:57,” she says. “I was kind of put in the limelight a bit, but now there’s less pressure, I’m putting less pressure on myself, and I can just enjoy racing again.

“I'm actually really grateful that it all happened, because I've now got experiences that most 17-year-olds don't have and I feel like that gives me a tiny bit of an edge maturity-wise; I now know what to expect at senior level championships, so I can just take a step back and focus on the age group champs and use what I've learned.

“I’m definitely nervous about racing again, I think about it all the time, but that just shows how passionate I am about the sport and how much I care about running; it means so much to me and it's given me so much in life.

“On the flipside, I'm still only 18 and I want to be in this for the long game, so if this year doesn’t match what I produced when I was 17 then I won’t mind too much because hopefully I've got a decade or more still in me. There will be other chances, but this year is about coming back, seeing what I can produce, and trying to stay healthy.”

AW



BELOW: Celebrating winning gold at the Commonwealth Youth Games



THE AMERICAN WAY





Almi Nerurkar, a post graduate student athlete at Georgetown University, writes about her experiences of college life in the US, and how drastically it contrasts to the approach taken in Great Britain

In the United States of America, sport functions not just as entertainment but as a powerful storytelling arena. From the Super Bowl's electric arena and its million-dollar adverts to the frenzy of media attention around the half-time show, sport embodies a distinctly American narrative.

It sells a dream deeply tied to national identity – one built on hard work, competition, exceptionalism and consumerism. This broader narrative trickles into the college system. Often seen as a bridge to the professional world, collegiate sport shows how education meets enterprise, competition meets community and performance defines identity.

After finishing my undergraduate degree in the UK, I decided I wanted to experience collegiate sport in the US. I had never been there before, but some of my friends from the UK had gone out to the US on full sports scholarships. They would tell me about the atmosphere at the football games in huge stadia; copious amounts of food in the student canteens; the extent of the high-performance facilities; the support staff; the luxurious hotel stays around competitions. How could I say no?

MAKING A CHOICE

From around the age of 16, I had been contacted by various US college coaches, first with offers for undergraduate degree options, and later with graduate programmes. It was exciting but there are just over 1200 schools in the NCAA, spread across all 50 states. Where should I even begin looking?

Some people make their choice depending on the academic programme, others on the coach, the facilities or the team's legacy. For some, the decision is based on family ties and prestige – factors that, to my surprise, seemed to matter more than I'd imagined.

The little I had heard about sport at American colleges painted a worrying picture: many coaches saw their athletes more as numbers than as individuals, and treated them accordingly. I had heard stories of girls being run into the ground, health issues completely ignored for short-term success. This was something I was determined to avoid. Choosing an athletic programme with a supportive coach was my priority.

As I was coming from the UK, I decided to narrow my options to the east coast which

ABOVE: Almi Nerurkar competes for Georgetown in a cross-country competition







would make travel and time differences easier. I contacted a family friend in Boston who was knowledgeable about the different programmes (and coaches) on that side of the country. With his help, I selected Georgetown in Washington DC, Duke in North Carolina and Boston College. I sent details of my running results to the coaches, asking whether they would consider recruiting me with a full scholarship. Again, this process is different for everyone. Some athletes go through agencies, while others are scouted directly.

Then came the introductory recruiting calls, the submission of paperwork, the campus visits, academic verification and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) eligibility checks... the length of the procedure alone spoke of the professional and often high-pressure nature of joining a US collegiate sports team.

NAVIGATING A DIFFERENT WORLD

The professional environment of collegiate sport in the US stands in stark contrast to university sport in the UK, which is considered by many as a leisure past-time, a welcome distraction from study and a place to meet other students or to try something new. In the US, sport is deeply embedded within the university experience. It promotes the institution's reputation, attracts prospective students, engages alumni and can generate significant funding.

Collegiate athletics is governed by the NCAA, which regulates everything from athlete eligibility and revenue opportunities to training schedules and academic commitments. While the system is structured and professional, offering support and clear pathways for student-athletes, it also brings a relentless pressure to perform both academically and athletically.



I started at Georgetown in August of 2024 and, on the track and field team, we are lucky to be led by a thoughtful and compassionate coach. As the mentor of one of the top distance running teams in the country, he still has to navigate the demands of competitive collegiate sport, yet there is also a sense of a genuine community that encourages teamwork and promotes life skills like leadership, confidence and resilience. Through a shared passion for running, we are not only building fitness, but also learning discipline and self worth.

All of that apart, there is still a perception that sport brings with it prestige. Merely calling yourself a "student-athlete" gives you a feeling of superiority; in fact the common nickname for non-athletes among student-athletes is NARP (non-athletic regular person). "Media day", a fixture early in the season, where hours are dedicated to a photoshoot in our team uniform, is a big date in the calendar.

For many young American athletes, college sport is seen as the pinnacle of their careers. Sport acts as a gateway to attending their dream university and then academic success becomes just as important as running success. For many of my British friends attending American colleges, however, competing in the NCAA is seen as a stepping stone to a professional career in athletics. It is a way of being part of a professional set-up and also serves as a developmental phase within their sporting careers.

The age at which you join the team affects your relationship towards it, too. As an undergraduate, it's likely that you will start out with a vision of student life – spending your mornings on the sports field, your weekends at competitions and parties, and your evenings sharing meals at the dining hall. You start and end each day together, sharing the same feelings of exhaustion and the same sense of purpose. Your team-mates are your community.

Graduate students come in with a different vision – their time on the team is limited and their sense of self is more developed. When it works, this can bring a dynamic energy to the team, with new members bringing broader perspectives and a sense of balance to a community that can easily become all-consuming. With each new incoming class, the team at Georgetown naturally evolves, making change inevitable and limiting the creation of rigid hierarchies.

ABOVE: Nerurkar with her Georgetown team-mates

AUTONOMY V ACCOUNTABILITY

Arriving with no prior experience of American collegiate sport, I initially struggled to understand the expectations, social codes and dynamics of the team. In many ways, I felt like a freshman – getting lost in unfamiliar corridors, juggling classes, training and travel, meeting new faces every day. In reality, I was the oldest member of the team. Having travelled a lot during my teenage years, I joined the team with plenty of experiences of my own.

To add to this, the running communities I had previously been part of were constructed differently to the one I was joining. The group

> **There is still a perception that sport brings with it prestige. Merely calling yourself a 'student-athlete' gives you a feeling of superiority**



ABOVE: Training in the Pyrenees

I was part of during my undergraduate degree in Leeds, for example, was just one of several communities I felt part of; sport at university was less all-consuming and so were my relationships within it. We met three times a week as a big group and, outside of that, training and socials were self directed. I got used to a sense of autonomy.

Here, the more commercial and professional aspect to sport means that there is funding for a more structured approach. We have a better support system, and therefore more people to whom we are accountable. Motivation is less self-directed and you learn more from your team-mates than from your own mistakes.

Unlike in the UK, where athletes individually decide on what races work best for them, everyone here follows a similar schedule – around five cross country races in the autumn, five indoor races in winter and five to six outdoor races in the spring. However, depending on the size of the team and the amount of funding they have, not everyone on the team is given the opportunity to race.

As the season goes on, the rosters become more selective, with competitions only allowing seven athletes to race. In our team of around 25 girls at Georgetown, team priorities go beyond performance and value is also placed on other roles, like organising social events, providing race-day support, and helping the coach communicate training plans. Involvement goes beyond performance, to embrace lifestyle and identity.

The expectation is always to make connections with others, with a high value placed on bonding with other members of your team. This was a new perspective for me, and in a lot of ways I admire it. It reflects an attitude of being friendly and involved, of keeping high standards and making everything, including human connection, an organised collaboration. For a society that prides itself on the pursuit of individual freedom, there is a lot of emphasis placed on teamwork.

IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

Universities act as anchors for identity and community. From the uniforms people wear, the lifelong alumni ties and the devotion for college sports, the walls are pulsing with pride and passion. But sport is not immune to the pressures felt more widely across society as a whole: where ambition and the relentless pursuit of success can come up against consumerism and a "win-at-all-costs" mentality. In such circumstances we can see the emergence of stories like that of Mary Cain, once one of America's most promising young runners, who spoke out about the damaging effects of a completely results-driven system that ultimately led to her leaving the sport.

During my time at Georgetown, I have felt fortunate to be participating in a sport which is not trapped in a culture driven by financial targets. I have valued the personal approach taken by our coach to take account of individual needs while still trying to foster a strong sense of team. I have also reflected on how my past experiences have made me more aware of how easily athletes can succumb to the pressures of performance and profit.

I feel grateful for all that sport has already given me: a sense of structure to my routine and a sense of purpose in the way I participate. It has also given me intense moments of connection both with the people with whom I train and with my environment. Within the US collegiate system, I've come to appreciate a new kind of community that surrounds sport, which is uniquely powerful as we pursue our sport together. We compete alongside and against each other, celebrating our shared and personal victories. I feel excited, not stressed; the weight of pressure feels lighter when it's shared. AW

Toruń treasure hunters



THE WORLD INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS ARE NOT ONLY SET TO SERVE UP SOME TOP-CLASS SPORT, BUT ALSO PROVIDE SOME MAJOR CLUES AS TO WHO MIGHT EXCEL IN 2026

It has been five years since a major international athletics championships was staged at the Kujawsko-Pomorska Arena in Toruń. Back then, the world was still in the grip of the pandemic, the puzzle of re-establishing sporting events was in the process of being solved and spectators were left outside looking in.

The 2021 European Indoor Championships were significant in many ways and also provided major staging posts for some of today's most established names. It was then that Keely Hodgkinson, Femke Bol and Yarosolava Mahuchikh won the first senior international titles of their careers, for example, while Jakob Ingebrigtsen sealed his first indoor gold medal-winning 1500m/3000m double and there was a maiden – so far the only – European Indoor Championships appearance from pole vault champion Mondo Duplantis.

From that illustrious group, the Swedish, British and Ukrainian stars are heading back to Poland this month, this time with winning World Indoor Championships medals in mind. Theirs are just a handful of the stories to follow not just over the three days of competition but also into a summer that is brimming with promise. Across this indoor exhibition, we'll get some of the first clues as to what might lie in wait for the track and field treasure hunters in 2026. AW



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



The sweet spot

WITH HER WORLD RECORD-BREAKING RUN IN LIÉVIN, KEELY HODGKINSON SHOWED THAT, AT FULL FITNESS, SHE IS UNTOUCHABLE. THE OLYMPIC CHAMPION HAS CARVED HERSELF A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO WIN ANOTHER MEDAL FOR HER EVER GROWING COLLECTION, WRITES KATHARINE MERRY



Katharine **Merry**

Olympic medallist and broadcaster

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It's the place that every athlete wants to find themselves in, yet so rarely ever gets to experience – 100 per cent fitness. No aches, no pains, no grumbles, no niggles, a consistent spell of good training under the belt and a clear track ahead. It's such a delicious feeling but that state of affairs can be so fleeting that you have got to seize the opportunity with both hands when the window is open.

As we head towards the World Indoor Championships, Keely Hodgkinson has that very opportunity. You can see it in her body language, you can hear it when she speaks and, most importantly, it is glaringly obvious from her performances on the track so far this year.

I had the pleasure of calling her 800m race in the arena at the UK Indoor Championships in Birmingham last month when she broke the then British indoor record with 1:56.33 and it was so clear that, after four months of training, she had been chomping at the bit to put her fitness to the test.

You know that if Keely turns up to race then it's going to be decent but this was a truly phenomenal solo run that was effectively a time trial. Her coaches Trevor Painter and Jenny Meadows were sitting right by the commentary booth as the race unfolded and Keely hadn't been supposed to run that fast. She was supposed to run a solid 400m and then just bring it home, perhaps putting some markers down at certain points in the second half, but she's in such a good place that she couldn't help herself and it ultimately set her up beautifully for her world record attempt in Liévin a few days later.

She had been very up front about her plan to race in France, and that it would mean she was only going to race in the heats at the UK Indoors, so I think she will have been hurt by some of the negative comments she received about doing that. But I also think it might have put a little bit of fire in her belly and helped fuel her world record-breaking run.

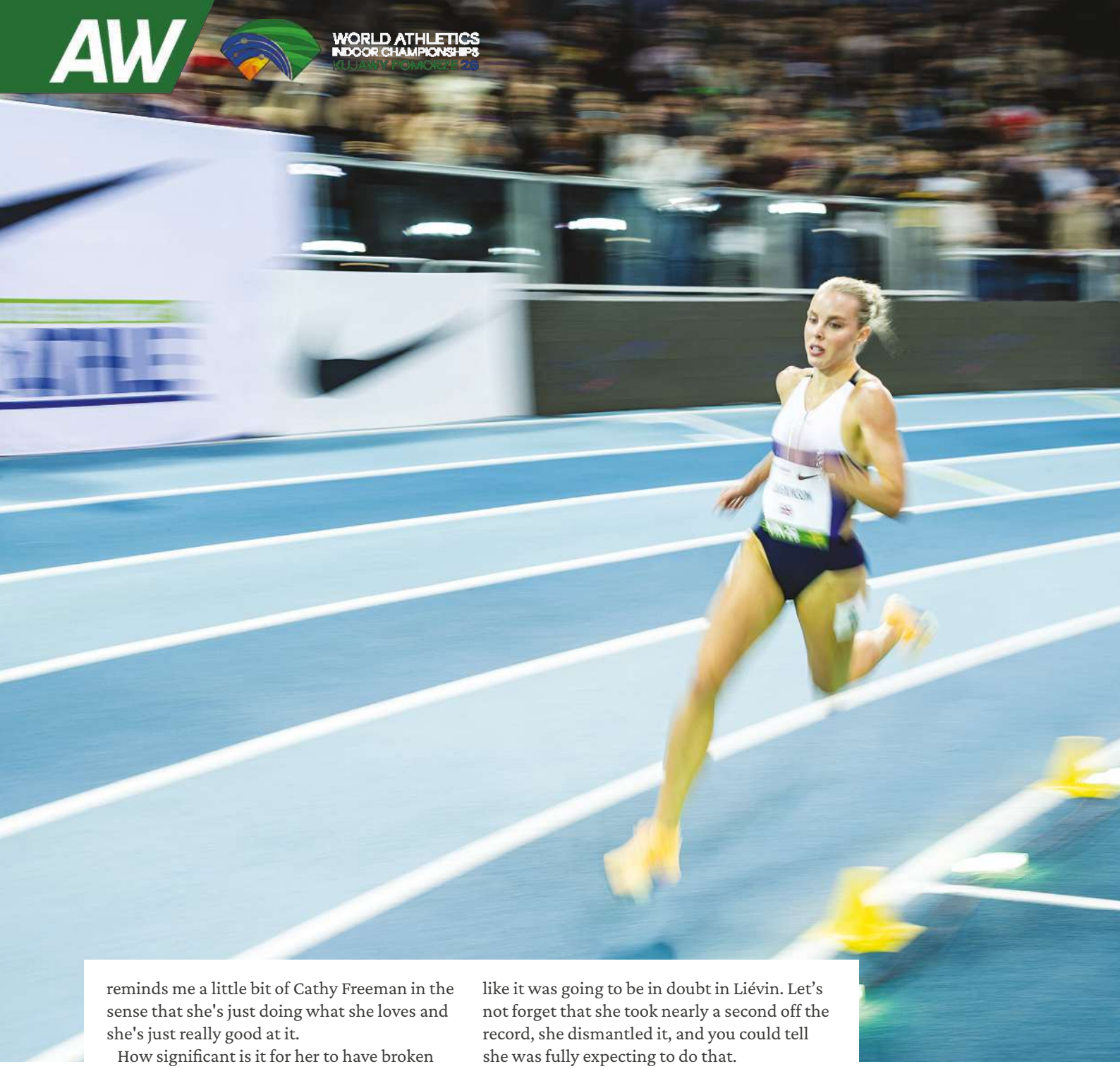
Her confidence is off the scale right now and the level she raised her game to was mightily impressive. Audrey Werro of Switzerland is no slouch and is developing into a very fine athlete but, when Keely put her foot down, she dropped her like a stone. You could see it was a complete change of gear and none of her opponents could do anything about it as she flew to 1:54.87. When Keely is fully fit, I don't think there's anyone around at the moment that can touch her.

There is perhaps one but she is keeping an incredibly low profile right now. When I woke up the morning after that world record had been broken, the first person I thought of was Athing Mu and how times have changed. It's not so long ago that the American was beating Keely to Olympic and world titles but the trajectory of both since then has been starkly different. One's gone sky high, while the other has dropped off the face of the earth (for now, at least).

With both in their early twenties, this was supposed to be a rivalry that would run and run but it hasn't materialised. Who knows, perhaps we'll see Athing re-emerge as a force to be reckoned with as we approach the LA Olympics – and she is certainly capable of doing that – but I'd be really interested to get a penny for her thoughts right now. I wonder what she makes of it all?

Keely has talked about feeling like she's closing in on that controversial outdoor 800m world record of 1:53.28 by Jarmila Kratochvilova that has stood for so long and this could well be the year for her to do it. Does she need someone like Mu breathing down her neck to help her get there? I'm not actually sure that she does – I think she can do it on her own.

Like I said, there's a supreme confidence and underlying belief in what she's capable of but there's not an arrogance with it. Keely



reminds me a little bit of Cathy Freeman in the sense that she's just doing what she loves and she's just really good at it.

How significant is it for her to have broken that world indoor record? It will be a weight off her shoulders, given that she has never shied away from declaring how much she wanted it and the fact that it had been set on the day she was born has been spoken about so many times.

It felt like it was always destined to become hers, and the plan had been for her to break it last year at the Keely Klassic before injury dictated otherwise. It certainly didn't ever look like it was going to be in doubt in Liévin. Let's not forget that she took nearly a second off the record, she dismantled it, and you could tell she was fully expecting to do that.

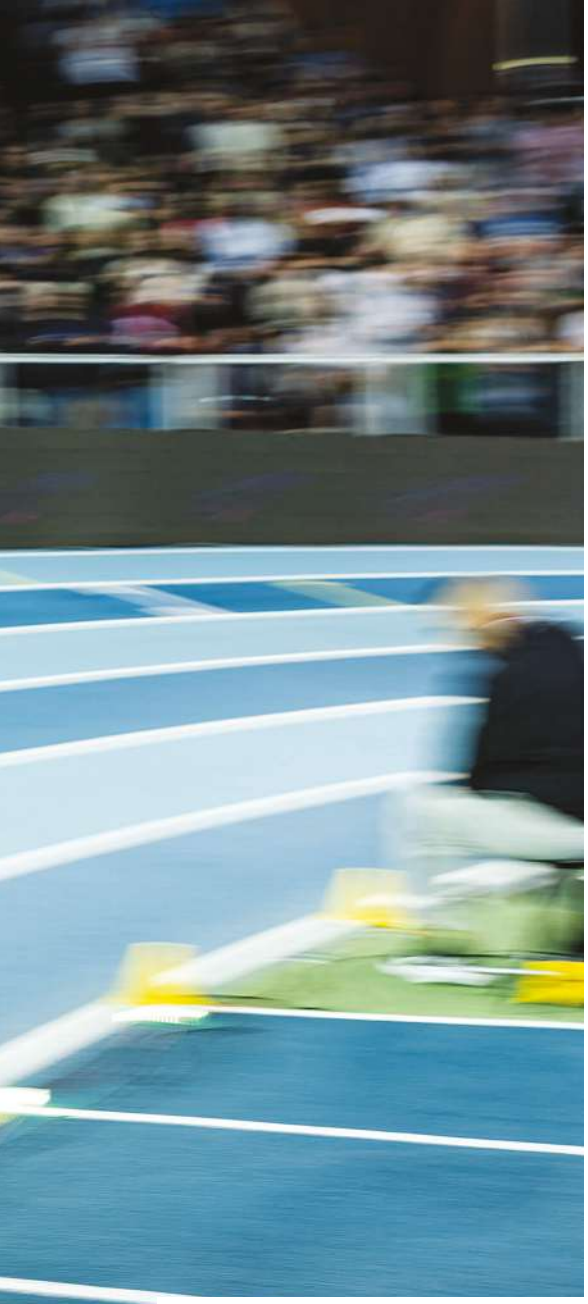
It was another honour to add to a growing list and, hopefully, she can hang on to that fitness and become a world indoor champion, too. It's remarkable to think that, due to injury, she hasn't even competed at a World Indoor Championships before. It's currently a medal missing from her collection and she deserves for fate to smile on her for this one.

