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APRIL 2026

**WORLD INDOORS  
REVIEW**

HOW TORUŃ FOUND  
THE RECIPE FOR  
CHAMPIONSHIPS  
SUCCESS



**SPRING PREVIEW  
SPECIAL**

# Marathon MAGIC

The enduring allure of Boston and London

**INSIDE**

IS THIS THE GOLDEN  
AGE OF RACING?

WHAT MAKES BOSTON  
SO SPECIAL?

**PLUS** INTERVIEWS  
WITH CHARLES HICKS,  
CALLI HAUGER-THACKERY,  
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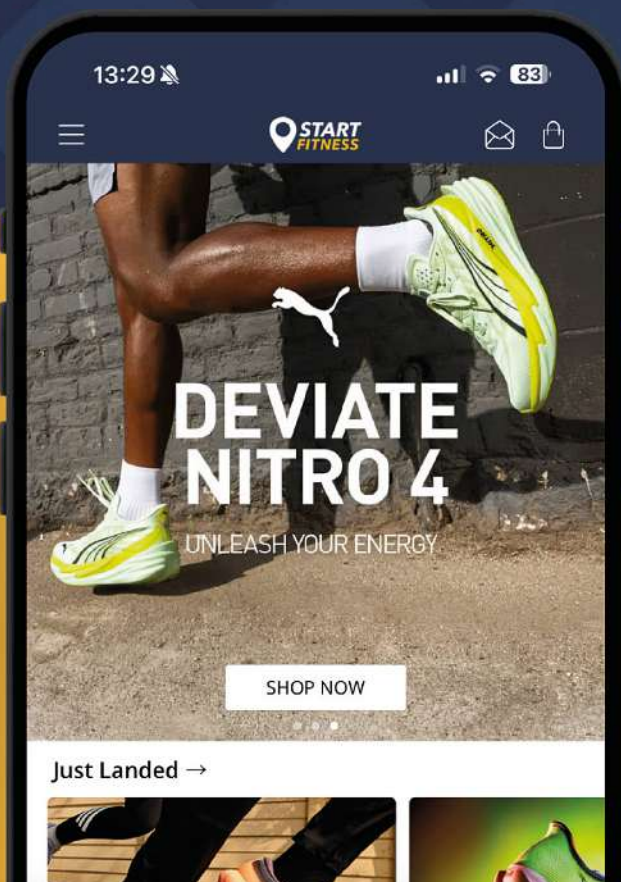
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# SHARED EXPERIENCE



**Euan Crumley**  
AW Editorial Director

**T**

he thing I remember most is the roar. I consider myself very fortunate to have experienced what it's like to run the Boston Marathon and, despite my best efforts, I wasn't quite prepared for what the renowned course would do to my quad muscles but also what it would be like to complete the final turn from Hereford Street on to Boylston Street, at the end of which sits the finish line.

Once you've taken that left, there are 600m to travel, flanked by crowds who are only too happy to make as much noise as possible, the din reverberating off the walls of the buildings as you pass by. You are surrounded – by fellow runners, by spectators, by the cityscape – but also the warmth of a shared endeavour and having gone through a particularly human experience that brings connection of the most visceral kind.

To get there, you travel through parts of Massachusetts that use the day as an annual celebration and an opportunity to showcase their own patch of America. I've seen it once so far, and I won't forget it, but the coach, writer and runner Mario Fraioli grew up with the race, knows just about every nook and cranny of it, and is almost always to be found in Boston on the third Monday in April. Des Linden, winner in 2018, loves the event so much that she has run it 12 times. Ahead of its 130th edition, both will guide you through what it's like, what it takes and why it's so special to make your way 26.2 miles from Hopkinton (p54).

Then there's London. I've wrestled with that one, too, and it's extraordinary to run in front of those crowds on a day when the city shows itself in its best light. As I'm writing this, a story has just been broken by *The Guardian* about the possibility of a two-day edition of the event in 2027, which would allow for 100,000 participants across the weekend and the men's and women's races potentially taking place on separate days.

"We are looking forward to amplifying one of the original aims of the London Marathon, which was 'to show happiness and sense of achievement in a somewhat troubled world,'" said London Marathon chief executive Hugh Brasher. "Poignantly, those words resonate even more now than they did almost 45 years ago to the day, when the first London Marathon took place."

This month, we'll see brilliant racing from the elite athletes (more of that on p48) and we've spoken to a few of them for this issue. But, as each runner sets about their own singular mission, the power of the collective will also be to the fore once again. **AW**

## PUBLISHING

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

General enquiries: [officemanager@athleticsweekly.com](mailto:officemanager@athleticsweekly.com)

[athleticsweekly.com](http://athleticsweekly.com)  
[x@athleticsweekly](https://x.com/athleticsweekly)  
[facebook.com/athleticsweekly](https://facebook.com/athleticsweekly)  
[instagram.com/athletics.weekly](https://instagram.com/athletics.weekly)

## EDITORIAL

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

Photography by Mark Shearman (unless stated)

Design: Duncan Jackson

Editorial contributors: Katy Barden, Martin Duff, David Hewitson, David Holmes, Matt Majendie, Katharine Merry, Gary Mitchell, Verity Ockenden, Denis Shepherd, Mark Woods

## ADVERTISING

Head of Sales **Paul Bramley**  
 07976 471245 / [paul.bramley@athleticsweekly.com](mailto:paul.bramley@athleticsweekly.com)

## PUBLISHING AND PRINTING

Managing Director **Wendy Sly MBE**  
[wendy.sly@athleticsweekly.com](mailto:wendy.sly@athleticsweekly.com)

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## SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES INTERMEDIA

Unit 6, The Enterprise Centre, Kelvin Lane Crawley, West Sussex. RH10 9PE  
 Tel: +44 (0)1293 312168  
 Email: [athleticsweekly@subscriptionhelpline.co.uk](mailto:athleticsweekly@subscriptionhelpline.co.uk)  
 Web: [athleticsweekly.imbmsubscriptions.com](http://athleticsweekly.imbmsubscriptions.com)

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## Everything everywhere all at once

FROM ALL-ROUND EXCELLENCE TO BRITISH SUCCESS, KATHARINE MERRY REFLECTS ON AN CAUTION OF THE WORLD INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS THAT WILL LIVE LONG IN THE MEMORY

**B**ut you don't see further than it, twice to wear from the season that took 2024 was one of the best athletes of the World Indoor Championships she has ever been. It was absolutely amazing and I felt privileged to be a part of it all from my position as a media ambassador.

I had all of the ingredients you need to see this to be successful. Firstly, a very healthy number of the big name athletes competing in it. In my opinion, there were some of the best athletes in the world competing to call it a season going to be a very knowledgeable and informed local perspective, and in my opinion, it was that's the most building block. Add in the fact that the presentation of the event was really good, and all of a sudden you find you've built a house and you can put a party on. It was really well done.

That, in turn, gave the athletes the perfect platform to compare and contrast - and so many of them did that. There wasn't a single event that didn't have that perfectly fine and the level of competition was fantastic. When I thought that even better, we would have been going and running, it had already been a long time since I had done that.

Merrids had just another world record with 6.1m. That had broken the long-standing women's 600m mark, Cooper Latham had been so impressive in the USA and was looking to become the youngest ever world indoor champion in the men's 600m - both of athletes across which then raised the excitement level. It was as if the indoor season had provided the best and the worst, and I was the first. And then on such a high level when the action got going! Ultra-athlete breaking the high jumper was a really nice touch, then you had Dean Chamberlain breaking the pole vaulter world record. Even though writing a month after you still see it in your mind, it was a really nice touch. I think the women's 600m has been and equalled but the approach of the men's 600m was so exciting, I think I'll never forget that. I think I'll never forget that. I think I'll never forget that.

**KATHARINE MERRY**  
 Olympic medalist and broadcaster

## 18 Assessing a brilliant edition of the World Indoor Championships

## GRAND SLAM TRACK

**Michael Johnson's much-hyped project was supposed to help save the sport but instead it has left a trail of anger and frustration after its financial collapse. One year on from the first meeting being staged, Jasmine Collett looks at how the dream died - and what might happen next**

**A**fter nearly a year of hype in Atlanta, Georgia, the Grand Slam Track series ended with a bang, but not in the way anyone would have expected. The series, which was supposed to be the most exciting and profitable of the sport, has been a disaster from the start. The series was supposed to be the most exciting and profitable of the sport, but it has been a disaster from the start. The series was supposed to be the most exciting and profitable of the sport, but it has been a disaster from the start.

Grand Slam Track, led by Michael Johnson, was launched with the intention of changing the face of the sport. It was supposed to be the most exciting and profitable of the sport, but it has been a disaster from the start. The series was supposed to be the most exciting and profitable of the sport, but it has been a disaster from the start.

Johnson's much-hyped project was supposed to help save the sport but instead it has left a trail of anger and frustration after its financial collapse. One year on from the first meeting being staged, Jasmine Collett looks at how the dream died - and what might happen next.

Michael Johnson's much-hyped project was supposed to help save the sport but instead it has left a trail of anger and frustration after its financial collapse. One year on from the first meeting being staged, Jasmine Collett looks at how the dream died - and what might happen next.

## 40 The event that promised much but has caused anger and frustration

## TRIP TO THE CITY

**As the world's oldest annual marathon prepares to stage its 130th edition, Euan Crumley finds out more about the ingredients that go into making Boston such a special - and enduring - event**

**AW SPRING MARATHONS**

## 54 The ingredients that make the Boston Marathon so special

# IN THIS ISSUE

## DIGEST

- 8 A marathon lesson in LA
- 10 The Month in Numbers

## MY GREATEST RACE

- 12 Marcus O'Sullivan and a Penn Relays run that changed everything

## RISING STAR

- 14 Sonny Allen on her cross country success and summer ambitions on the track

## ARIZONA DREAMING

- 16 Verity Ockenden and the significance of an unexpected return to Flagstaff

## EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE

- 18 Katharine Merry reflects on an eventful championships that ranks very highly

## TAKING FLIGHT IN TORUŃ

- 22 The best moments from Poland

## FACTS AND FIGURES

- 26 All of the World Indoors medallists

## LEARNING FROM THE BEST

- 28 How coaching has helped Jenny Meadows rediscover her love for athletics

## A FAMILY AFFAIR

- 32 Larissa Iapichino carving her own path

## AW LEGENDS SERIES

- 36 Liz McColgan looks back on her career

## RUNNING DOWN A DREAM

- 38 James Kingston and an Olympic ambition

## GRAND SLAM FLAK

- 40 Assessing the fallout from a project that failed to deliver on its promises

## LIVING WITH WAR

- 44 The athletes caught up in conflict

## THE GOLDEN AGE?

- 48 Tim Hutchings on why we've never had it so good with marathon racing

## A TRIP TO THE CITY

- 54 Inside the Boston Marathon from those who know it best

## A NEW IDENTITY

- 62 Charles Hicks on his marathon move and a change of allegiance

## BABY ON BOARD

- 66 Calli Hauger-Thackery and the challenges of running through pregnancy

## BACK TO THE START

- 70 Julia Paternian is returning to the place where she learned to be an athlete

## FRIENDS AND FOES

- 74 Patrick Dever preparing to face Emile Caira on the streets of London

## TWO LAPS, NO MERCY

- 78 The history of the 800m

## CLUB OF THE MONTH

- 80 The progress being made by Windsor Slough Eton & Hounslow

## PERFORMANCE

- 84 How They Train with Issy Boffey
- 86 Coaching conversations with Peter Eriksson
- 90 The best footwear for race day

## FINISHERS

- 94 A Lap With Louisa Stoney
- 96 Have Your Say: readers' letters
- 97 What's on?
- 98 Delving into the AW archive

COVER PHOTO BY LONDON MARATHON EVENTS

NEXT MONTH  
HEADING FOR THE  
HILLS AND LOOKING  
TOWARDS THE  
SUMMER  
ON SALE  
MAY 1





PICTURE THIS

## A LESSON IN LA

**N**athan Martin, a substitute teacher and athletics coach at a high school in Michigan, won the closest finish that the Los Angeles Marathon has ever seen on March 15. In a remarkable climax to the race, exhausted long-time leader Michael Kimani Kamau was reeled in and pipped on the line by the American, whose winning time was 2:11:18 and margin of victory was 0.01 seconds.

There was further drama as Kamau was hampered in the closing 200m after a spectator holding a flag stepped on to the course, with the Kenyan having to take evasive action. He then appeared to follow the lead car in the wrong direction before getting back on to the correct route. “At a mile and a half to go, I could see the leader and, with 800m to go, I was thinking: ‘I’m catching him,’” said Martin. **AW**



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

# THE MONTH IN NUMBERS

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

**91**

Ron Delany created history in the men's 1500m final at the Melbourne Games in 1956 when he became only the third Irish athlete at the time to have won an Olympic gold. Remarkably, 70 years later, he remains the last Irish athlete to win an Olympic track and field title.

Delany died on March 11 following a short illness, just five days after turning 91. He was only 21 years old in Melbourne and retired when he was just 26 due to injury.

The 1500m at those 1956 Games was packed with talented contenders, such as Australia's home hope John Landy, but Delany's late surge took him to gold. The Arklow runner produced a brilliant finish to win in an Olympic record of 3:41.2.

Delany, who also won European 1500m bronze in 1958, became a global running star.

Six months before the Melbourne Olympics he became the seventh man to run a sub-four-minute mile and also broke the world indoor mile record several times during his career.

ABOVE: Ron Delaney, who died last month

**57:20**

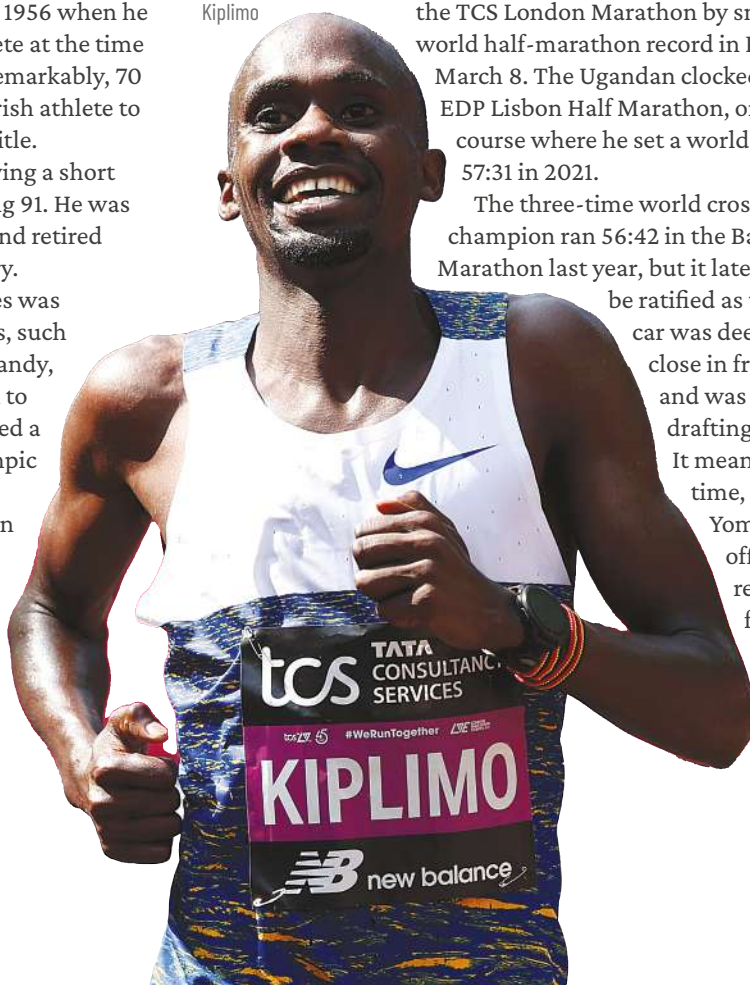
BELOW: Jacob Kiplimo

Jacob Kiplimo showed fine form ahead of the TCS London Marathon by smashing the world half-marathon record in Portugal on March 8. The Ugandan clocked 57:20 in the EDP Lisbon Half Marathon, on the same course where he set a world record of 57:31 in 2021.

The three-time world cross-country champion ran 56:42 in the Barcelona Half Marathon last year, but it later failed to

be ratified as the pacing car was deemed too close in front of him and was giving him drafting benefits.

It meant that, this time, Kiplimo broke Yomif Kejelcha's official world record of 57:30 from Valencia in 2024.





**6.31m**

Mondo Duplantis has set a myriad of world records around the globe but the one he produced on March 12 could end up being the most special to him. He has improved his own global mark at the Paris Olympics, two World Athletics Championships and his home Diamond League in Stockholm.

His latest world record of 6.31m, the 15th of his illustrious career, was at a meeting he helped create – the Mondo Classic in Uppsala.

The Swede has now gone one better than Sergey Bubka's tally of 14 consecutive world records and has now raised the global mark from 6.17m to 6.31m in just six years.

**2:10:53**

Fotyen Tesfay's 2:10:53 on her marathon debut in Barcelona on March 15 puts the Ethiopian No.2 on the world all-time women's marathon rankings. Only Ruth Chepngetich's 2:09:56 from Chicago in 2024 is quicker, although the Kenyan's world record is marred by the fact she received a three-year drugs ban last October.

Some might now regard Tesfay as the de facto world record-holder. On the flipside, Chepngetich's otherworldly sub-2:10 performance followed by the revelation that she took the banned substance hydrochlorothiazide, means fans will be

ABOVE: Mondo Duplantis breaks another world record

BELOW: Hellen Obiri

BOTTOM: Fotyen Tesfay



**2:46:09/3:13:39**

The Great Britain & Northern Ireland squad enjoyed huge success at the IAU 50km World Championships in New Delhi on March 14, with Alex Milne and Naomi Robinson capturing the individual world titles and leading both the men's and women's teams to gold medal victories. Milne led home an outstanding men's team performance, setting a European record of 2:46:09 in the process. In the women's race, Robinson took the win in 3:13:39.

**66:33/59:30**

Hellen Obiri of Kenya set a women's course record of 66:33 at the United Airlines NYC Half Marathon on March 15, beating Sharon Lokedi's 67:04 from 2025. The men's victory, meanwhile, went to Adriaan Wildschutt of South Africa in 59:30.

It was a good day for British runners, too, as Megan Keith clocked 67:13 in third place in the women's race and Patrick Dever broke the 60-minute barrier in seventh in the men's race with 59:56.

**62:07/69:15**

The Bath Half attracted the cream of British distance running on March 15 as it incorporated the official UK Athletics trial race for the World Athletics Road Running Championships in Copenhagen later this year.

Joe Wigfield, who came into the event with the qualifying standard of 61:30 under his belt, proved strongest in the closing sprint, winning in 62:07 from Phil Sesemann (62:13).

Alex Bell, an Olympic 800m finalist in 2021, produced a magnificent solo effort in the women's race, breaking clear of Jess Warner-Judd in the early stages and powering to a personal best of 69:15 that also secured her spot on the team for Denmark.





MARCUS O'SULLIVAN

# MY GREATEST RACE

*Penn Relays, Philadelphia, April 28, 1984, Men's 4x1500m relay, first place, 14:52.81 (meeting record)*

A pep talk at his lowest ebb sparked a lightbulb moment that set the Irishman on a path to three world indoor titles. A key part of it all was turning failure into success at the Penn Relays, a final leg of 3:38.6 helping to restore Villanova's reputation and bringing some personal redemption

**T**he Penn Relays is an anomaly in many ways. You'll see nothing like it for the rest of the year. It doesn't necessarily represent track and field as much as it represents participation. It's like a mecca at the end of April every year at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

Donald Walsh, who was an Irish runner, ended up being my coach as a youth and said: "Villanova [University in Pennsylvania] is where you need to go." Great athletes in the

past had gone there. Ron Delany. Eamonn Coghlan. Sonia O'Sullivan ended up going there. We had a tremendous history and relationship between Ireland and Villanova.

I quickly learnt that Villanova and the Penn Relays were synonymous. Jumbo Elliott, who was my coach when I was recruited and in my freshman year, felt that there was no better place to run because it was in our backyard, in our hometown. But it became this enormously stressful weekend in terms of the expectations and, up until 1983, we had never walked out of that stadium without a prize of some sort.

ABOVE: Marcus O'Sullivan competes in the heats of the 1500m at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984



## I LEARNED THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE WAS NOT THE FEAR OF FAILURE, BUT THE FEAR OF NOT TRYING

But Jumbo died in the spring of 1981 and I lost my way as an athlete for the three years. When British and Irish athletes come to the US, there are some that make it and some that don't. Sometimes people blame the US system but my ideology on that is that kids are kids. They're aged 18-22. You spend time partying. You spend time not focusing on what you should be doing and, in 1983, we went to the Penn Relays and walked out with nothing.

I sat behind the wall and cried by myself. I realised that I had let myself down, I'd let everybody down. I decided that I was going to quit college, I was going to go home and not come back. Looking back, I probably went into a mild depression. I really felt alone.

When I went home, I met my old coach, Donie Walsh, who also grew up in Cork and went to Villanova. You didn't meet Donie at the club. You'd meet him in a pub and he would always hang with bookies and gamblers. He loved the dog track. He loved the horse races. He sat me down in the pub, and he looked at my diary. It was one thing that he always made me keep.

After about 10 minutes of looking at it, he said: "You're an absolute disgrace. You've been given a gift and you're squandering it." I made some excuses and he said: "Either s\*\*\* or get off the pot. Either you want to be in it or you don't. But don't go through the rest of your life blaming people for why things didn't work out for you. You need to start training if you really want to be serious."

Of course, I came up with a different spin. I was like: "Hey, my room-mate's coming over from the US tomorrow. I want to go camping for the week. How about we start in a week's time?" I always remember how he said: "You'll start tomorrow. You've wasted enough time as it is." It was almost like he caught me by the shoulders and said: "Son, you're going in the wrong direction here."

When I walked home that night, I felt 10 feet tall. There was something in me that transformed that evening. I did go camping, but I trained every day. It was transformative. I finally decided that I wanted to be a runner. I really wanted to commit to it. I wasn't going to be afraid of losing. A lot of athletes won't

go out there because they're literally afraid of failure, afraid of the disappointment. I never looked at it like that.

I remember having a cup of coffee with my sister one day, and she said: "I could never do what you do in life, because you fail too many times," but I always looked at the failure as a moment of growth and deeper understanding. How can I fix this for the next time out? How can I make it successful the next time?

And when I made my way back to the university, the team knew there was something going on, like "this guy's on a mission". The kids started following me. We actually started getting really good. We won our conference and we went on to NCAAs and I trained through the winter following year. I was really training with one goal in mind, that maybe I could make the Olympic team. But I needed to get some redemption at the Penn Relays.

The 4x1500m was on the Saturday but we had lost the day before in the distance relay to Arkansas. I was beaten out by Paul Donovan on the closing 1600m leg. That was our best shot – the one we should have won. People were saying we had no hope in the metric mile, that we didn't have enough depth. I was so angry though. I went back to my team-mates, and I said: "If you get me within 50 yards of Paul on Saturday, I promise you he will not beat me."

They got the baton to me and I sat on him and waited until the top of the turn and then went by him – and we ended up winning. When I crossed the line, I had this feeling that I still have today, of relief, redemption. It's like the whole world got lifted off my shoulders.

And at that moment, through that year, I learned that the most important thing in life was not the fear of failure but the fear of not trying. The reason that race means so much to me is because all the rest of the stuff came after, even walking out into an Olympic Stadium, walking out into a world championship, the pressure I felt on that weekend when I went out there to get that redemption, nothing ever came close. **AW**

*As told to Mark Woods*

## FACTFILE

**Born:** December 22, 1961

**Events:** 1500m/Mile

**PBs:** 3:33.61/3:50.94

### Honours

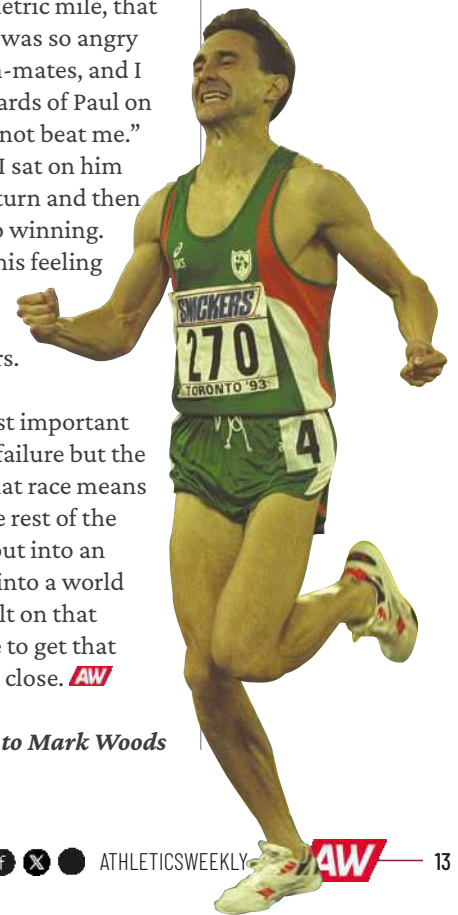
1993: World Indoor Championships 1500m gold

1989: World Indoor Championships 1500m gold

1987: World Indoor Championships 1500m gold

1985: European Indoor Championships 1500m silver

BELOW: O'Sullivan celebrates gold at the 1993 World Indoor Championships



# RISING STAR

## SONNY ALLEN

### FACTFILE

**Age:** 15**Club:** Highgate Harriers**Coach:** Errol Peak**Events:** 1500m/3000m**PB:** 4:28.90/9:39.81

**Jasmine Collett** talks to an emerging talent who has enjoyed great cross country success and is looking to take that momentum on to the track



PHOTOS BY GARY MITCHELL

**T**hree major cross-country victories in a row have marked out 15-year-old

Sonny Allen as one of the most exciting young talents coming through the British ranks. The Highgate Harriers athlete capped a remarkable winter by winning the SIAB Schools International junior title in March, adding to her dominant performances at the English Schools Championships and the national under-17 crown in Sedgfield.

What makes the achievement even more striking is the scale of her improvement. Just a year ago, Allen finished 21st at the English Schools Cross Country Championships but this season she returned not just to contend, but to win convincingly against the country's best.

Still very much in early stages of her relationship with the sport, having joined Highgate Harriers only three years ago, Allen's rise has been built on consistency rather than sudden change.

Training under coach Errol Peak and regularly working alongside older male athletes, she has quietly developed into a formidable competitor, steadily growing in confidence and belief.



**How did you first get into athletics?**

I was always active. I played football about seven or eight years ago, but I wasn't going to go beyond a small club level. I was [doing it] more for the social side and to stay active. I joined my local athletics club, Highgate Harriers, about three years ago and since then it's taken off.

**Did anything change in the last year that led to your quick progress?**

Not really. I carried on, trusted my training and my coach, and followed the plan. Winning the English Schools Cross Country Championships this year was a surprise to me and everyone else. People didn't expect me to be in the top 10, let alone win it.

**How does it feel to win, especially three times in a row?**

It's a strange feeling. I still haven't fully processed winning English Schools. It's the pinnacle of the season and I knew the competition would be tougher. Crossing the line, I felt proud and happy to show I was at that level. I knew from my training what I was capable of, but I had underperformed before. To finally deliver, and know it wasn't a fluke, was really satisfying.

**What does your training set-up look like?**

I'm coached by Errol Peak at Highgate Harriers. I train with the



**I TRAIN WITH THE BOYS' GROUP BECAUSE THE COMPETITION PUSHES ME. I GET MORE OUT OF TRAINING WHEN I'M AROUND PEOPLE WHO ARE BETTER THAN ME**

boys' group because the competition pushes me. I get more out of training when I'm around people who are better than me.

I train about five to six times a week running, with strength work and cross-training alongside. It's about doing the hard sessions hard and the easy days easy.

**What are your goals for the track season?**

I'll have a short break, then maybe do a few 5kms. I want to go to the

English Schools, possibly in the 1500m or 3000m, get qualifying times, and aim for the under-18 Europeans which is quite a big goal to aim for. I'd also like to make the England team again for track.

**Who do you look up to?**

That's a difficult question. I follow athletes from the M11 Track Club, especially Keely Hodgkinson and Georgia Hunter Bell, as they run similar distances. But I also find younger athletes like [New Zealander] Sam Ruthe inspiring, as he's close to my age and he hasn't been in the sport for that long either. He's out there competing with experienced professionals and I love watching it. There are others, too, including [Australian] Cam Myers and some more of the American athletes.

**What advice would you give your younger self when you started?**

I wouldn't change much. I focused on enjoyment at the start and didn't take it too seriously. That helped me stay passionate and the results came later.

**What are your long-term goals in the sport?**

The Olympics is the dream, but it's very difficult to reach. For now, I want to stay consistent, avoid injuries and keep enjoying it.

Long-term, I'd like to make European teams and earn a senior England vest on the track.

# ARIZONA DREAMING

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

**Verity Ockenden** writes about how an unexpected return to Flagstaff represents a full circle moment and a reminder that ambitions really can be realised

**A** quarter of the way through 2026 and the year has already been defined by something I hadn't planned for at all: a return to America. It's a place that has, on three separate occasions now, quietly but decisively altered the course of my career – despite the fact I hadn't set foot here for five years until the World Cross Country Championships this January in Tallahassee.

Even then, it hadn't entered my mind that I might already be back on US soil again in March. It is a full circle moment, returning to Flagstaff in particular; the place that earned me my first Olympic qualifying time and, as a consequence, my first professional contract with On. To return, five years on and sign my second contract, this time with Hoka, as I train out here once more with a view to breaking that five-year-old 5000m personal best, feels like it was all meant to be somehow.

I think of the conversations that I had around the dinner table of the neighbours I got to know here back in 2021. Not runners, they were retired golfers, and had leaned over their garden fence as I ran past one day to offer me half-jokingly a cold margherita when I

was done. I took them up on the offer, and invited them round for a reciprocal dinner the following week.

As older generations often are, they were all ears as I gushed forth with the tales of all my hopes and dreams, content in the knowledge that they had already lived their own.

I spilled out my soul in a way you only can when you're far from home and slightly untethered from reality. There was a warm, steady generosity in their wisdom as they enjoyed my youthful, and perhaps somewhat naive or romanticised, enthusiasm.

It was a strange feeling to say out loud to relative strangers that you believed you could make the Olympics, as the first and most important thing they should know about you. It felt both ridiculous, and self-interested, arrogant, affirming, liberating and vulnerable all at the same time. It was a declaration, not just to them, but to myself.

I also told them about my other pipe dream, how I hoped one day, perhaps when I myself retired having somehow made some money, I would move to Italy – my favourite place in the world. That felt like even more of a fantasy.

Looking back now, what strikes me most is how sincerely I believed in things that, at the

ABOVE: Flagstaff, Arizona is a hugely popular training base



**THIS TIME, MY SENSE OF SELF-BELIEF FEELS LESS GREEN, MORE WORN-IN, SAFER. I'M MORE STABLE, MORE RESILIENT. I UNDERSTAND THE SPORT BETTER NOW**

time, had almost no evidence behind them. It was a kind of optimism that bordered on recklessness, but perhaps that's what the sport demands of you early on.

It was a time when socialising felt precious after so long in the collective hibernation of 2020, when the Nike Dragonfly spike had only just come onto the market, and you had to know somebody to get your hands on a pair. Getting hold of those gauzy, carbon-soled slippers felt like gaining access to a competitive edge you couldn't afford to miss, in a sport where hundredths of a second could redraw entire careers.

I got by with the help of my friends who put me up, bought me the spikes they found on eBay and picked me up whenever the huge improbability of everything got overwhelming.

I had just achieved something I had never even dreamed of by claiming a bronze medal at the European Indoor Championships in Toruń, Poland and was surfing the wave of self-belief it had filled me with. Now, as I sit on a different sofa in a different Airbnb in that very same Arizona mountain town, another international championship to be held in Toruń has just taken place.

The difference is subtle, but significant. This time, my sense of self-belief feels less green, more worn-in, safer. I have been tested; stretched by injuries, near misses, and the slow, sometimes frustrating, process of trying to inch closer to times that don't yield easily. I'm more stable, more resilient. I understand the sport better now.

I know its rhythms, its unpredictability, its capacity to give and take in equal measure. And, importantly, it hasn't jaded me. If anything, it's made me more willing to lean into uncertainty. Because somewhere along the way, that other "pipe dream" quietly became real.

I *did* move to Italy. I've been living there for four years now, and I think it's that kind of plot twist that gives me the hope and courage to keep striving crazily at running fast.

It reminds me constantly that you just never know what's around the corner if you keep showing up. I hadn't expected to be out in

Flagstaff again so soon, that's for sure.

It was a flight that I had booked with 48 hours' notice that cost me the last of the money I'd stashed to tide me over between contracts, having verbally committed to signing with Hoka, but with nothing yet on paper. When I was given the opportunity to join Team Makou on their training camp out here, even without having registered completely how serendipitous it all was, I just knew in my gut that it was the right thing to do.

I scrambled my suitcases to make it happen, trusting that when I landed all the rest of my un-made plans would take care of themselves. Times have moved on in the sport now as I watch a World Championships that require a minimum of 8:35 over the women's 3000m, down a full 14 seconds from 8:49 back in 2020. It's a stark reminder that progress in athletics is not linear, and certainly not guaranteed. These times are goalposts that are forever moving and, for the past couple of years, are benchmarks that have hovered agonisingly just beyond my reach. Close enough to glimpse, but not quite to grasp. Held back by a combination of circumstance, timing, and, at times, sheer bad luck.

And yet returning to Flagstaff once more having taken a big leap of faith in a new beginning has stirred in me the feeling that this year might just be the year that it all aligns again. Not the wide-eyed certainty of 2021, but something quieter and perhaps more durable.

If there's one thing I've learned between then and now, it's that the most significant shifts in this sport rarely arrive as part of a carefully constructed plan.

More often, they come disguised as risks. As leaps of faith. As last-minute flights you're not entirely sure you can afford and sometimes, if you're willing to take them, they bring you exactly back to where you need to be. **AW**

BELOW: Verity with her European Indoor bronze medal in 2021



**AW**



WORLD ATHLETICS  
INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS  
KUJAWY POMORZE 2025

WORLD ATHLETICS  
INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS  
KUJAWY POMORZE 2025

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

TM

Everything

everywhere

all at once

FROM ALL-ROUND EXCELLENCE TO BRITISH SUCCESS,  
KATHARINE MERRY REFLECTS ON AN EDITION OF THE WORLD  
INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS THAT WILL LIVE LONG IN THE MEMORY

# ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS TORUŃ 2026



**B**efore we delve any further into it, I want to state from the outset that I think 2026 was one of the best editions of the World Indoor Championships there has ever been. It was absolutely amazing and I felt privileged to be a part of it all from my position as in-stadium announcer.

It had all of the ingredients you need for an event like this to be successful. Firstly, a very healthy number of the big-name athletes committed to it. From Mondo Duplantis to Keely Hodgkinson, having those high-profile competitors to call on is always going to be a strong base to start from. When you have a very knowledgeable and informed local organising committee, as we had in Toruń, that's another building block. Add in the fact that the presentation of the event was really

good, too, and all of a sudden you find you've built a house and you can put a party on. It was really well done.

That, in turn, gave the athletes the perfect platform to compete at their best – and so many of them delivered. There weren't many events I can think of that fell particularly flat and the level of competition was fantastic. It also helped that, even before the world indoors got up and running, it had already been a hugely eventful indoor season.

Mondo had just set another world record with 6.31m, Keely had broken the long-standing women's 800m mark, Cooper Lutkenhaus had been so impressive in the USA and was looking to become the youngest ever world indoor champion in the men's 800m – loads of athletes across the board had already done brilliant things, which then raised the excitement level. It was as if the indoor season had provided the heats and the semis, and Toruń was the final.

And then so much happened when the action got going! Ukraine winning both the high jumps was a really nice touch, then you had Simon Ehammer breaking the heptathlon world record, Tom Walsh winning a fourth shot put title in a row and his seventh World Indoor medal. Devynne Charlton made it three in a row in the women's 60m hurdles and equalled her world record, the men's and women's 60m races were exciting, Jakub Szymański won the men's 60m hurdles in front of a home crowd for Poland... there were very few events that didn't have either really strong performances or interesting storylines attached to them.

The one event that got everyone talking was the new format to the 400m, where the medals were decided by the three fastest times across two finals. I'm all for innovation but I'm not sure that a world championships is the place to try something out for the first time. We wait to see if it returns.

And then, of course, there were those four gold medals for the British team. I think everyone was getting a little bit twitchy about the lack of medals but Josh Kerr got the ball rolling superbly well with his win in the 3000m on the Saturday evening. Despite what he said afterwards, he totally controlled that race and repeated what he

## KATHARINE MERRY



**Katharine Merry**

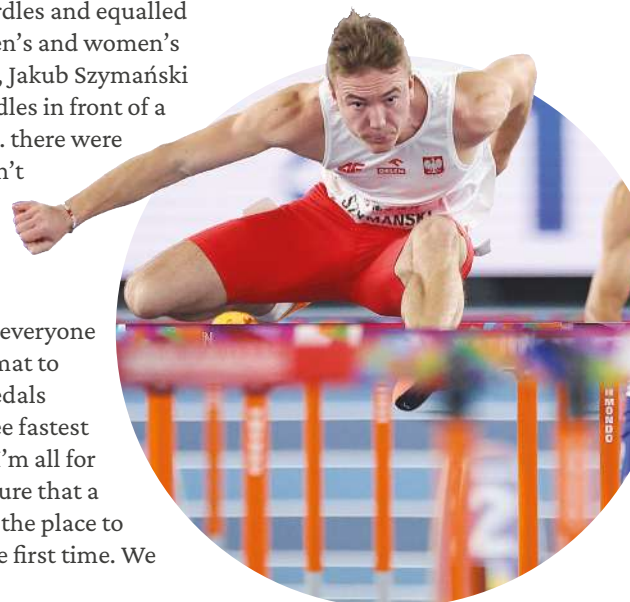
Olympic medallist and broadcaster



@KatharineMerry



@katharine.merry



ABOVE: Jakub Szymański delighted the home crowd with gold in the 60m hurdles



did in Glasgow two years ago. I loved that there was a little bit of spice between him and Cole Hocker with the sleeping celebration.

I think everyone was confident that Keely would get the job done in the 800m on Sunday evening, and I was not at all surprised that Georgia Hunter Bell did the same in the 1500m, but Molly Caudery has not been quite as consistent so for her to strike gold in the women's pole vault, too – and for all three medals to be won in the space of 28 minutes... we didn't see that one coming!

It's worth remembering that all four of those champions have, at various points, been knocked down by the sport but have managed to recover. Josh limped over the line in Tokyo, Keely has been outspoken about

how difficult last year was, Molly has had a lot of injuries, demons and downright bad luck to deal with, too, while Georgia of course left the sport completely but has now well and truly vindicated her decision to come back – from cyber security and tech sales to world champion is quite a journey.

It speaks volumes, too, for the work being done by Trevor Painter and Jenny Meadows with their M11 Track Club, where Keely and Georgia are the two star names. I've seen people already asking: "What are they doing in terms of the structure and the set-up that other events can learn from or even that other sports can learn from?"

Their key to success is that their approach is people-led and athlete focused. Yes, there

ABOVE: Georgia Hunter Bell, Molly Caudery and Keely Hodgkinson all secured gold medals in a single thrilling session for British athletics



**It was as if the indoor season had provided the heats and the semis, and Toruń was the final**



is a mind-boggling level of detail, data and skill involved but at its heart its performance driven yet people-led. It's understanding that everyone's human and finding the right balance between having to crack the whip when it's needed but also giving the athletes leeway to be themselves.

They are human like the rest of us but also just happen to all be really good at athletics and, when you've got somebody like Keely who's pulling up trees and Georgia winning titles, people then want to join the group and it gets bigger and bigger. It becomes a very special environment. I can relate to that.

And what an indoor season Keely has had. She has spent most of it proving a few points, even with that leg of 50.10 – the fastest of all the athletes – in the 4x400m relay final. Given how far back the British team were when she took the baton you could have forgiven her for not really putting the foot down but she just wants to run. She'd been saying for a long time that she wanted to be part of the relay and she's so strong now that she can go out and do that less than an hour after running an 800m final. It's not a big deal.

I would love to see her doing more of that and it wouldn't surprise me to see her as part of the England 4x400m relay team at the Commonwealth Games. You can see her doing the same at the European Championships if it works for her – and can you imagine putting her in a mixed relay line-up along with Amber Anning, Matt Hudson-Smith and Charlie

Dobson? That one is far less likely but it would be something else.

The great news is that we'll have these big showpiece occasions to see these athletes in action again later this year but the problem is that, with the indoor season now done, we won't see any of them competing again for a while.

The image of Keely, Molly and Georgia on top of the world, laughing and joking with each other and sharing that plastic crown is absolutely priceless. It's just the perfect advert but, as we know, building on it can be so difficult. The British success is wonderful, we should be celebrating it and I hope it brings more people towards our fantastic sport but, speaking as the president of Birchfield Harriers, do we have the foundations in place to be able to deal with that and to grow? I think if you speak to most of the people involved at the grassroots level of the sport there is a feeling that we don't.

To come back around to my original point at the start of this column, you have to have a strong base from which to build and bring out the best in those who choose to be a part of it all. Even at the highest level, it's a disjointed sport.

But I won't be forgetting Toruń any time soon. That final evening was one of the best days of indoor athletics I've ever worked on and it really does whet the appetite for more of the same as we had into the outdoor season. The next host – the Indian city of Odisha in 2028 – already has a very tough act to follow. **AW**

ABOVE: Josh Kerr won Great Britain's first gold medal, with victory in the men's 3000m



# TAKING FLIGHT IN TORUN



A SELECTION OF THE BEST IMAGES FROM  
THE WORLD INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS



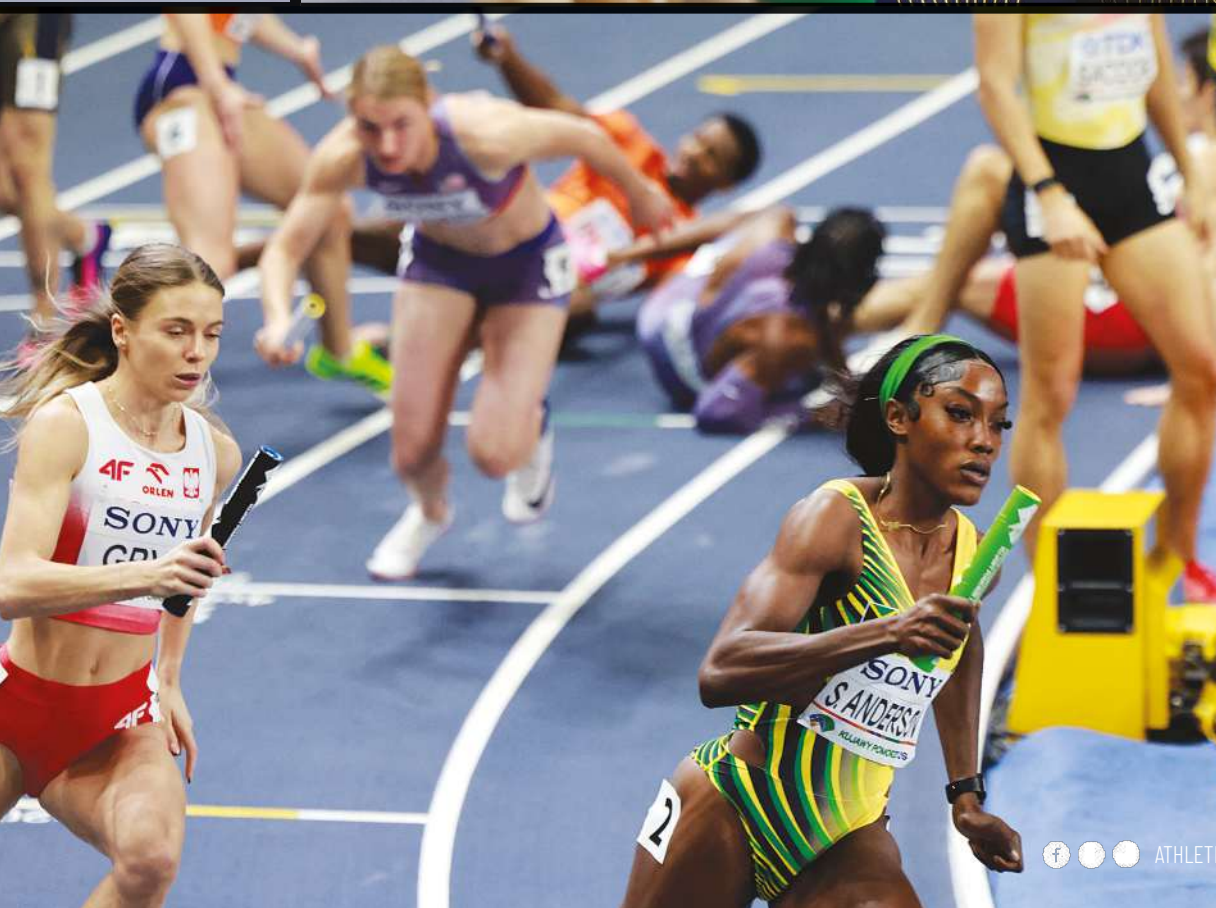
ABOVE, LEFT: Mondo Duplantis was flying high after his fourth successive world indoor title

ABOVE: 17-year-old Cooper Lutkenhaus became the youngest ever world indoor champion when he won 800m gold

LEFT: Home favourite Ewa Swoboda in 60m action

FAR LEFT: Nadia Battocletti can hardly believe her win in the women's 3000m





ABOVE, LEFT: Devynne Charlton equalled her own world record in winning the women's 60m hurdles title for a third time

ABOVE: Mariano Garcia became the first Spaniard to win the men's 1500m gold

LEFT: There was chaos and clashes in the mixed 4x400m

FAR LEFT: Tom Walsh won the seventh world indoor medal of his shot put career



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# TORUN BY NUMBERS

## THE WORLD INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS FACTS AND FIGURES

**6670**

Two world records fell in Poland, with Simon Ehammer notching an unprecedented 6670 points in winning men's heptathlon gold. The Swiss also set a world heptathlon best of 7.52 in the 60m hurdles.

line-up in the men's 4x400m relay (3:01.52) and Mondo Duplantis in the men's pole vault (6.25m), the Swede securing his fourth successive world indoor title.

FROM TOP: Simon Ehammer, Sophie Dokter and Jordan Anthony won heptathlon, pentathlon and 60m golds respectively

**7.65**

Devynne Charlton equalled her own 60m hurdles world record of 7.65 to win her third successive title.

**7**

New Zealand's Tom Walsh created history by winning his fourth world indoor shot put title, capturing his seventh world indoor medal overall – a men's record.

**4**

As well as the marks from Ehammer and Charlton, a further four championship records were set, by Keely Hodgkinson in the women's 800m (1:55.30), Christopher Morales Williams in the men's 400m 44.76, the US

**632**

A total of 632 athletes from 111 countries – 323 men and a record 309 women – competed.