It will help that these championships are being staged in Toruń. It's a place that will

ABOVE: Keely Hodgkinson on her way to breaking the indoor 800m world record

RIGHT: Winning European gold in Toruń in 2021

Her confidence is off the scale right now and, when Keely put her foot down, she dropped Audrey Werro like a stone. You could see it was a complete change of gear





bring back happy memories for Keely given that she won the European Indoor title – the first major senior honour of her career – there in 2021. It's incredible to consider everything that has happened since then and all that has been achieved.

She knows the set-up there and she is a very clear favourite to take gold, but I think the biggest difference on this occasion is likely to be her winning time. Five years ago, she won in 2:03.88 and it's hard to imagine history repeating itself on that score. With a gold medal on the line, I'd expect her to be around six seconds quicker!

I just hope so much that she can stay fit but don't forget that she has only just turned 24 and is still learning all the time with Trevor and Jenny. There's a developing maturity to her running and I think the injury problems of last year will have taught them all a great deal. Those problems will also have been a reminder that, if you're in shape, you just go for it.

I think the new rule in the 800m, whereby the break point has been moved further back by 100m to cut down the risk of early trips and falls, will make quite a difference too. It's a good rule, Keely's already spoken about how much she likes it, and it should make things nice and clear for her so that she can run her race any way she wants.

She has the talent and the ability to dictate how that final will unfold, but those decisions will be dictated by how she's feeling. When you're on and really ready to go, you know it straight away. As soon as you're down on the warm-up track and you're turning over, feeling bouncy, you know you're going to have a good day.

You think of the consistency and work that has got you to that point and then, if you drop a good performance, it's like: "This is what it's all about". It's incredibly satisfying. Mind you, it doesn't take long for your mind to change to: "Right, I've got to make sure I can keep this".

You are never complacent with it. As we know, consistency breeds good results and good results breed confidence. Let's see if Keely can deliver the goods, and another amazing result, once again. AW

Keely Hodgkinson's 800m world record splits

200m
26.80

400m
56.01 *(29.21)*

600m
1:25.06 *(29.05)*

800m
1:54.87 *(29.81)*

Going his own way

JOSH HOEY MADE A FRESH START IN AUTUMN OF LAST YEAR AND NOW THE AMERICAN IS HOPING HE CAN ADD MORE HONOURS TO HIS RECORD-BREAKING EXPLOITS, WRITES STUART WEIR

Much like Keely Hodgkinson in the women's event, Josh Hoey will head for the World Indoor Championships this month brimming with confidence, having shattered a long-standing indoor 800m world record.

In the American's case, it had been the mark of 1:42.67 set by Wilson Kipketer at the 1997 championships in his sights when he toed the line at the New Balance Indoor Grand Prix in Boston in late January. There was good reason for Hoey to have high hopes of hitting his target. Just a few weeks earlier, with his older brother Jaxson pacing him on the notoriously quick Boston University track, the 26-year-old had broken Donavan Brazier's indoor 600m world best of 1:13.77, clocking 1:12.84.

Hoey had started afresh following the end of the 2025 summer season. There was a new coaching set-up and a new training programme, with more emphasis on speed endurance. Running a 600m in December was initially seen as a way to gauge how that training was progressing and the response could barely have been more positive. That Jaxson had paced him was also good preparation.

"I definitely went in [to the New Balance Grand Prix] with a bit of confidence because we had been doing our new training programme for about 16 weeks at that point," says Josh. "And we had hit a lot of markers that made me think that I was in much better shape than compared to the year before and even, I would say, last summer. Going into Boston, we had a clear plan of Jaxson helping with the pacing, and we knew I had the fitness to deliver.

"The strategy was to go out in about 50-point low through the first 400m, trying to maintain a relatively even pace through those first two 200m laps. I had told Jaxson: 'If you can accelerate from 400m to 500m and just try and slingshot me around the bend, then that would put me in perfect position'.

"I heard over the loudspeaker that we went through 400m in about 50 seconds dead and in my head, I was like: 'He's done it. Now I have to do my part'. I would say that Jaxson paced it almost absolutely perfectly, and it really set me up to just close home."



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES



PHOTO BY VICTAH SAILER

And close he did. Hoey hit the line in 1:42.50. Mission accomplished.

"It was very comforting [to run with Jaxson], because we've been training together for many, many years," he adds. "He has always been my biggest role model or the person I look up to the most when it comes to track and field, so getting to do that together was an extra special moment."

It was a moment that also represented something of a vindication of a major decision Hoey had chosen to make in October of last year. He was a prodigious teenage talent, setting a US high school record of 1:47.67 and competing at the World Under-20 Championships in 2018, reaching the 800m semi-finals. Rather than accepting an offer from the University of Oregon, he turned pro that same year. It took him several years – and six different coaches – before he made his mark. The one to help him do that was the Australian Justin Rinaldi.

"Unfortunately, my transition from being a high school athlete to being a professional was not very smooth," says Hoey. "I had a lot of back and forth and difficult experiences, I would say, with the coaching. But ultimately, when we found our stride, then I was able to get a lot more out of my body. And I feel like I'm still continuing to develop right now. In some ways, you could say I was a late developer. We just ran into a lot of problems at that early stage of my career."

The ship was steadied when he began working with Rinaldi in 2023 and the first major honour of Hoey's career came 12 months ago with World Indoor 800m gold in Nanjing.

Even though he subsequently missed out on selection for the World Championships in Tokyo in the summer, finishing fourth at the US Championships, he also won the Lausanne Diamond League, as well as coming second in Paris and Monaco and third in Stockholm.

"It was unfortunate, the only two races that I wasn't top three were the only ones that you needed to be top three – the US Trials and the Diamond League Final," he says.

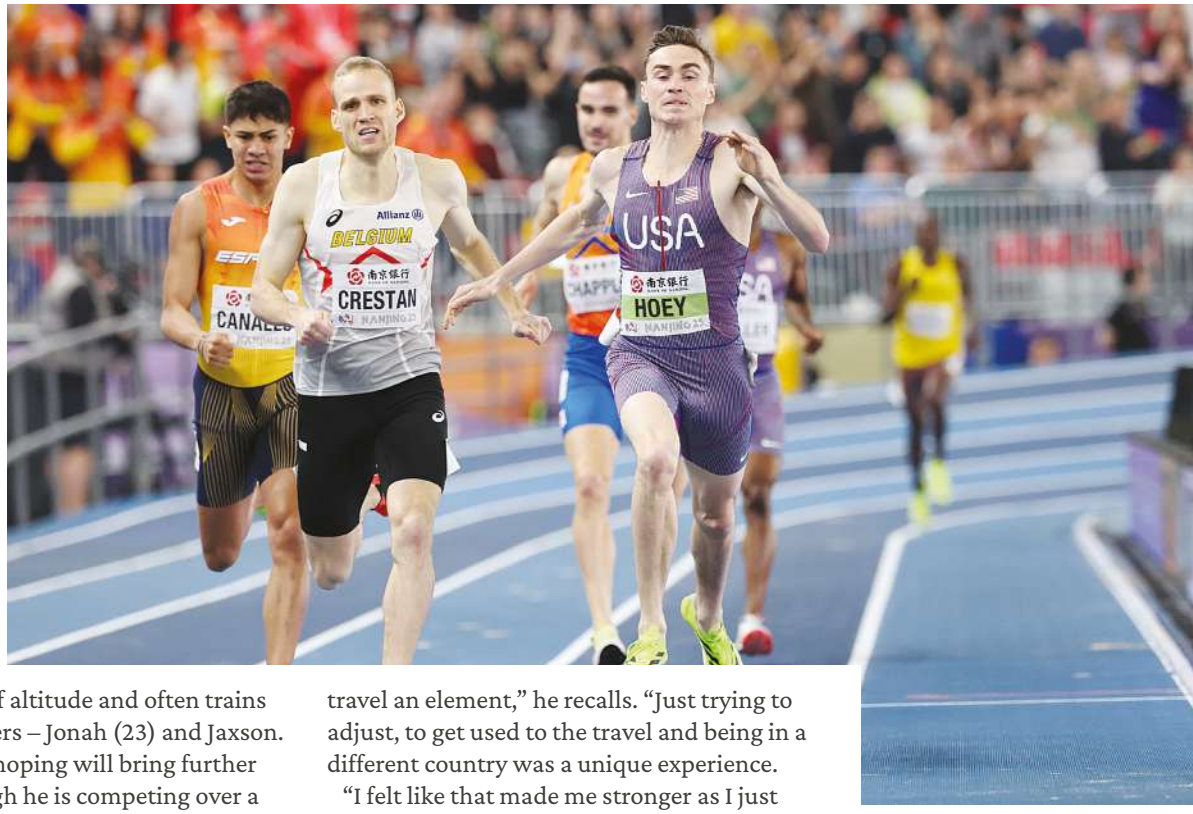
There was still much to be positive about, though, so eyebrows were understandably raised when the news broke that he and Rinaldi were parting ways. In fact, Hoey doesn't currently have a coach and writes his own programmes, with his father Fran – a former athlete himself – acting as a sounding board.

Family is a hugely important thread running through Hoey's career. He comes from a running family near Philadelphia and, during the pandemic, they built a track on their family farm. Josh is now based in Flagstaff, Arizona at

ABOVE: Josh Hoey breaks the indoor 800m world record

> **I don't think that I'm a better indoor runner than an outdoor runner. I'd say I tripped into that reputation**





ABOVE: Hoey takes 800m gold in Nanjing

around 7000 feet of altitude and often trains with his two brothers – Jonah (23) and Jaxson.

It's a set-up he is hoping will bring further honours and, though he is competing over a full indoor season for again, he will be mindful of how he makes the transition to outdoor competition this time around.

"My performances in 2025 had a lot to do with the way that we had approached changing the training programme and the transition from the indoor to the outdoor last year," says Hoey. "We tried to transition a little bit into longer VO2 work and to focus a little bit more on trying to build the endurance side versus speed.

"Ultimately, our progress stalled a little bit. I got sick and it just wasn't a smooth transition. When I think back to maybe falling short in some ways in the outdoor season, it had more to do with our build-up in the spring than it did have to do with the indoor season specifically."

Hoey admits he has plans to "move to the 1500m at some point, and that's why I do so much mileage as an 800m guy – about 85 miles a week". For now, though, his focus is on defending that indoor title over the shorter distance.

While winning gold last year might have been something of a surprise to the outside world, it was less so to him. In fact, on paper it was pretty straightforward – win the heat in 1:48.14, win the semi-final in 1:45.23 and win the final in 1:44.77.

"It was my first time really travelling outside of the US for a major competition and being all the way to China made the logistics of the travel an element," he recalls. "Just trying to adjust, to get used to the travel and being in a different country was a unique experience.

"I felt like that made me stronger as I just tried to take care of myself and work through the rounds. Luckily I had enough, though barely enough [beating Eliott Crestan by 0.04] – right at the end."

While he denies being better at indoor races than outdoors, Hoey has a clear understanding of the different approach needed when it comes to the former.

"There are a lot fewer moves to be made on an indoor track because of how tight the bends are," he says. "It's harder to run out in lane two, to give yourself a little bit of leeway like you can do on an outdoor track."

However, he adds: "But I would also say the outdoor meets nowadays are more bunched up, like indoor meets. I approach indoors with the mindset of almost time-trialling because you take advantage of that aspect of the indoor track. And also indoors is not so important. The competitions themselves pale in comparison to outdoors, so I see indoors as a lot more light-hearted and fun and like an expo for talent and training and to see how things are progressing.

"I don't really think that I'm a better indoor runner at all than an outdoor runner. I would say I coincidentally tripped into that reputation, as I train all year round and I do like to race hard, no matter what time of the year it is. And so I am willing to run an indoor season and stay in shape and put up good performances."

He has certainly done that this winter. Let's see what comes next. AW

Facts & flashbacks

AS WE APPROACH THIS YEAR'S EVENT, HERE'S AN EVENT-BY-EVENT REMINDER OF WHAT HAPPENED AT THE 2025 WORLD INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS, PLUS SOME VITAL STATISTICS

*Information correct at time of going to print. World records shown are the best times or distances ever recorded indoors.

MEN

60m

World record: Christian Coleman *USA* ***6.34,*** 2018
Championships Best Performance (CBP): Christian Coleman *USA* ***6.37,*** 2018

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Fresh from having just become a father and winning the European indoor title, Britain's Jeremiah Azu also struck global gold in a time of 6.49 to edge Australia's Lachlan Kennedy (6.50) and Akani Simbine of South Africa (6.54).

Did you know?
Third place in Nanjing gave Akani Simbine the first major international individual medal of his career.

400m

World record: Kerron Clement *USA* ***44.57,*** 2005
CBP: Jereem Richards *TTO* ***45.00,*** 2022

What happened in Nanjing last year?
The USA reigned supreme as Christopher Bailey led an American clean sweep of the medals. In truth, the 25-year-old was a class apart as he led clocked 45.08 to finish clear of Brian Faust (45.47) and Jacory Patterson (45.54).



Did you know?
Nanjing was only the second time in championships history that a single nation filled all of the medal positions, following on from Ethiopia's sweep of the women's 1500m in Belgrade in 2022.

800m

World record: Josh Hoey *USA* ***1:42.50,*** 2026
CBP: Wilson Kipketer *DEN* ***1:42.67,*** 1997

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Pre-championships favourite Josh Hoey took the first major title of his career in a thrilling race to the line. Despite fading in his closing strides, the American had just enough to win with his dip as he clocked 1:44.77 to beat

ABOVE: men's 60m champion Jeremiah Azu with silver and bronze medallists Lachlan Kennedy and Akani Simbine

RIGHT: Jakob Ingebrigtsen

ABOVE, RIGHT: Grant Holloway takes his third successive 60m hurdles title



Belgium's Eliott Crestan (1:44.81), while Elvin Canales won bronze in 1:45.03.

Did you know?

Three men have won back-to-back world indoor 800m titles – Kenya's Paul Ereng (1989 and 1991), Abubaker Kaki of Sudan (2008 and 2010) and Ethiopian Mohammed Aman (2012 and 2014).

1500m

World record: Jakob Ingebrigtsen *NOR* ***3:29.63,*** 2025
CBP: Samuel Tefera *ETH* ***3:32.77,*** 2022

What happened in Nanjing last year?

Jakob Ingebrigtsen strode to gold and completed the distance double just one day after taking the 3000m title. In doing so, he became just the second man – after Haile Gebrselassie in 1999 – to win two gold medals at the same World Indoor Championships.

The Norwegian won in 3:38.79, with Britain's Neil Gourley coming through to take silver in 3:39.07 ahead of American bronze medallist Luke Houser (3:39.17).

Did you know?

Marcus O'Sullivan was the first ever men's 1500m world indoor champion, winning gold three times in total (1987, 1989 and 1993).

3000m

World record: Grant Fisher *USA* ***7:22.91,*** 2025
CBP: Haile Gebrselassie *ETH* ***7:34.71,*** 1997

What happened in Nanjing last year?

Until this race, Jakob Ingebrigtsen had never won a World Indoor Championships gold medal, but he made sure of changing that statistic. He was made to work for it, though, as Berihu Aregawi pushed him all the way. It was the Norwegian's closing speed that clinched it in 7:46.09 from the Ethiopian, with Ky Robinson of Australia (7:47.09) completing the podium.

Did you know?

Ethiopian athletes have been a dominant force in the history of the world indoors 3000m, taking gold eight times.

60m hurdles

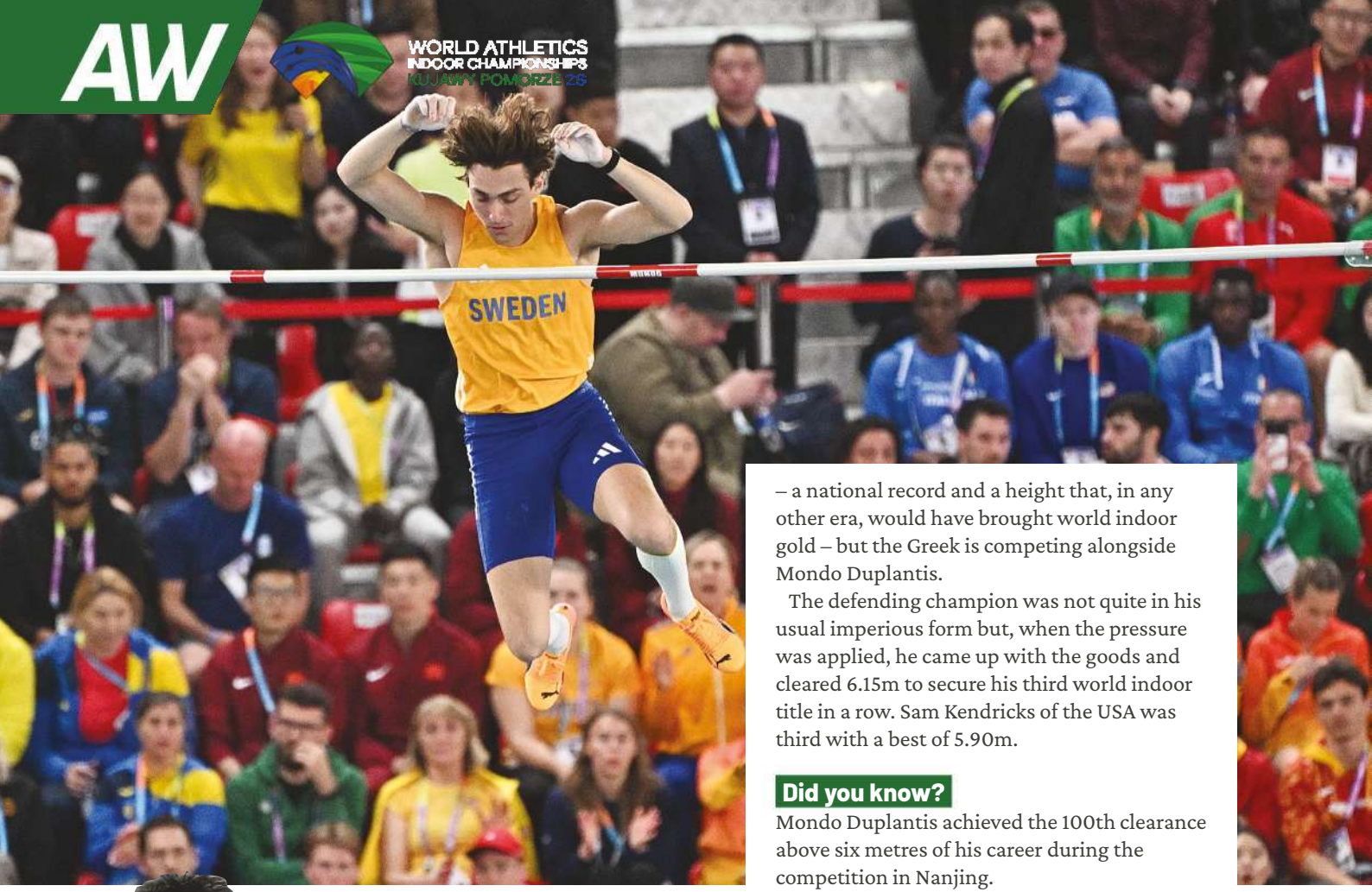
World record: Grant Holloway *USA* ***7.27,*** 2024
CBP: Grant Holloway *USA* ***7.29,*** 2024

What happened in Nanjing last year?