## WOMEN

### 60m

- Zaynab Dosso *ITA* **7.00**
- Jacious Sears *USA* **7.03**
- Julien Alfred *LCA* **7.03**

### 400m

- Lurdes Gloria Manuel *CZE* **50.76**
- Natalia Bukowiecka *POL* **50.83 =NR**
- Lieke Klaver *NED* **51.02**

### 800m

- Keely Hodgkinson *GBR* **1:55.30 CR**
- Audrey Werro *SUI* **1:56.64 NR**
- Addison Wiley *USA* **1:58.36**

### 1500m

- Georgia Hunter Bell *GBR* **3:58.53 NR**
- Jessica Hull *AUS* **3:59.45 AR**
- Nikki Hiltz *USA* **3:59.68**

### 3000m

- Nadia Battocletti *ITA* **8:57.64**
- Emily Mackay *USA* **8:58.12**
- Jessica Hull *AUS* **8:58.18**

### 60m Hurdles

- Devynne Charlton *BAH* **7.65 =WR**
- Nadine Visser *NED* **7.73**
- Pia Skrzyszowska *POL* **7.73 NR**

### High Jump

- Yaroslava Mahuchikh *UKR* **2.01m**
- Nicola Olyslagers *AUS* **1.99m**
- Angelina Topić *SRB* **1.99m**
- Yuliia Levchenko *UKR* **1.99m**

### Pole Vault

- Molly Caudery *GBR* **4.85m**
- Tina Šutej *SLO* **4.80m**
- Amálie Švábíková *CZE* **4.70m**
- Imogen Ayris *NZL* **4.70m**
- Angelica Moser *SUI* **4.70m**

### Long Jump

- Agate De Sousa *POR* **6.92m**
- Larissa Iapichino *ITA* **6.87m**
- Natalia Linares *COL* **6.80m**

## Triple Jump

- Leyanis Perez Hernandez *CUB* **14.95m**
- Yulimar Rojas *VEN* **14.86m**
- Saly Sarr *SEN* **14.70m**

## Shot put

- Chase Jackson *USA* **20.14m**
- Sarah Mitton *CAN* **19.78m**
- Axelina Johansson *SWE* **19.75m NR**

## 4x400m relay

- USA **3:25.81**
- Netherlands **3:26.00**
- Spain **3:26.17**

## Pentathlon

- Sofie Dokter *NED* **4888 NR**
- Anna Hall *USA* **4860**
- Kate O'Connor *IRL* **4839 NR**

## MEN

### 60m

- Jordan Anthony *USA* **6.41**
- Kishane Thompson *JAM* **6.45**
- Trayvon Bromell *USA* **6.45**

### 400m

- Christopher Morales Williams *CAN* **44.76 CR**
- Khaleb McRae *USA* **45.03**
- Jereem Richards *TTO* **45.39**

### 800m

- Cooper Lutkenhaus *USA* **1:44.24**
- Elliott Crestan *BEL* **1:44.38**
- Mohamed Attaoui *ESP* **1:44.66**

### 1500m

- Mariano Garcia *ESP* **3:39.63**
- Isaac Nader *POR* **3:40.06**
- Adam Spencer *AUS* **3:40.26**

### 3000m

- Josh Kerr *GBR* **7:35.56**
- Cole Hocker *USA* **7:35.70**
- Yann Schrub *FRA* **7:35.71**

## 60m Hurdles

- Jakub Szymanski *POL* **7.40**
- Enrique Llopis *ESP* **7.42 NR**
- Trey Cunningham *USA* **7.43**

## High Jump

- Oleh Doroshchuk *UKR* **2.30m**
- Erick Portillo *MEX* **2.30m**
- Raymond Richards *JAM* **2.26m**
- Sanghyeok Woo *KOR* **2.26m**

## Pole Vault

- Mondo Duplantis *SWE* **6.25m CR**
- Emmanouil Karalis *GRE* **6.05m**
- Kurtis Marschall *AUS* **6.00m**

## Long Jump

- Gerson Baldé *POR* **8.46m NR**
- Mattia Furlani *ITA* **8.39m**
- Bozhidar Saraboyukov *BUL* **8.31m**

## Triple Jump

- Andy Diaz Hernandez *ITA* **17.47m**
- Jordan Scott *JAM* **17.33m**
- Yasser Triki *ALG* **17.30m**

## Shot put

- Tom Walsh *NZL* **21.82m**
- Jordan Geist *USA* **21.64m**
- Roger Steen *USA* **21.49m**

## 4x400m relay

- USA **3:01.52 CR**
- Belgium **3:03.29**
- Jamaica **3:05.99**

## Heptathlon

- Simon Ehammer *SUI* **6670 WR**
- Heath Baldwin *USA* **6337**
- Kyle Garland *USA* **6245**

## MIXED

### 4x400m Relay

- Belgium **3:15.60**
- Spain **3:16.96**
- Poland **3:17.44**



### Medals table

RANK	COUNTRY	G	S	B	TOT
1	United States	5	7	6	18
2	Great Britain & NI	4	0	0	4
3	Italy	3	2	0	5
4=	Portugal	2	1	0	3
4=	Ukraine	2	1	0	3
6	Spain	1	2	2	5
7	Netherlands	1	2	1	4
8	Belgium	1	2	0	3
9	Poland	1	1	2	4
10	Switzerland	1	1	1	3

### Placing table

RANK	COUNTRY	TOT
1	United States	164
2	Poland	58
3	Netherlands	54
4	Jamaica	52
5=	Great Britain & NI	49
5=	Italy	49
7	Australia	43
8	Spain	39
9	Sweden	36
10	France	31



# “We’re learning from Keely”

**JENNY MEADOWS TALKS TO EUAN CRUMLEY ABOUT HAVING HER FAITH IN ATHLETICS RESTORED, FINDING THE JOY IN COACHING AND WHAT LIES AHEAD THIS SUMMER FOR BRITAIN’S 800M STAR**

**I**f, as the saying goes, “a happy athlete is a fast athlete”, then it’s no coincidence that Keely Hodgkinson has been grinning from ear to ear for so much of 2026. Capturing the first world indoor title of her career last month brought the curtain down on an exceptional – and eventful – winter that could barely have gone any better.

The 24-year-old’s exploits have also brought a smile to the faces of her coaching team, the husband and wife duo of Trevor Painter and Jenny Meadows whose approach is making a real mark on the sport. In fact, for Meadows, seeing the Manchester-based M11 training group going about their business has not only helped to restore her faith in athletics, it has also “healed her heart”.

It’s 10 years since the now 44-year-old hung up her spikes after an international 800m career that featured four international medals but could have included more, given that she

missed out to athletes who subsequently tested positive for doping.

“It means a lot,” she says, speaking to *AW* at the Emirates Arena in Glasgow at the beginning of March where Hodgkinson and training partner Georgia Hunter Bell were tuning up for Toruń. “I never wanted to get involved in coaching, but being married to Trevor [who coached Meadows] he was always going to carry on and he got me involved about six weeks after I retired, mentoring some athletes.

“I think sometimes you don’t realise how much you know. I do absolutely love it now and I think it’s healed my heart a little bit, because I was quite dubious towards the end of my career. Things looked too good to be true. Quite often [it was] ‘Can you see amazing performances and can you actually believe it?’ So I’d rather be involved on the inside knowing that you can.

“You can only vouch for the athletes that you’re involved with. These guys train really, really hard and I know you can be the best in the world by doing it clean. It has been a 180



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

[degree change] for me. I do feel like I have a lot to give the sport. [The athletes] tell me I make a difference, so that's always good. I can't imagine doing anything else now."

If there is one thing that Meadows is still trying to comprehend about her old event, it's how rapidly things have moved on since she stepped off the track. She coaches the current indoor world record-holder, of course, and admits to having been taken aback by the nature of the modern-day 800m.

"I have to pinch myself when I think about these times that are being run now," she says. "I am an old school athlete. I've never run in the super shoes, they've [now] got pacemakers and wave lights, the recovery now is so much better. If I look at the whole team behind Keely and Georgia, for example, they've got full-time staff, therapists, physiologists.

"I used to wait to train with lots of people who were working or at college and Trevor was working full-time, so I used to train during club evenings. I look now at what these guys have got, and I can understand why there's advancements in the sport, but they work so, so hard.

"It's only 10 years since I retired, and it is almost like a completely different sport. But they work so hard, and I'm not resentful in any way. They deserve these opportunities."

And the athletes are taking them. Hodgkinson and Hunter Bell will now head into a summer that features the Commonwealth Games, European Championships and Ultimate Championship with world indoor titles and gold medals to their name.

For the Olympic champion, "domination" has been her word for 2026 and it would seem she is fully intent on producing just that on the track, fuelled by the thought of making up for the time she lost in 2025 due to injury.

"It really hurt her last year, not being able to compete until August," says Meadows. "This



winter has been the first proper winter Keely's had in three years. So we really have to look back to the end of 2022 as the last time we've gone through all the phases of the training.

"And she wasn't happy with that [world] bronze in Tokyo. She won a medal, she never stopped training, but it was almost like she was in base training for a whole year. Imagine just having to do the endurance for a whole year with no kind of phases of training, no rewards. It was pretty tough, but still to run 1:54 twice shows what an incredible athlete she is.

"But because she has those months now of consistent training this winter, she's hitting outdoor times indoors, and it just makes me really excited. I think she will be running those 1:53s that she's so desperate to run. Whether it's [the world record of] 1:53.28, we'll see but it was

ABOVE: Discussing training with coaches Trevor Painter and Jenny Meadows



## She's developing into her own adult body. She's 60kg, but doing it for the event, not the image or for what someone thinks she should be

in London in 2024 that she saw 1:54 on the clock for the first time and now she's really looking forward to that moment when she sees 1:53 on the clock."

Hodgkinson has been open about targeting Jarmila Kratochvílová's world record and also recently took to social media to gauge opinion on the potential use of male pacemakers in women's races – an approach that goes against current rules. The challenge is finding female pacemakers who can hit those speeds, Hodgkinson's argument being that any woman in a position to pace such an attempt at the moment would be potentially looking to either win the race or break the record themselves.

Meadows believes it's an interesting discussion point and argues that, in the same vein as Faith Kipyegon's Breaking4 project last year, even a showpiece that didn't conform to the rules could be a very worthwhile exercise.

"Faith Kipyegon had an array of pacers doing different things, and it was a test and it was a challenge, rather than it was going to be a legitimate record," she says. "I think, as an athlete, you always want to challenge yourself, and I think it would be good to have conversations with someone, even if it's not a valid world record, just for Keely to know she's done that, and then maybe if she goes back to a female paced race, she'll then think 'I've shown myself I can do that and, actually, I just need to take control of the race'. So maybe it is a conversation that will help push the event forward."

Hodgkinson's performances have certainly taken a step forward, too – her World Indoor Championships record coming five years after she won her first title at the European Indoor Championships, also in Toruń, as a 19-year-old. How has Meadows seen her change in that time?

"She's more in tune with her body now," she says. "I think her goals are very self-driven, and Trevor and I always go along with those goals. She used to listen to us a lot for reassurance and she still does. [For the world record in Lievin] she specifically

asked: 'Jen, do you think I can do this?' And it wasn't the world indoor record [she was talking about]. It was 1:53.

"It's great that she still wants that opinion but she also has self assurance now. Now she knows the numbers, she understands how the sport works, how our training works, and she's very challenge driven, like: 'This is what I want to get out of the session'. So I think we're learning from her as much as she's learned from us, and we're going through this almost like a partnership now."

In working to get stronger, to make herself more robust, the European champion has also cut a noticeably different figure this year – a topic that she hasn't shied away from discussing in public. In doing so, Meadows argues that Hodgkinson has only enhanced her credentials as a role model.

"I'm glad that she's put that out there recently about her being heavier when she goes on the scales," she says. "Females think that's a negative thing but it is just a product of her growing and where her body should be. If I look back at how she looks in Paris, she was 54kg and she actually looks quite skinny to me, but she's developing into her own adult woman's body now. She's 60kg, but doing it for the event, not the image or for what someone thinks she should be.

"I really respect Keely for that because, even now, I still look on the scales at what I weigh and I get emotional from it, but Keely's looking at it from a performance point of view. I respect her so much that she just knows what she wants from the sport and she's prepared to do it." **AW**

BELOW: Celebrating a pair of gold medals with training partner Georgia Hunter Bell





# Family affair

**MATT MAJENDIE SPEAKS TO WORLD INDOOR SILVER MEDALLIST LARISSA IAPICHI**NO ABOUT BEING ABLE TO FORGE HER OWN PATH IN THE LONG JUMP, DESPITE BEING THE DAUGHTER OF TWO WELL-KNOWN ATHLETES

**L**arissa Iapichino initially did everything in her power to avoid going down the path she has taken. Growing up, she was the quintessential reluctant long jumper. The daughter of two athletes – her mother Fiona May was a two-time long jump world champion and father Gianni a national record-holder at the pole vault – she was determined to navigate her own, alternative sporting journey.

It began with gymnastics, which came to a premature halt when she grew too tall, as well as being demonised by her fear of the beam. She pondered volleyball, tennis and then, eventually, athletics.

“I remember thinking: ‘I don’t want to be too serious about it, I’m not my mum, I’m not my dad,’” says the 23-year-old Italian. “But, the thing is, I went for the first hour-and-a-half and I fell in love with the sport. It started with the hurdles as

I still wanted something different to jumping.”

The problem was that she had a natural aptitude for leaping feet first into the long jump pit, despite her initial reluctance and that of her mother. She recalls: “My mum was desperate: ‘Please keep with the hurdles or middle distance but not the long jump’. I was like: ‘Mum, I’m good at this, the results speak for themselves’.

“Okay, maybe I have a little more pressure because my parents were who they were but it was just a destiny already written by someone else. And I said: ‘Who cares if people want to put pressure on me? Just let them and I’ll do my own thing’.”

It perhaps seemed inevitable that both her genetics and being named after a long jumper, Larisa Berezhnaya, a contemporary of her mother’s, meant she would eventually land on the long jump runway. Whatever the pathway, it has paid off to good effect as a European Indoor champion, European silver medallist and having placed agonisingly fourth at the last Olympic Games in Paris. A first ever global medal

ABOVE: Larissa Iapichino in action at the World Indoors last month in Toruń



## She did amazing things and I never felt like a weight on my shoulders being my mum's daughter. I am me and she is her

is also now in her grasp thanks to the 6.87m leap that brought silver at the World Indoor Championships last month.

Mother, a British-born athlete who switched allegiance to Italy and won world titles in 1995 and 2001 along with two Olympic silver medals, remains the inspiration but her daughter has successfully created her own identity.

"She did amazing things and I never felt like a weight on my shoulders being my mum's daughter," says Iapichino. "I am me and she is her. I'm doing, and she did, athletics in two different eras. We cannot compare much. I have my qualities and she has hers. I have my own path to do and follow. Sometimes I look at videos of her and go 'wow' but that's inspiring, not something negative."

Another link is their coach. Gianni, Larissa's father, coaches her as he did Fiona May, the couple going on to marry before divorcing in 2011. Being coach and athlete, as well as father and daughter, has its challenges but they laugh at the sometimes rollercoaster nature of it.

"We have very strong personalities but I also have a little touch of my mother so it's not that easy," says Larissa, laughing and looking across to her smiling father. "We manage to put our private relationship – father and daughter – aside when we're at the track."

Unlike the likes of World Athletics president Seb Coe, who called his dad Peter when he was coaching him, she sticks to 'dad' at the track. "I think what we have is very special," she adds.

Dad briefly butts in to explain a bit about the Iapichino family characteristic being a feisty, combative one which can raise eyebrows to those witnessing it. "It's like the relationship that I had with my father," he explains. "We had terrible fights and still do, and it looks terrible but in an hour it's gone without needing to explain things to each other. Our relationship is a bit the same. Sometimes we have to get mad with each other but it ends there."

Having witnessed both at the height of their careers, how do mum and daughter compare as athletes? "They're very different," he starts diplomatically. "As Larissa said, it's completely different eras. She has a physiotherapist, osteopath, a nutritionist, back then we just had water and food, no amino acids, protein or anything like that."

"Fiona was very tough mentally. She never complained once, even if maybe she thought it! With Larissa there's more feedback and that's a good thing." Larissa chimes in, "I'm very opinionated," to which dad responds warmly, "She sometimes comes out with things that are very useful and, anyway, I'm not a dictator."

There have been tough moments together, most recently the World Championships in Tokyo last year where Larissa had arrived in the form of her life, jumping in excess of seven metres, but then failed to qualify for the final. The rebuild has not been easy, although she bounced back with a best ever season-opener of 6.93m on her comeback before that medal hunt in Toruń.

"It takes time to think about what happened and you need to take that time," she says of the aftermath of Japan. "You need to rest a little bit, reset your mind, go back on the track and work harder."

One big change has been the removal of a sports psychologist, the aim being to give her more ownership in dealing with the tough moments mentally in competition when they arise.

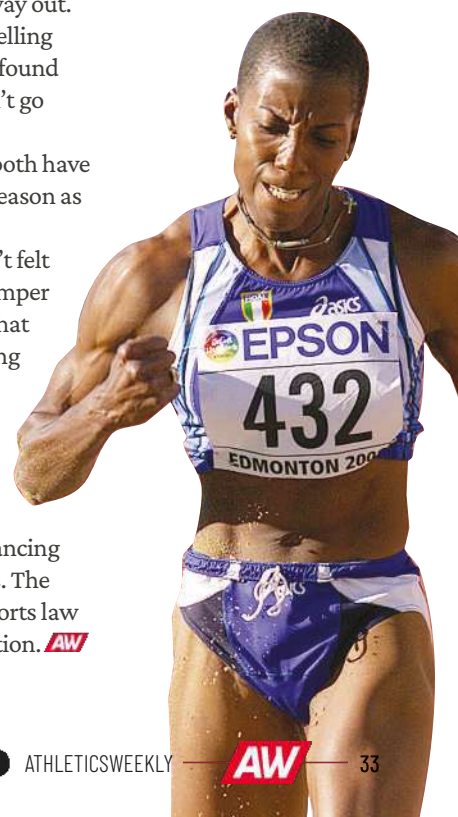
Dissecting Tokyo, her dad says: "Why were there sometimes these blackouts? They weren't physical. She was in a heck of a shape in the days before Tokyo – she's probably never been so strong in her life. So we had to point out the real things that weren't going right, trying to work on her mindset, letting her try to get out of the difficult situations and try to find a way out. This will help her rather than someone telling her how to coach her mind. Instead, she found herself in a difficult situation and couldn't go back to normal business."

Heading towards the outdoor season, both have big ambitions and beyond in their fifth season as coach-athlete.

Larissa speaks of the fact that: "I haven't felt the jump. I strongly believe that every jumper in a career has the jump where you feel that it's long, that you're flying, that everything just got together perfectly. I haven't felt that. I'm just working hard trying to find my perfect jump."

She has just ended her winter exams in what is the fifth year of her part-time legal career. It involves an organised balancing act and she likes having the two pursuits. The eventual aim is to navigate a career in sports law but, first, will come the pursuit of perfection. **AW**

BELOW: Iapichino's mother, Fiona May, twice won world championship gold



# THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE

WORLD ATHLETICS  
**ULTIMATE**  **CHAMPIONSHIP**  
BUDAPEST 26

World Athletics' innovative new competition will showcase the stars of the sport with an end-of-season celebration in Budapest

**T**he inaugural World Athletics Ultimate Championship is less than six months away! World Athletics launched the Ultimate with the guiding principle of ending each athletics season with a major global championship. It is intentionally designed to showcase the stars of the sport within a fast-paced and dynamic structure built explicitly with fans in mind.

The first edition will take place on September 11-13 at the National Athletics Centre in Budapest, Hungary marking a return to the site of the successful 2023 World Athletics Championships.

With no country quotas, athletes are invited based purely on performance. Automatic qualifications have been secured by 26 Olympic champions from Paris in 2024 and by 26 world champions from Tokyo in 2025.

The Diamond League Final in Brussels on September 4-5 will see 25 Diamond League champions qualify. The remaining spots will be allocated based on world rankings.

It's time to settle the debate over who is the best of the best, with Olympic champions, world champions and Diamond League winners all vying for the Ultimate crown.

The timetable has been configured to spotlight every essential in-stadium moment with just one action-packed session per evening. Every



LASZLÓ MARTON ZSIGMOND FOR WORLD ATHLETICS

second, every lap and every attempt will matter. A more seamless balance between field and track has been achieved through a distilled programme and strategic scheduling.

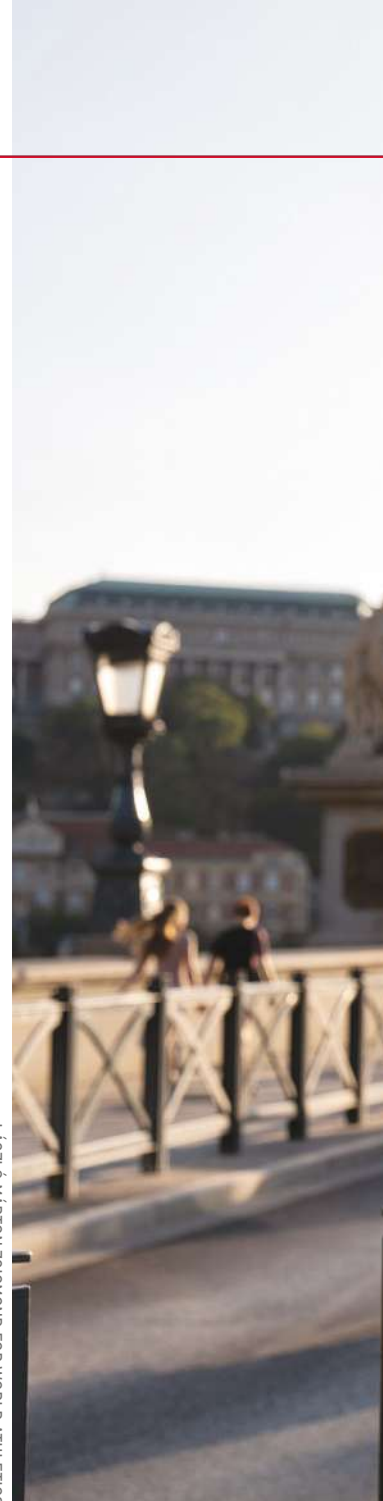
There will be no initial qualifying rounds, just straight finals for field events, the 1500m and the 5000m. Action begins with semi-finals for all other track races.

Innovations on the field of play, throughout the live experience, and within the television product are sure to delight audiences. The unashamedly made-for-TV event will showcase the expertise of Tata Communications and HBS as host broadcaster. Usain Bolt has already been announced as the Ultimate Legend, with Mondo Duplantis announced as an Ultimate Star.

It has also been revealed that Duplantis will

ABOVE: Pole vault superstar Mondo Duplantis will be among the athletics heroes in action at the National Athletics Centre in Budapest

RIGHT: The Hungarian capital is one of Europe's most historic and beautiful cities





compose the Ultimate Anthem, a song which will be a part of the fabric of the championship in-broadcast and in-stadium. A fan challenge is underway to find the Ultimate Fan, with top-scorers winning a trip to Budapest and the opportunity to meet Bolt.

Unprecedented prize money is also on offer. The guaranteed \$10 million (USD) prize purse is the largest in the history of the sport. Each Ultimate Champion will earn \$150,000 but prize money will be paid to every athlete who competes in recognition of their status as the best of the best.

Sparks will fly. Be a part of history and get your tickets today! **AW**



**Visit [ultimateathleticschampionship.com](http://ultimateathleticschampionship.com) for more info**



LIZ

McCOLGAN

As part of AW's exclusive Legends Series, **Tim Hutchings** speaks to the former world champion and London Marathon winner about her career

A

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

interviews will educate and inspire you as each legend takes us through their personal journey in the sport.

Liz McColgan's journey has been a remarkable one. Her breakthrough moment came when winning 10,000m gold for Scotland at the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, a title she went on to retain in 1990. She also won Olympic silver over the distance in 1988 and memorably became world champion in 1991 in Tokyo, while there was also a world half marathon title and medals at the World Cross Country Championships. Her move to the marathon was also a successful one, with wins in New York (1991), Tokyo (1992) and London (1996). Now based in Doha, she works as a mentor and coach and has guided the career of her daughter Eilish.

**Your whole life has been running. You were brought up in Dundee, ran for Dundee Hawkhill Harriers. By the age of 18 you were**

**winning races and then went to university in the US.**

I started running when I was 12. I wasn't the best. I'd be making Scottish schools teams and be the fourth or fifth player on it, so I wasn't that outstanding when I was younger. It took me a bit of time to grow into my athletics.

When I got to 17,18 I started to respond to the training that I was doing and I got offered a scholarship to go to the University of Rexburg, Idaho. I had to go to a junior college because I didn't have the qualifications to get into a four-year school, which was Division two. I went for a year in Idaho and it was a bit of an eye-opener, because it was a Mormon school.

At the end of my first year, I got recruited and went to the University of Alabama. That was a game changer. I was there for three years, came back home, won my first British Championships, which was the first 10,000m for women. That was 1985 and it was the start of my career, really.