Grant Holloway kept his extraordinary 60m hurdles record intact, extending his 11-year winning streak and taking his third successive world indoor title. Even with a slightly slow start, the American produced a run of 7.42 that brought him home well clear of Frenchman Wilhem Belocian (7.54) and Junxi Liu of China (7.55).

Did you know?

Grant Holloway was the first man to win three successive world indoor 60m hurdles gold medals. His compatriot Allen Johnson won the title in 1995, 2003 and 2004.



– a national record and a height that, in any other era, would have brought world indoor gold – but the Greek is competing alongside Mondo Duplantis.

The defending champion was not quite in his usual imperious form but, when the pressure was applied, he came up with the goods and cleared 6.15m to secure his third world indoor title in a row. Sam Kendricks of the USA was third with a best of 5.90m.

Did you know?

Mondo Duplantis achieved the 100th clearance above six metres of his career during the competition in Nanjing.

High Jump

World record: Javier Sotomayor *CUB* ***2.43m,*** 1989

CBP: Javier Sotomayor *CUB* ***2.43m,*** 1989



What happened in Nanjing last year?

Three years after winning his first world indoor high jump title in Belgrade, Korea's Woo Sanghyeok reclaimed it with a first-time clearance of 2.31m. Defending champion and Olympic gold medallist Hamish Kerr – who went on to win the outdoor world title in Tokyo last year – took silver with 2.28m, beating Jamaica's Raymond Richards on countback.

Did you know?

Woo Sanghyeok is only the third man to win multiple titles in the event, joining world record-holder Javier Sotomayor and Sweden's 2004 Olympic champion Stefan Holm, both of whom hold four titles.

Pole Vault

World record: Mondo Duplantis *SWE* ***6.27m,*** 2025

CBP: Mondo Duplantis *SWE* ***6.20m,*** 2022

What happened in Nanjing last year?

Emmanouil Karalis cleared 6.05m

Long Jump

World record: Carl Lewis *USA* ***8.79m,*** 1984

CBP: Ivan Pedroso *CUB* ***8.62m,*** 1999

What happened in Nanjing last year?

Mattia Furlani won his first global title thanks to a leap of 8.30m in the second round. In an extremely tight contest, it was just enough for the young Italian, who went on to win the outdoor world title later in 2025, to take top spot from Jamaica's Wayne Pinnock (8.29m) and Australia's Liam Adcock (8.28m).

Did you know?

Nanjing was the first time since 2019 that two-time world indoor champion Miltiadis Tentoglou had missed the podium at a global championships.

Triple Jump

World record: Hugues Fabrice Zango *BUR* ***18.07m,*** 2021

CBP: Teddy Tamgho *FRA* ***17.90m,*** 2010

What happened in Nanjing last year?

The first champion to be crowned last year was Italy's Andy Diaz Hernandez, who flew out to a world lead and national record of 17.80m with his very first jump. The third-farthest leap in World Indoor Championships history set a standard his rivals couldn't match, with China's Zhu Yaming reaching 17.33m for silver



and Burkina Faso's defending champion Hugues Fabrice Zango jumping 17.15m to land bronze.

Did you know?

Diaz Hernandez only produced one valid jump in the final, fouling his second attempt before sitting out the third, fourth and fifth rounds, then running through in the sixth round.

Shot put

World record: Ryan Crouser *USA* ***22.82m,*** 2021
CBP: Ryan Crouser *USA* ***22.77m,*** 2024

What happened in Nanjing last year?
With defending champion and world record-holder Ryan Crouser missing, Tom Walsh stepped forward to win his third world indoor title. The New Zealander led from his opening throw, his season's best of 21.65m keep the USA duo of Roger Steen (21.62m) and Adrian Piperi (21.48m) at bay.

Did you know?

You would have to go back to 2012 to find the last time Walsh failed to appear on the world indoors podium.

4x400m relay

World record: University of Houston ***3:01.51,*** 2019
CBP: Poland ***3:01.77,*** 2018



What happened in Nanjing last year?
Having enjoyed a clean sweep of the individual 400m, the USA's trio of medal winners combined with Elija Godwin to land the top prize, winning in a time of 3:03.13. They were made to work for it by the Jamaican team that secured silver in 3:05.05, with Hungary third in 3:06.03.

Did you know?

USA have won the men's 4x400m title at the World Indoor Championships 11 times.

Heptathlon

World record: Ashton Eaton *USA* ***6645,*** 2012
CBP: Ashton Eaton *USA* ***6645,*** 2012

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Sander Skotheim arrived in China on top form, having broken the European indoor record with a score of 6558 at the European Indoor Championships, and the Norwegian maintained his momentum. He led an all-European podium, with Johannes Erm breaking the Estonian record for silver with 6437 and Germany's Till Steinforth winning bronze with 6275.

Did you know?

Across last year's indoor season, Sander Skotheim produced three of the 13 best scores of all time in the heptathlon.



ABOVE, LEFT: Can anybody beat the seemingly invincible Mondo Duplantis?

BELOW, LEFT: Korean world champion Woo Sanghyeok will look to retain his title

LEFT: Sander Skotheim dominated the heptathlon

ABOVE: Italy's Mattia Furlani took the gold medal in Nanjing



ABOVE: Switzerland's Mujinga Kambundji regained the 60m title in Nanjing

WOMEN

60m

World record: Irina Privalova *RUS* ***6.92,*** 1995
CBP: Gail Devers *USA* ***6.95,*** 1993

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Having won 60m world indoor gold in 2022, Switzerland's Mujinga Kambundji regained the title with a run of 7.04 to hold off Italy's Zaynab Dosso – who had just won the European Indoor title – by 0.02. Patrizia van der Weken finished third in 7.07 to win Luxembourg's first ever world medal, indoors or out.

Did you know?
Only two European women have won more than one world indoor 60m title – Nelli Cooman of the Netherlands (1987 and 1989) and Mujinga Kambundji (2022 and 2025).

400m

World record: Femke Bol *NED* ***49.17,*** 2024
CBP: Femke Bol *NED* ***49.17,*** 2024

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Two weeks after being disqualified at the European Indoor Championships for a lane infringement, Britain's Amber Anning battled her way past Alexis Holmes of the United States to take gold by three hundredths of a second in 50.60.

Anning was forced out into lane two on the penultimate bend, before easing past the tiring Holmes in the final metres, as Henriette Jaeger of Norway took third in 50.92.

Did you know?
There have only been two British medallists in the history this event, with Amber Anning taking gold in 2025 and Eilidh Doyle bronze in 2018.

800m

World record: Keely Hodgkinson *GBR* ***1:54.87,*** 2026
CBP: Ludmila Formanova *CZE* ***1:56.90,*** 1999

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Prudence Sekgodiso sprang a shock to win South Africa's first world indoor medal, clocking a world-leading national record of 1:58.40 and surging away from Ethiopia's Nigist Getachew, who ran a PB of 1:59.63. Patricia Silva broke the Portuguese record to take bronze in 1:59.80, while Ethiopia's Olympic silver medallist Tsige Duguma faltered to sixth in 2:04.76.

Did you know?
Patricia Silva won her 800m bronze 24 years after her father Rui Silva won the 1500m at the 2001 world indoors in Lisbon.

1500m

World record: Gudaf Tsegay *ETH* ***3:53.09,*** 2021
CBP: Gudaf Tsegay *ETH* **3:54.86,** 2025

What happened in Nanjing last year?
The 2022 world indoor champion Gudaf Tsegay produced a masterclass, improving the championship record she had set in Belgrade, to win her second title in 3:54.86. The indoor world record-holder was followed home by her fellow Ethiopian Diribe Welteji (3:59.30), while Great Britain's Georgia Hunter Bell secured bronze with an indoor PB of 3:59.84 and Australia's Georgia Griffith set an Oceanian indoor record of 4:00.80 in fourth.

Did you know?

Gudaf Tsegay's run was the only championship record-breaking performance in Nanjing.

3000m

World record: Genzebe Dibaba *ETH* ***8:16.60,*** 2014
CBP: Elle St Pierre *USA* ***8:20.87,*** 2024

What happened in Nanjing last year?
After winning 800m world indoor silver in 2022 and 1500m gold in 2024, Freweyni Hailu came out on top in the 3000m. The Ethiopian produced a time of 8:37.21 to see off Shelby Houlihan (8:38.26) – the American securing her first global medal – and Jess Hull, who became Australia's first medallist in the women's 3000m with 8:38.28.

Did you know?

Ethiopian athletes have won gold in this event at 10 of the last 12 World Indoor Championships. World record-holder Genzebe Dibaba won three in a row between 2014 and 2018, while Meseret Defar won four consecutive titles between 2004 and 2010.



ABOVE: Amber Anning on her way to 400m gold last year

60m hurdles

World record: Devynne Charlton *BAH* ***7.65,*** 2024
CBP: Devynne Charlton *BAH* ***7.65,*** 2024

What happened in Nanjing last year?
In a race of extraordinary depth, world record-holder Devynne Charlton successfully defended her title as she hit the line in 7.72 to just edge out Swiss European Indoor champion Ditaji Kambundji (7.73) and Jamaican Ackera Nugent (7.74). The top six were separated by just 0.04.

Did you know?

Nadine Visser's time of 7.76 in coming sixth in Nanjing would have been enough to win 15 of the past 20 editions of the World Indoor Championships.



BELOW: Gudaf Tsegay broke the 1500m championships record



ABOVE: Saga Vanninen took gold in Nanjing, making her the first Finnish woman to win a senior global combined events title

LEFT: Claire Bryant took gold on her major international debut

BELOW: Canada's Sarah Mitton retained her title in China

High Jump

World record: Kajsa Bergqvist *SWE* ***2.08m,*** 2006
CBP: Stefka Kostadinova *BUL* ***2.05m,*** 1987

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Nicola Olyslagers won an Australian battle with her team-mate Eleanor Patterson, clearing 1.97m to win on countback and successfully defend the title she had won in Glasgow 12 months previously. Ukraine's 2022 world indoor champion Yaroslava Mahuchikh, dealing with an ankle problem, managed a best of 1.95m to claim bronze on countback ahead of Serbia's Angelina Topic.

Did you know?

Bulgaria's Stefka Kostadinova is the most successful high jumper in world indoors history, the former world record-holder winning the title five times.

Pole Vault

World record: Jenn Suhr *USA* ***5.03m,*** 2016
CBP: Sandi Morris *USA* ***4.95m,*** 2018

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Marie-Julie Bonnin cleared 4.75m to equal the French pole vault record and gain her first global gold. Having finished third in the European Indoor Championships two weeks previously, she beat Apeldoorn silver medallist Tina Sutej of Slovenia and Swiss gold medallist Angelica Moser, who both managed a best of 4.70m.

Did you know?

Jenn Suhr, who set the indoor world record for the women's pole vault 10 years ago, was the first woman ever to clear the five-metre barrier indoors.

Long Jump

World record: Heike Drechsler *GER* ***7.37m,*** 1988
CBP: Britney Reese *USA* ***7.23m,*** 2012

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Making her major international debut, Claire Bryant's PB of 6.96m helped her to seal long jump gold. Silver went to Switzerland's Annik Kalin (6.83m), while Spaniard Fátima Diame landed bronze with a best jump of 6.72m.

Did you know?

The USA has a long line of world indoor champions in the long jump that features Claire Bryant (2025), Tara Davis-Woodhall (2024), Brittney Reese (2010, 2012 and 2016) Tianna Madison Bartoletta (2006) and Dawn Burrell-Campbell (2001).

Triple Jump

World record: Yulimar Rojas *VEN* ***15.74m,*** 2022
CBP: Yulimar Rojas *VEN* ***15.74m,*** 2022

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Leyanis Perez Hernandez managed just one legal jump, but the Cuban made it count, producing a world lead of 14.93m that took her to her first global gold. Her team-mate Liadagmis Povea was second with 14.57m while Spain's Ana Peleteiro-Compaore clinched bronze with 14.29m.

Did you know?

Ashia Hansen, who took triple jump gold twice (1999 and 2003) is the only British athlete to have won more than one world indoor title.

Shot Put

World record: Helena Fibingerova *CZE* ***22.50m,*** 1977
CBP: Valerie Adams *NZL* ***20.67m,*** 2014

What happened in Nanjing last year?
For the first time since 1991, all three medallists threw beyond 20 metres, Canada's Sarah Mitton reaching furthest with a best of 20.48m to win her second successive world indoor title. European indoor champion Jessica Schilder of the Netherlands was second with 20.07m as Chase Jackson of the USA completed the podium thanks to her attempt of 20.06m.







Did you know?
Valerie Adams of New Zealand, ambassador for the 2026 championships, won the world indoor shot put title four times in a row from 2008 to 2014.

4x400m relay

World record: Russia ***3:23.37,*** 2006
CBP: USA ***3:23.85,*** 2018

What happened in Nanjing last year?
A thoroughly dominant display from the USA quartet of Quanera Hayes, Bailey Lear, Rosey Effiong and Alexis Holmes saw them take gold by almost five seconds in 3:27.45. Early leaders Poland took silver in 3:32.05 ahead of Australia, who clocked 3:32.65.

Did you know?
Quanera Hayes was also part of the USA team to win world indoor 4x400m gold in 2016 and 2018, as well as silver in 2024.

Pentathlon

World record: Nafi Thiam *BEL* ***5055,*** 2023
CBP: Nataliya Dobrynska *UKR* ***5013,*** 2012

What happened in Nanjing last year?
Saga Vanninen became the first Finnish woman to win a senior global combined events title as she took gold with a tally of 4821 to follow on from her victory at the European Indoor championships. There was also a slice of history for Kate O'Connor (4742), who became the first Irish woman to win a global combined events medal, while USA's Taliyah Brooks earned her first major medal with a PB of 4669 in third.

Did you know?
Three-time Olympic and two-time world heptathlon champion Nafi Thiam, who also has three European outdoor titles and a trio of European Indoor pentathlon gold medals to her name, has never won a World Indoor medal. AW

ABOVE: The US 4x400m team were head and shoulders above their rivals in Nanjing

Changes to look out for in Poland

In autumn of last year, World Athletics approved a number of changes to the staging of indoor athletics events that have been in place during this season and will be at play during the World Indoor Championships.

A NEW 400M FORMAT
In an attempt to achieve fairer conditions, each 400m heat will now feature only four athletes, placed in lanes three to six. Lanes one and two, considered to be disadvantageous because of the tight curves and banking, will be left empty. The 400m final will change from a single six-athlete race to two separate sections of four athletes, with medals decided by the fastest overall times.

800M BREAK POINT
A particularly challenging part of an indoor 800m, the point at which athletes break to the inside lane no longer takes place after the first bend, but after the second – at around 165m, the same break point used in the 400m. This is being done to give the field more space to string out before the fight for position, reducing clashes, shoves and falls in the early stages of the race.

MIXED 4x400M RELAY IS IN
The Mixed 4x400m Relay, which made its debut at the European Indoor Championships last year, will be seen at the World Indoor Championships for the first time in 2026. It will feature a mandatory running order of man-woman-man-woman.

CHANGEOVER CHANGED
In the 4x400m relays, the order in which teams are arranged for the subsequent legs is no longer decided at the old reference point; instead, it depends on the position they occupy as they cross the finish line to start the final lap, equivalent to the 200m split. From that point, teams line up from the inside out in race order, a process overseen by an appointed official.

A DROP IS NOT DEADLY
A dropped baton no longer results in automatic disqualification. Athletes are no longer required to pick it up precisely where it was dropped, provided they gain no advantage and do not impede others, with the possibility of sanction remaining if the judges deem that the drop has resulted in a sporting benefit for the team.

The Toruń

YOUR SCHEDULE FOR THE WORLD INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS

DAY ONE - MARCH 20

MORNING SESSION

Local Time	UK Time	Sex	Event	Round
10:05	09:05	M	60m Heptathlon	
10:20	09:20	M	60m	Heats
10:50	09:50	M	Long Jump	Heptathlon
11:15	10:15	W	400m	Heats
11:30	10:30	W	High Jump	Final
11:55	10:55	M	400m	Heats
12:35	11:35	W	800m	Heats
13:00	12:00	M	Shot Put	Heptathlon
13:20	12:20	M	800m	Heats

EVENING SESSION

Local Time	UK Time	Sex	Event	Round
18:35	17:35	W	1500m	Heats
18:35	17:35	M	High Jump	Heptathlon
18:45	17:45	W	Shot Put	Final
19:18	18:18	M	1500m	Heats
19:35	18:35	M	Triple Jump	Final
20:05	19:05	W	400m	Semi-Final
20:25	19:25	M	60m	Semi-Final
20:50	19:50	M	400m	Semi-Final
21:22	20:22	M	60m	Final

DAY TWO - MARCH 21

MORNING SESSION

Local Time	UK Time	Sex	Event	Round
10:05	09:05	M	60m Hurdles	Heptathlon
10:20	09:20	M	60m Hurdles	Heats
11:05	10:05	W	60m	Heats
11:10	10:10	M	Pole Vault	Heptathlon
11:55	10:55	X	4x400m Relay	Final
12:08	11:08	W	800m	Semi-Final
12:15	11:15	M	High Jump	Final
12:37	11:37	M	800m	Semi-Final

EVENING SESSION

Local Time	UK Time	Sex	Event	Round
18:35	17:35	M	Pole Vault	Final



timetable

18:40	17:40	M	400m	Final
18:50	17:50	M	1000m	Heptathlon
19:05	18:05	W	3000m	Final
19:20	18:20	W	Triple Jump	Final
19:25	18:25	M	3000m	Final
19:50	18:50	M	60m Hurdles	Semi-Final
20:15	19:15	W	60m	Semi-Final
20:44	19:44	W	400m	Final
21:05	20:05	M	60m Hurdles	Final
21:20	20:20	W	60m	Final

DAY THREE - MARCH 22

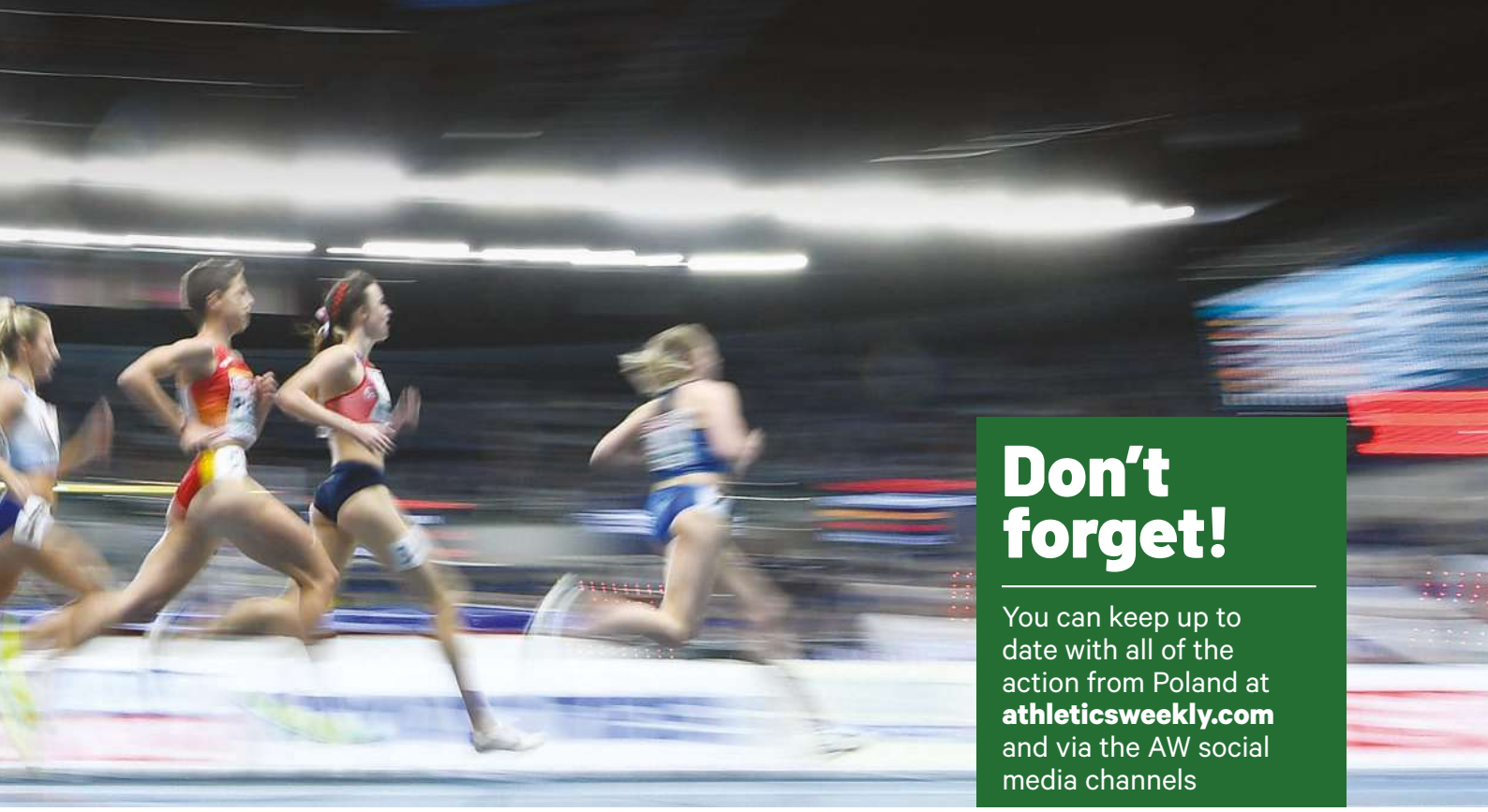
MORNING SESSION

Local Time	UK Time	Sex	Event	Round
10:05	09:05	W	60m Hurdles	Pentathlon
10:20	09:20	W	Long Jump	Final
10:25	09:25	M	4x400m Relay	Heats
10:45	09:45	W	High Jump	Pentathlon
11:00	10:00	W	4x400m Relay	Heats
11:20	10:20	M	Shot Put	Final
12:55	11:55	W	60m Hurdles	Heats
13:15	12:15	W	Shot Put	Pentathlon

EVENING SESSION

Local Time	UK Time	Sex	Event	Round
17:40	16:40	W	Long Jump	Pentathlon
18:05	17:05	W	Pole Vault	Final
19:02	18:02	M	Long Jump	Final
19:09	18:09	M	1500m	Final
19:20	18:20	W	60m Hurdles	Semi-Final
19:42	18:42	W	1500m	Final
19:55	18:55	M	800m	Final
20:05	19:05	W	800m	Final
20:15	19:15	W	800m	Pentathlon
20:25	19:25	W	60m Hurdles	Final
20:38	19:38	M	4x400m Relay	Final
20:50	19:50	W	4x400m Relay	Final

There will be live TV coverage in the UK across the weekend via the BBC



Don't forget!

You can keep up to date with all of the action from Poland at **athleticsweekly.com** and via the AW social media channels

Proving herself

EUAN CRUMLEY SPEAKS TO DITAJI KAMBUNDJI, WHOSE HURDLES WIN AT LAST YEAR'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS HAS TRULY WIDENED HER HORIZONS



As the youngest of four sisters, Ditaji Kambundji has spent much of her life trying to catch up – a particularly difficult task in a family of top-class sprinters. She can't remember precisely what age she was when she first raced but does recall that those contests came so early that "the age category didn't exist yet, so I had to compete with the kids one year older than me". However, rather than all of that chasing leaving her demoralised or disheartened, it had quite the opposite effect.

"It has really driven me," says the 23-year-old. "I've grown up in the position of looking up to my sisters, so I wanted to start athletics really, really early. I was born into this. I think, two weeks after my birth, my mum was at a kids competition with me in her arms. I've known tracks my whole life and I've always had that [belief of]: 'I can go further, I can run faster'."

That belief has proved to be well-founded. After years of watching her older sibling Mujinga (33) scorching her way to world and European medals, as well as three Olympics, while Muswama (30) also pursued a sprinting career before switching from the starting blocks to the bobsleigh and was part of Switzerland's squad at the Winter Games in Milan-Cortina, Ditaji has been leading the way.

Last year, and especially at the World Championships in Tokyo, was when everything changed. *Really* changed.

As her siblings focused on the 100m and 200m, it was through the combined events that Ditaji first developed her love for the hurdles "mixing speed and technique and everything". European U20 and U23 titles arrived, as did senior medals and qualification for the Paris Olympics, but last spring, at the European Indoor Championships in Apeldoorn, came a first senior title when she broke the continental 60m hurdles record, taking gold in 7.67. A silver medal at the World Indoor Championships followed two weeks later and the platform was set beautifully for the summer ahead.

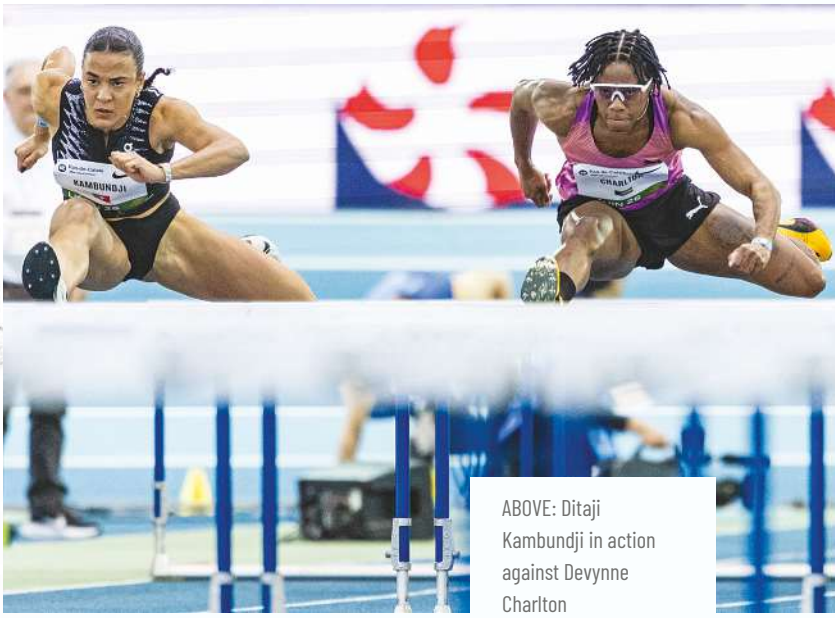
Outdoors, over the 100m hurdles, Kambundji had a feeling that something special might be on the cards but the Swiss is also very much aware that running fast in training is one thing, but doing it in competition – right when it matters – is quite another.

"I had a season where I had a lot of s table runs around the 12.40s and 12.50s," she says, "But I was able to break that big barrier in the moment when it really counted."

Her previous best of 12.40 would become a thing of the past in Tokyo. Facing a field that included Olympic champion Massai Russell and world



PHOTO BY ON RUNNING



ABOVE: Ditaji Kambundji in action against Devynne Charlton

record-holder Tobi Amusan, Kambundji held her nerve and ran the race of her life, timing her dip to the line perfectly.

"I had that moment where I was like: 'Okay, I know this was good, I might be in for a medal'," she recalls. "But I didn't want to [allow myself to think] 'Did I win?' and then not win. I needed to see it on the screen."

After that moment of limbo, the results flashed up. Kambundji had indeed won, in a time of 12.24, just shy of Yordanka Donkova's 27-year-old European record.

"The biggest thing that really made me proud is that I was able to prove to myself that: 'Okay, I can do what I think I'm able to do'," she says. "In my head all season, I'd been thinking about those fast times and knowing that it was possible, but I'd never run them. A lot of people can run fast in their head but I showed myself that I can run these fast times, and I proved it to myself in the right race."

As the moment of victory started to sink in, up in the stands, the Kambundji family were cheering the achievement to the rafters. Ditaji knew precisely what they were experiencing.

"I know exactly what it feels like to be on the other side," she says. "I spent my whole childhood in the stands, and I know what it's like to cheer your family on, and how special it is for the people watching. It's always something that really inspired me when I was in the stands, that one day I wanted to be there. I wanted to be the person competing."

So often the source of that inspiration was Mujinga, the reigning world indoor 60m and European 200m champion who has been many things to Ditaji – sister, training partner,



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

travel partner, room-mate. However, fulfilling another very different role took the older sister away from all of that until recently. She gave birth to her first child, Léon, in November and his auntie is smitten.

"It's the best thing ever," says Ditaji. "My oldest sister already had two kids, but the more kids the better. I love the role of being an auntie and I think it's such a beautiful journey for [Mujinga] to be on. It makes so much sense seeing her in that role and it's just beautiful to watch."

The sisters have now been reunited at their training base and it was just recently announced that Mujinga had joined Ditaji in signing with On, a brand that also has its roots in Switzerland.

"I love training with her," says Ditaji. "But then also travelling, competition, sharing a room – being able to do that with my sister has always impacted me in a positive way and meant I'm always comfortable where I am. It doesn't matter where I go on the planet.

"Training with her has also had a big impact. When we run together, she's always been faster than me and having her push me has been really, really helpful. I have really missed her these last couple of months, but I'm really excited now that she's back.

"At a young age, I was able to see my sister and look at what she does. A lot of things that were set in place for her – her structure, the coaching – were also things that worked really,

ABOVE: Kambundji secures gold in Tokyo

> **A lot of people can run fast in their head but I showed myself that I can run these fast times, and I did it in the right race**

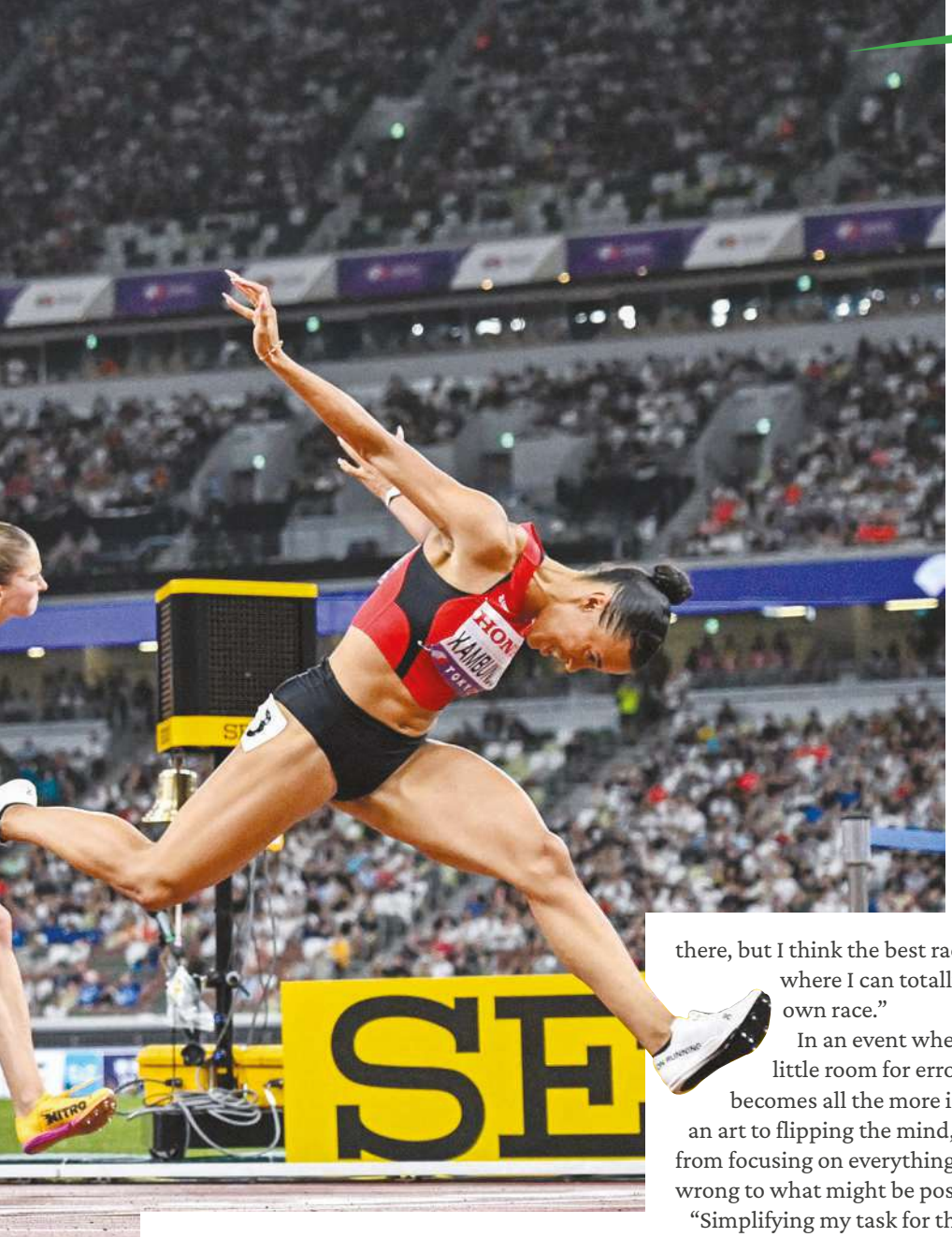


PHOTO BY ON RUNNING



ABOVE: Ditaji with her sister Mujinga

really well for me. I was able to find my perfect solution really quickly and at a young age."

The next big assignment for Ditaji is the World Indoor Championships. A silver medallist last year, she has warmed up nicely for Toruń and has already won in the venue this winter, taking victory at the Copernicus Cup last month. Opposition will be fierce, particularly in the form of defending champion and world record-holder Devynne Charlton – a dominant force over the 60m hurdles who is going for her third consecutive title. However, Kambundji has spent a lot of time working on the mental side of her event and isn't about to be intimidated.

"I have very, very strong competitors," she says. "It's always different to start next to her [Charlton]. She's a very, very quick starter, and I have to bring my absolute best, but the most important thing at a competition has always been to focus on myself.

"In Tokyo, for example, I don't know what happened next to me. I don't think I really need that one-to-one battle. I can handle it when it's there, but I think the best race will always be where I can totally run my own race."

In an event where there is so little room for error, mental clarity becomes all the more important. There is an art to flipping the mind, says Kambundji, from focusing on everything that could go wrong to what might be possible instead.

"Simplifying my task for that day is really what gets my mind to focus and be calm about everything," she says. The spinning thoughts don't really help you so [it's better to focus on] the simple thoughts like: 'I have to hurdle. That's something I've done 1000 times before and I'm going to do it 1000 times after this. I'm not doing something that I don't know how to do'. That is what really helped me.

"I work a lot with breathing exercises. I needed to learn 'what person am I when I go to the start line? Am I the person that needs to be really hyped with a lot of energy?'. I learned that that is absolutely not what works for me. I need to be calm, I need to be focused."

She adds: "A good race is a race where I don't remember much. In Tokyo, I remember the last few hurdles, but I have no memories of everything that happened from one to eight and that is a good thing.

"Of course, right before the race, there are a lot of thoughts. So that's when I use my techniques and calm myself down, but during the race, when I have a good race, I don't need the cues. I don't think, I just do." AW

Bar exam

REIGNING HIGH JUMP CHAMPION NICOLA OLYSLAGERS TALKS TO STUART WEIR ABOUT GOING FOR A GOLDEN WORLD INDOORS HAT-TRICK, MASTERING HER TECHNIQUE AND REMOVING ANY LIMITS TO HER AMBITION

The last time Nicola Olyslagers was fighting it out for a world championships gold medal, she also had to overcome a battle with the elements as torrential rain caused delays to the field events at Tokyo's Olympic stadium.

She emerged victorious from the downpours but, though she can be assured of staying completely dry this time around in Toruń, the 29-year-old knows all too well that the task of winning her third consecutive world indoor high jump title will be far from straightforward.

The two-time Olympic silver medallist is on a roll, having won gold in Glasgow in 2024, then in Nanjing 12 months ago, before going on to navigate that aforementioned Japanese monsoon to land her first global honour outdoors.

As if that weren't enough, 2025 also saw the Australian improve her Oceania record when she cleared 2.04m at the Diamond League final in Zurich. For the woman who has become well known for writing copious mid-competition notes, there were plenty of positives to jot down in her journal.

That will be part of her process this year, too, as she faces a field that contains the likes of world record-holder and Olympic champion Yaroslava Mahuchikh in Poland.

How do you assess 2025?

My main goal was to be in the best possible shape for the world championships, and everything else fell underneath that as far



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES





as priorities for my performance so it was a delight that the rest of the season seemed to work out very nicely towards that. Having the opportunity to win indoor and outdoor world championships was quite amazing.

You compete indoors and outdoors, in stadia and at street meetings. Do you have a preference?
I love a street meet. If you like having crowd interaction, a street meet is incomparably great because you can feel all of the people around you. There is no wind indoors and wind is the hard thing to adjust to. I think indoor surfaces are often more tailored to people who have a strong position at take-off so, if you just purely rely on speed, it's not going to work as well for you. If you purely rely on your power, it is better but the best jumpers indoors are ones that are really, really strong and very technically correct. Sometimes you can get away with things outdoors, but I feel, indoors, it's very, very technical.

Do you still get a thrill by clearing two metres or are you past that?
I still get excited for it. My first two-metre attempt and the first two-metre clearance in Sydney [in 2021] was one of the highlights of my life. That was a very, very big moment but I just felt like it wasn't one perfect jump.

I want to do that perfect jump in every environment and in every circumstance. Last year, I wanted to be a two-metre jumper in any conditions and I got to have a few goes of it in street meets, in the pouring rain in Tokyo and indoors. Every time I get over it, it is that really exciting point of: "Okay, we've done it again" but I'm trying to learn not to put the bar too low if my personal best could be higher.

How high do you think you can go?
I keep changing as an athlete year by year. Years ago, I wanted to jump two metres and now we're at 2.04m. My coach has banned me from putting a ceiling on how high I think I can jump because we improve each year, so I suppose what I am working on is just every centimetre higher at a time, just really aiming for it. I know that if you don't aim for the world record, you won't get the next centimetre. So if I don't aim 2.10m plus, I won't get 2.05m because it really requires you just to go outside of yourself to keep aiming higher and higher.