**The 1986 Commonwealth Games were your first major championships. Were you confident that you could win?**

I knew. I think, as an athlete, you always know when you're on your game. It wasn't a

ABOVE: Liz McColgan on her way to the World Championship 10,000m gold in Tokyo

RIGHT: Competing in Scottish colours at the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, where she claimed gold

## IN 1986 I FELT THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD ON MY SHOULDERS BUT I WAS VERY, VERY CONFIDENT THAT I COULD WIN IT

good Games for Scotland that year. The team manager said to me: "You're our last hope," and I just felt the weight of the world on my shoulders as I left [for the race]. But I was very, very confident that I could win it.

**You were coached by Harry Bennett, then John Anderson briefly and also Grete Waitz. What did you learn from her?**

She was more a mentor than a coach, and we were very, very similar. She brought a few different things to me. I didn't do an awful lot of weights and plyometrics, circuits and things like that. She introduced that into me, so I was a lot stronger in my legs. She was an amazing, amazing person and she just would share her knowledge. That's what Harry did with me when I was a youngster, too.

**Did that experience help to equip you for being a coach?**

The whole thing about being a coach or a mentor is learning your sport, and I think I've learned the hard way through trial and error. I'm not saying that every great coach has to be a great athlete, because they don't, but you do have to delve into your sport and learn the ins and outs of it and what works and what doesn't.

You only get that from being out in the field and practicing and practicing and practicing. Having been an athlete gives you that extra bit of edge, because a person that hasn't run doesn't know how it feels to be in a call room for 20 minutes before you're going out to the biggest race in your life or if you're not feeling confident, how that feels.

**Which performance from your career stands out for you?**

If you're world champion and you're the best at that moment in time, it's hard to say that that's not your favorite moment. I was always time orientated, so when I broke the world records at the various distances and they lasted for 12 years that meant a lot to me.

**Which world record stands out?**

I think the half marathon [in 1992] does, because I had just had Eilish and we went to

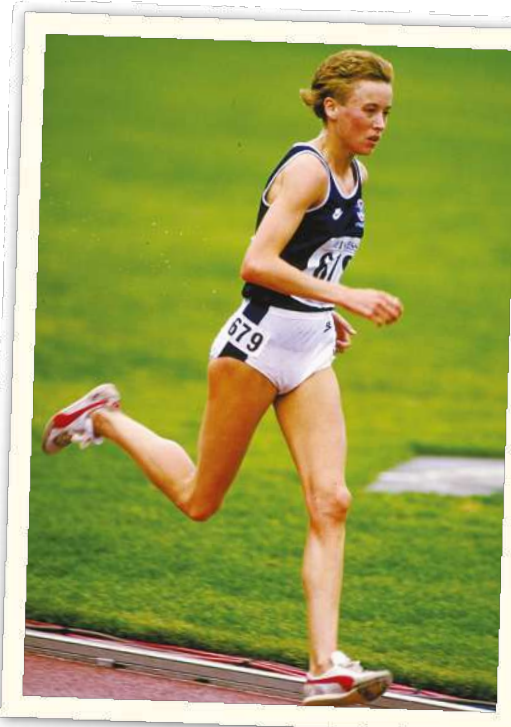


PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

Japan. I remember saying to my husband at the time: "You know what? I really don't care. I'm so tired. I'm just going to run as hard as I can."

I went through 10km way too fast and then I just really suffered over the latter part. I got hit by a wheelchair! I had no idea how fast I was running, because I was running like a zombie, to be honest. I was just out of it. I was just pushing and pushing. When I finished and saw the time, I was just amazed. It was 67:11, [I'd taken] quite a bit off the world record, and I couldn't believe I'd done it.

**Your daughter Eilish now holds the British record for the half marathon. She's engaged to former 800m Michael Rimmer and they're a great pairing. Are you very involved in Eilish's career?**

Oh yes, I talk to Eilish like nearly every day, but I'm not dictating to her what to do now, because Eilish has learned from me, and I've got the confidence to know that she and Michael are able to design the programme. But we still have a lot of discussion. I'm more of a mentor, like Grete was with me. Eilish is a mature woman. She's a mature athlete. She doesn't need mum to tell her what to do all the time. **AW**

### CAREER MEDAL RECORD

Olympic Games



World Championships



World Indoor Championships



Commonwealth Games



World Marathon Majors



World Half Marathon Championships



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# RUNNING DOWN A DREAM

James Kingston hopes his domestic cross-country achievements will one day act as a springboard to the Winter Olympics, writes **Jason Henderson**

**A**s a cross-country runner, James Kingston won the English National in 2023, made the British team for the World Championships in 2024 and claimed victory in the UK Inter-Countries last month in Nottingham.

The 24-year-old Tonbridge AC man is aiming to make more of an impact on the roads and the track in coming years, but if cross-country running fulfils its Olympic dream and makes its Winter Games debut in France in 2030 then he would be hugely motivated to keep his cross-country spikes sharp.

“I had this discussion with a training partner recently,” he says. “If cross country became a Winter Olympics sport it would become a big aim. It’s a great opportunity to go to the Olympics and, if it happened, it would be amazing for the sport. Smaller sports that no one really watches get a lot of views when the Winter Olympics are on. So it would be great for cross country if it happened.”

If that did come to pass, Kingston would be a strong contender to make the British team. Despite still only being 24, he has been a stalwart of the domestic scene in recent years, highlighted by his UK Inter-Countries win at Wollaton Hall last month.

It came after a disappointing early part of the winter season, too, when he finished seventh at the Liverpool Cross Challenge, failing to make the British team for the European Cross in Lagoa.

“I was really disappointed at Liverpool,” he says. “I felt I was good enough to make the team but just didn’t get out hard enough at the start and found myself with too much to do. But training went well up to the National [in Sedgefield in February] and I was beaten there by a very good runner, Hugo Milner, so I took a lot of confidence from that. Then, at the Inter-Countries, I felt really good. It all clicked in the weeks leading up to that race.”

Kingston believes the 2026 version of himself would comfortably beat the 2023-24 version who won the English National at Bolesworth Castle and placed 67th at the World Cross Country Championships in Belgrade.

“If I raced myself when I won the National or ran in the World Cross then I would be a long way ahead now,” he says. “I don’t think my old self [from 2023-24] would have won a medal at this year’s Inter-Countries. It’s nice to know I’m a lot stronger and can build on this in the next year or two.”

Back in 2023-24 he was running about 80-85 miles per week but now regularly hits 100. Outside athletics he works part-time in the Running Hub store in Tonbridge, which gives him the flexibility to train and race. “I feel every year I’ve come on a bit,” he says.

On the track Kingston ran 13:41.91 for 5000m last year in Brussels and hopes to do the same race again this summer, with a sub-13:30 the goal.

“I think that time should, and will, come down this summer and I’d like to get inside



PHOTOS BY DAVID HEWITSON

ABOVE: James Kingston powers ahead at the UK Inter-Countries Championship and (right) crosses the line in first place





13:30," he says. "I'd like to do a bit more road this summer, too. Sometimes I see people who I've beaten comfortably on the cross running much faster on the track than me."

Kingston also flirted with the roads last year with a 64:35 half-marathon at the Great North Run. "That was hard!" he remembers. "I wanted to do a half and went into it a bit naively without any fuelling plan or anything. There was a horrible headwind for about 11 of the 13 miles and I was by myself for about 10 of the miles, too.

"I basically blew up a bit and just about held on for a decent time. I'm sure there's a lot more there when there are a few people around me and there isn't a disgusting headwind. It was a good thing to do but not really the kind of time I was hoping for."

For now, the marathon can wait. "It's not really in my plans at the moment, although I might do another half-marathon this year," he says. "I can do a half marathon and recover quite quickly but for the marathon I'd have to drop everything else and make it the No.1 goal."

You get the feeling he'd drop everything for the chance to run cross country in the Winter Olympics, though. **AW**

## UKA Cross Challenge highlights

### Cardiff November 8

Just 17, Cynthia Chepkirui of Kenya stormed to victory in the senior women's race as Megan Keith was the first Brit in fourth.

With the meeting being part of the World Athletics Cross Country Tour, there is a strong international element and the men's race saw a Kenyan one-two-three led by Mathew Kipsang as Zak Mahamed was top Brit in fourth.

Innes FitzGerald enjoyed a 50-second victory in the combined under-20 and under-17 women's race, while Holly Dixon and Jack Higgins won one mile races that acted as British trials for the mixed relay at the Euro Cross.

### Liverpool November 22

The Euro trials at Sefton Park saw Scott Beattie and Rory Leonard place one-two in the men's race.

Elsewhere there were good wins for Cari Hughes ahead of Poppy Tank in the senior women's race, Innes FitzGerald in the under-20 women's and Michael Clark in the under-20 men's race in front of William Rabjohns and Alex Lennon.

### London February 7

Parliament Hill was the venue as Hugo Milner returned from a stress fracture injury to win the men's race ahead of Richard Slade and James Kingston.

Eleanor Curran produced one of her biggest ever wins with an 11-second victory in the senior women's race ahead of Scout Adkin and Niamh Brown.

The under-20 victories, meanwhile, went to Jack Marwood and Emma Stewart.

### Nottingham March 7

Wollaton Hall in Nottingham saw James Kingston and Jess Gibbon winning the senior titles. Kingston beat Jacob Cann and Richard Slade while Gibbon beat Eleanor Curran and Niamh Bridson-Hubbard.

Under-20 victories went to Ava James an Alex Lennon, while Madison Kindler continued her a streak of fine victories in the under-13 girls race.

# GRAND SLAM FLAK

Michael Johnson's much-hyped project was supposed to help save the sport but instead it has left a trail of anger and frustration after its financial collapse. One year on from the first meeting being staged, **Jasmine Collett** looks at how the dream died – and what might happen next

**A**lmost exactly a year ago I was in Miami, covering the Grand Slam Track series and watching what felt like a genuine turning point for athletics unfolding in real time. The noise, the energy, the access, the ambition – it all pointed towards something that the sport had long been searching for but never quite grasped. Now, nearly 12 months later, that same project is fighting for survival.

Grand Slam Track, led by Michael Johnson, was launched with the intention of changing athletics for the better – financially and in terms of its visibility and appeal to a wider audience. Instead, as it now faces bankruptcy proceedings and mounting frustration from athletes, creditors and those involved over unpaid money, there is the increasing sense that its impact has done more harm than good.


Being on the ground in Miami, it was difficult not to be swept up in it all. This was the second “Slam” of the series, following its launch in Kingston last April. There had been some warning signs at that opening meeting in Jamaica – most notably the sparse crowds and a stadium that looked far from the vibrant

spectacle organisers had promised. Yet the narrative around the event was so heavily driven by its ambition and long-term vision that those concerns were, at least publicly, brushed aside.

Miami, in contrast, felt like a step forward – bigger, louder, more assured. The Ansin Sports complex is not one of the sport's great cathedrals but, from the moment you entered the stadium, there was a distinct shift in tone from what athletics audiences are used to. Music filled the air almost constantly, DJs bridged the gaps between events and there was a conscious effort to create something closer to a live entertainment experience than a traditional track meet. It worked. The stands were engaged, the athletes seemed energised, and there was a sense that this might be the beginning of something genuinely significant.

What struck me just as much, though, were the goings on away from competition.

The day before the event began, I had unusually open access to the training track. I was able to walk freely among athletes, filming and observing as they went about their preparations – something that simply wouldn't happen at a Diamond League meeting or a global championship, where access is tightly controlled and carefully managed.



ABOVE: Packed stands at the Ansin Sports Complex for the second Grand Slam Track event

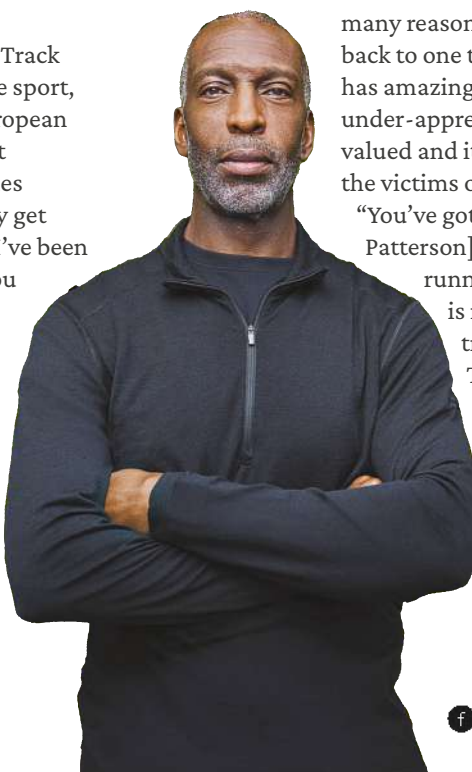


That athlete-first approach extended beyond training. In the build-up to press conferences, athletes were encouraged to present themselves almost as if stepping on to a runway – dressed in carefully selected, often sponsor-led outfits, stopping for photographs in a setting that felt closer to a fashion shoot. It was different, slightly surreal at times, but undeniably effective in giving athletes a platform beyond just performance.

Athletes noticed it, too. “Grand Slam Track is the best thing that’s happened to the sport, ever since I’ve been involved,” said European 5000m silver medallist George Mills at the time. “I was talking with my coaches and psychologist and you don’t usually get opportunities and conversations that I’ve been having over the last five days unless you are at a championships. So for us to do that and be able to learn and take so much from it is something we can really use to benefit us in world and Olympic championships.”

At the time, those comments felt entirely justified. There was no hint – at least not publicly – of what was to come. Central to Grand Slam Track’s appeal was its messaging and, in the

BELOW: Michael Johnson was hoping to change athletics for the better with Grand Slam Track



Miami mixed zone, Johnson articulated that vision with clarity.

“We knew Kingston was great and we came into Miami excited because we were going to see even more,” he said. “We’ve had some amazing stories already for our second Slam. We’ve got Walmart workers, we’ve got UPS delivery truck loading people winning \$50,000 dollars and changing their lives. There are many reasons for doing this but they all come back to one thing. And that is that this sport has amazing athletes and this sport has been under-appreciated, under monetised, under-valued and it’s under performing. And who are the victims of that? The athletes.

“You’ve got a world-class athlete [Jacory Patterson], one of the best in the world running 43 seconds over 400m which is not easy to do and he’s loading trucks, going to work at 4am. That’s insane. How many athletes have decided it’s not worth it and they need to go feed their family and make a living? That’s just not right so that’s why Grand Slam Track exists.”

It was a compelling argument and, in Miami, it felt tangible.



The prize money on offer – with even last place earning \$10,000 – the visibility given to lesser-known athletes, and the emphasis on storytelling all reinforced the idea that this was a league designed not just for the stars, but for those beneath them.

The contrast with the present situation is stark. In the months since Miami, Grand Slam Track’s trajectory has shifted dramatically. First, came the late news of the third Slam, staged in Philadelphia, being cut from three to two days and the programme trimmed.

The cancellation of the LA Slam, due to have been the last of four, was the moment when the picture really changed, though. At the time, little detail was given, but the development raised questions that could no longer be ignored.

Soon financial difficulties surfaced, culminating in the organisation filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Alongside that came reports of delayed and unpaid prize money, leaving a number of athletes in limbo.

More recently, developments have added another layer to the situation, with a proposed deal between Grand Slam Track and its creditors reportedly including Michael Johnson

## GRAND SLAM TRACK™

paying back \$500,000 he had been accused of “secretly” receiving.

The proposal would also see athletes’ share of outstanding payments reduced from 85 per cent to 70 per cent, while unsecured creditors are set to receive between 14 per cent and 16 per cent – equating to a combined \$1.8million from the roughly \$13million owed. That total would be boosted by Johnson’s repayment.

For a project built on the promise of financial empowerment, that has proven to be especially damaging.

Newly crowned world indoor 3000m champion Josh Kerr signed as a Racer across all three Slams. He won the short distance Slam – which involved racing 800m and 1500m – in Miami and, across his appearances, is reportedly owed \$218,750.

“Of course I’m frustrated. I’m owed a lot of

ABOVE: Some of the Slam champions in Miami

“

**Before there is any future, there has to be a resolution to the present. Until that happens, Grand Slam Track will be remembered less for what it promised – and more for what it left behind**



money and in any business, anyone is going to be frustrated,” he said last month.

But his frustration comes with perspective – and it is here that the deeper impact of Grand Slam Track begins to show. Because while Kerr’s losses are significant, he is not the one most at risk.

“I’m not super worried about myself, I’m worried about some of the other athletes that had their stories exposed,” he added. “They had working jobs, not being sponsored and then they thought they had this life-changing money – that’s what I care about.”

Athletes like Patterson and his fellow American Dylan Beard – working with UPS and Walmart respectively – were held up as examples of what the league could do. Suddenly, they were given the opportunity to earn sums that would alter everything.

And while the current situation has left uncertainty and frustration, it would be wrong to say there has been no lasting benefit. Patterson, for example, secured a sponsorship deal with Nike in the months following his appearances – an opportunity that may not have materialised without the exposure that Grand Slam Track provided. That, perhaps, is the contradiction at the heart of the project. It did change lives – just not always in the way it intended.

“The top people on the vendor list are not a priority in my book,” Kerr said. “I see the athletes who are owed the most money but were able to go other places and get opportunities... I’m really grateful for that. With all of this stuff... I’m standing with the people that I signed with and I think that they are good people. This is just a horrible situation.”

Grand Slam Track has acknowledged both its ambitions and its failings. In a statement to AW, the organisation said: “Grand Slam Track set out with a bold goal to build a new format in professional athletics and bring a new vision of what track can be to the world. We knew this would be a challenge, but in our first season the response from fans and athletes confirmed the quality and potential of our product. Across three events we saw strong attendance, competitive broadcast audiences and a young and diverse fan base emerge.

“It must also be acknowledged that Grand Slam Track has simultaneously faced significant financial challenges and we own that. Our

BELOW: Josh Kerr is reportedly owed \$218,750 by the Grand Slam Track organisers

commercialisation efforts did not keep pace with the speed of product development. This ultimately led the company to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

“Despite these challenges, we refuse to give up. The restructuring process now underway is designed to stabilise the business and allow Grand Slam Track to re-emerge on a measured and sustainable footing while preserving what worked – a league in which our athletes believed and which resonated with our fans. We would like to thank all the athletes and fans who continue to support Grand Slam Track.”

While the concept captured attention, the fallout has left a far deeper mark. But, despite everything, Grand Slam Track is not yet ready to disappear. Throughout the process, there has been a consistent message from Johnson and those involved: this is not the end, but a reset, with plans for a revised and more sustainable model and even ambitions of building a new calendar of events beyond its debut season. Recent documents even reference an ambition for the series to relaunch in 2027.

There remains a belief internally that the concept can still succeed but whether it will be afforded that chance remains to be seen. World Athletics has made its position clear: “It is unconscionable that efforts would be made for Grand Slam Track to restart without the settlement of outstanding financial obligations to athletes, vendors and service providers,

“It is paramount that athletes who competed in good faith and vendors and service providers are treated fairly and paid. World Athletics will only consider licensing or supporting any future Grand Slam Track events once its debts from the 2025 season are settled.”

Will we see Grand Slam Track return? Before there is any future, there has to be a resolution to the present. Until that happens, Grand Slam Track will be remembered less for what it promised – and more for what it left behind.



# LIVING WITH WAR

**Matt Majendie** speaks to three athletes about the challenges of trying to compete at the top while being caught up in conflict

**I**ryna Klymets was in the corridor of the block where she lives when the night time Russian shelling struck. A siren had just sounded warning of the imminent attack, and now whenever any sort of alarm sounds it instantly sparks fear within the Ukrainian hammer thrower.

For four years since the Russian invasion began, she has continued to train and somehow qualify for the likes of the Paris Olympics – in that case sealing her place just days after the death of her father – and last year’s World Championships in Tokyo. That she is able to survive the hardships, let alone train at all and be mentally and physically ready for competition, is nothing short of a miracle.

“For me, the worst thing is when the alarm is at night,” she says of her life in Ukraine. “Now any alarm is stress for me. And this winter, due to the shelling of power plants, we had no light for 16 hours a day and no heating. It’s very difficult when it’s minus 20 degrees outside.”

In addition, her coach has been on military service, meaning he cannot leave

the country to support her for any significant period of time.

“Also, all the funding in the country is directed towards the war, so I don’t have the opportunity to go and train somewhere in warm countries,” she adds. “And because of constant anxiety and enemy attacks, training is often disrupted. There’s constant alarms about power outages and the harsh winter with severe frosts. There is fear whenever there is an air raid and we are being attacked. We don’t sleep at night.”

Klymets’ rival athletes were quick to reach out to offer support when the war broke out, while World Athletics has put on training camps where possible ahead of major championships for her and the Ukraine national team. She readily admits the hardship has made her a stronger person but argues that the lack of opportunities for training have also curtailed her results. And, despite peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, both her fear and expectation is that the war – and hence the shelling – will continue for some time hence.

For 800m runner Mohammad Dwedar, his training in the West Bank where the Palestinian lives is consigned to the street.



**The worst thing is when the warning siren is at night. Now any alarm is stress for me**

**Iryna Klymets**



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



**We don't have a track, we don't have anything. I train in the street with cars and motorcycles and people. This is not the right training for 800m**

**Mohammad Dwedar**

“Back at home, we don't have a track, we don't have anything,” he says. “So, I train in the street with cars and motorcycles and people. This is not the right training for 800m, as you need spikes and a track but people really support me back at home. Life in Palestine and the West Bank is not easy because the occupation is very difficult.”

His federation has supported him for training camps abroad, including one early in 2026 in Germany which was curtailed when he picked up a foot injury. While away from home, Dwedar struggles to read about issues back at home.

“It's very difficult for me and my life when I see it like this,” he says, “and I'm not feeling good.” But, at the same time, he says he prefers not to focus on the bad but the good instead.

“To represent Palestine is very special for any

athlete really and any people in Palestine,” he says. “You know what's happening and I have a lot of feelings when I'm doing the races, camps and training in my body because I'm feeling happy that I'm doing what I love and feeling sad with what's happening in Palestine. It's not easy to go far away from family for three or four months. But dreams need a lot of sacrifice.”

And, having enjoyed life-changing experiences at the Paris Olympics and also the most recent World Championships, the university student dares to dream of the ultimate on the world stage in the future.

Of that future, he adds: “Really in my life I want to do everything in Palestine. I want to give all myself to Palestine. In my dream, I wish I can get Palestine one medal in my life. This is very important for me, thinking: ‘I am

ABOVE: Mohammad Dwedar at the Paris Olympics in 2024

OVERLEAF: Ukrainian hammer thrower Iryna Klymets



## I will run, I will try my best. Now I run for refugees all over the world

**Perina Lokure Nakang**

the hero, I am the best, I am a champion, I can do this'. That helps mentality about thinking everything positive. This is my dream."

Failing that, he is studying physical education and wants to do a masters to enable him to shape the next generation of track and field talent back at home.

Like Dwedar, Perina Lokure Nakang also competes over 800m but, in her case, she knows she will never return home to south Sudan, where she fled the conflict there as a youngster. For her, it is still not safe to go back to the land of her birth.

She was seven years old when she crossed the border to Kenya with her aunt at the behest of her parents who stayed behind with her other siblings. Tragically, her father was later killed, while she was not reunited with her mother and siblings until years later. Now in her early twenties, she partly recalls the journey to and life at Kakuma refugee camp while the rest is from the stories retold to her by her aunt.

"We travelled for days and there was no food," she says. "Many people died but I managed to come to Kenya."

In camp, she played football and basketball but also took up athletics for the first time, coaxed to do so in the 100m and 200m initially by a coach who spotted her running talent. In due course, it was suggested she make the step up to the 800m by 2007 world champion in the event, Janeth Jepkosgei, who would in turn go on to become her coach and still fulfils that role to this day.

"It was God saying: 'Perina you love to run, go and run'. So I said: 'No problem, I will run, I will try my best'," she says. "And now run for refugees all over the world."

Like fellow middle-distance runner Dwedar, she competed in both Paris and Tokyo in the past two seasons as part of the refugee team both at an Olympics and World Championships. She competed in the heats of both, including racing against the likes of

eventual Olympic champion Keely Hodgkinson in Paris in the summer of 2024.

She has also been training at Eliud Kipchoge's Kenyan base and she readily admits: "Athletics has come to change your life. For me, athletics is good, with it you can go far".