What ambitions do you have left?
I want to keep jumping higher. As I said, 2.04m is not the ceiling. Beyond that I think I've got more Olympics in me and I think there's a lot more, including more medals. I've never competed in South America, so hopefully one day I can do that and I've never done a full indoor season. I think that would be wonderful. The world indoor record is 2.08m – that looks quite nice. I don't know what the next four or five years will look like in the high jumping landscape – we might have multiple world record-holders coming through, you just never know – so I just want to compete and see how high I can push myself until my body

> **My coach has banned me from putting a ceiling on how high I think I can jump**

ABOVE: Nicola Olyslagers on her way to gold in Tokyo

BELOW: Competing at the last World Indoors in Nanjing



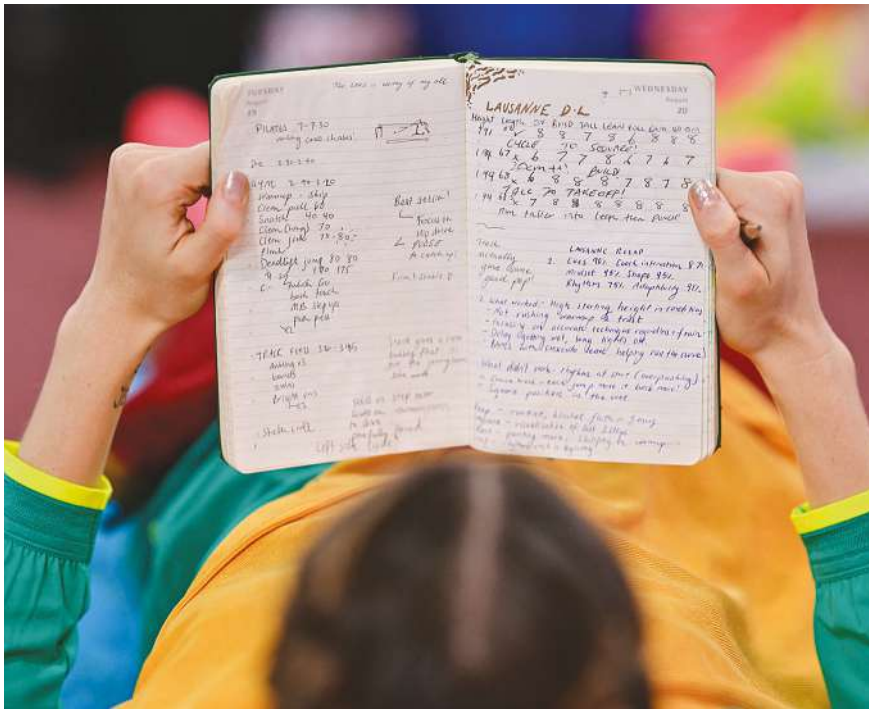
tells me it's time to retire. I want to enjoy the experience and hopefully tick a few things off the bucket list and jump two metres in every kind of conditions, maybe even in snow one day. Who knows? There's a lot more in the sport for me.

How would you describe your technique?
People like to say that jumpers are either power-based or speed-based. I would say I'm more power-based, but it's always a spectrum. No one's completely one or the other. When I won a medal at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, I was more of a speed jumper.

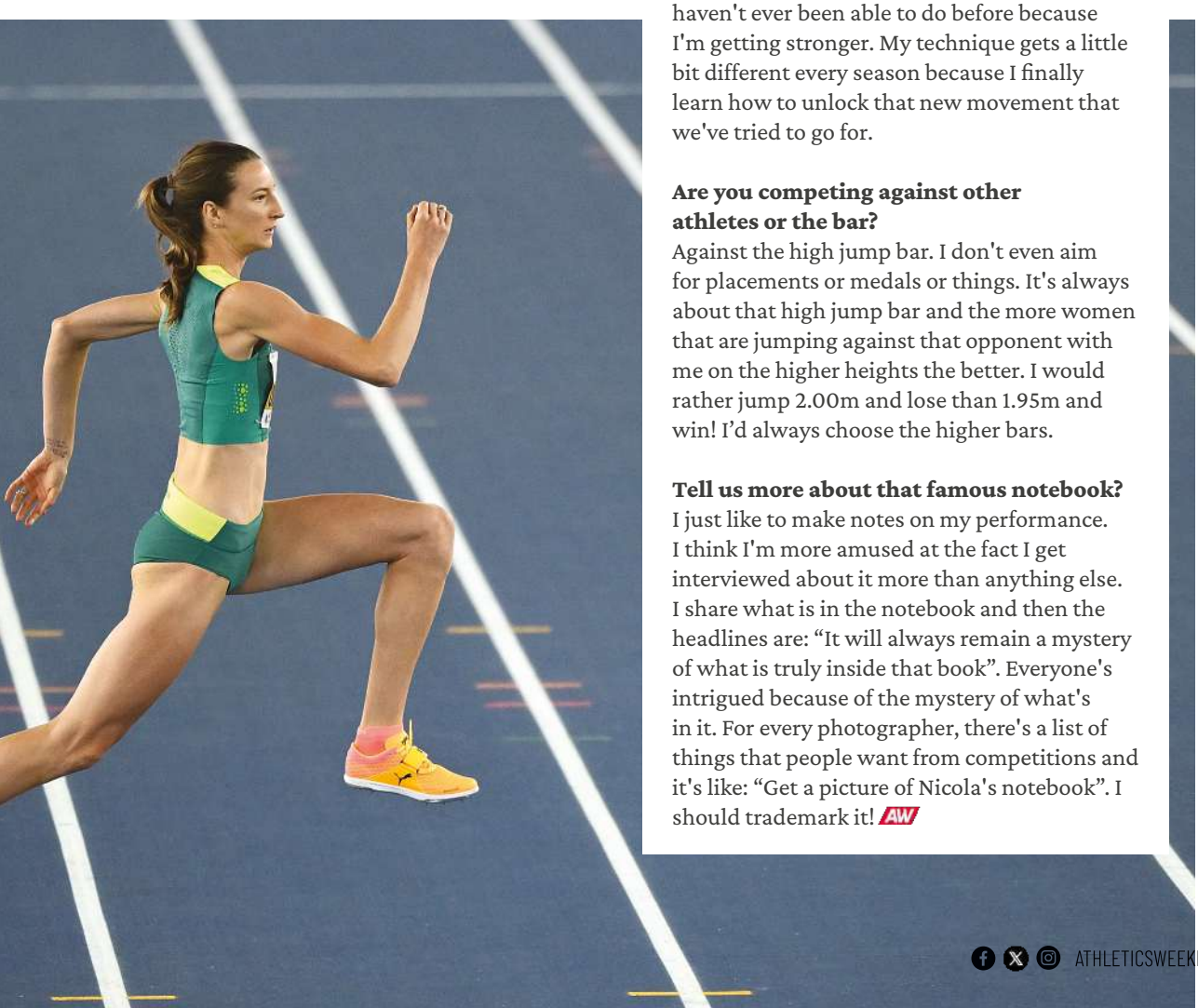
You can spot a speed jumper based on what they do at the start of the run-up. If they have these little steps running into it, they're trying to gain as much speed as possible and so that's what I was doing, but my body didn't get to the highest heights that I knew were possible.

In 2019, we changed it to be more power-based. We increased the weights in the gym, we made the run-up a lot shorter with fewer steps and tried to be as accurate as possible. And then, over the years, I've gradually developed a new run-up where I wasn't doing these big bounds at the start, but was trying to gain more speed.

I was just running at the start – still accurate, still the same amount of steps, but just trying to increase the speed a bit. My coach likes to say that I'm morphing into a middle-power speed hybrid jumper, which he's very proud of. I think I'm learning how to unlock certain muscles and certain movements that I haven't ever been able to do before because I'm getting stronger. My technique gets a little bit different every season because I finally learn how to unlock that new movement that we've tried to go for.



ABOVE: Olyslagers pores over her famous notebook during the Tokyo World Championships



Are you competing against other athletes or the bar?
Against the high jump bar. I don't even aim for placements or medals or things. It's always about that high jump bar and the more women that are jumping against that opponent with me on the higher heights the better. I would rather jump 2.00m and lose than 1.95m and win! I'd always choose the higher bars.

Tell us more about that famous notebook?
I just like to make notes on my performance. I think I'm more amused at the fact I get interviewed about it more than anything else. I share what is in the notebook and then the headlines are: "It will always remain a mystery of what is truly inside that book". Everyone's intrigued because of the mystery of what's in it. For every photographer, there's a list of things that people want from competitions and it's like: "Get a picture of Nicola's notebook". I should trademark it! AW



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



"It's a ticking timebomb"

SCOTT LINCOLN IS LOOKING TO REPAY THE FAITH OF THE COUPLE WHO BACKED HIM – AND SETTLE ANY ARGUMENTS OVER THE BRITISH SHOT PUT RECORD – BY "UNLOCKING" THE HUGE THROW HE KNOWS HE IS CAPABLE OF, WRITES BEN BLOOM

Scott Lincoln learned long ago that it was unwise to rely on his federation's centralised funding programme to finance his athletics career. On the two previous occasions that he had worked his way on to British Athletics' list for second-tier funding, the 32-year-old found himself swiftly removed after a season or two.

So when his name appeared among Britain's Olympic and world medallists on the highest tier of funding for the first time this winter, Lincoln's joy was tempered. The financial reward came as rightful recognition of his achievements last summer, when he placed eighth at the World Championships, achieving Britain's highest ever shot put finish in the competition's 42-year history.

But, without the security of backing from his governing body, Lincoln had already found an alternative route to support a career that he hopes will this year produce international medals and the end of a disputed British record.

It was at the 2022 Oregon World Championships – where he failed to advance from qualifying – that Lincoln was fortunate enough to be introduced to a husband and wife pair from London. The couple, who insist on remaining anonymous, had been successful in the business world and enjoy using some of their wealth to help others – giving money to those they felt were deserving, with no strings attached. That Lincoln became one of them may well have saved Britain's best shot putter in a generation.

"Without them I would probably have walked away from the sport a couple of times," says Lincoln, who turned full-time five years ago. "But I had the financial backing from them, which made all the difference. I've struck gold with them, not only with the money but I'm good friends with them now.

"I'll go and visit them quite often, and I've stayed with them. They are just fantastic people wanting to help people like me. They help a lot of other people in different avenues of the world. They don't want me feeling any pressure. When I first got the funding they said I didn't have to speak to them ever again and I'd still get the money.

"They just want to watch and enjoy from afar. But they are great people, so I've been thrilled to get to know them over the past few years and we've become very good friends.

"I go to them for advice because they can give







me a different perspective on things that don't come from within sport. I really respect both of them for what they have done for me in my career."

While he now stands alongside the great and very good on British Athletics' Olympic podium funding, it is telling that an athlete of Lincoln's calibre had to resort to such measures to keep his career going.

"It's a difficult sport to be in unless you are financially backed or are willing to spend all of your wages on what you do," he says. "British Athletics funding is there to help you in your career, and progress your career, but you also can't rely on it because it's very fickle. It's very performance-based and quite brutal if you don't match the things they are asking of you straight off.

"The first time I was on it, they said I would be on it for two years, and then they dropped me after one. The second time, I appealed being removed because I felt hard done by – the appeal seemed to be successful but then they reconvened and said no. It's just a matter of not relying on it."

It is approaching a decade since Lincoln first pulled on a senior GB vest, but these are early days in what is something of a second coming in his shot put career. It was after competing at his second Olympics in Paris 18 months ago that he decided a change was needed. Having been with his childhood coach Paul Wilson since his early teenage years, he began scouting around for a fresh set-up. The search landed him in Melbourne, Australia, under the guidance of Dale Stevenson.

"I was wanting a new challenge, something fresh, to find my spark again," explains Lincoln. "I became a full-time athlete with Paul, he got me to two Olympics and I won a Commonwealth medal [bronze in 2022]. I'll always be thankful for what Paul did for me. But I still feel I have more to give.

"I needed something to stimulate me again: fresh ideas and a fresh perspective on things. I was very frustrated by my major championship performances. I was doing well throughout the year and was very consistent, but as soon as I got to a major championship I was way down. I just couldn't put my finger on what it was."

Since November 2024, Lincoln has lived a dual life, spending winter and much of the spring in Australia – where his girlfriend, javelin thrower Freya Jones, has family – and returning to his home in Yorkshire for indoor and outdoor competition seasons. It has not taken him long to start reaping the rewards.

After just a few months Down Under, he came within two centimetres of a European Indoor medal last winter. That was then

> **"I just want to be the first British 22m thrower and clean the whole British record thing up. If I throw 22m, there's no dispute about it**



ABOVE: Scott Lincoln finished eighth at the World Championships in Tokyo last summer

ABOVE, LEFT: Lincoln celebrates bronze at the Commonwealth Games in 2022

followed by that career high of finishing eighth at the World Championships in Tokyo.

"That was definitely a huge step forward in my career, in regards to actually performing at a major," says Lincoln, of making the world final. "Dale is all about the major championships – everything in between works around that.

"It was a big step not just in results, but mentally, knowing I can make the finals comfortably. There was genuinely a time in that final where, for the first time in my career, I was sat watching the circle feeling like I could win a medal if I connected fully.

"It didn't happen, but it's a huge mindset shift from trying to scrape into finals and never quite making it. We're going to build from there now."

His current return to home shores began with an astonishing 21st consecutive British title won in Birmingham last month. Yet despite not tasting defeat at a national championships either indoors or outdoors for 10-and-a-half years, and earning Commonwealth bronze in front of the Birmingham crowd three years ago, his yearning for more prompts a surprising admission: "I feel like I don't have much to show for my career right now.

"Getting the medal at the Commonwealth Games gave me a taster of what it feels like to win medals. Hopefully I can get a few more now and also the British record."

That latter goal is non-negotiable. Geoff Capes' official national mark of 21.68m has stood since 1980 and there is a personal connection to Lincoln, with the former World's Strongest Man serving as a mentor until his death a little over a year ago. The situation is also made a bit murkier by Carl Myerscough's 21.92m throw in 2003 – soon after his return from a doping ban – which was never ratified by the governing body.

"In all honesty, I just want to be the first British 22m thrower," says Lincoln. "I've got this thing in my head that I just want to clean the whole British record thing up. If I throw 22 metres, the record is clean, there's no dispute about it and the job is done."

The time to do so, he insists, is now. His latest British indoor title came with a best effort of 20.80m, but Lincoln says the moment was tinged with frustration because "I know that there's bigger in me". After a second winter spent in Melbourne, he is ready – and fully expecting – to unleash something in the near future.

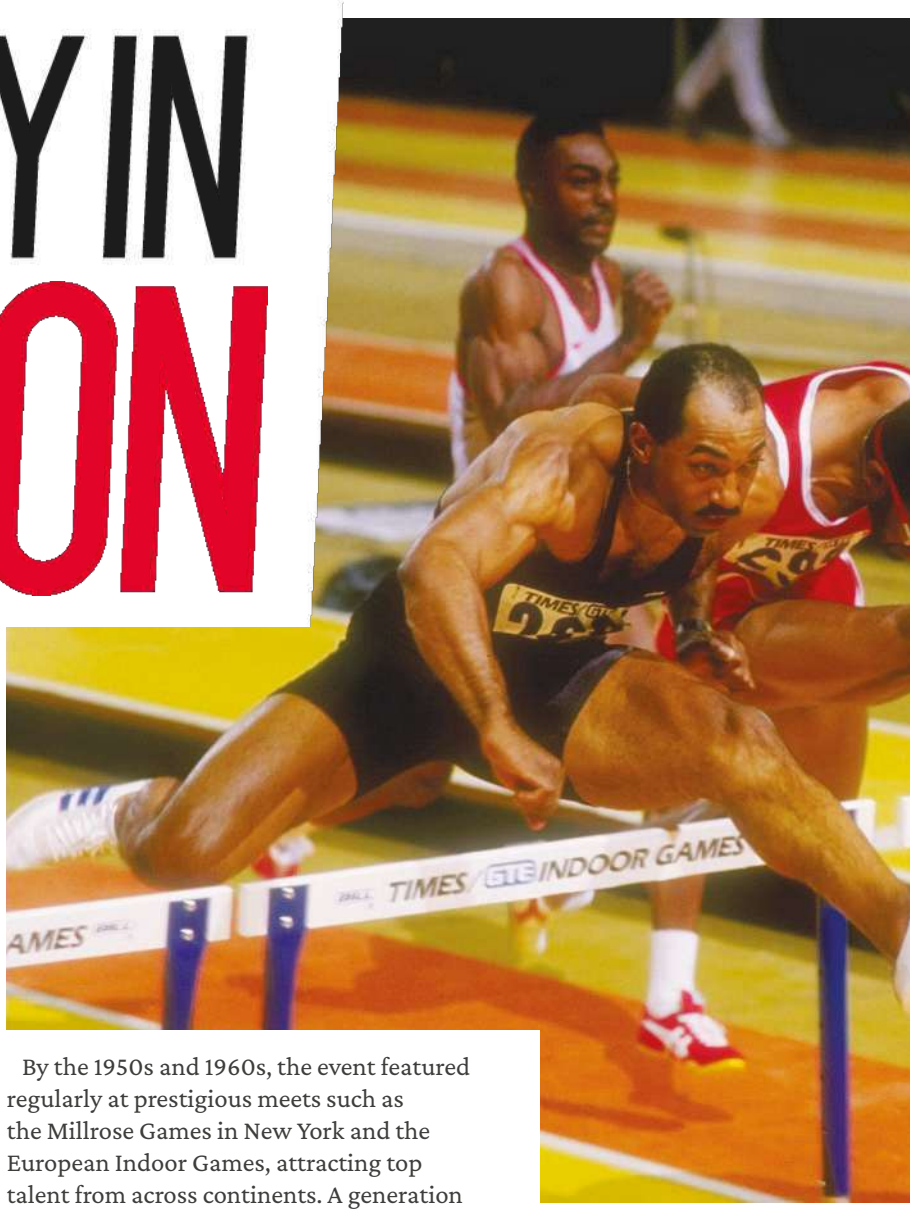
He adds: "I did a bit of training in Loughborough the day before the [British Indoor Championships] and they were going a long way past my PB. I'm definitely in PB shape. In my eyes, I'm in British record shape. But you're not in that shape until it comes out.

"I've got a lot of horsepower at the moment, it's just not quite coming out at the right time in competition. We'll figure it out and then it will come. It's a ticking timebomb at the moment. Hopefully it will come out when it needs to. I need to unlock the big throw that is sat there waiting."

If things go to plan, it will emerge at this month's World Indoor Championships, where he hopes to challenge for the podium. Whether it comes in the next few weeks or not, he is confident that this summer will be his most successful yet, with a self-imposed expectation of winning medals at both the Commonwealth Games and European Championships: "I think 2026 is my time." AW

POETRY IN MOTION

Dave Holmes looks at the development of the 60m hurdles, an event for "sprinters with attitude" that blends speed, power and precision



In the world of indoor track and field, few events offer the raw, explosive drama of the 60m hurdles. Over in the blink of an eye, the fastest athletes sprint for just over seven seconds, clearing five imposing barriers with surgical precision.

While the outdoor 110m (men) and 100m (women) hurdles are the blue-riband events, the indoor 60m hurdles is a specialist's arena – a brutal test of acceleration, technique and nerve. Its history, though shorter than its outdoor siblings, is a chronicle of speed, innovation and the relentless pursuit of the hundredth of a second.

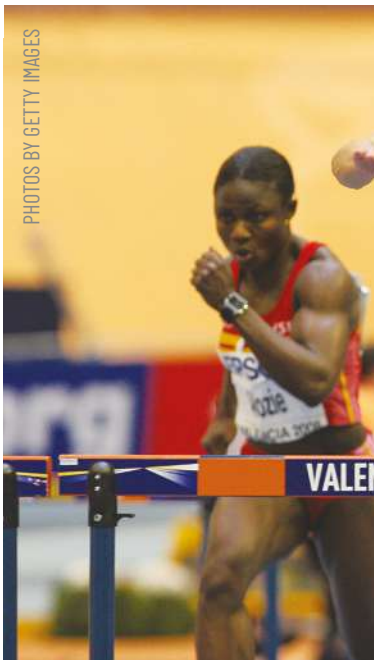
The 60m hurdles emerged in the 1930s as an indoor adaptation of outdoor hurdle racing, born out of the need for winter competition in colder climates. Arena tracks were typically no longer than 60 metres, forcing organisers to shorten the sprints and hurdle races, using five barriers instead of the usual ten.

Early competitions in Europe and North America were lively, intimate affairs, where the crowd could feel every step, every airborne second. Local athletes experimented with starts, hurdle technique and sprint rhythm, producing informal "world bests" that were eagerly discussed in coaching circles long before official records existed.

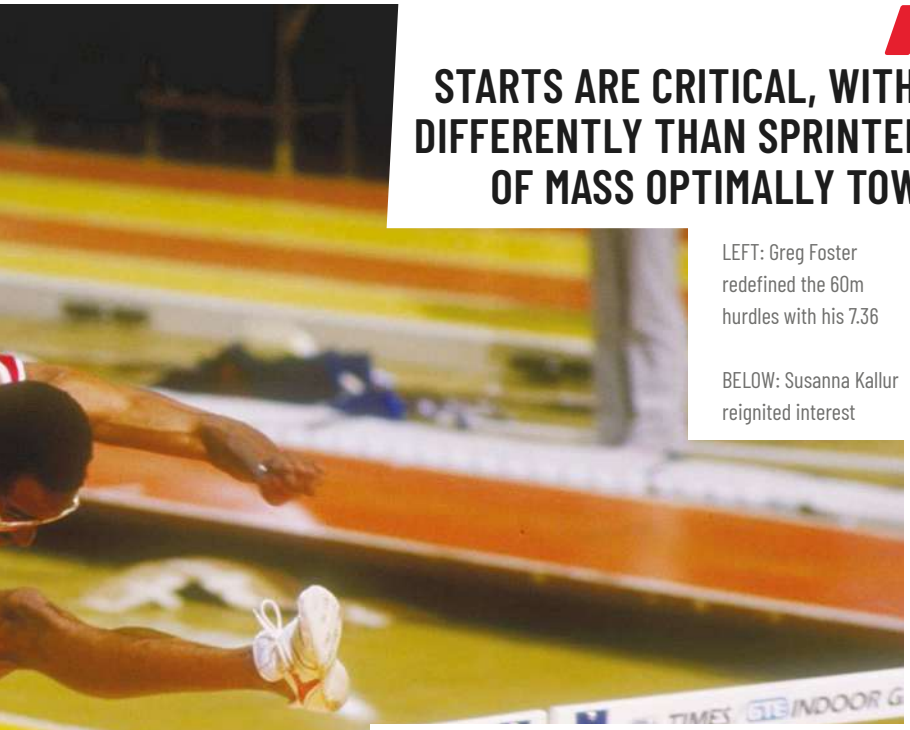
By the 1950s and 1960s, the event featured regularly at prestigious meets such as the Millrose Games in New York and the European Indoor Games, attracting top talent from across continents. A generation of indoor specialists in Europe and North America pushed both speed and technical sophistication, refining the explosive five-hurdle rhythm that defines the event today.

Through the 1970s and early 1980s, the 60m hurdles gained a clearly defined identity. As indoor competitions increasingly moved onto synthetic surfaces, performances became faster and more repeatable. American hurdlers dominated the world best lists, with figures such as Renaldo Nehemiah and Willie Gault blending raw speed with pinpoint accuracy, while European athletes such as Thomas Munkelt brought meticulous technique and rhythmic perfection to every barrier.

Indoor meets had become arenas of intense rivalry, the crowd's roar echoing off the walls as athletes exploded from the blocks. Though these performances were not officially ratified, they forged a deep competitive history and a standard of excellence that set the stage for



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



LEFT: Greg Foster redefined the 60m hurdles with his 7.36

BELOW: Susanna Kallur reignited interest



STARTS ARE CRITICAL, WITH HURDLERS SPACING BLOCKS DIFFERENTLY THAN SPRINTERS TO PROJECT THEIR CENTRE OF MASS OPTIMALLY TOWARD THAT FIRST BARRIER

formal recognition. In 1987, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) began ratifying indoor records.

The first officially ratified men's record was 7.46 seconds, but American Greg Foster would soon redefine the event. In January 1987, he clocked 7.36 seconds in Los Angeles, a mark that would inspire a generation of hurdlers to push the boundaries of human speed.

The 1990s saw a shift across the Atlantic. Great Britain's Colin Jackson dominated with his distinctive, flawless technique, culminating in a legendary run of 7.30 in Sindelfingen, Germany in 1994. That record would stand for nearly 27 years, a monumental target for every aspiring hurdler. The women's event of the era was shaped by the Soviet Union's Lyudmila Narozhilenko, who progressively lowered the world record to 7.63 seconds by 1993, a mark untouched for over a decade. These athletes combined physical prowess with artistry, their performances studied and admired by coaches worldwide.

The new millennium brought fresh challengers. Cuba's Dayron Robles injected blistering speed into the men's event, running 7.33 in 2008 and 7.34 in 2010, flirting with Jackson's seemingly untouchable record. On the women's side, Sweden's Susanna Kallur reignited interest in 2008 with a 7.68-second run, demonstrating the global spread of talent and the continued evolution of technique.

The 2020s have been a golden era. Leading the charge is American Grant Holloway, whose blend of raw sprinting power – a flat 60m best of 6.50 – and technical mastery has made him synonymous with the event. After chipping away at Jackson's record with 7.29 in 2021, Holloway finally broke it in February 2024 at the US Indoor Championships in Albuquerque with 7.27, extending an extraordinary unbeaten indoor streak spanning more than a decade, with over 90 consecutive victories in the 55m and 60m hurdles.

"I knew it was going to be a good one after I got out of the blocks," he said, capturing the confidence and instinctive timing that separates the great from the merely fast. Holloway cemented his legacy with an historic third consecutive world indoor title in 2025, underlining his status as one of the most dominant figures in indoor track history.

The women's record has seen a parallel revolution. The 2024 season featured a stunning duel: The Bahamas' Devynne Charlton ran 7.67 at the Millrose Games, only for America's teenage sensation Tia Jones to equal the mark five days later. On the biggest stage, at the World Indoor Championships in Glasgow, Charlton lowered the record to 7.65.

The drama of these duels, decided by hundredths of a second, captures why the 60m hurdles continues to captivate both athletes and spectators alike. But the event is not just about stopwatch times. Biomechanical studies reveal why it is so uniquely demanding: starts are critical, with hurdlers spacing blocks differently than sprinters to project their centre of mass optimally toward that first barrier.

That opening hurdle is the most distinct, requiring a shorter take-off and wide first step to launch the five-hurdle rhythm, a pattern that elite athletes execute with near-perfect consistency. Every millisecond counts and, to the trained eye, the 60m hurdles is as much art as sprint. As the former British record-holder Lorna Boothe once put it: "It's poetry in motion." Holloway would agree. "Hurdlers are sprinters with attitudes," he says. "Our event is sexier than just a regular fast sprint because we have barriers in the way." AW

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A RICH HISTORY

For AW's club of the month feature in partnership with England Athletics, Tim Adams visits Birchfield Harriers, a breeding ground for top athletes

There aren't many clubs across the UK that can boast the rich history of Birchfield Harriers. Since 1877, the Birmingham-based organisation has been the home for thousands of aspiring athletes, with over 100 members having represented their countries at the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

That journey has now been highlighted through *AW's* new documentary series, in partnership with England Athletics, which will feature one club from across the country every month.

From 1929 to 1977, Birchfield Harriers was based at Perry Barr but then moved to the Alexander Stadium, named after the club's founder Wolf Alexander. Tony Hadley witnessed that transition. After joining the club as a 14-year-old in 1967, he then became a coach and is now in his second term as chairman. Few people know Birchfield better.

"The reason that Birchfield has a formal legal agreement between Birmingham City Council and ourselves is because we had 14 acres of land down the road," he explains. "We were the only club in the country to actually own our own track.

"As a consequence of handing that 14 acres to the city 50 years ago, we're now guaranteed to have an athletics track here for at least the next 70 years."

During his coaching years, Hadley trained



ABOVE: Tony Hadley is the chairman of Birchfield Harriers



the likes of Derek Redmond, Phil Brown and Matthew Hudson-Smith. Since Archie Robertson became the club's first Olympic champion in 1908, a myriad of other medallists have passed through the doors including Denise Lewis, Katharine Merry and Mark Lewis-Francis, to name just a few.

"That history is based on a really good connection with the schools in the area over a number of decades," Hadley adds. "All of our Olympic alumni would have come through the West Midlands Best Kids programme, and that's when the schools organisations within the area were very strong."

Developing athletes from the juniors to international level takes perseverance, dedication and skill. One person who is well accustomed to having an eye for talent is Sharon Morris, a UK Athletics Level 3 Sprints and Combined Events Coach.

She was the person who first spotted Hudson-Smith, who has gone on to become the British 400m record-holder and secure an Olympic silver, two world medals and two European titles over the distance.

"It's all about the athletes and getting them to be the best they can be," Morris says. "I spotted Matthew as a nine-year-old. He came to Birchfield Harriers academy and I recall saying to his mum that: 'I'd like to coach him as I think he's really special'.

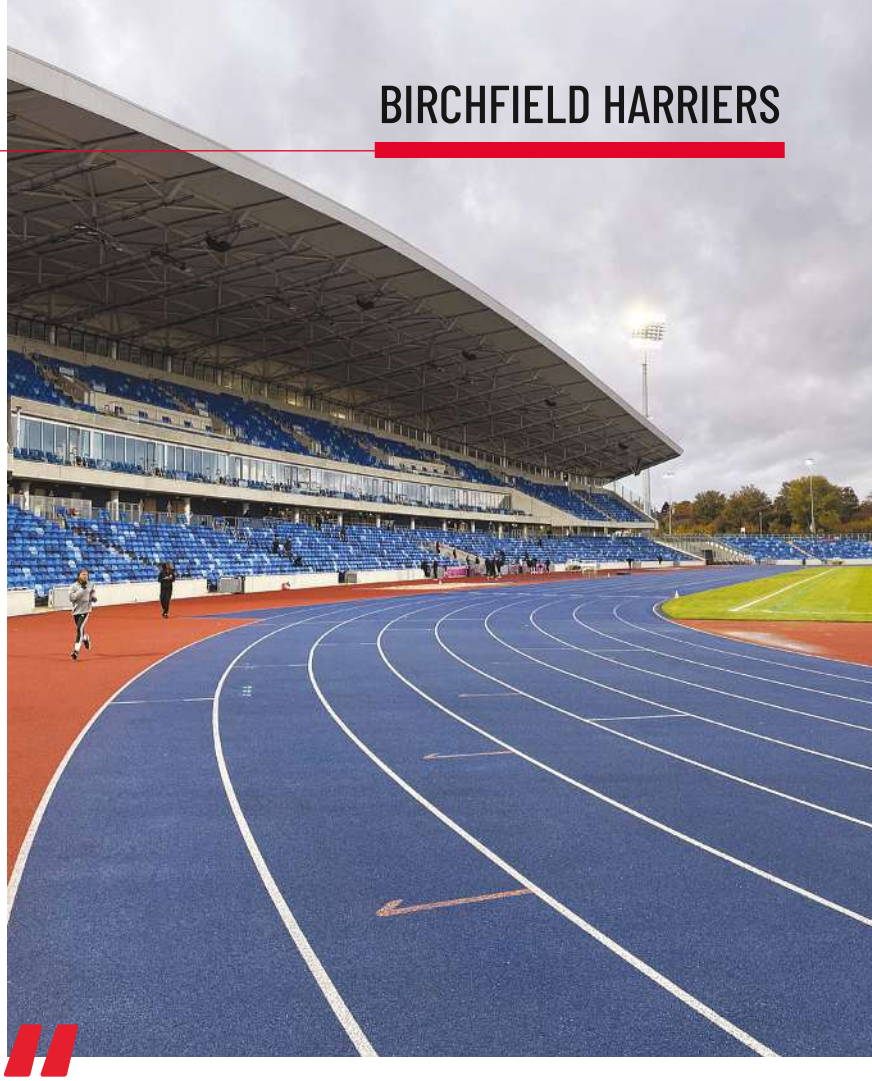
"I coached him for around four to five years and he never forgets me. It's so great to see how he's developed and that he's become such an inspiration now to young athletes."

One emerging young talent at the club is Irish junior sprinter Precious Akpe-Moses. The 19-year-old, who joined Birchfield three years ago, was inspired to join because of her sister Gina, and has subsequently thrived on the track. At last year's European U20 Athletics Championships in Tampere, she competed in eight races and finished fourth in the 200m.

"There's a lot of support and communication at the club," she explains. "If you're feeling that things aren't working for you, then you can obviously address that in a sensible manner. People are aiming for major championships, so having a nice track and gym is a big help. I feel like I have the facilities that I need to get towards my goals."

Like most clubs, however, Birchfield Harriers hasn't been immune to challenges. During the rebuilding of Alexander Stadium for the 2022 Commonwealth Games, Hadley states the club was "nearly put out of business".

"We had three years of not having a home," he says. "We sadly didn't have the opportunity to recruit new people to the club because we weren't initially allowed back into the stadium until six months after the Commonwealth Games."



EVERYTHING IS GEARED TOWARDS HOW TO PRESENT THE SPORT TO THE YOUNGER ATHLETES IN A WAY THAT IS ATTRACTIVE TO THEM

RIGHT: Sharon Morris spotted Olympic medallist Matthew Hudson-Smith's potential

ABOVE: Alexander Stadium, home of Birchfield Harriers



Morris concurs and states "there is a gap when it comes to some age groups as we did lose a few athletes when we moved" but adds "we've been fighting back since lockdown". There is likely to be a further spike in interest later this year, too, when the European Championships come to town.

"The mantra that we're working with, with the officers of the club to inspire the next generation, is 'pass the baton'," Hadley adds. "Everything is geared towards how to present the sport to the younger athletes in a way that is attractive to them. I'm pretty positive and hopeful we can put things in place that can help rebuild the sport in this area." AW

Scan here to watch the club of the month documentary

WHAT REALLY WORKS?

Peta Bee takes a closer looks at the legal supplements that are becoming a key part of the conversation around improved performances, and assesses their effectiveness



Super shoes, advanced training methods and fast tracks are contributing to a slew of record-breaking times, but do supplements also play a role? As exercise physiologists and nutrition scientists probe ever more deeply into the effects of pills, powders and drinks that are billed as legal performance enhancers, an increasing number of athletes of all levels are using them to see if they provide an edge. Four main players have emerged – but how much do we really know about whether or not they work?

Bicarb

What is it?

Bicarbonate of soda or baking soda – the stuff added to cakes – has been packaged in newly digestible forms that are easier on the gut than taking the stuff neat. Maurten, the market leader from Sweden, sells micro-pills of bicarb encased in a hydrogel that sends it straight to the intestine, minimising the famous adverse GI issues. Joshua Cheptegei and Keely Hodgkinson are fans.

Then there is Flycarb, produced in the UK, which combines an energy mix that protects the bicarb from breaking down too early in the stomach, allowing for a controlled release into the intestines. Dosage levels for both are based on body weight and the products require mixing with water before consumption.

Another delivery method is enteric coated capsules such as those offered by Healthspan's Elite Sodium Bicarbonate tablets. According to Healthspan you need two to three capsules per 10 kg bodyweight with plenty of water – that is up to 18 capsules for someone weighing

PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

nine-and-a-half stones – and might need to spread intake over six to eight hours.

Claims: It works to improve performance by raising the pH – lowering the acidity – of the blood. By neutralising increased muscle acidity (hydrogen ions) during exercise, fatigue and muscle burn are delayed, allowing you to run harder for longer. It has a positive effect on endurance performance for exercise lasting between 60 seconds and 60 minutes.

Evidence: Bicarb and its effects on sports performance has been extensively researched since the 1980s. There's no question that it works for some aspects of performance. Scientists from Edge Hill University showed a 1.4 per cent boost – about 60 seconds improvement in an hour – for cyclists using bicarb before a 40km time trial.

But it's not all good news. A small 2025 study in the *Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition* found the Maurten Bicarb System did not significantly enhance performance in a group of college runners. It is notoriously hard on the digestive system, causing bloating, cramps and diarrhoea for some athletes. A review by leading experts in the *International Journal for Sports Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism* highlights what many athletes will already know: "Potential for gut disturbances is high risk in running-based events, likely due to the increased sodium content and large fluid intake required to consume the supplement."

Verdict: Overall, the evidence is positive (if you can stomach it) and there's little doubt that bicarb works. The World Athletics Consensus Statement on Nutrition for Athletes lists bicarb as a supplement that has a strong enough evidence base for contributing to performance.



Beetroot shots

What are they?
Shots of a standardised amount (up to 400mg) of concentrated beetroot juice, which is rich in dietary nitrates.

Claims: Nitrates are converted by the body to nitrite and then nitric oxide, which is known to relax and widen blood vessels, leading to better endurance capacity and recovery. Nitrates have been shown to improve oxygen efficiency, reduce fatigue and increase endurance.



ABOVE: There is positive evidence about Bicarb

LEFT: Beetroot shots are rich in dietary nitrates

Evidence: There is plenty of research and evidence for nitrates from beetroot, many confirming the performance-enhancing effects. One study in the journal *Nutrients* found that female athletes who consumed beetroot juice for two days before attempting a high intensity training session had better muscle endurance and less muscle pain than those who didn't take the beetroot supplement.

Nitrates are also available in capsule form but, as is often the case, real food is the winner. In a recent study researchers at Indiana University found that beetroot juice beat nitrate supplements on various aspects of sports performance and recovery because of the phytonutrients in beetroot which amplify the beneficial effects.

Verdict: Worth a (beetroot) shot. It gets a tick from the World Athletics Consensus Statement on Nutrition for Athletes as a supplement with a strong enough evidence base for contributing to performance.

"Beetroot shots are a convenient way of getting enough nitrates in your diet and there are studies showing they can increase muscle efficiency, endurance and recovery," says the sports nutritionist Anita Bean.

They are not without potential side-effects, including pink pee or stools and stomach cramping for some users.

Nomio

What is it?
A relative newcomer on the scene, this is a pre-competition drink made from young broccoli shoots, lemon juice and sugar developed by scientists at the renowned Karolinska Institute in Sweden and the Swedish School of Sport and Health Science in Stockholm. Their athlete ambassadors include Cole Hocker and Andreas Almgren.

Cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli and cauliflower, are a good source of isothiocyanates, organic compounds that interact with the body in a number of beneficial ways. Young broccoli shoots harvested just a few days after germination contain the highest levels of isothiocyanates. Ideally, the shots should be consumed two hours before competition.

Claims: Stabilises blood sugar levels and reduces the build-up of lactic acid in muscles, delaying fatigue and enhancing performance.

Evidence: For a study, Larsen and his team asked healthy participants to perform hard interval training for a week at a time, performing five four-minute bike efforts at 90-95 per cent maximum effort, sometimes followed by three to four 30-second sprints.

For one week they were provided with two broccoli shots to be taken morning and evening and two to three hours before exercise and on the other a placebo drink. Results, published in *Redox Biology* showed the broccoli shots led to less oxidative stress in the muscles, better blood sugar control, lower lactic acid levels and overall improved performance.

Verdict: Tom Brownlee, associate professor in applied sport sciences at the University of Birmingham, says the research paper providing the basis for the product claims holds promise.

"If we were able to optimally balance the impact of oxidative stress on adaptation, it could be really beneficial for pro athletes and weekend warriors alike," he says.