Alongside the running, she also studies and is making her way through high school. Her favourite subject is biology. As for her ambitions, she says: "Let me finish school but I'd also like to coach with Janet to train athletes and help her. But, first, I want to run to make the most of this opportunity." **AW**

BELOW: Perina Lokure Nakang cannot return to her home in South Sudan, and has been competing for refugee teams at Olympics and World Championships



# A golden age?

Tim Hutchings tells **Euan Crumley** why the Boston and London Marathons are expected to underline the exceptional quality, talent and compelling race craft to be found on the roads right now

**T**he sport of athletics moves quickly. Just as the curtain comes down on another indoor season so the spotlight rapidly switches to the roads – and spring marathons. At this time of year, the calendar is festooned with all manner of 26.2-mile events, but two in particular loom so much larger than any of the rest. On April 20, the Boston Marathon will be staged for the 130th time before, just six days later, London will celebrate turning 45.

Both are loaded with history, tradition and great moments but, while their respective courses share markedly different traits, they also share the endearing habit of producing excellent races. Covering the Boston course well is a famously arduous task. Because it is a point to point and has an overall downhill profile – despite the notorious Newton Hills in the second half of the race – it isn't eligible for

records. So no pacemakers, no time trials, just grit and racing smarts. London is considerably quicker and has provided a record-breaking platform, but ceremonial runaway wins have been rare, especially recently. To break the tape first has been a hard-won reward.

While the biggest marathon headline of the year so far has been written by Folyen Tesfay's run of 2:10:53, no-one is expecting anyone to replicate the Ethiopian's eight-minute victory in Barcelona at either of these show-stopping occasions.

One look at the elite fields, particularly in London, reveals remarkable strength and depth. In Boston, John Korir returns to defend his title, as does his Kenyan counterpart Sharon Lokedi, who came out on top 12 months ago after a brilliant battle with two-time winner Hellen Obiri.

The 1984 Olympian Tim Hutchings, a European and Commonwealth 5000m





PHOTO BY LONDON MARATHON EVENTS

medallist, will be commentating on the events in Massachusetts and believes the absence of Obiri – also a three-time winner in New York – this time around will be significant.

“She is a racer rather than a time trialist and she is a bit of a phenomenon,” says Hutchings of the 36-year-old. “She’s no spring chicken but she goes on and on. There are not many races she doesn’t either win or isn’t a big factor in and I think she’ll be a factor in London, too.”

The two-time world 5000m champion has indeed decided to swap the east coast of America for a run around London’s landmarks but it is a measure of the task she is stepping into that, even though she is fourth-fastest in the field, her marathon personal best of 2:17:41 is almost exactly three minutes slower than the third-fastest – reigning world champion Peres Jepchirchir (2:14:43).

“She’s going to have to run a big PB to really challenge,” adds Hutchings of last month’s

New York half marathon winner. “She wouldn’t be my favourite. I think she might struggle to get in the top three when you look at the London field.”

The former world record-holder Tigist Assefa has the fastest personal best (2:11:53) in the field, and broke the women’s-only world record with her run of 2:15:50 in winning London last year. Yet she also just missed out on gold at the Tokyo World Championships after Jepchirchir stormed through in the closing strides. That rivalry will be resumed, though the withdrawal of Sifan Hassan – who also denied Assefa gold, at the 2024 Olympics – is a notable setback.

“She’s the ultimate racer,” says Hutchings of the Dutch athlete whose best is 2:13:44. “A proven competitor of extraordinary calibre.

“But Assefa obviously has that 2:11 and Peres is a great racer... what makes it fun is that with a big three with personal bests between



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES



2:17:20

2:11 and 2:14 [last year's runner-up Joyciline Jepkosgei has run 2:14:00] I think it's really hard to pick out a favourite.

"You don't want predictability. You want the unknown factor, the mystery factor, and I think London delivers that. It's got everything. It's got such a strong field. You don't know who's going to win it, you know you're going to get a great race.

"You're going to get a fast race. I still think London's got the potential to deliver a world record, but it would have to be a super strong run, because it can't compete with Chicago and Berlin [in terms of how fast the course can be]. They're probably worth a minute or so over London."

But could the men's world record – the late Kelvin Kiptum's 2:00:35 – fall in London? It was a target that Sebastian Sawe had very much in mind in Berlin back in September, only for the unseasonably hot weather to scupper his plans as he won in 2:02:16, 11 seconds faster than his winning time in London last year.

The Kenyan has said he believes he will need to at least beat Kiptum's course record of 2:01:25 to win in London this time around, given the level of opposition.

Jacob Kiplimo, runner-up in London and winner in Chicago last year, has made an extraordinary start to his marathon career and has just made sure of the half marathon world record with 57:20 in Lisbon. The Ugandan will be just one of many threats.

"I feel sorry for Sebastian Sawe, because he should have got the world record in Berlin," says Hutchings. "He ran 2:02 in 24 degree heat. It was a horrible day and I know he was incredibly frustrated.

"If conditions are good, Sawe is probably



capable of going down to 2:01 in London but whether or not he could break the world record in London, I'm not sure. Again, the wonderful thing about London's men's race is that it offers the same as the women's, it's just got this insane strength and depth.

"Jacob Kiplimo just set a world record for a half marathon, while Joshua Cheptegei might prove to be one of these late developers in the marathon. He has run two marathons and his best is 2:04:52 but when you think that he's been Olympic champion over 5000m and 10,000m, and is the world record-holder in both, it might be that the marathon is beyond his upper range.

"Surely this is a guy who should be breaking a

TOP: Sharon Lokedi wins in Boston last year

ABOVE: Tigist Assefa on The Mall after winning the 2025 London Marathon

# Boston elite fields

## MEN

Benson Kipruto (KEN, *PB 2:02:16*)  
 John Korir (KEN, 2:02:24)  
 Cybrian Kotut (KEN, 2:03:22)  
 Abdi Nageeye (NED, 2:04:20)  
 Lemi Berhanu (ETH, 2:04:33)  
 Hailemaryam Kiros (ETH, 2:04:35)  
 Alex Masai (KEN, 2:04:37)  
 Alphonse Felix Simbu (TAN, 2:04:38)  
 Mohamed Esa (ETH, 2:04:39)  
 Conner Mantz (USA, 2:04:43)  
 Benard Biwott (KEN, 2:05:25)  
 Kennedy Kimutai (KEN, 2:05:27)  
 Zouhair Talbi (MAR/USA, 2:05:45)  
 Richard Ringer (GER, 2:05:46)  
 Sondre Nordstad Moen (NOR, 2:05:48)  
 Galen Rupp (USA, 2:06:07)  
 Tebello Ramakongoana (LES, 2:06:18)  
 Hendrik Pfeiffer (GER, 2:06:45)  
 Rory Linkletter (CAN, 2:06:49)  
 Biya Simbassa (USA, 2:06:53)  
 Clayton Young (USA, 2:07:04)  
 Tsegay Weldlibanos (ERI, 2:07:35)  
 Patrick Tiernan (AUS, 2:07:45)  
 Ryan Ford (USA, 2:08:00)  
 CJ Albertson (USA, 2:08:17)  
 Yemane Haileselassie (ERI, 2:08:25)  
 Alex Maier (USA, 2:08:33)  
 Amaury Paquet (BEL, 2:08:44)  
 Sam Chelanga\* (USA, 2:08:50)  
 Daniel Mesfun (USA, 2:08:51)  
 Wesley Kiptoo (USA, 2:08:54)  
 Ben Preisner (CAN, 2:08:58)  
 Segundo Jami (ECU, 2:09:05)  
 Turner Wiley (USA, 2:09:27)  
 Colin Bennie (USA, 2:09:38)  
 Charles Hicks (USA/GBR, 2:09:59)  
 Tiidrek Nurme (EST, 2:10:02)  
 Nick Hauger (USA, 2:10:18)  
 Joe Klecker (USA, 2:10:37)  
 Chris Maxon (USA, 2:10:55)  
 Petter Engdahl (SWE, *Debut*)  
 Nicholas Kipkorir (KEN, *Debut*)  
 \*Denotes Masters (40+) Athletes

## WHEELCHAIR MEN

Marcel Hug (SUI)  
 Josh Cassidy (CAN)  
 Johnboy Smith (GBR)  
 Daniel Romanchuk (USA)  
 Kota Hokinoue (JPN)  
 Rafael Botello Jimenez (ESP)  
 David Weir (GBR)

Patrick Monahan (IRL)  
 Miguel Jimenez-Vergara (USA)  
 Sho Watanabe (JPN)  
 Hermin Garcic (USA)  
 Jeyna Senbeta (USA)  
 Jetze Plat (NED)  
 Brian Siemann (USA)  
 Evan Correll (USA)  
 Jason Robinson (USA)  
 Geert Schipper (NED)  
 Wyatt Willand (USA)  
 Sean Frame (GBR)  
 Tiaan Bosch (RSA)  
 Dustin Stallberg (USA)  
 Valera Jacob Allen (USA)

## WOMEN

Sharon Lokedi (KEN, *PB 2:17:22*)  
 Irine Cheptai (KEN 2:17:51)  
 Workenesh Edesa (ETH, 2:17:55)  
 Magdalena Shauri (TAN, 2:18:03)  
 Loice Chemnung (KEN, 2:18:24)  
 Bedatu Hirpa (ETH, 2:18:27)  
 Emily Sisson (USA, 2:18:29)  
 Vivian Cheruiyot\* (KEN, 2:18:31)  
 Mary Ngugi-Cooper (KEN 2:19:26)  
 Sara Hall\* (USA, 2:20:32)  
 Gadise Mulu (ETH, 2:20:59)  
 Calli Hauger-Thackery (GBR, 2:21:24)  
 Fikrte Wereta (ETH, 2:21:32)  
 Susanna Sullivan (USA, 2:21:56)  
 Fiona O'Keeffe (USA, 2:22:10)  
 Mao Uesugi (JPN, 2:22:11)  
 Jess McClain (USA, 2:22:43)  
 Erika Kemp (USA, 2:22:56)  
 Isobel Batt-Doyle (AUS, 2:22:59)  
 Lisa Weightman\* (AUS, 2:23:15)  
 Annie Frisbie (USA, 2:23:21)  
 Natosha Rogers (USA, 2:23:28)  
 Mercy Chelangat (KEN, 2:23:33)  
 Dakotah Popehn (USA, 2:24:20)  
 Gabi Rooker (USA, 2:24:29)  
 Amanda Vestri (USA, 2:25:40)  
 Paige Wood (USA, 2:26:02)  
 Stephanie Bruce (USA, 2:27:47)  
 Madey Dickson (USA, 2:28:57)  
 Zaida Ramos (PER, 2:29:49)  
 Elena Hayday (USA, 2:30:51)  
 Carrie Ellwood (USA, 2:31:51)  
 Diana Bogantes (CRI, 2:32:08)  
 Monica Hebner (USA, 2:32:40)  
 Katie Florio (USA, 2:32:44)  
 Katie Kellner (USA, 2:32:48)  
 Breanna Sieracki (USA, 2:32:53)

## What happened last year?

Sharon Lokedi and John Korir of Kenya were crowned champions, with Lokedi moving clear of defending women's champion Hellen Obiri in the final kilometre while Korir dramatically recovered from a fall at the start of the race to take the men's victory.

Once he got back into his stride, Korir was a class apart and cruised home in 2:04:45 as American Conner Mantz was just run out of the podium places with Alphonse Simbu of Tanzania edging out Cyprian Kotut of Kenya for second and third places – both runners clocking 2:05:04 – as Mantz ran 2:05:08.

Lokedi won a far tighter battle, but her time of 2:17:22 sliced well over two minutes off Buzunesh Deba's course record. Obiri was rewarded with a PB of 2:17:41 as Yalemzerf Yehualaw of Ethiopia ran 2:18:06 in third. Britain's Calli Hauger-Thackery was sixth in 2:22:38.

Wheelchair race victories went to Marcel Hug of Switzerland in 1:21:34 and Susannah Scaroni of the United States in 1:35:20.

Carolyn Buchanan (CAN, 2:32:54)  
 Marybeth Chelanga (USA, 2:33:33)  
 Elizabeth Chikotas (USA, 2:33:57)

## WHEELCHAIR WOMEN

Susannah Scaroni (USA)  
 Manuela Schar (SUI)  
 Tatyana McFadden (USA)  
 Catherine Debrunner (SUI)  
 Eden Rainbow-Cooper (GBR)  
 Noemi Alphonse (MRI)  
 Christie Dawes (AUS)  
 Madison De Rozario (AUS)  
 Wakako Tsuchida (JPN)  
 Vanessa Cristina de Souza (BRA)  
 Michelle Wheeler (USA)  
 Hoda Elshorbagy (EGY)  
 Emelia Perry (USA)  
 Patricia Eachus (SUI)  
 Chelsea Stein (USA)  
 Rachel Cleaver (USA)

Information correct at time of going to print

world record for the half marathon. I think he's got more potential in the half marathon than the marathon.

"Kiplimo is quite a lot younger and has been astonishing at the marathon – second in London and first in Chicago last year. This is any race director's dream, isn't it? Then there's Tamira Tola, plus Yomif Kejelcha is making his debut as well, which would be interesting. That's a man who held the world record for the indoor mile until a year or so ago."

Where distance running is concerned, the spectre of doping is never far away from the surface. The ban for women's world record-holder Ruth Chepn'getich, as well as Kenya's ongoing problems as so many athletes continue to fall foul, means that the levels of scepticism have only increased.

Sawe is all too aware of the issue and openly underwent 25 drug tests, funded by sponsors Adidas, in the lead-up to Berlin last year in an effort to be as transparent as possible.

"I admire what Sawe is doing," says Hutchings. "It's a very, very honest and open way of saying: 'I've got absolutely nothing to hide. I am angry at my countrymen who have been busted, and I totally understand why people are so sceptical and cynical of it. I'm not on drugs, and I want everybody to be able to see that, and this is the most I can possibly do. There's no other way to show more clearly that I'm clean, other than to test me anytime, anywhere, and I'd be delighted to welcome testers through my door'.

"I think it's brilliant being that open and, if it's not prohibitively expensive, I'd love to see more people making the same gesture."

There will be no shortage of British interest in London, either, with Emile Cairess openly targeting Mo Farah's British record of 2:05:11, while Eilish McColgan is arriving in a position of strength for her second at the distance, having battled through injury problems to clock a Scottish record of 2:24:25.

First up, though, is Boston – an event that speaks for itself.

"Boston used to be excited by quick times but I quite admire their stoicism," says Hutchings. "They don't care what the rest of the world thinks. They know they've got a diamond of a race on their hands, because it gets massive crowds, it has a massive atmosphere. It produces fast times and great racing without



pacemakers. It's not eligible for record purposes, and they don't care.

"Every year it produces great races and great racing. What Boston delivers, in place of legality of performance, is more jeopardy.

"We have to say we're in a golden age of great racing in the marathon and we should be embracing it, enjoying every single race. Long may it continue." **AW**

ABOVE: Sebastian Sawe will be looking to come out on top in London again

BELOW: Hellen Obiri will be hoping to challenge in London



# London elite fields

## MEN

Sabastian Sawe (KEN, *PB 2:02:05*)  
 Jacob Kiplimo (UGA, *2:02:23*)  
 Deresa Geleta (ETH, *2:02:38*)  
 Amos Kipruto (KEN, *2:03:13*)  
 Tamirat Tola (ETH, *2:03:39*)  
 Amanal Petros (GER, *2:04:03*)  
 Geoffrey Kamworor (KEN, *2:04:23*)  
 Joshua Cheptegei (UGA, *2:04:52*)  
 Shunya Kikuchi (JPN, *2:06:06*)  
 Emile Cairress (GBR, *2:06:46*)  
 Mahamed Mahamed (GBR, *2:07:05*)  
 Philip Sesemann (GBR, *2:07:10*)  
 Hassan Chahdi (FRA, *2:07:30*)  
 Adam Lipschitz (RSA, *2:08:54*)  
 Patrick Dever (GBR, *2:08:58*)  
 Peter Lynch (IRL, *2:09:36*)  
 Tim Vincent (AUS, *2:09:40*)  
 Weynay Ghebresilasie (GBR, *2:09:50*)  
 Tewelde Menges (GBR, *2:09:58*)  
 Liam Boudin (AUS, *2:10:28*)  
 Jake Smith (GBR, *2:11:00*)  
 Marc Scott (GBR, *2:11:19*)  
 Jack Rowe (GBR, *2:12:31*)  
 Andrew Fyfe (GBR, *2:13:20*)  
 Alex Milne (GBR, *2:14:03*)  
 Peter Le Grice (GBR, *2:14:45*)  
 Sean Hogan (GBR, *2:14:51*)  
 Jake Barraclough (GBR, *2:14:55*)  
 Christopher Thomas (GBR, *2:14:55*)  
 Chris Perry (GBR, *2:14:57*)  
 David Bishop (GBR, *2:15:16*)  
 Charlie Sandison (GBR, *2:15:38*)  
 William Mycroft (GBR, *2:15:54*)  
 Yomif Kejelcha (ETH, *Debut*)  
 Hagos Gebrihiwet (ETH, *Debut*)  
 Isaia Kipkoech Lasio (KEN, *Debut*)  
 Alfie Manthorpe (GBR, *Debut*)

## WHEELCHAIR MEN

Rafael Botello Jimenez (ESP)  
 Josh Cassidy (CAN)  
 Evan Correll (USA)  
 Sean Frame (GBR)  
 Kota Hokinoue (JPN)  
 Marcel Hug (SUI)  
 Jin Hula (CHN )  
 Hiroki Kishizawa (JPN)  
 Simon Lawson (GBR)  
 Ludwig Malter (AUT)  
 Michael McCabe (GBR)

Patrick Monahan (IRL)  
 Hiroki Nischida (JPN)  
 Jetze Plat (NED)  
 Jason Robinson (USA)  
 Daniel Romanchuk (USA)  
 Geert Schipper (NED )  
 Brian Sieman (USA)  
 John Boy Smith (GBR)  
 Tomoki Suzuki (JPN)  
 Luo Xingchuan (CHN)  
 Sho Watanabe (JPN)  
 David Weir (GBR)

## WOMEN

Tigist Assefa (ETH, *PB 2:11:53*)  
 Joyciline Jepkosgei (KEN, *2:14:00*)  
 Peres Jepchirchir (KEN, *2:14:43*)  
 Hellen Obiri (KEN, *2:17:41*)  
 Degitu Azimeraw (ETH, *2:17:58*)  
 Catherine Reline Amanang'ole (KEN, *2:20:34*)  
 Balemelay Shumet (ETH, *2:21:59*)  
 Charlotte Purdue (GBR, *2:22:17*)  
 Laura Luengo (ESP, *2:22:31*)  
 Rose Harvey (GBR, *2:23:21*)  
 Abbie Donnelly (GBR, *2:24:11*)  
 Florencia Borelli (ARG, *2:24:18*)  
 Eilish McColgan (GBR, *2:24:25*)  
 Jessica Warner-Judd (GBR, *2:24:45*)  
 Fadouwa Ledhem (FRA, *2:25:50*)  
 Marta Galimany (ESP, *2:26:14*)  
 Lucy Reid (GBR, *2:26:35*)  
 Julia Paternain (URU, *2:27:09*)  
 Louise Small (GBR, *2:27:48*)  
 Alice Wright (GBR, *2:28:48*)  
 Verity Hopkins (GBR, *2:31:19*)

## WHEELCHAIR WOMEN

Noemi Alphonso (MRI)  
 Christie Dawes (AUS)  
 Catherine Debrunner (SUI)  
 Madison de Rozario (AUS)  
 Vanessa De Souza (BRA)  
 Patricia Eachus (SUI)  
 Tatyana McFadden (USA)  
 Merle Menje (GER)  
 Tsubasa Nakamine (JPN)  
 Eden Rainbow Cooper (GBR)  
 Susannah Scaroni (USA)  
 Manuela Schar (SUI)

## What happened last year?

In the men's race, a devastating surge after 31km saw Kenya's Sabastian Sawe move clear and take a decisive victory in 2:02:27. Uganda's Jacob Kiplimo finished runner-up on his marathon debut with 2:03:36, while 2024 winner Alex Mutiso won the sprint to the line with Abdi Nageeye for third, with both men clocking 2:04:20.

Mahamed Mahamed enjoyed a fine run to finish top Briton in 2:08:52, ninth overall, while Olympic triathlon champion Alex Yee was 14th overall in 2:11:08 on his debut.

In the women's race, Ethiopia's Tigist Assefa broke the women's-only world record with 2:15:50, well inside the 2:16:16 set by Peres Jepchirchir in winning London in 2024. Kenyan Joyciline Jepkosgei finished 2:18:43, while Sifan Hassan of the Netherlands was third in 2:18:59.

On her marathon debut, Eilish McColgan broke the Scottish record and was the first British woman home, coming eighth in 2:24:25.

She also overtook the 2:26:52 marathon best of her mother and coach, 1996 London Marathon winner Liz McColgan.

Catherine Debrunner and Marcel Hug were a class apart as they both successfully defended their wheelchair titles.

Debrunner took her third win in four years, breaking her own course record with 1:34:18. Hug captured his fifth consecutive London win (he has seven in total), in 1:25:25.

Wakako Tsuchida (JPN)  
 Michelle Wheeler (USA)  
 Linden Williamson (USA)  
 Zhou Zhaoqian (CHN)  
 Tian Yajuan (CHN)r

Information correct at time of going to print

# A TRIP TO THE CITY

As the world's oldest annual marathon prepares to stage its 130th edition, **Euan Crumley** finds out more about the ingredients that go into making Boston such a special – and enduring – event

The Lenox



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It's something that's important to note," says Mario Fraioli, warming to one of his favourite topics of conversation. "It's the marathon. For people in Massachusetts, whether you're a runner or not, it's not the Boston Marathon. It's the marathon. It's the only one that matters."

And he should know. The coach and writer – the man behind the *The Morning Shakeout* newsletter and podcast, as well as being a rather useful runner himself – was born and raised in Worcester, "about 45 minutes west of Boston". He grew up with his local marathon embedded into his psyche, has run it six times and has only missed one edition of the race since 2003.

He will be on the sidelines to support his athletes again this month, continually drawn back by an occasion that he openly admits has him firmly under its spell. He is far from being the only person that this has happened to.

Des Linden, for example, grew up on the opposite side of the United States and knew little of the "lore of Boston", yet it took just one appearance for the Olympian to fall in love with an event in which she participated a total of 12 times and famously battled through atrocious conditions to win in 2018.

Incredibly, this will be the 130th edition of the world's oldest annual marathon and, ever since John J. McDermott emerged victorious from the 15-strong starting field back on April 19, 1897 to become the first ever Boston Marathon champion, it has woven its way into distance running folklore.

There is a personality to each of the marathon majors, but Boston is different – and for all sorts of reasons. It is a behemoth that manages to feel simultaneously huge yet intimate, that has the capacity to celebrate smalltown America as well as one of the country's great cities in equal measure. And while so many of the finest names ever to lace up a pair of running shoes have toed the start line, it is the Boston course that will always be the true star of the show.



"The Boston Marathon is a little bit of a misnomer," says Fraioli. "You only really run in Boston for maybe 5km and the rest of the race is run through all of these smaller towns that are taking you closer to the city."

ABOVE: The Boston Marathon actually starts in the small town of Hopkinton

So let's look more closely at an occasion – and a route – that so many people have chosen to follow and experience.

**"M**arathon Monday is Patriots Day in Massachusetts," says Fraioli of the celebration that takes place on the third Monday of every April. "It's a holiday and, as a kid, even before I had an interest in running, I loved that, because we didn't have to go to school. But the race was all over the place. It was on every TV

“

**Drive along the course on the weekend before the marathon and you see the chairs that are already put out. People have already established their spots**



channel, all the local channels broadcast the race live. The coverage would start the week of [the event], and the local newspaper, which I read every morning, was all about Boston Marathon, the local athletes that were running, and the internationals that were coming into town. There's just a lot of excitement in the general Massachusetts area about the marathon."