But Asker Jeukendrup, sports nutrition scientist and founder of *mysportscience.com*, says more evidence is needed.

"Benefits should be based on the totality of evidence and at the moment this is very thin and pretty much from one source only," he says. "There is very little evidence at present and we certainly need more independent studies, ideally performed in a range of athletes."



ABOVE: Caffeine gum has become popular in recent years

Caffeine gum

What is it?
Caffeine-infused gum is increasingly popular, with research by pharmacologists showing it is absorbed quickly for faster results than caffeine from other sources, such as coffee and tea.

Claims: Caffeine can prevent fatigue and feelings of pain by blocking a chemical called adenosine that is responsible for making us feel drowsy. In doing so, it improves focus, alertness, motivation and reaction time for athletes. The substance can also help muscles to exert more force by mobilising the calcium needed to produce powerful contractions.

Evidence: According to a recent study in *Sports Medicine*, caffeine stimulates the central nervous system and blocks the release of adenosine, a chemical that promotes sleepiness and fatigue, with the result being a stimulating effect. This prompts the release of hormones such as dopamine and epinephrine which enhance mood and alertness.

The statement by the ISSN says there are moderate benefits to taking caffeine before strength training, sprinting, jumping and throwing performances, but the biggest and most consistent gains come when it is consumed before endurance activities such as running. You don't have to be an Olympian to reap rewards. Exercise scientists from Sheffield Hallam University found that recreational runners who chewed gum supplying 300mg of caffeine 30 minutes before a Saturday morning parkrun ran an average 17.28 seconds faster than those who were given a placebo.

Verdict: Caffeine is one of the five supplements shown to support performance by a World Athletics review panel. Black coffee does the job, but gum provides a standardised dose of caffeine that is easily and more rapidly absorbed.



KPMG Prague Night of PBs

Commonwealth Games Limit and National Record at Stake

Last year, the KPMG Prague Night of PBs marked a return to track racing for UK's Daniel Jarvis and offered a breathtaking solo effort in the women's 5,000m by Tereza Zimovjanová, a UK-based Czech triathlete. The third edition of the race, slated for May 14th, will again feature at least one British headliner: Jack Kavanagh, the 2025 British championship 5,000m runner-up. Kavanagh is expected to lead the front pack together with Czech indoor mile record holder Jan Friš, who is transitioning to longer distances. Both will be trying to break 13:25. For Kavanagh, the time limit is a ticket to the Commonwealth Games. For Friš, the local hopeful, it would be a new Czech national record.

From lockdown runner to English vest

Jack Kavanagh's progress to elite level running has been remarkable. Like many other runners, the primary school teacher only began running in lockdown. In November 2021, he joined his local club, Holland Sports AC, where he met ex-Winter Olympian and Olympic Coach, Neil Danby. Danby describes his coaching style as follows: "It is rooted in my Scandinavian experience as a biathlete. First and foremost, build a good base. Focus on threshold training rather than hammering high-intensity workouts several days a week."



The approach clearly works for Kavanagh, an On Cloud ambassador who now boasts a road 5k PB of 13:34 and has already earned his first English vest. He has recently paused his career as a teacher to pursue his ambition to become a professional athlete.

Photo: Jerry Sun

Will Friš break a long-standing Czech record?

Jan Friš, a KPMG employee by day, is well known to local Czech fans. This year, he has made the exciting announcement of moving to longer distances, en route to his ultimate goal of qualifying for the LA Olympic Games in the marathon. His mile PBs suggest he should be a force to reckon with in Czech distance running.

The KPMG Prague Night of PBs will be his attempt to break the Czech record in the 5,000m set in 1980 by Jiří Sýkora, a patron of the event. Coincidentally, the Czech record of 13:24:99 is virtually the same as Kavanagh's 13:25 limit for the Commonwealth Games. "I am glad to see Jan won't be alone in his effort to break my record. Hopefully a solid pack will form at the front and the boys will be able to help each other. I can't wait to see the record broken – it's long overdue!" comments Sýkora.

Inspired by London's Night of the 10,000m PBs

The first edition of the KPMG Prague Night of PBs was held in 2024. The race organisers proudly say that the event is modelled after Highgate Harriers' Night of the 10,000m PBs, which is taking a year off in 2026. "Our mission is to create an unforgettable atmosphere for runners and draw more spectators to the track. If London being cancelled this year leaves you without a race in the spring, come to Prague and race our 5,000m," says KPMG Partner Eva Bláhová, who has provided auspices for the event.

Besides elite 5,000m races, the KPMG Prague Night of PBs will offer elite mile races, kids events and two 3,000m races open to the general public. The entire proceeds from the event will be donated to Spartak Praha 4, the club hosting the event.

HOW THEY TRAIN

TOM KEEN

AGE: 24 **COACH:** MARK VILE

Katy Barden talks to the indoor 3000m champion about learning lessons, building from a solid base and aiming to keep up with the best of British

As British indoor 3000m champion Tom Keen looks ahead to a summer of possibilities, he reflects with good humour on a 2022 training camp in Colorado that led inexplicably to one world title (for Jake Wightman) and a 3:40 1500m in Luxembourg (for him).

Wightman and Keen have trained together on many occasions, most recently in Flagstaff, Arizona at the end of last year. There's mutual benefit, of course, but as Keen points out: "If I knew he was in a good place, I knew I'd be in a good place, and that gave me confidence going into races." Except it didn't always work out: "It was weird," he says, "because I did every session [with Jake] in Colorado, then I came second in a B race in Luxembourg and he won Worlds in 3:29. I was just like: 'What's happened there?'."

Keen laughs, but he acknowledges that perhaps there was a lesson in there, too.

Last year is a perfect example. In 2025, he ran a personal best over 3000m in Glasgow in January (7:45.87) and a 1500m best of 3:35.12 in Boston in February. He then made his senior track debut for Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the European Athletics Indoor Championships in Apeldoorn. It was a successful indoor season that had the potential to set him up for a fantastic summer, but the results didn't quite match up to his expectations.

"Nothing really went wrong," he says. "I raced loads and loads and just ran 3:35 over and over again in as many different ways as you could think possible. I guess it's something – at least it was consistent – but it was just frustrating not to have that one breakthrough run where everything clicks and you knock a second-and-a-half, two seconds off your PB."

'Plateau' over 'progress' perhaps, but a very solid benchmark from which to build.

Keen's January 2026 camp to Potchefstroom in South Africa, which coincided with a move to adidas – an exciting opportunity that he hopes will enable him to be "a little bit more professional" with his set-up and focus entirely on his own needs – marked the start of a new era.

He returned to the UK to win his first British title in a thrilling 3000m, his 7:51.68 edging out second-placed Henry McLuckie (7:51.70). Notably, he did so while keeping his mileage high and without too many "super-fast sessions". In fact, there wasn't too much focus on the indoor season at all.

"I'm feeling strong and I'm more confident than I have been [in the past] going into the main outdoor season," he says, acknowledging the benefits of a slightly different approach to training this year.

"I had a sort of small breakthrough indoors last year, but when I ran that fairly respectable 1500m [of 3:35.12 in Boston] it ended up being my season's best, so I think we just focused too much on doing the really quick stuff.

"Looking back at the mileage, I'd actually dropped down to like 30, 40 miles a week, whereas this year we've kept it up at about 80 all the way through the camp. Obviously [pre-UK Indoor Championships] was a little bit down, but we'll get straight back on it again and hopefully just stay more consistent instead of having the peaks and troughs throughout the winter."

The 24-year-old University of Birmingham graduate has a lot to look forward to as he targets selection for this summer's Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and the European Athletics Championships in Birmingham. "I've still got a fairly strong connection with Birmingham, so to be up there and to compete in front of a home crowd would be pretty special," he says. The European team in particular will be tough – 1500m running in Great Britain





PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

A TYPICAL TRAINING WEEK

POTCHEFSTROOM, SOUTH AFRICA, JANUARY 2026

Keen, who is based just outside of Cambridge, trains primarily alone but links up with his club (Cambridge & Coleridge) on a Tuesday evening.
Alongside coach Mark Vile and athletes including Callum Dodds and Tom Bridger, he spent January 2026 in Potchefstroom where he averaged around 80 miles per week.

- Monday: (am) 8-9 miles at steady pace (sub-six minute miles); (pm) 5 miles easy (on grass) and 30min cross trainer
- Tuesday: (am) hills or longer track session e.g., 10 x 600m at 3km pace off 90 seconds; (pm) easy run and gym
- Wednesday: (am) 6 miles followed by prehab session; (pm) 6 miles
- Thursday: (am) tempo session e.g., 6 x 1mile off 75sec (road) – controlled efforts at 5min/mile pace; (pm) 5 miles easy plus speed drills and sprints
- Friday: 45min cross trainer or complete rest (alternate each week)
- Saturday: (am) split 800s at 3km pace or quicker e.g., 2 x (600m-200m/500m-300m/400m-400m) with 60sec between efforts, 3 minutes between sets; (pm) 30min easy run, 30min cross train, plus gym
- Sunday: 14-15 miles

Favourite session: "My favourite session is five sets of 300m (1500m pace) then 200m (flat out) with five minutes between sets."

Least favourite session: "Probably 500s or 600s on the track; I just think that if you're doing 500m or 600m on the track you're basically just running the same pace as you do for a 400m effort - but for longer!"

continues to represent the global standard – but that in itself is a positive.

"I think a really successful summer is making both of those teams," he says. "If I can run the qualifying time for the Europeans (3:33.50) then that would be a good PB and I'd be pretty happy, so that's definitely the goal going into the season. To be honest, I feel like it was there last year, it just never clicked, so I feel confident in going for it.

"I actually think that because so many top 1500m runners are from the UK it almost seems more achievable [to succeed]. I prefer it this way. It makes your life pretty difficult making a team but, if you can make the British team, then you know you're a serious contender for going deep into a champs, which is quite exciting." AW

“It’s about being open to what others are doing”

LAURENT MEUWLY





PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

COACHING CONVERSATIONS

Katy Barden speaks to the man behind the Netherlands' growing impact on the sprints and hurdles landscape about building the platform for success

Laurent Meuwly is head coach for sprinting, hurdles and relays in the Netherlands and is best known for coaching multiple world and European champion Femke Bol, the Olympic mixed 4x400m relay champion and two-time Olympic bronze medallist and European record-holder in the 400m hurdles.

Based out of the Olympic Training Centre Papendal, he works with a group of Dutch athletes including Lieke Klaver (Olympic, world and European relay champion); Nadine Visser (European 4x100m bronze medallist and fourth in the 100m hurdles at the 2024 Olympic Games); Liemarvin Bonevacia (Olympic, world and European relay medallist and European 400m bronze medallist); and Isaya Klein Ikkink (Olympic 4x400m mixed relay gold medallist).

He also coaches Swiss sprinter Ajla Del Ponte (2021 European indoor 60m champion and Tokyo Olympic Games 100m finalist); world U20 200m silver medallist and Australian 100m national record-holder Torrie Lewis; world U20 400m champion Lurdes Manuel (Czechia) and European indoor 400m champion Attila Molnár (Hungary), the European indoor record-holder.

Meuwly was previously head coach for sprinting, hurdles and relays in Switzerland. During that period he transformed Swiss fortunes in the 4x100m relay and coached Léa Sprunger – Swiss national record-holder in the 400m and 400m hurdles – to European titles in the 400m (indoors) and 400m hurdles.

How did you first get into coaching?

I was an athlete at my home town club [in Switzerland]. The club needed coaches to take care of younger athletes once a week, but it soon became two times, then three, four and five.

I started to work with those club athletes very early – I was only 18 – and my goal was to help them reach their full potential. I went from club coach to regional centre coach, national centre coach, then national coach in Switzerland.

I had a lot of injuries as a young athlete and that was one of my motivations to start as a coach, because I didn't want to repeat the same mistakes my coaches had made with me.

In October 2018 I got invited to Papendal for a coach congress. [Former British Athletics head coach] Charles van Commenée had just started again as head coach for the Netherlands. He followed my presentations a little bit, and also the training sessions I gave.





ABOVE: The athletics world is intrigued to see how well Femke Bol will adapt to competing at her new distance of 800m

He called me a month later and asked me to join his team. I discussed with my key athletes if they would follow me to the Netherlands and I took the decision to move. I started in April 2019.

What attracted you to the Netherlands job after your success in Switzerland?
At that time it had nothing to do with the talent of the athletes, because there were very few of them already there. It was partly because of what I'd seen in Papendal – the facilities and the organisation of the centre – but also because of Charles' vision on high performance, which is really close to mine.

The rest I developed from the moment I started, because we went from three athletes in the 400m and 400m hurdles to now 15 or more, and that's not including the short sprints and short hurdles.

Charles knew that, while it was great to have athletes on the programme, you also need good coaches. Some months later, he asked me: "We need a new national coach for middle and long distance, who would you bring in?". We brought in Tomasz Lewandowski and we've made some nice steps forward with Niels Laros [Dutch Olympic and world 1500m finalist and multiple national record-holder] and Stefan Nillessen [European U23 1500m champion and Dutch indoor mile record-holder]. Charles was good at that and I think that's one of the things that changed from 2019 to 2022 and led to the successful development of Dutch athletics.

What was your plan for the programme when you first started?
My approach with this kind of project is always to start with relays because I think that creates a nice dynamic. I started with 4x400m projects to have more people interested in running 400m. I'm not really a patient guy when it's about high performance, so Charles was saying: "It's going to take time to close the gap", but I told him that we had to be present at the World Championships that first year [Doha 2019], which we were, and we made the women's final.

That was the start and then, through the relays, individual athletes started to develop. I think that's the key; it's really complicated to take one athlete and go to the top and it's not always sustainable, but I think when you start with a relay project, you get a larger base of athletes and the chance that many of them will develop to the highest level is bigger.

What were the other things that you implemented in those early years that have contributed to the programme's success?
We trained a bit more. Also, I was impressed by the number of experts who were available from the Olympic Committee at Papendal, for example in nutrition, physiology, biomechanics and the medical team, but they were a bit underused and under-stimulated, so I tried to challenge them to try new things. Charles was also a fan of that, so that helped a lot.

They also had very nice facilities but there was nothing in terms of recovery, so very quickly we put in place a well-organised recovery set-up – ice bath, sauna, sleeping pods – with a good medical team and physios at every session.

I think we really raised the bar everywhere, not only with the athletes. We started to do more/longer training camps and the athletes became more professional. Overall, I think the organisation became more professional.

How has your philosophy evolved over the period you've been coaching?
It's developed with the level of the athletes I've coached. When you start out in a club, everyone is at school or doing an apprenticeship or whatever, and you have to adapt to their conditions because they are not professional athletes.

The volume part developed with the more professional athletes, so being able to train more but having the time to recover properly from the sessions. From a training perspective, I think when I started my approach was very sprint-oriented but, if I focus on sprint hurdles, I reached a point after some years where I understood that to be able to train more, to recover quicker from training, we needed a bigger aerobic base. I think over the years this became one of the signs of my training philosophy.



Our training is very polarised – we focus on speed and strength all year, but at the same time we're running a lot of kilometres at a slow pace with short rests. A lot of coaches around the world think that makes you slow, but I think it helps a lot with the recovery and also to support the hard, more lactic sessions.

Who has been your greatest coaching influence?

There are not really specific people. I did my coaching qualifications for the theoretical base, but I've also learned a lot abroad at camps and being in contact with other training groups, watching what they were doing, trying to figure out what would add value to my philosophy, to my training content and, of course, staying up to date with the latest developments in science.

I also search for the right expertise in every domain – in nutrition, in recovery, in physiology, in biomechanics – and to ensure I'm surrounded by experts who can bring a different view on my work.

So it's not one person or one viewpoint, it's more about being open to what others are doing, or to exchange knowledge with people who are more expert in certain domains than I am and then filtering that information and identifying what fits best with my philosophy.

Has coaching changed since you first started?

When I first started coaching it was very directive, athletes would come with the programme and the plan, but now I let my athletes give their opinions more and more. They know the programme and they know the philosophy. I can integrate the athletes much more because they're at a different level and have different experience.

There are also challenges. Coaches need to be careful with younger athletes and teach them to become professional athletes progressively. They need to stay aware and be able to adapt.

We speak a lot now about creating a safe environment for athletes, but it's a very thin line where you can push athletes too much or what kind of remarks you can make. It can make our jobs really hard at times because there are people around in high performance who don't really understand that athletics is a very competitive sport.

I think for some coaches who were active 30, 40 years ago, they've had a hard time adapting to new generations, to a new environment. Or the environment is still the same, but the way people look at it is a bit different. That's the difficult part. I try personally to keep the high performance standard, but of course to adapt my talking, my coaching, to the new generation and the new rules.

> **It's realistic for Femke to be one of the best 800m runners in the world in the coming three years and to battle for the gold medal in Los Angeles**

Femke's transition to the 800m has attracted significant interest. How do you manage the risk and expectations around change for such a high-profile athlete?

I think it starts with good communication but also being realistic on what is possible. We've been discussing the 800m project for quite a long time.

Actually, after the disappointment in Paris [finishing third in the Olympic 400m hurdles final], she almost wanted to change directly to 800m for 2025. It wasn't too early for her, but I thought that it would have been a pity to end a great career in the 400m hurdles on a negative note. Luckily, I convinced her to do another year and it turned out to be a very successful one.

I have information that shows me that it's realistic for Femke to be one of the best 800m runners in the world in the coming three years and to battle for the gold medal in Los Angeles, because I would not propose this kind of change to an athlete of this calibre without having a certain amount of guarantee that it's going to be successful.

Some things are a bit subjective of course – her stride, her relaxation, the way she can keep her form even when she's in the last part of the race – but a lot is also objective; for example she holds the 500m indoor world record (65.63). If she'd just have jogged another 100m she would probably also have the 600m indoor record.

The plan is to be competitive in 2026, to be in the final or top five in 2027, and to be medal competitive in 2028. I don't think it's an unrealistic plan.

The race-specific work – the speed, the strength – is no problem, she's very good in the anaerobic part, but she needs to become better in the aerobic part, to progressively build a solid base. It's like starting a new sport, because when you're a world and Olympic champion, it's more difficult to be patient and to adapt to this kind of stuff. AW

SPRING INTO TRAINING

Paul Freary takes a look at the latest footwear for the changing season

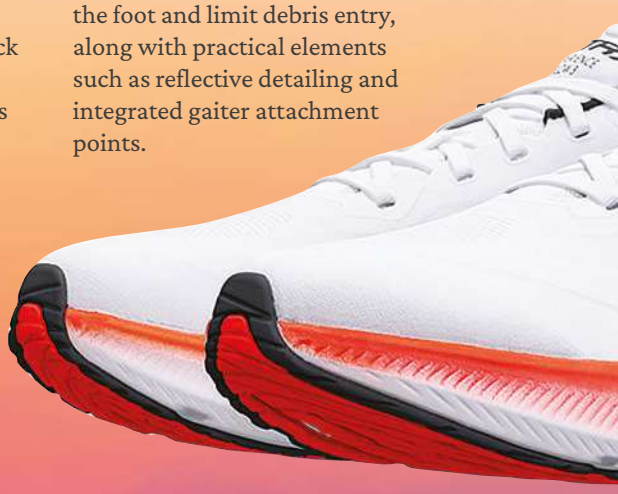
HOKA SPEEDGOAT 7

hoka.com **£145**

This popular trail shoe returns with a new supercritical EVA foam midsole that aims to improve responsiveness and durability. Engineered to deliver a softer yet more energetic ride compared with previous versions, this midsole uses gas-infused foam to create a lighter, more responsive feel while preserving the protective cushioning needed for long-distance comfort. The shoe still sits at around 40mm in stack height with a 5mm drop and provides a balanced ride for a max-cushioned model. The Vibram Metagrip outsole has 5mm lugs for mixed terrain and copes well with anything from forest paths to muddier trails.

The Speedgoat has always been relatively light for such a well-cushioned trail shoe and this model is no different, weighing in at around 275g. It features a lightweight woven upper with stretch elements and a dual-gusseted tongue to secure the foot and limit debris entry, along with practical elements such as reflective detailing and integrated gaiter attachment points.





MIZUNO NEO ZEN 2

emea.mizuno.com **£140**

The original Neo Zen broke the mould on traditional training shoes, with its super-soft and ultra-responsive cushioning. This update retains the key design elements but improves on both stability and performance with an all-new nitrogen-infused midsole.

The familiar, almost bouncy, ride remains, but the shoe feels altogether more balanced, which should give it a wider appeal. A revised midsole geometry aids heel-to-toe transition, making this a more versatile and capable daily training option. A new engineered mesh upper improves on the overall fit and has a neater ankle collar for a sock-like feel and a secure, more locked-down, fit.





SALOMON AERO GLIDE 4

salomon.com **£145**

The latest version of the brand's go-to road running model is the best yet. With a new geometry to the midsole cushioning and a "reverse camber" design, the shoe has a light, lively and responsive feel with a great heel-to-toe ride and springy push-off. The lightweight OptiFOAM2 midsole feels engaging and almost wants to go faster, with the forefoot rocker encouraging this sensation even more.

For a max-cushioned shoe with a 41mm stack, it provides a surprisingly agile and stable ride.

The shoe has a breathable, 3D mesh upper with an "inside out" construction, meaning a seamless fit and a neat and secure wraparound feel. With the combination of deep, responsive cushioning and racing shoe performance, the Aero Glide 4 proves to be a very versatile daily trainer, capable of steady miles as well as faster intervals and tempo runs.



ALTRA EXPERIENCE FLOW 3

altrarunning.eu/uk **£130**

Altra's lightweight, performance training shoe keeps to the brand's ethos of a lower drop and naturally shaped toe-box. The Altra EGO P35 midsole foam is light, plush and responsive, while the 4mm heel-to-toe drop provides a smooth riding experience. The rocker forefoot complements the low drop and helps encourage a faster toe-off – perfect for when you want to pick up the pace.

A new engineered mesh upper improves the fit and feel, while the redesigned ankle collar keeps the foot secure and snug. The design naturally encourages stability and makes the shoe a great value option for those seeking a lower drop model for daily training.



361 PHOENIX 2

361europe.co.uk **£145**

The Phoenix 2, stability road trainer gets a revamp that sees a new, two-piece midsole, combining the brand's Primo Foam for plush cushioning and ENGAGE Foam to provide structure and guidance through the gait cycle.

The combination creates a smooth, balanced ride that feels cushioned yet controlled.

The new upper has a breathable engineered mesh incorporating recycled yarns, offering airflow while maintaining a secure fit.

Overall, the shoe has a premium feel and performance about it that exceeds its price tag, making this a great value for money option for those looking for cushioning and control in a daily trainer capable of going the distance.



SKECHERS AERO SPARK

skechers.co.uk **£120**

The Aero Spark combines daily trainer cushioning with racing shoe performance in a good value package. The lightweight, versatile model uses the brand's Hyper Burst Ice midsole, a supercritical, nitrogen-injected foam with high levels of energy return.

Embedded in the midsole is a carbon-infused H-plate. Designed to provide racing shoe levels of responsiveness in a more versatile daily training environment, it does just that. The ride is soft and cushioned, yet well-balanced and versatile enough to feel good at any pace.

The upper features a simple yet functional design, with a good fit, with the shoe being rounded off with a Goodyear rubber outsole that offers great traction and durability.



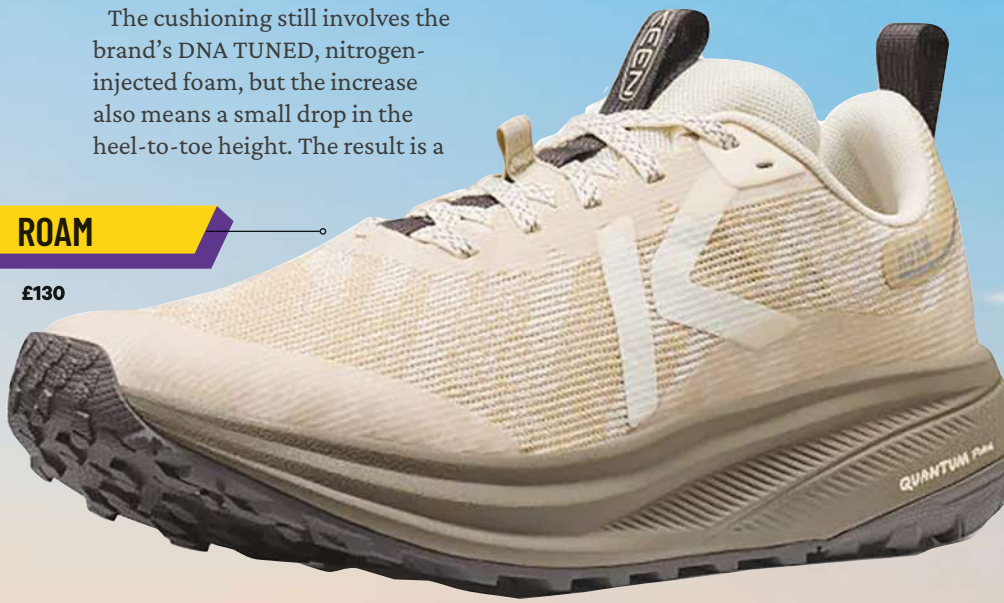
BROOKS GLYCERIN 23

brooksrunning.co.uk **£165**

Sometimes a small change makes a big difference, and that's certainly the case here with the latest version of Brooks' premium neutral cushioned shoe. The Glycerin 23 gets just a 2mm increase in the cushioning stack of the forefoot, but it transforms the ride and responsiveness massively.

The cushioning still involves the brand's DNA TUNED, nitrogen-injected foam, but the increase also means a small drop in the heel-to-toe height. The result is a more balanced ride with soft heel landings and springy toe-offs, making this a great daily trainer.

The upper has been upgraded and is now even softer and plusher than ever for a premium fit and feel that hugs the foot and makes every mile a pleasure. For plush daily miles at any pace, the Glycerin 23 is a sure-fire winner.



KEEN ROAM

keenfootwear.co.uk **£130**

As its name suggests, this new shoe from the outdoor brand is built to go wherever you may wander. QuantumFoam cushioning is stable on the trail but responsive on the road, with a nice degree of energy return, which is rare for a shoe of this type. The ripstop upper provides a great, wraparound fit and keeps trail undergrowth at bay, while the multi-directional lugs are perfect for a wide variety of trail surfaces.

The upper fit is a little more generous than many shoes in the forefoot area, so there's plenty of space for the toes to spread to aid overall stability, as well as allow for natural swelling over extended runs. It's a versatile and durable door-to-trail option offering good value and go-anywhere ability.

ASICS TRABUCO MAX 5

asics.com **£160**

Bringing "max" cushioning to the trails, the Trabuco Max features a high stack of the brand's FF BLAST PLUS midsole cushioning foam with a lower 5mm heel-to-toe drop for off-road stability. The ride is fast and smooth, as you might expect from the midsole which is usually found on the brand's faster road running shoes. At around 300g, it's still light for a "max" shoe and proves to be a good performer on firmer trails and gravel tracks.

While this model sits in a rather unique category, it excels for faster-paced running on firmer trails, where it has good traction, great energy return and a super-smooth feel.





A LAP WITH...

MOLLY HUDSON

Jasmine Collett speaks to the British indoor silver medallist whose leap of faith is paying off

When Molly Hudson stepped on to the start line for the women's 1500m at this year's British Indoor Athletics Championships, she did so with quiet ambition rather than expectation.

"I didn't think I'd medal this year," she says. "In the future, maybe. But not now."

The field was deep and experienced. For her, the fight for bronze seemed the most likely outcome.

"I thought one and two were probably confirmed between Jemma [Reekie] and Revee [Walcott-Nolan]," says the 23-year-old. However, some advice from Dave Ragan, coach to her partner Ben Pattison, changed her mindset. "Don't give anyone too much respect."

For an athlete who has struggled with self-belief, the instruction hit home. "I'm usually someone who doubts myself a lot, so I needed to be overly confident going in," she says.

It worked, as Hudson positioned herself well and captured a senior national silver medal behind Reekie.

"I was just thinking, 'Don't doubt yourself. Stay in it'," she says. "It came down to how much you wanted it. And I obviously wanted it."

The medal marked a major step forward after what has been a challenging period. "The past few years have been really hard," says Hudson. "Mentally, especially."

Hudson spent two years in the United States in the NCAA system at Boston College, where she achieved academic success and formed strong friendships but struggled to progress on the track. Coaching changes disrupted continuity and confidence.

"The training was very turbulent. The first year I probably didn't do enough, the second year I probably did too much. There wasn't consistency. And consistency is key in running," she says. "I had one coach we didn't see eye to eye with, and the training wasn't right for me. It was a really difficult time.

"She gave me a hard time out there. There were moments I wanted to come home, and I didn't, but I stuck it out, and I'm glad I did because I completed it."

Hudson improved her 1500m PB but plateaued over 800m, frustrated by the lack of repeatable training and momentum. Returning to the UK and based back in Loughborough, she began working formally with Pattison.

The transition was not without its challenges. After completing the American collegiate season early, she tried to extend into the British season without a proper reset.

"I tried to force it," she says. "I wasn't ready mentally or physically. I was just desperate to prove a point."

Instead, she refocused on rebuilding. Training volume settled into what she calls her "sweet spot" of 40-45 miles a week, and the emphasis shifted to consistency rather than chasing quick fixes. Trusting Pattison as a coach was a leap to take, but one that paid off.

"When I came back, I thought: 'I'm just going to trust you'," says Hudson. "I listened to everything he said. I don't really need a lot of attention. I just get on with it because he's got his own thing."

Their approach paid off with a 4:10.02 performance early in the indoor season – a personal best.

"I knew it was in me," she says. "Physically I was in a good place. It was more of a mental block. When you run a PB or a time you're happy with, your confidence just comes back. If you don't believe you can do it, you won't."

Looking ahead, Hudson's focus is clear: lower her personal best and position herself for major championship standards.

"After this indoor season, I'm setting my eyes on those Commonwealth and European standards a bit more," she says. "I can definitely run sub-4:10."

For now, the British indoor silver stands as a piece of firm evidence that the rebuild is working.

"I've finally been happy with my races," she says. "And that's been a long time coming." AW

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

I'd have to say either Jessica Ennis or Kelly Holmes as they were both my idols growing up and women I look up to. I don't think I'd be able to keep up with any of them though and I assume Jess's training would be different to mine! But it would be a lot of fun.



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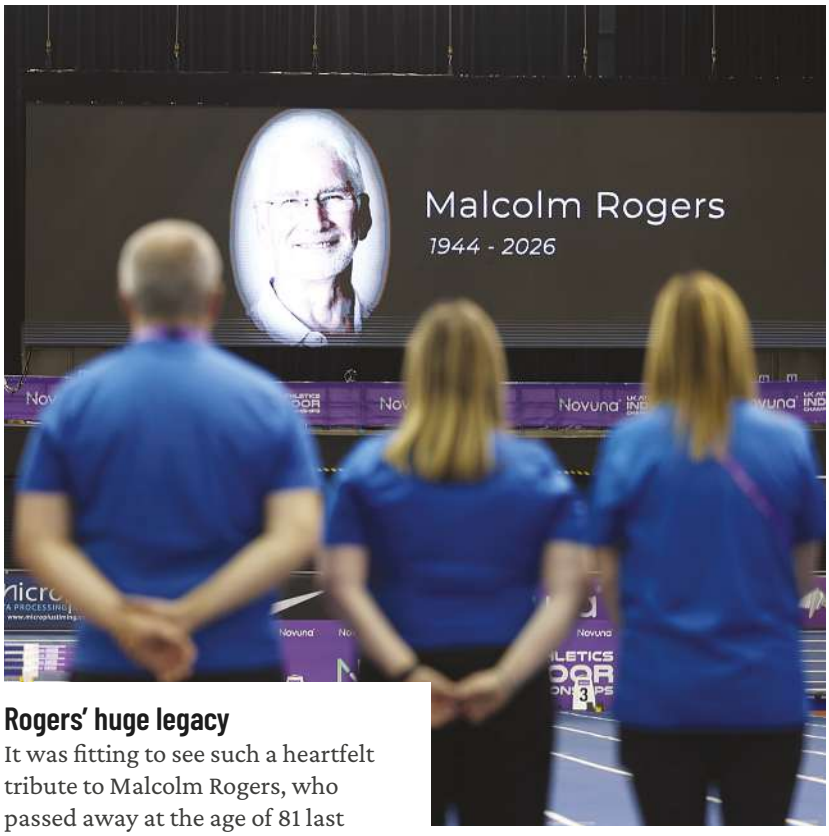


PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

Rogers' huge legacy

It was fitting to see such a heartfelt tribute to Malcolm Rogers, who passed away at the age of 81 last month, at the UK Athletics Indoor Championships. He did so much for the sport.

He was such a highly respected official and you only need to look at the reaction to his passing to see how well regarded he was. As a PE teacher, he taught some of the greats – such as Jessica Ennis and cricketer Joe Root – but he achieved so much during his 50 years of officiating.

From the London 2012 Olympics to his work in helping incorporate para athletics events into mainstream meeting, he is leaving not just a remarkable legacy but also a huge void. Athletics could sorely do with more people like him.

J Turnbull

Gabbett's greatness

Peter Gabbett, who died last month at the age of 84, was one of the finest athletes whom I have ever coached. Coming to decathlon in his mid-twenties, he absorbed its diverse skills as to the manner born and expressed them superbly in competition. Indeed, he even made the national 4x400m team and at the Munich Olympics ran 46.07, the best decathlon run at ground-level at that time.

His enthusiasm was infectious, and he had made a positive impact upon every member of the squad, laying the way for that great athlete Daley Thompson and a host of other British decathletes. He was our first star in the event and will be much missed.

Tom McNab

Wood's fine work

Derek Wood, who died peacefully at home in Enfield aged 96, ran at the White City over three and six miles back in the 1950s, and worked his way up to being a bank manager in north London and a Lodge Master with the Honourable Artillery Company. He won the M50 title in both the London and New York marathons, in the same year, in the early 1980s. He was a great inspiration for his club Barnet & District AC, where he became President and helped them to win M50 and M60 national titles.

Alastair Aitken

Leaving a sour taste

I know I'm not the only person who was disappointed by some of the athletes who were late withdrawals from the British Indoor Championships. Of course the competitors need to look after themselves with a long season ahead and injuries need to be managed – plus I appreciated the honesty of the likes of Keely Hodgkinson, who only ran the 800m heat given that she clearly had a world record attempt in mind – but for quite a few big names to pull out at the 11th hour, when tickets have already been sold and the crowd had been heading to Birmingham in expectation, left a bit of a sour taste. It's not a great look for athletics.

Emily Knighton

WHAT'S ON



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

MARCH 6
- ISTAF Indoor 2026
  Berlin
  istaf-indoor.de

MARCH 7
- UKA Cross Challenge (inc UK Inter-Counties Championships)
  Nottingham
  britishathletics.org.uk
- Perche Elite Tour
  Rouen
  perche-elite-tour.fr

MARCH 8
- Air Loughborough
  lboro.ac.uk
- Lisbon Half Marathon
  maratonaclubedeportugal.com
- Paris Half Marathon
  hokasemideparis.fr

MARCH 7-8
- England Athletics Age Group Combined Events and Junior Para Championships
  Sheffield
  englandathletics.org

MARCH 8
- Los Angeles Marathon
  lamarathon.com
- BFTTA Indoor Series 3
  Lee Valley
  befittodaytrackacademy.co.uk

MARCH 12
- Mondo Classic
  Uppsala
  mondoclassic.se

MARCH 13-14
- Adelaide Invitational
  athletics.com.au
- NCAA Division I Indoor Track and Field Championships
  Fayetteville
  ncaa.com

MARCH 14
- English Schools Cross Country Championships
  Liverpool
  esaa.org.uk
- IAU 50km World Championships
  New Delhi
  iau-ultramarathon.org

MARCH 14-15
- European Throwing Cup
  Nicosia
  european-athletics.com

MARCH 15
- Rome Marathon
  runromethemarathon.com
- NYC Half Marathon
  nyrr.org
- Vault London
  Lee Valley

MARCH 20-22
- World Indoor Athletics Championships
  Torun
  worldathletics.org

MARCH 21
- Scottish Road Relay Championships
  Linlithgow
  scottishathletics.org.uk
- British Masters Cross Country Championships
  Bangor
  bmaf.org.uk

MARCH 22
- British Short Trail Championships, Forest of Dean Trail Half Marathon
  tra-uk.org/championships

MARCH 24-28
- ISSA/Grace Kennedy Boys and Girls Championships
  Kingston
  issasports.com

MARCH 26-APRIL 2
- European Masters Indoor Athletics Championships
  Toruń
  emaci2026.com

MARCH 28
- Maurie Plant Meeting
  Melbourne
  athletics.com.au
- Prague Half Marathon
  runczech.com

MARCH 29
- Berlin Half Marathon
  generali-berliner-halbmarathon.de
- Tom Scott Road Race 10M
  Motherwell
  tomscottroadraces.com

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FROM THE AW ARCHIVE

Looking back 20 years to the Melbourne Commonwealth Games

With the 2026 Commonwealth Games heading for Glasgow this summer, a large amount of the attention will inevitably fall on the athletes from the home nations. Hopes will be high for a strong medal count this summer, given the number of high profile competitors who have already announced their intention to compete at Scotstoun Stadium.

A look back through the *AW* Archives shows it is 20 years ago this month since the Games of 2006 – an edition that was impressively and memorably hosted by Melbourne and had the feel of an Olympics. It's perhaps a sign of how quickly times have changed that this year's event is only happening in Scotland because Glasgow stepped in when the Australian State of Victoria pulled out of hosting duties due to costs.

Two decades ago, there were mixed fortunes for the home nations athletes. As Jason Henderson wrote in the March 30 review issue of *Athletics Weekly*: "Ever since the first gold rush here in Victoria, people have come to this area of Australia in eager search of precious metal. Yet for track and field athletes from England and the rest of the home nations at these Commonwealth Games, it was a difficult and, at times, painful hunt.

"England won six gold, four silver and eight bronze medals. Including the para events, Wales took one silver and two bronze medals and Scotland earned a solitary silver and bronze (there were no medals for Northern Ireland). This compared with Australia's mighty haul of 16 golds and 41 medals in total.

"Some of the supplementary statistics were even more frightening, too. England won half as many titles as in 2002. No British man won gold on the track. For the first time ever, no British man reached the 800m final. No British man reached the 200m final for the first time since 1966. There was no Scottish sprinter in the men's or women's 100m, 200m or 400m for the first time in half a century. British athletes failed to win a 100m or 200m medal for the first time since 1974."

However, the review adds: "There were also many fine performances, with gold medals over a wide range of events – heptathlete Kelly Sotherton, triple jumper Phillips Idowu, javelin thrower Nick Nieland, decathlete Dean Macey, 400m sprinter Christine Ohuruogu and 1500m runner Lisa Dobriskey."

How many home nations athletes will reach the top of the podium this time around? AW



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