That same anticipation will be starting to ramp up as you read this, too – for residents, spectators and runners alike. It's an event day quite unlike any other. The first task for those taking part is to catch one of the fleet of yellow school buses that will transport the runners from the pick-up point at Boston Common in the heart of the city to the start line that is situated in the town of Hopkinton, which lies 26.2 miles to the west but, at first glance, could almost be from another world.

"A lot of the buildings are very historic and still look very old," says Fraioli. "They've done a good job of preserving them. You feel a little bit like you're going back in time."

It's from there that the thousands of runners who have hit qualifying times just to stand on the start line in the first place – another quirk that is unique to Boston – will follow the largely downhill first half through the towns of Ashland, Framingham and Natick before reaching the "scream tunnel" at halfway in Wellesley, where students of the nearby college follow the tradition of lining up to offer some encouragement of the exuberant variety.

All of that precedes the challenge of the Newton Hills that commences around 17 miles in and ends in the 21st mile with the both famously, and ominously, named Heartbreak Hill. Survive that in good shape and the closing stages through Brookline and into Boston itself, taking the famous turns of "right on to Hereford Street, left on to Boylston Street" to the finish line can represent the happiest of endings. Overcook your earlier efforts, however, and it will be a very different experience indeed. But we'll come back to that.

"I think of the course," says Linden when asked what first comes to mind at Boston's very mention. "I've spent so much time doing



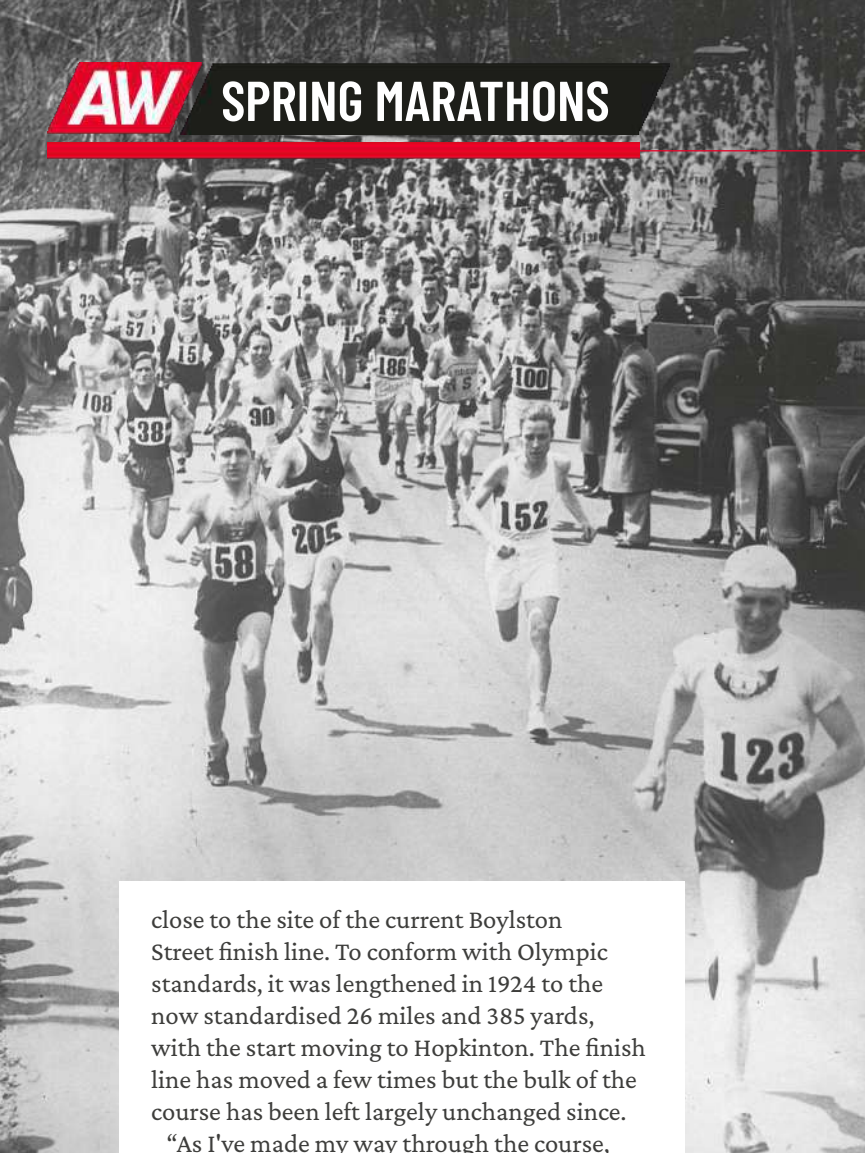
training runs on the Boston course that I immediately picture a series of landmarks along the route: the finishing stretch on Boylston always stands out, and the worn out painted finish line from the year prior on training day, but then of course the spruced up and updated finish line on race day.

"The history sets it apart from all the other marathons. There's tradition on the course, the landmarks and challenges on the route all have a story that pair with them, and the fans have knowledge and respect for the event, there's an ownership of it unlike anywhere else in the world."

The original Boston course was 24.5 miles long, beginning at Metcalf's Mill in Ashland and finishing at the Irvington Oval in Boston,

TOP: Fleets of school buses transport competitors to the start line

ABOVE: A sea of runners get off and running in Hopkinton



close to the site of the current Boylston Street finish line. To conform with Olympic standards, it was lengthened in 1924 to the now standardised 26 miles and 385 yards, with the start moving to Hopkinton. The finish line has moved a few times but the bulk of the course has been left largely unchanged since.

“As I’ve made my way through the course, I’ve always noticed: ‘There’s the old church and all those historic homes’ along the way,” says Fraioli. “And then, as you get to the city you start to see [Fenway Park, home of the Boston Red Sox] and skyscrapers off in the distance. I think that makes it unique.

“One of my favourite aspects is some of the history along the course. A lot has changed in the last 100 and however many years, but a lot of families still live along the course, and they have their traditions every year. One of my favourite things to do is to go out on the Saturday or Sunday before the marathon and just drive along the course in Hopkinton, Ashland, Framingham and you see the chairs that are already put out. People have already established their spots, like: ‘This is where we are going to be on Monday. This is where we, or

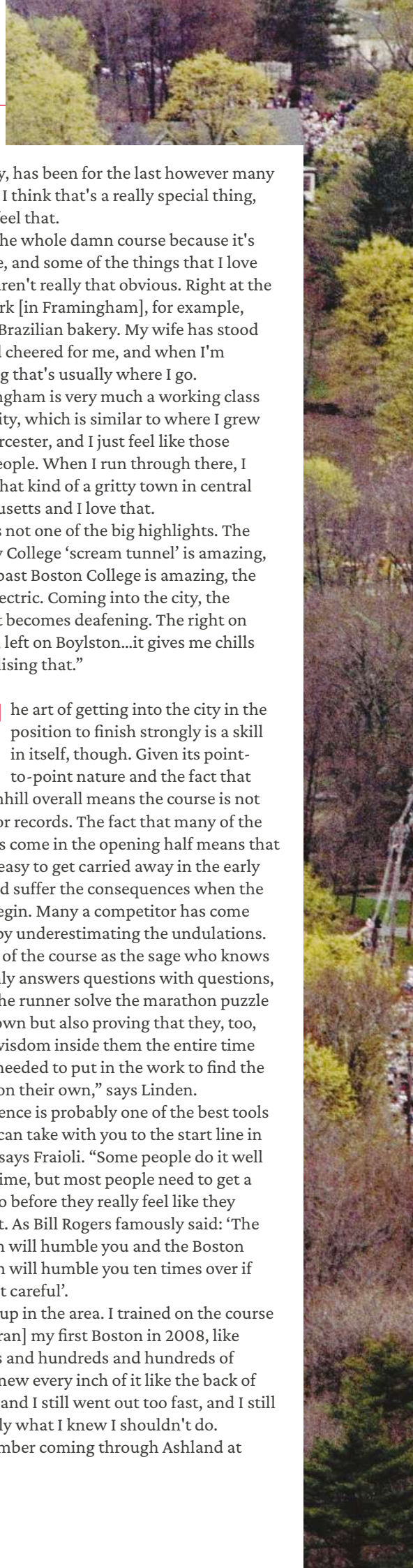


**I think of the course as the sage who knows all but only answers questions with questions, making the runner solve the marathon puzzle on their own**

TOP: Athletes compete in the 1930 race

RIGHT: The runners wind their towards Boston

FAR RIGHT: Bobbi Gibb, who became the first woman to run the marathon in 1966



my family, has been for the last however many decades’. I think that’s a really special thing, and you feel that.

“I love the whole damn course because it’s so unique, and some of the things that I love about it aren’t really that obvious. Right at the 10km mark [in Framingham], for example, there’s a Brazilian bakery. My wife has stood there and cheered for me, and when I’m spectating that’s usually where I go.

“Framingham is very much a working class community, which is similar to where I grew up in Worcester, and I just feel like those are my people. When I run through there, I just feel that kind of a gritty town in central Massachusetts and I love that.

“But it’s not one of the big highlights. The Wellesley College ‘scream tunnel’ is amazing, running past Boston College is amazing, the start is electric. Coming into the city, the noise just becomes deafening. The right on Hereford, left on Boylston...it gives me chills just vocalising that.”

**T**he art of getting into the city in the position to finish strongly is a skill in itself, though. Given its point-to-point nature and the fact that it is downhill overall means the course is not eligible for records. The fact that many of the downhills come in the opening half means that it can be easy to get carried away in the early stages and suffer the consequences when the uphill begin. Many a competitor has come unstuck by underestimating the undulations.

“I think of the course as the sage who knows all but only answers questions with questions, making the runner solve the marathon puzzle on their own but also proving that they, too, had the wisdom inside them the entire time and just needed to put in the work to find the answers on their own,” says Linden.

“Experience is probably one of the best tools that you can take with you to the start line in Boston,” says Fraioli. “Some people do it well the first time, but most people need to get a rep or two before they really feel like they can nail it. As Bill Rogers famously said: ‘The marathon will humble you and the Boston Marathon will humble you ten times over if you’re not careful’.

“I grew up in the area. I trained on the course before [I ran] my first Boston in 2008, like hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of miles. I knew every inch of it like the back of my hand and I still went out too fast, and I still did exactly what I knew I shouldn’t do.

“I remember coming through Ashland at

5km, looking at my split and saying to myself: 'You are f\*\*\*ed!'. I went through halfway in 1:12:11, hitting the brakes, and ended up suffering through a 1:18 second half – the real hard way to run a 2:30 marathon at Boston.

"But I knew at 5km that I'd ruined my day. In some other marathons, I feel like you can get away with a little bit of a quick start and make some adjustments and still be okay. But Boston, if you get too greedy in that first half, the second half will really put you in your place. It really requires abnormal levels of patience and control early on and, in the years that I've done it well, I've been able to do that.

"With the athletes that I've coached, the main thing I tell them, from an execution standpoint, is: 'Be present, take in all this energy but, from an effort standpoint, you almost need to be bored'.

"Because the course is net downhill everybody's excited, everyone's running fast, you're fresh. It's easy to just run fast during that first half and not have it feel hard.

"I joke all the time that if Boston were a half marathon, everyone would PR. If you were just racing a half marathon, everyone would go into Wellesley feeling like a hero. But if you want to race the entirety of the Boston marathon course well, you really have to be bored early on and just try to be as controlled as possible through halfway so you can have the legs when the topography of the course changes, around 16-17 miles."

It's Heartbreak Hill that gets all the attention. It was so named in 1936 by Boston Globe reporter Jerry Nason when he wrote about the duel between Ellison "Tarzan" Brown and John A. Kelley. Brown had been leading but was caught in the Newton Hills by Kelley, who tapped his rival on the shoulder to signal his arrival. Brown would have the last laugh, however, retaking the lead on the final hill, "breaking Kelley's heart" and going on to win. However, it's that first climb that can inflict considerable damage.

"I love all the challenges; it makes the racing meaningful and more than just another time trial," says Linden. "But I hate the specific challenge of the Lower Newton Falls, something about the big climb there just always got the best of me."

Fraioli nods in agreement when asked if this is in fact the point in proceedings where marathon dreams can die. "That's really the first significant climb in the race and if you've burned all your matches early on that one really stings," he says. "And if that one really stings, you're in for it the next 10 miles."

All hope is not lost, however.

"But if you can get over that one, and you're still in pretty good shape, the next couple aren't too bad," he adds. "Heartbreak really isn't that long, it's really not that steep. Maybe I can say that because I've run up and down it more times than I care to remember, but if you can get over Heartbreak, and you're in good shape, and you can really roll the last five miles, you'll feel like a rock star going into the city."

**T**he 600m long finishing straight on Boylston Street becomes a moving sea of humanity on marathon day and brings to mind the special moments and performances that have taken place down the decades. For example, this year marks 60 years since Roberta "Bobbi" Gibb created her own slice of history.

She might not have been an official entrant (women weren't allowed to enter at the time), but snuck into the field after the starting gun had been fired and ran 3:21:40 to finish 126th and become the first woman to run the Boston Marathon.

Gibb would also claim the "unofficial title" for the next two years, with Kathrine Switzer – who had signed her entry form KV Switzer and became the first woman to receive a Boston number – also finishing the 1967 race, despite official Jock Semple's efforts to wrestle her off the course. Women were officially able to enter the race in 1972.

"It was always awesome knowing that I was racing in the steps of legends," says Linden. "It was inspiring to know that, if I did something meaningful enough on the course, I could make a name for myself in running history."

The now 42-year-old did just that eight years ago during an edition of the race that has well and truly entered running folklore. As the wind blew, the rain lashed, the temperatures plummeted and many of the other leading contenders struggled to cope, Linden was able to use a wealth of experience that she had built up since her first Boston appearance back in 2007.

Looking back on that debut, which delivered similarly awful conditions, she says: "In 2007 it was the USATF National Marathon Championship so it made sense to get in a high calibre national competition at the time. Boston was also slated to host the Olympic Trials the following year so it was a good





chance to get familiar with the American competition and the surroundings of the host city. Embarrassingly, it had little to do with the lore of the Boston Marathon, but after meeting with folks from the BAA and experiencing the atmosphere on race day I truly fell in love with the event and the distance. It was unlike any other race experience I had ever had.

“The weather was the star of the show and I remember having to adjust my race day goal because of conditions; having heard so many stories about weather impacting races in Boston it was a valuable lesson in how important being ready for all conditions can be.”

She was ideally placed, then, to cope with anything that would be thrown at her in 2018 – even though she had very nearly been forced to quit the sport entirely due to health problems the previous year. Japan’s Yuki Kawauchi produced a similarly brilliant and controlled performance to win the men’s race.

“It’s very special to be on the list of champions and be a small part of the long history of the race,” says Linden, who had missed out on victory by just two seconds in 2011, and became the first American to win the women’s title in 33 years. “After coming so close in 2011 and getting a glimpse of what it could be like to win, but also learning that even two seconds away from winning isn’t in the same stratosphere as breaking the tape, it felt more meaningful to step in the winner’s circle and fully experience that world.

“It felt so unexpected. Of all the years I lined up and felt like I had it in me to win, this was the one year I went in with no expectations or pressure on myself to have a big day. It was eye-opening to realise how badly I wanted it

and that maybe I needed to be less attached to results and just focus on the process a bit more.”

**F**raioli also ran that year and recalls it fondly, too. “I stayed at my dad’s house before the race,” he says. “He’s retired now, but he was a plumber, and he had all these drawers of old, thick, warm, work socks. I basically cut the ends off them and I made arm sleeves for myself!”

That single edition of Boston he has missed since 2003 is one that has gone down in history for reasons that have little to do with running. “It was 2013, the year of the bombings,” he says of a weekend filled with emotional significance. “My wife and I got married on April 13 and the marathon was Monday the 15th.”

It was on that day that two bombs were detonated close to the finish line, killing three people and injuring hundreds, but the response to the terrorist attack gave rise to the phrase “Boston Strong” and galvanised not just the local community but the running community at large.

“Everyone wanted to go back and be part of that [the 2014 Boston Marathon],” remembers Fraioli. Running with the names of the victims on his bib, Meb Keflezighi rose to the occasion, riding an outpouring of emotion and support to become the first American man to win since 1983.

“It felt like a giant celebration that scoffed at the idea of anyone or anything holding us, the running community, down,” says Linden, who also ran that day. “All the things that runners go through, that set us back but don’t hold us down were on display: defiance, resilience, grit, persistence and fight.

“Watching Meb win in 2014 was special. He was always counted out or looked at as an underdog, even though he had proven himself repeatedly. He had more credentials than me but it was a position I could relate to and seeing him have his day when so many wrote him off was inspiring.

“I remember chatting with his wife at the finish line that day. They were always big supporters of mine and, even as he was having



TOP LEFT: Des Linden crosses the finish line to win the 2018 race

ABOVE: The left turn into Boylston Street means the finish is almost there

RIGHT: Meb Keflezighi celebrates after winning in 2014



his big moment, she took the time to say she knew I could do it too and she believed I would have my winner's moment. That always stuck with me and was something I thought about again in 2018."

The story of 2026 is soon to be written and Linden and Fraioli will be two of the countless intrigued onlookers waiting to see what unfolds next. Given the significance of the occasion, and the weight it carries, does his advice to his athletes differ when Boston is concerned compared to other marathons?

"[I tell them] to be present and take it all in," he says. "It is such a unique experience, and for most of these athletes to qualify for the Boston Marathon is, in many ways, the crowning achievement of their running career."

"Of course, we have splits we want to hit, strategies that we want to execute, but I also don't want them to miss out on the experience. It's like: 'Take a minute to just appreciate the environment, to thank a volunteer'."

"I've had years in Boston where I haven't done that myself. I didn't do it in 2021 but I went back in 2023, I knew I was fit, I knew the course, I knew what I had to do, but my goals were just to be present, to thank the volunteers, to acknowledge the crowd, to really take into account that: 'This is amazing. I'm here. I get to do this again'. That's the number one thing I encourage my athletes to do – not to take for granted how incredible an opportunity it is to be able to do this race, whether it's your first time or your 15th time." **AW**



**It was awesome knowing that I was racing in the steps of legends. It was inspiring to know that I could make a name for myself in running history**

## The Boston Marathon by numbers

### 1897

Inspired by the 1896 Olympic marathon, Boston Athletic Association (B.A.A.) member and US Olympic team manager John Graham decided to stage a marathon in the Boston area.

### 15

The number of athletes that started the inaugural Boston Marathon.

### 28,384

The number of finishers at the 2025 Boston Marathon, with 28,845 runners having started the race.

### 1972

Nina Kuscsik became the first official Boston women's winner.

### 1975

Boston became the first race to include a wheelchair category, with Bob Hall recognised as Boston's first wheelchair finisher.

### 140

The course elevation of the Boston Marathon sees runners dropping 140m over the entirety of the route. That represents an average of 3.33m per km which contravenes the World Athletics requirement "of not exceeding an average of one metre per kilometre".

### 2020

The only year that the Boston Marathon was cancelled, due to Pandemic. A virtual race took place instead.

### 2:03:02

The men's course record set by Kenyan Geoffrey Mutai in 2011.

### 2:17:22

The women's course record set by Kenyan Sharon Lokedi in 2025, a time took two minutes and 37 seconds off the mark that had stood for 11 years.

# A new identity

From leaving the track and cross country behind to embark on a marathon career, to switching allegiance from Great Britain to the USA, Charles Hicks talks to **Euan Crumley** about making some big, and very personal, decisions

**I**t has been a time of change for Charles Hicks. It's just 12 months ago that he was making the final preparations to compete in his first ever road race – a significant departure for an athlete steeped in cross country competition and tussles on the track.

But this was no sudden dive into the deep end. The idea of becoming a marathon runner had already been taking shape in his own mind so, when his coach Jerry Schumacher raised that same notion, the decision to hit the road was made and months of preparation began.

In that first venture on to the asphalt, Hicks impressed at the Cherry Blossom 10-Miler in Washington D.C. – an event that doubles as the US Championships for the distance. His victory brought a national title, but his dual citizenship with Great Britain meant that his time of 45:14 would not stand as a US record. That honour went to second-placed Alex Maier, whose 45:15 just edged inside Conner Mantz's previous mark of 45:16.

But there's more change in the air. Come mid-July, Hicks will become eligible to compete for the USA. The 24-year-old was born in London and lived in Fulham for the first 12 years of his life before moving Stateside with his family.

His international career thus far has played out in a British vest, with two European U23 cross country titles and a 5000m gold at the

2023 European U23 Championships to his name. But, with having lived the second half of his life in the US and with his country of residence looking unlikely to change any time soon, he admits: "I was feeling increasingly fraudulent the more time I spent outside of the UK." It has felt like the right call to make and, should he realise his Olympic dream by competing at the LA Games in 2028, he will do so as a member of the home team.

He will certainly have plenty of support coming his way later this month when he takes part in the Boston Marathon for the first time, his second outing over 26.2 miles after finishing seventh in New York last November with 2:09:59. It goes against conventional wisdom for one so young to be committing themselves to the distance but, then, the marathon rulebook is becoming increasingly rewritten with every passing year.

"People, especially out of the US and the NCAA system, don't typically try to do marathons as aggressively as we have," says the Stanford University graduate as he speaks to *AW* via video call from his Oregon base, sat at a workspace encased by an altitude generator tent "that is usually set between 10,000 and 12,000 feet".

"But the beautiful thing is you're seeing a lot of guys are trying to make this switch earlier than people previously did and that can lead to really exciting performances as people figure out [that the marathon] isn't something that just physically obliterates you."





**The shoes people used to run marathons in are horrifying. It felt like I was in a medieval torture museum looking at implements of terror and destruction**

ABOVE: Charles Hicks competes for Great Britain in the 5000m at the European U23 Championships in Finland in 2023

Hicks could perhaps have added the words “any longer” to the end of that sentence. Having had a glimpse into the past and seen the tools once used in the marathon trade, it’s the rapid advancement of technology that he sees as playing a major role in the event attracting a more youthful competitive audience.

“My personal conspiracy theory, and I don’t know if this is controversial or not, but I think it has a big deal to do with the shoes,” he adds. “One thing I have seen by being at the Nike archives is that the shoes people used to run marathons in are horrifying.

“It felt like I was in a medieval torture museum looking at implements of terror and destruction. I get why you wouldn’t put a 23, 24-year-old in them and get them to run 26 miles because I don’t think that that developing body would do well.

“But now we have so much insulation from the impact forces of the marathon. I can still barely walk after mine but you’re getting a lot of energy return from these shoes and I think

it’s less of a destructive force than it used to be. That’s allowing people to take more risks, maybe train a little bit harder and race a little bit more aggressively without having so much destruction.”

That doesn’t mean Hicks will be approaching this next marathon assignment by throwing caution completely to the wind. He is maintaining a healthy respect for the distance and that debut in New York proved to be an exercise in self restraint.

“There was a big move at halfway and, looking back, I’m not sure whether or not going with it could have placed me a couple of spots higher or 50 spots worse!” he says.

“I determined in that moment: ‘I’m running really well. I’m feeling really strong. There’s still 13 miles left, and I think there’s so much unknown so why don’t we just play it safe, run with the second chase pack, and still give yourself a shot at a top 10 finish?’ Running conservatively and having it work out really well does excite me for the opportunities.”

The plan, with every passing attempt, will be to loosen that leash slightly.

“What I really do want to do with each progressive marathon is take that as the foundation and then throw it out the window a little bit, then just be a little more aggressive each time,” adds Hicks. “I want to take a balance of that very risk averse way that I raced in New York, to inject a little risk tolerance into the model, and start to find out where my ceiling is.”

## CHARLES HICKS

Hicks is clearly an athlete who thinks deeply about his sport and it's the idea of literally going on a journey, rather than lapping a track or a cross country course, that appeals most to him about the new stage of his career. He sees this chapter, though, as an extension of what he first learned – and came to enjoy most – during his off-road adventures.

“What I loved about cross country was only more available on the roads,” he says. “The things that I really loved were competing and having competitive placement be the ultimate priority at every race. I found that to be extremely true on the roads. Times are obviously important – there are races where you chase records – but, with every road race I've been in, placement has been the ultimate priority and that felt very cross countriesque.

“And then the other is doing reconnaissance, having all these new locations, finding the hill elevations, figuring out ‘because X,Y,Z, then should I do this’. That's still on the track too, because there are tactics, but I felt like [on the roads] the course itself is almost like a character in each of these races. There's a lot more thought that's worth putting into these races beforehand that I just really, really enjoy.”

All of the above is part of Hicks' identity, something that was at the core of that very personal decision to switch national allegiance. Much like the move to road racing, it wasn't taken on a whim and the reaction, he's pleased to report, has been a positive one.

“I'm sure there are some British fans who are less excited about it but because the decision was so personal, I feel much more comfortable [and still would] even if the reactions had been overwhelmingly negative,” he says. “I made a decision that was true to who I was and who I wanted to be.

“I was 24 when I made the decision and the reason I started thinking about it was that I moved from the UK to the US and I turned 12 right after. I had had 50 per cent of my life in the UK, and then 50 per cent of my life in the US. And I was like: ‘If I'm ever going to make a decision, this is a very real inflection point for me and what's the rest of my life going to look like?’

“Maybe in college or before that, I thought there was a chance I could move back [to the UK], re-establish roots and whatnot, but I think just the reality of my life having taken shape now and being able to see it so clearly just makes me realise that that number is just going to keep getting more US-centric.

“I think that lends more credence to some of those perspectives that maybe were more



ABOVE: Hicks and Zak Mahamed compete at the 2022 European Cross Country Championships

negatively skewed about whether or not I truly embodied what it meant to be a Brit. But I think, when I made the decision [to compete for Britain] when I was 18, I felt much more British than I did American at the time. I think it also might have been just reactionary from the move [to the US] and wanting to retain a sense of stability at a young age.

“In some ways, I think the truth of life is that you can never make decisions that make everyone happy, so you might as well make the ones that you think are right.”

And so to Boston, that beast of a course and a marathon challenge unlike any other. What lessons learned from New York does Hicks think he will take with him on this next venture to the east coast?

“The main thing I learned is that you need to have a sort of lower sense of urgency when you're racing [the marathon],” he says. “When people make moves, you can think things through carefully before you respond, whereas in a 5000m or 10,000m, you're operating on milliseconds and you have to take a lot more risks. I think what really benefits me is an analytical approach, trying to make sure that, when I react to things, there's a justification behind it.

“Being an experienced cross country runner set me up well for marathon progression. I think it's very easy to say: ‘I want to run faster, I want to place higher every single race’ but the field is going to be totally different, the style of marathon is going to be totally different.

“This is my opportunity to go out there, get as many experiences as possible, race as hard as is humanly possible, maybe be a little bit more aggressive than New York, start pushing those limits and see where they're at.” **AW**

# Baby on board

Calli Hauger-Thackery's marathon momentum may have been stalled, albeit temporarily, but the expectant mum tells **Euan Crumley** why she wouldn't have it any other way

**C**alli Hauger-Thackery knew that something wasn't quite right. She was 19 miles into the Honolulu Marathon and on her way to victory last December, but started to feel less than perfect.

"I felt like really vomiting," she recalls. "I was like: 'What is going on?' I've never been sick in a training session, never been sick in a race. I had one of my final drinks and it basically didn't want to go down. It just came back up.

"I just had to fight for the finish. I wanted that win so badly and I was able to take myself to a different place and tell myself: 'You can be as sick as you want to be when you're finished'. I later joked with [husband, coach and fellow athlete] Nick: 'Imagine if it's morning sickness', but we just rushed past it."

Two weeks later, on Christmas Eve, came the confirmation that in fact she hadn't been very far off the mark. Calli had been four weeks pregnant during the race. The news meant a rethink for the 33-year-old when she lined up for the Houston Marathon on January 11.

There was an acceptance that the ambition to run under 2:20 would have to be shelved, but that didn't mean another win was off the table. The race would provide an exceptionally steep learning experience and no-one but Nick knew just what the eventual victor, in a time of 2:24:17, had been going through.

"For Houston I knew I'd be eight weeks pregnant and it was a different kind of tough," says Hauger-Thackery. "It was just mentally and physically so hard, but you also have this

shift of your mindset. You're like: 'You're doing this for your little person as well. Now it's not just for you, it's your little family unit'. You have this mum strength already and I'm like: 'You're doing this. We're getting the win today'.

"Obviously, if there had been any major red flags, I'd be like: 'Absolutely not, it's not worth it' but for the most part it was fine. I felt pretty strong. You're just working a lot harder than you normally are, because you are growing a human. And then you just have to cap [the pace]. 'Forward momentum only. Don't worry about the pace any more. Just get to that finish'. And that's what I did. Luckily, I was able to pull it off. But it was so hard.

"It's the recovery as well. That's when it really took its toll. Obviously, it's hard after a marathon anyway, but that was: 'I'm absolutely exhausted. Will I ever feel normal again?'. I took a full week off, which is so rare for me, and then I just slowly got back into it. God, it was tough."

The second trimester has gone so well, however, that the Flagstaff-based Hauger-Thackery has been back in racing action in recent weeks, first with a top 10 finish at the Gate River Run 15km in Florida and then coming 17th at the New York City Half Marathon last month.

"Right now, while I feel so good, I'm just going to take advantage of it day by day, week by week," she says. "But I spoke to the doctors, and they were like: 'Because you've run since you were 12 years old, it would be weird for you not to do this. It's not going to be bad for you'.





PHOTO BY KEVIN MORRIS

PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES



“They were like: ‘Obviously, if you’ve never run a marathon, then don’t do it. But you’re fine to continue as normal’. And I’ve spoken to so many of my amazing athlete friends who’ve done it, and they’re all basically like: ‘You will feel good until you don’t’. I’m sure when that 30-week mark comes, then it’s going to be different but until then I’m just going to continue to do what my body allows me to.”

“My body feels great just being outside, doing what I always do every day. It’s been so good for me and I do genuinely think it’s great for the baby as well. There’s a lot of research in that, if that’s what your body’s used to, just keep it the same, but obviously within reason.”

“I feel way more normal being outdoors, doing what I love and getting to race a little bit more while I can. I think it’s going to be really nice to tell my future kid ‘you’ve actually won two marathons and you’ve got quite a few finisher’s medals already.’”

The New York Half had originally been

intended as a warm-up race for Hauger-Thackery’s second appearance at the Boston Marathon, where she had been hoping to build on her impressive sixth-place finish last year. At the time of speaking with AW, she wasn’t ruling out still taking part, although it was beginning to look less likely.

“I genuinely just don’t know,” she says. “It’s going to be a huge ask. It’s so different and it’s the marathon again. I’m in my second trimester and feeling so good but, at the same time, I’m fully aware that it could all change in an instant. I would love to do it if my body allows it, just because it’s an amazing weekend and it’s a great race. I’m definitely not going to be ‘full send’ or anything, but it’d be really cool to be able to try and do that.”

Regardless of what transpires, it will still be a significant day for the family.

“My husband will be turning 30 that day, and he’s also doing the race so it’s a really nice little story for us,” she smiles. “I’d love to be

ABOVE: Calli Hauger-Thackery competes in the marathon at the Paris Olympics



**You’re working a lot harder than you normally are, because you are growing a human. But you have this mum strength**

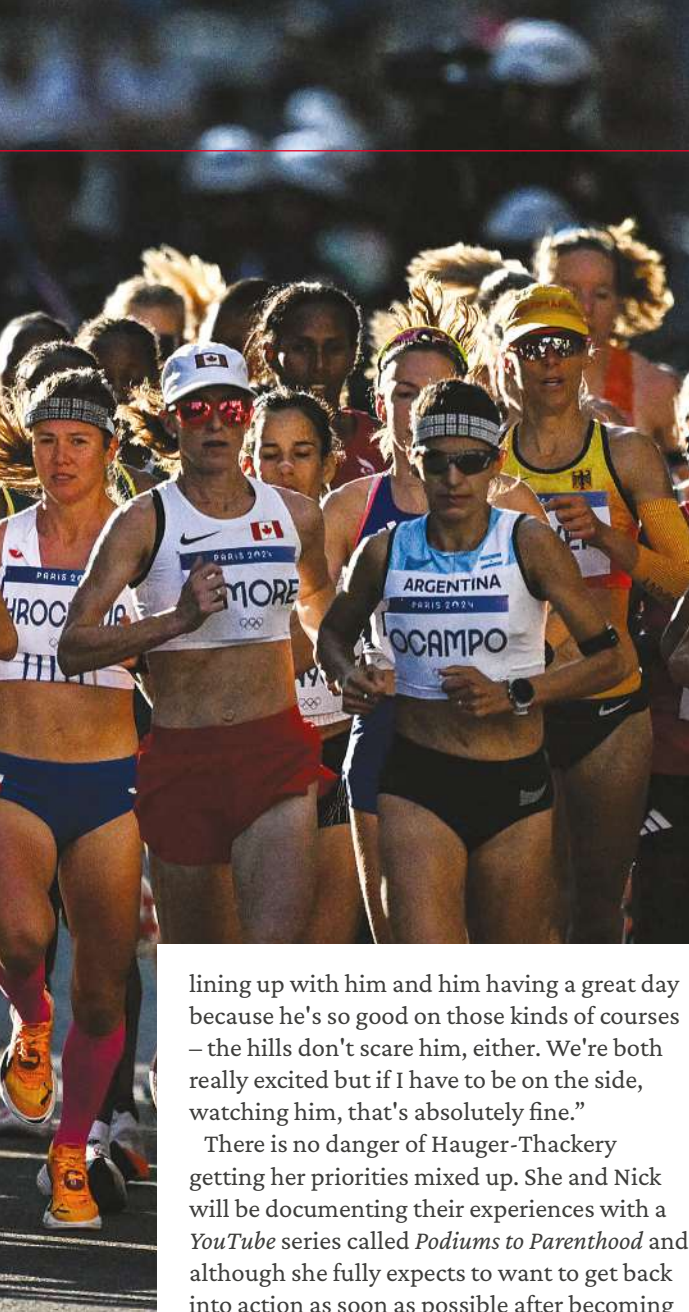


PHOTO BY KEVIN MORRIS



lining up with him and him having a great day because he's so good on those kinds of courses – the hills don't scare him, either. We're both really excited but if I have to be on the side, watching him, that's absolutely fine.”

There is no danger of Hauger-Thackery getting her priorities mixed up. She and Nick will be documenting their experiences with a *YouTube* series called *Podiums to Parenthood* and although she fully expects to want to get back into action as soon as possible after becoming a mother in late summer, there is no pressure being attached to her return. “After pregnancy, I have no time limit and I’m going to give my body the grace it needs,” she says.

But her marathon journey will continue. After a first Olympic appearance in Paris, the LA Games in 2028 is a huge target and, let’s not forget, at the time of writing the former world record-holder Paula Radcliffe was the only British female to have run faster over the marathon than Hauger-Thackery, whose personal best of 2:21:24 came in Berlin in 2024.

“I obviously really want to do big things, especially in the marathon, and then the LA Olympics but I’ve got a good timeline so I’m excited, all being well,” says the European half marathon bronze medallist.

“This is a great year for it [becoming a mother]. There were things that got me excited [about racing this year], but I said to Nick: ‘It’s not necessarily firing me up’ and because I had such a busy, big year last year, I feel like this is the right time to actually just slow down a bit, to then move forward and have a different

purpose. I think a shift in purpose sometimes really gets the best out of you.”

It will also present an opportunity for Hauger-Thackery to take a step back and consider her body of work to date. Last year was indeed exceptionally packed, not just with road races but also an 11th place in the 10,000m on the track at the World Championships in Tokyo.

“It’s always on to the next thing and you don’t fully smell the flowers and take in what you’ve accomplished,” says Hauger-Thackery. “At the press conference in Houston someone said to me ‘you had a career year last year’ and I appreciated that so much. I have done so much to get to that point and for them to actually recognise that and say that really means a lot.

“As athletes we’re our own worst critics and I just look at the things that I did wrong or thinking ‘what if I had done this?’ You’re always wondering. But [that comment] just made me think: ‘No, you should be proud of what you’ve done’.

“I still feel fresh to the marathon. I’m still learning so much and there’s a lot more to learn. I love mixing it up in these different marathons. I think you’ve got to. For the Olympics, it’s not going to be an easy marathon, it’s going to be a battle of attrition, and I’m glad I’ve done a few marathons now to show me that: ‘You *are* tough, you *can* do that’.

“And then this is a really nice new fresh chapter. It will just give me a whole new meaning. I’ve already felt the ‘mum strength’. It’s crazy what it does.” **AW**

ABOVE: Calli Hauger-Thackery and husband Nick celebrate her victory at the Houston Marathon

# Back to the start

Julia Paternain made headline news with her world championships bronze last year. The former British international talks to **Euan Crumley** about the significance of London being the next stop on her marathon journey

**T**he sight of Julia Paternain's jaw dropping in shock when she was informed of having secured third place in the women's marathon was one of the enduring images of last summer's World Championships in Tokyo. Her careful management of the hot and humid conditions took her to a spot on a global podium behind Kenyan winner Peres Jepchirchir and Ethiopia's Tigist Assefa that has changed her life and opened doors to a new level of recognition, as well as competition.

The 26-year-old admits it has taken some getting used to but one of the welcome developments it has brought is the chance to race at this month's London Marathon. For the woman who was born in Mexico, now competes for Uruguay (where her parents are from) but grew up in England and ran for Cambridge & Coleridge in her youth, it will represent a full circle moment and a journey back to where it all began.

The two-time English Schools 3000m winner and former British international finished second in the U17 race at the 2017 Mini London Marathon and will be fulfilling a teenage

ambition by stepping up to the full event.

Paternain also ran for Penn State and Arkansas University in the US, and spoke to AW from her base in Flagstaff, where she is coached by Jack Polerecky of the McKirdy Trained team and was making her final preparations for that return to British soil.

#### **How are your preparations for London going?**

I am excited for London. After Japan, it was difficult to readjust to life, I guess. I had the experience of my life, which was really, really cool, but also completely new territory that I've never had to manage before so dealing with the mental aspect of that has been a new challenge, but I think things are going well now. My long run workouts are starting to click and it's also starting to feel more real. Now it's like: "Okay, I'm actually doing this".

#### **How much of an impact did Tokyo have on you? Was it difficult to get back into a routine and pick up your running again?**

I took a two-week break and then I was really eager to get back into it, because everything felt so unusual that I just wanted some form of normality. After all the interviews and the travel, the jet lag, everything, I was like: "I just



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

want to run and go to practice and do what I'm used to doing". At first it was really easy to get back into things, which I think was almost a blessing and a curse, because then I went a little too hard too early and ended up picking up an injury around January.

That was difficult just dealing with: "I now have a little bit more pressure on me, but now I'm dealing with the first injury I've had in a little while", and figuring that out.

Then I had the very humbling return to fitness. I seem to have finally turned a corner in terms of training and getting used to the new kind of lifestyle I'm in. There have been a lot of new things to navigate.

### What doors did the world championships open for you?

I'd never been asked to do a podcast before, for example! I'm also now able to get into a lot of different races, which changes the calendar and the schedule, what I prepare for and what goals I have. The other thing that changed was that now I can go for a run or go to a pro meet, and people know who I am, which wasn't the case before, which is kind of weird, because I'm just me. The same person.

### Do you like that or would you rather just be a face in the crowd?

I am not someone that loves to have the camera on me. I would never be able to be a YouTuber or anything like that. I have so much respect for them, but that could not be me. But, at the same time, I'm a big nerd of the sport and I do really enjoy being able to talk about it and sharing my experience.

I think transparency in this sport is something that is missing a little bit with some of the pros. I feel like you get a very vanilla background of their life and it's not that inspiring all the time, so I think that it's nice to be able to share my story and hopefully show that it's not always just a super linear progression.

### One of the doors that has been opened to you is the London Marathon. How much of a full circle moment is that for you and how are you feeling about going back?

That has been one of my main motivating factors in the last few months. I'm excited to go back and just reminisce on my whole running journey. In 2017 I did the mini marathon and it was probably one of my best races as a junior. I want to say it was my first road race, too, so being able to have that full circle moment is really exciting. I haven't been back since



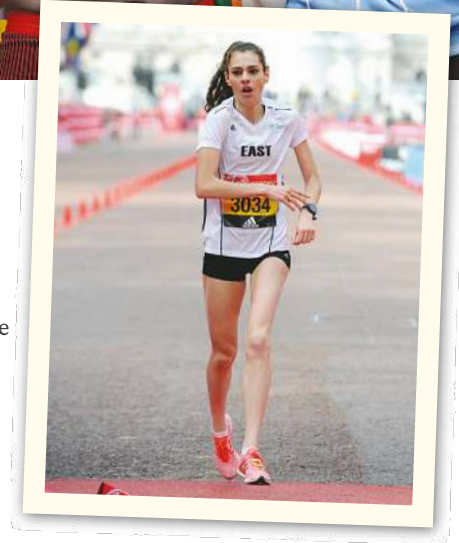
around 2021, so I'm just excited I'll get to see all my close friends.

### What are your memories of that mini marathon?

I remember just being so honoured that I had even been selected. Those big competitions do feel really big, so I was just really excited to be there. The whole experience felt so professional – the way that they transported us to the race, and where they would hold us before the race, everything just felt very professional, which was really cool at that age.

The winner of the race was Erin Wallace [now a member of the M11 Track Club] and I think she passed me with around a kilometre to go. She was running for Scotland and I remember everyone in the crowd yelling: "Let's go Scotland!". It was such a cool experience. It was such a big race. I don't think I'd ever had so many people watch me run, either, so I absolutely loved it. I had a great time. And I remember thinking: "When I'm older, I want to do the full marathon".

In terms of regular running memories in England, I spent so much time growing as an athlete. I feel like so much of my development happened back in the UK.



TOP: Celebrating an unexpected bronze medal in Tokyo

ABOVE: Crossing the line of the Mini London Marathon in 2017

RIGHT: Paternain in shock after realising she had won a medal in Tokyo



**In England, I spent so much time growing as an athlete. I feel like so much of my development happened back in the UK**

**What would represent success for you in London?**

My main goal is just to run as fast as I can. I've run 2:27 twice now, and I think I was in much better shape than that when I ran it in Japan – it was just the heat and conditions. It has taken me a while to reach that form again but, by the time London comes around, I'm hoping I'll be ready and I think that PB is well within my reach.

But, really, I just want to get some more experience. I'm still relatively young to the marathon, after Japan it was: "Let's just take a little bit of a step back and not get too ahead of ourselves here", because that was when the pressure was kind of getting to me. So it's [about]: "Let's get some more experience and try and build a long career", rather than just trying to go for something monumental every time I step on a start line.

**You'll be on the start line again with Peres Jepchirchir and Tigist Assefa. How are you feeling about stepping into that environment again?**

It is an honour to stand on the start line with these women. Even racing Eilish McColgan – I have looked up to her for years. She has been phenomenal and so consistent for so many years, so getting to stand on the start line with her is an honour in itself.

But I will go into this the same way I did with Japan in that I can't control what anyone else is doing. I can only control what I do and the effort that I give. They are some phenomenal athletes and if I'm even able to be close to them, then I will be over the moon.

**Running is your job now but are you an athlete who also uses it for their wellbeing? Is it a part of who you are?**

Yes, and I attribute a lot of that to my upbringing in Great Britain, because I know a lot of athletes that come to the NCAA, and then they finish in the NCAA, and they're like: "I never want to run again". For them, running is very much a means to go to university or get a scholarship or whatever. I've always thought: "I want to run, and this is really cool that it opens these doors for me but, regardless, I'm still going to run". And I got that from the club system in the UK.

I would go down to the track on a Tuesday night, it was all sorts of different ages. People that just wanted to run for the fun of it, and just run for the enjoyment of the sport. I go insane if I can't run. I definitely am someone that does it for my wellbeing, too. **AW**



# Friends and foes

Patrick Dever talks to **Jason Henderson** about the latest in a long line of battles with Emile Cairess, raising his game and the thrill of making his London Marathon debut



**A**fter his 2:08:58 marathon debut in New York last November, Patrick Dever is looking forward to running faster – and making an impact on British soil – in the TCS London Marathon on April 26.

“I’m so excited about doing London,” he says. “I’ve heard so many good things about it. I always watched it growing up and even just talking to my friends who live in London or who have done it or spectated, it sounds like such an incredible race to be a part of.

“It was insane to me at the New York Marathon how loud the crowd was and I’m sure London will be the same or louder. My family, who live mainly in Leyland, Lancashire, don’t get to see me race too often so it’ll be nice to have them there.”

Dever, 29, finished sixth in the Mini London Marathon in 2012 and then fifth in 2013 representing the North West of England. But since those early teenage years with Preston Harriers he went on to run for Loughborough and then the University of Tulsa in the United

States, where he won the NCAA 10,000m title. He has also won British titles at 5000m and 10,000m, competed in the Paris Olympics in 2024 and has run 27:08.81 for the 25-lap event.

The London Marathon will also be a good opportunity for him to renew his long-time rivalry with Emile Cairess. The Yorkshireman is just over a year older than Dever and moved up to the marathon earlier, clocking 2:06:46 in London two years ago before finishing a fine fourth in the Olympics.

Over the years the pair have enjoyed a particularly close rivalry. At the British Universities 5000m at Bedford in 2017, for example, Dever beat Cairess by less than a tenth of a second, although the pair finished half a second behind Ellis Cross.

Then, in the same summer, Cairess pipped Dever by 17 hundredths of a second in a British Milers’ Club 5000m in Manchester, whereas at a Trafford 10km Dever beat Cairess by five seconds.

Some of their toughest races have come in cross country. At the European Cross Country Championships in Tilburg in 2018, Dever finished fifth and Cairess eighth, with



just two seconds separating the duo. Most memorably of all, the 2019 British Universities Cross Country Champs (pictured left) saw the pair separated by just one tenth of a second, although organisers admitted it was technically one thousandth, after half an hour of rugged racing on the south coast of Devon.

“If I see Emile at races I try to take the time to speak to him and ask how things are going,” says Dever. “I really like him and the way he goes about his training and races. It’s been great watching how he’s done in the last few years.”

Both athletes have progressed a lot from those student days of seven years ago when they fought it out with faces daubed with the colours of their respective universities.

“One hundred per cent,” Dever agrees when asked how much stronger he is today. “The level I’m able to train at now consistently is way higher than what I was able to do back then. The quality of sessions I do now and am able to come back from quickly are head and shoulders above what I was able to do just three or four years ago.

“I’ve really found a sweet spot with my training. I know how hard to push on the easy days in order to make my main workouts count. I’ve still got a lot to learn about the marathon and pushing up my volume but I’m really confident that I’ve come on a lot in the past few years.”

He adds: “A big part is to take breaks regularly and to let the training and racing make their adaptations. After New York I did a really good job of taking a nice break and since then everything else has gone really smoothly.”

Dever is chatting to AW from his altitude training base in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The Puma athlete has already done his first run of the day and is relaxing on the porch outside his apartment wearing sunglasses to shield his eyes from the bright sunshine.

Friends often call him “Paddy” but he doesn’t mind Patrick, either. His father is apparently a stickler for his surname being pronounced properly, though. Over the years many have mistakenly said “Deever” whereas instead it should rhyme with “never”.

He is part of the Puma elite running team and is coached by Alistair and Amy Cragg with a group that includes fellow British distance runner Jack Rowe. A few days earlier a number of the squad raced at the NYC Half and Dever excelled with a 59:56 PB to place sixth.

“Psychologically to get under the one-hour mark was good,” he says. “I knew it was a

matter of time before I got under that mark but wasn't sure it'd happen in New York as it's quite a challenging course."

It was his first race since the New York City Marathon five months earlier, too, where he placed fourth behind three Kenyans, Benson Kipruto, Alex Mutiso and Albert Korir, the latter of whom was suspended in January after testing positive for drugs.

On New York, he says: "I've kind of parked it a little and have been trying not to think about it too much. During the build-up to London I didn't want to be complacent. Just because one's gone well it doesn't mean they will all go well.

"I'm really trying to keep improving in training. London is completely different as well as there's more of a time aspect."

On the NYC Half last month, he says: "When I finished I was definitely completely gassed although I could have run it a bit smarter at the

beginning. I was probably a bit too 'engaged' from the get-go. In the marathon I was mentally really switched off early in the race but in the half-marathon I was too engaged or hyper aware of every surge early on in the as I was worried about people breaking away. I'll take this forward into the London Marathon hopefully."

Dever seems quietly confident ahead of London. He will stay in Albuquerque until just over a week before the race and then head down to North Carolina for a few days before coming across to Britain. "Most of the work will be done up here and then I'll come down to hopefully reap the benefits," he says.

"The marathon is such a long way and you can think your training has gone really well but something might happen in the race that throws you off a bit," he says. "All you can do is make the training as good as possible and learn what you can to feel as good as possible on the

OVERLEAF: Emile Cairess and Patrick Dever battle it out in 2019

BELOW LEFT: Dever finishing fourth at last year's New York City Marathon

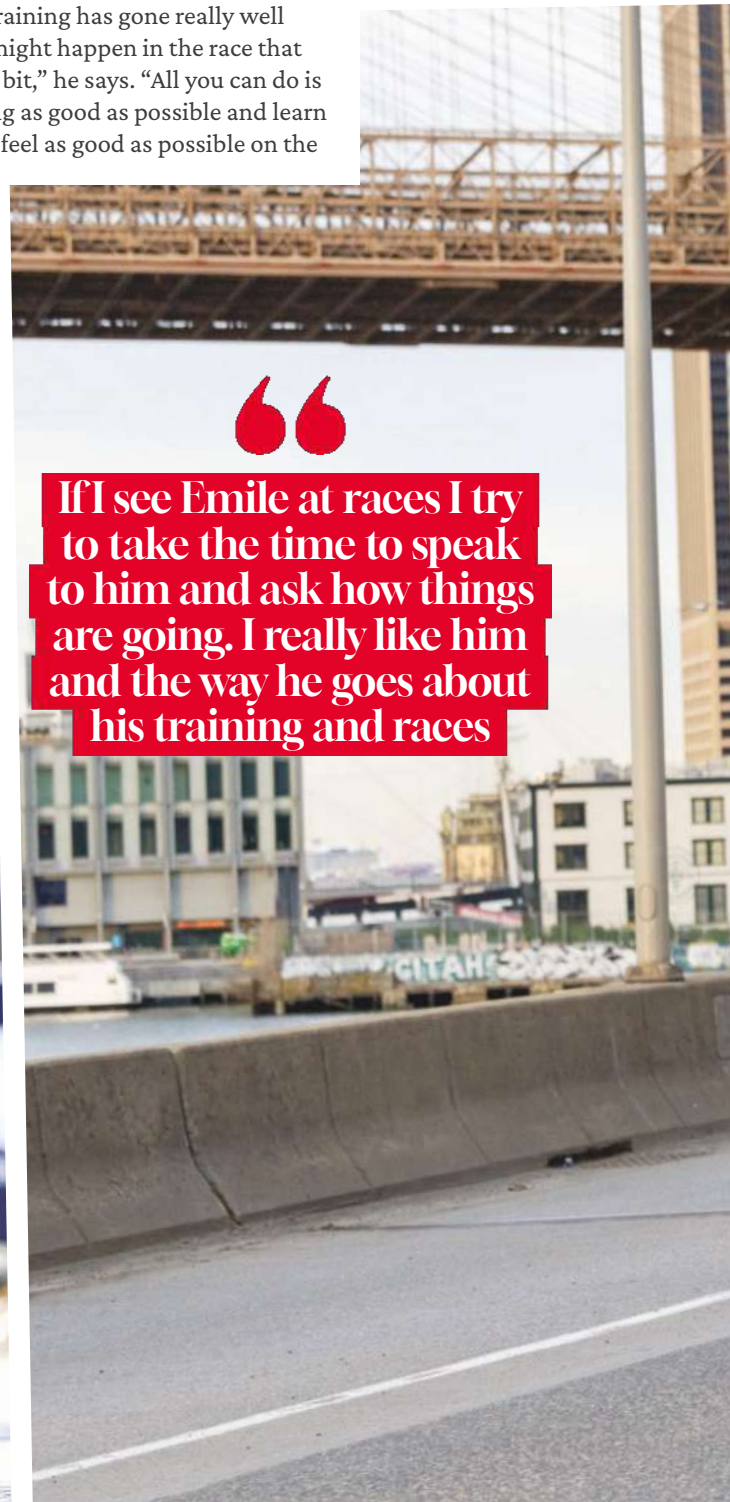
BELOW: Dever in the leading pack at the NYC Half Marathon

RIGHT: Competing at the 2024 Paris Olympics

PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES



**If I see Emile at races I try to take the time to speak to him and ask how things are going. I really like him and the way he goes about his training and races**

day, such as fuelling in the final few days and on the day itself.”

He adds: “There will always be that element of the unknown, though, which is what I guess gives you those nerves.”

Cairness has been talking about breaking Mo Farah’s British record of 2:05:11, which was set in Chicago in 2018. Given Dever’s history of being neck and neck with the former, in addition to his fine debut in New York, surely this makes him believe he can match whatever his fellow Brit does?

“Definitely,” he says. “Through the age groups we were doing much less training than we are now. But I feel there’s no reason why I can’t get up to those levels in the marathon.”

“I’ve just been spending a little longer on the shorter distances and I feel I have more room to grow over distances like the half-marathon and 10,000m. Whether it’s now or 2027 or 2028, I feel I have tonnes more growth to make over the marathon distance.” **AW**



PHOTO BY NYC HALF MARATHON

# TWO LAPS, NO MERCY

**Dave Holmes** examines the history of the 800m, a discipline that represents a test of speed, strength and strategy

**I**n the world of middle-distance running, few races combine speed, strategy and endurance like the 800m. Two laps of the track might seem straightforward, but the event punishes hesitation, rewards boldness and exposes any weakness in pacing or stamina.

Unlike the sprints or the marathon, the 800m sits in a liminal space, demanding both the explosive power of a 400m runner and the endurance of a distance runner. Its history, stretching from cinder to synthetic tracks, is a chronicle of tactical evolution, political drama and unforgettable performances.

The 800m emerged as an Olympic distance in 1896 for men, quickly establishing itself as a test of tactical acumen as much as speed. Early champions such as Australian Edwin Flack and Italian Emilio Lunghi combined raw pace with clever positioning. Across Europe and North America, club meets nurtured rising talent, while the Olympics offered a global stage where national pride and athletic ambition intersected. By the 1920s, the 800m had become an international spectacle, a race in which split-second decisions were as important as physical preparation.

Women first ran the 800m at the Olympic Games in 1928, in Amsterdam, in what was both a landmark and a controversy. The event ended with dramatic finishes, but newspapers

reported that several competitors collapsed at the line. Critics at the time claimed the distance was too strenuous for female athletes. In response, the International Olympic Committee barred women from competing in the 800m for the next 32 years, not reinstating the event until the 1960 Rome Olympics.

Despite the official ban, women continued running the distance in national and club competitions, gradually demonstrating that stamina, speed and strategy were not exclusively male traits.

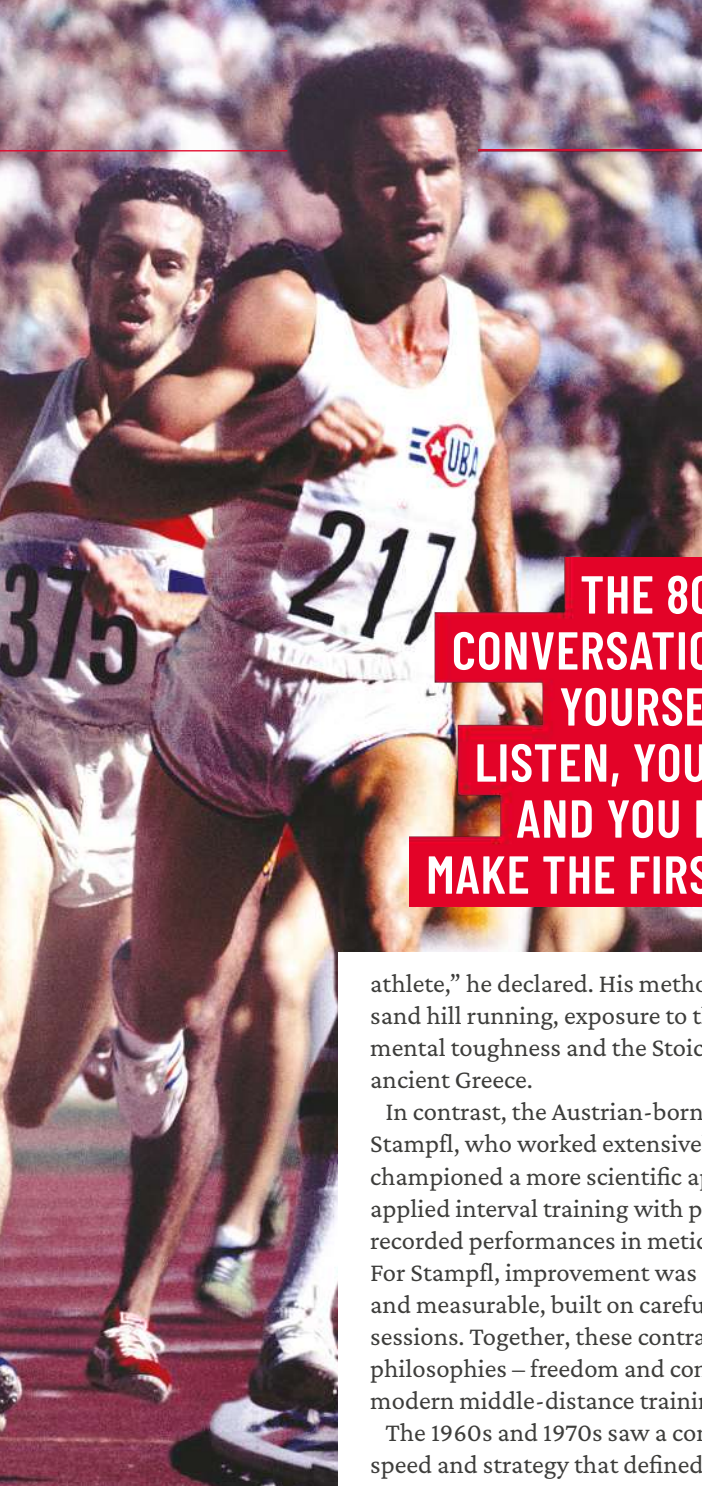
The 1930s and 1940s brought further refinement for men's racing. Athletes such as Britain's Tommy Hampson and America's Mal Whitfield demonstrated that success demanded precise energy distribution. Too fast in the opening lap and lactic would devastate the finishing kick, too slow and the race would be out of reach. Whitfield's Olympic victories in 1948 and 1952 embodied the ideal 800m race: controlled, powerful and perfectly timed. Meanwhile, women's unofficial competitions quietly developed, laying the groundwork for the post-1960 era.

Coaching approaches to training at this time reflected a tension between intuition and science. The Australian middle-distance coach Percy Cerutti rejected rigid structure in favour of individual freedom and natural development.

"Schedules, I never set them – since I hold that such things enslave the mind of the



ABOVE: Alberto Juantorena, Steve Overtt and Ivo Van Damme in action at the 1976 Montreal Olympics



“**THE 800M IS A CONVERSATION WITH YOURSELF. YOU LISTEN, YOU REACT, AND YOU DARE TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE**”

athlete,” he declared. His methods emphasised sand hill running, exposure to the elements, mental toughness and the Stoic philosophy of ancient Greece.

In contrast, the Austrian-born coach Franz Stampfl, who worked extensively in Britain, championed a more scientific approach. He applied interval training with precision and recorded performances in meticulous detail. For Stampfl, improvement was systematic and measurable, built on carefully structured sessions. Together, these contrasting philosophies – freedom and control – shaped modern middle-distance training.

The 1960s and 1970s saw a convergence of speed and strategy that defined modern 800m racing. Athletes such as Peter Snell of New Zealand and Ralp Doubell of Australia pushed the boundaries. Doubell’s Olympic victory in 1968 was described by Roger Bannister as “the finest tactical run I have ever seen” and remained an Australian record for half a century. Synthetic tracks, introduced at this time, improved times and reduced injury risk, while professional coaching and sports science refined training methods.

The 1976 Montreal Olympics featured Cuba’s Alberto Juantorena, whose combination of 400m speed and exceptional speed endurance saw him take the 800m gold in world-record time, a performance that reshaped how athletes approached the event. Journalists described his final lap as “a sprint at distance”, leaving competitors grasping for air as he surged to gold.

The women’s 800m of the era was shaped by Soviet and East German athletes such as Nadezhda Olizarenko, who broke the world record at Moscow 1980, but whose achievements were viewed with suspicion given the doping regime at the time.

The 1980s and 1990s were dominated by athletes who brought both personality and politics to the track. Britain’s Sebastian Coe turned the 800m into a theatre of psychological warfare. His duels with Steve Ovett are the stuff of legend, their contrasting styles captivating millions.

Coe, with his smooth stride, exuded calm precision, while Ovett relied on unpredictable surges that kept rivals guessing. Coached by his father Peter, Coe’s mastery was not just in tactics but in sheer speed: in Florence on June 10, 1981, he ran 1:41.73, setting a world record that would remain unbroken for 16 years.

The 2000s introduced a new era of globalisation and record-chasing.

David Rudisha of Kenya redefined the men’s race, blending aerodynamic efficiency, unparalleled pacing and an irresistible finishing kick. His 1:41.01 world record at the 2012 London Olympics was a demonstration of what perfect execution could achieve. Rudisha later reflected: “Every stride has a purpose. The 800 is unforgiving – you are either precise or you are gone.”

On the women’s side, athletes such as Pamela Jelimo of Kenya and Caster Semenya of South Africa produced some of the fastest performances in history but the controversial world record of 1:53.28, set by Czech runner Jarmila Kratochvílová in 1983, remains unbroken. It is a mark that Britain’s Keely Hodgkinson has set her sights on.

The 800m is far more than a measure on a stopwatch. It is a test of split-second judgment, of reading rivals, of daring to strike when others hesitate, all while negotiating the razor’s edge between speed and stamina.

From Flack to Rudisha, from cinder tracks to Olympic stadiums, the event has remained a test of human capability – a science, an art, and a spectacle. Coe, reflecting on his career in 2012, captured its essence: “The 800m is a conversation with yourself. You listen, you react, and you dare to make the first move.” It is a conversation that continues to enthral audiences and challenge the very best in athletics today. **AW**

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



# GROWING STRENGTH



For AW's club of the month feature in partnership with England Athletics, **Tim Adams** visits Windsor Slough Eton & Hounslow AC

**W**indsor Slough Eton & Hounslow Athletic Club has a long history, and one which has involved several name changes over the decades. After the original Slough Cycling & Athletic Club was formed in 1880, it was renamed Slough Harriers in 1920, before becoming Slough Athletic Club in 1946.

The changes didn't stop there, though. Two years later a breakaway group formed Eton Athletic Club, moving to Windsor to become Windsor & Eton Athletic Club in 1953. Then, in 1968, Windsor & Eton AC and Slough AC

merged to form Windsor Slough & Eton AC. In 1999 Windsor Slough & Eton AC then moved to their present base at the Thames Valley Athletic Centre and, at the turn of the century, merged with Borough of Hounslow AC, with the result now being Windsor Slough Eton & Hounslow AC.

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

Nick Pearson has witnessed the change over the past 30 years. He first trained with, and then competed for, Hounslow AC before

RIGHT: International hammer thrower Jake Norris coaches at Windsor Slough Eton & Hounslow AC



making the move to coaching and team management. He's also had the experience of being a parent at the club and, for the past four years, has been Windsor Slough Eton & Hounslow AC chairman. He states that its geography is one of its biggest strengths.

"We're in a really lucky position that we've got an amazing facility," he explains. "It's one of the prettiest tracks you'll ever come to. We've got the Eton College grounds next to us and Windsor Castle isn't too far away, either."

From Wendy Sly and Nicola Sanders to Mark Richardson and Morgan Lake, the club boasts a myriad of alumni that have achieved success at major global championships. To showcase that history, the club has its records displayed on the wall for each discipline, a reminder to the next generation of what can be possible.

"We've got amazing alumni at the club," Pearson adds. "We've got Olympic champions and world record-holders who have come through these doors. We're in a privileged position where there really isn't an Olympics or world championships that goes by where we're not represented.

"That acts as incredible inspiration to some of the youngsters. We're lucky that we're small enough that the youngsters get access to those stars of the sport and it can act as a real point of engagement with them for elite athletics."

One emerging young talent is Zoë Allan. The teenager, who first got into running after joining her brothers at a junior parkrun aged just four, has been at the club for five years now. She has represented Berkshire at the Inter County Cross Country Championships and was also part of the junior girls England team that secured gold at the 2024 SIAB Cross Country International.

A member of retired GB athlete Shireen Higgins' middle distance group at Windsor Slough Eton & Hounslow AC, Allan states the club is like a family.

"It's just so different to what I'll be doing with the rest of my week, which will be things like school," Allan says. "One of the best bits about the club is that I've got so many friends here.

"I feel I can always go to Shireen or other coaches and I can fully trust them. They just always have the right thing to say to encourage me. I want to make them proud."

An example of someone who has excelled in elite athletics but has given a lot back to the club is Jake Norris. A triple national hammer



## THERE REALLY ISN'T AN OLYMPICS OR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS THAT GOES BY WHERE WE'RE NOT REPRESENTED. THAT ACTS AS INCREDIBLE INSPIRATION TO SOME OF THE YOUNGSTERS

throw champion, he represented Great Britain at last year's World Championships in Tokyo.

Having become world under-20 hammer champion in 2018, the 26-year-old knows only too well about the importance of developing as an athlete through the age groups. A member of the club since 2011, Norris is now coaching the next generation of throwers at Windsor Slough Eton & Hounslow AC.

"A few years ago the club actually helped me buy a competition hammer, as they're not that cheap," Norris explains. "The facility where we train at in Thames Valley is pretty convenient as we've got a separate circle which is pretty much just for us. I've been in coaching for about a year-and-a-half now. I do discus, javelin, hammer throw and shot put. It's great and really enjoyable. It doesn't take too much out of me and the club understands that as well. Hopefully the kids enjoy it!"

With a high quality eight-lane all weather track outside and a recently refurbished indoor facility that includes a five-lane 60m sprint straight and provision for pole vault, jumps and throws, there is no doubting that Windsor Slough Eton & Hounslow AC has a lot to offer.

The club has a thriving and increasing membership of over 550 athletes, and Pearson believes that the future can only be brighter.

"We're set on trying to maintain ourselves as an elite top level domestic track and field club," he says. "However we also need to keep pushing the club's role in the community, so we're working on how we change the focus of the club, making it more values based and more about being about a positive impact on young people.

"So how do you make things even more fun and youth centric? We feel that if we can do that over time then the by-product over time is that we'll have even more high-quality athletes that want to perform and compete for the club regularly." **AW**



ABOVE: Club chairman Nick Pearson



LEFT: Morgan Lake represents the club on the national stage



Scan here to watch the club of the month documentary

## HOW THEY TRAIN

## ISSY BOFFEY

AGE: 26 COACH: LUKE GUNN

**Katy Barden** talks to the British indoor 800m champion whose big breakthrough in January has opened up a whole new world of opportunity

**I**n amongst a myriad of highlights there are two images that stand out on Issy Boffey's *Instagram* grid; the first is her reaction to breaking two minutes for 800m for the first time with a 1:59.30 clocking in Madrid in July 2023. The other is her delight, relief, even disbelief to running 1:57.43 in Boston in January 2026.

Both events were landmark occasions, each representing a significant breakthrough. That 1:59 opened up the opportunity to compete at the 2023 World Championships, Boffey's first major senior international vest after completing a clean sweep of European age group titles from 2016-2021.

But 1:57 has changed the game entirely. European Championships and Commonwealth Games qualifying times – targets for early summer – have already been achieved, while the World Indoor Championships, not initially on her agenda, was quickly pencilled in and she reached the semi-finals in Toruń.

"We kind of made a joke, like: 'Oh, maybe I'll just skip 1:58,'" laughs Boffey, whose 1:59.30 remains her second-fastest time ever. "It's so weird, because I think my aim for maybe the past two years, obviously bar injuries and stuff, has just been to be consistent with the 1:59s and then aiming to run a 1:58. All of a sudden every race is a 1:59 and I've jumped to a 1:57. It's been a goal for so long, but it's only just come together."

Progress is rarely linear and, for an athlete who enjoyed such incredible success as a junior, the challenges of progression and transition through to the senior ranks can appear more acute. While Boffey made it to the outdoor World Championships in Budapest three years ago, she suffered injury and illness throughout the summer of 2024 which put paid to any chance of going to the Olympics. Last year provided a wake-up call.

"I was really surprised at how long it took me to get back, and mentally, I was really, really struggling," she admits.

"Before the British Champs, I thought: 'Do I quit?' I just didn't know what was going on. I felt like I'd been training so hard for so many years and it just wasn't coming together. I didn't realise how much I was struggling until it sort of all hit me in the middle of the season.

"It was just an absolute mess. It wasn't until the August that I started to see the results I knew I was capable of (Boffey ran back-to-back 1:59s to finish her season).

"There have been some lows for sure, but it makes the highs better. Running 1:57 [in January 2026] was three years in the making and it has definitely required some resilience and perseverance. Obviously it's so hard to see the highs coming when you're just feeling so run down and tired of it all, but I've been working on my mental attitude which I think has been a really big game-changer for me."

Coach Luke Gunn had encouraged Boffey to see a sports psychologist for some time. "It's taken me a while to find the right person," she says. "Now that I have, it makes such a difference, just having that very open, judgment-free space to speak about how you're feeling and how running is going, but also how life is going generally. It's definitely made me feel freer which has essentially just allowed me to be more relaxed and more stress-free. I think that's now helping me to run better, which is amazing."

While acknowledging the current depth of talent in the women's 800m, Boffey has her sights set on the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and the European Championships in Birmingham this summer. "I don't think I could be living here in Birmingham and not be at that Champs. I think it would break my heart a little bit, especially having already missed the Commonwealths in 2022," she says.

As a 1:57 runner, the opportunities now afforded to her – for example competing on the Diamond League circuit where she'll race against, and learn from, the best athletes in the world – are the ones that will best prepare her to succeed. **AW**



## A TYPICAL TRAINING WEEK (WINTER TRAINING WEEK IN BIRMINGHAM AHEAD OF 2026 INDOOR SEASON)

Boffey is based at the University of Birmingham, where she benefits from a Graduate Sport Scholarship. In addition to a refreshed mental attitude, an increase in mileage has also made a practical difference.

"It's been a very gradual progression over the years," she says, explaining that her maximum weekly mileage is 50 miles, but she consistently aims for 40-45 miles per week. "A lot of it is just doing three miles in the morning and then a bigger session in the evening. I'm not doing anything fancy, but it works for me."

As she progresses through winter, her focus moves from tempo to speed work (for example a winter VO2 session becomes an 800m pace session in the summer). "I'm someone with natural speed but not so much natural aerobic capacity," she says. "Every athlete is different and, while my speed can increase really quickly, my aerobic capacity has to be built up over time and it's taken us a while to figure that out."

- ◆ Monday: (am) 20-minute run followed by gym/strength and conditioning session; (pm) track tempo e.g., 30 x 200m off 30 seconds or variation e.g., 3 x (10 x 200m), or speed session option e.g. 4 x 250m (off long recovery)
- ◆ Tuesday: (am) 40-minute run; (pm) 30-minute cross train followed by sauna
- ◆ Wednesday: (am) 25-minute run; (pm) VO2 max session e.g., 4 x 1km or 6 x 600m (off 2-3 minutes) or 15 x 300m off a 100m jog (plus two miles warm up/two miles cool down)
- ◆ Thursday: (am) gym including strength and conditioning session; (pm) 30-40-minute easy run
- ◆ Friday: (am) tempo session 20-25min of 1min tempo/1min float or a steady run, e.g., 30 minutes steady plus warm up/cool down
- ◆ Saturday: (am) hill or grass session, e.g., 5 x 45sec, 5 x 30sec, 5 x 20sec hills (off slow jog back recovery) or 6 x 3min off 90sec rest (using Metchley Fields); (pm) 20-minute run or 30-minute cross train
- ◆ Sunday: rest day

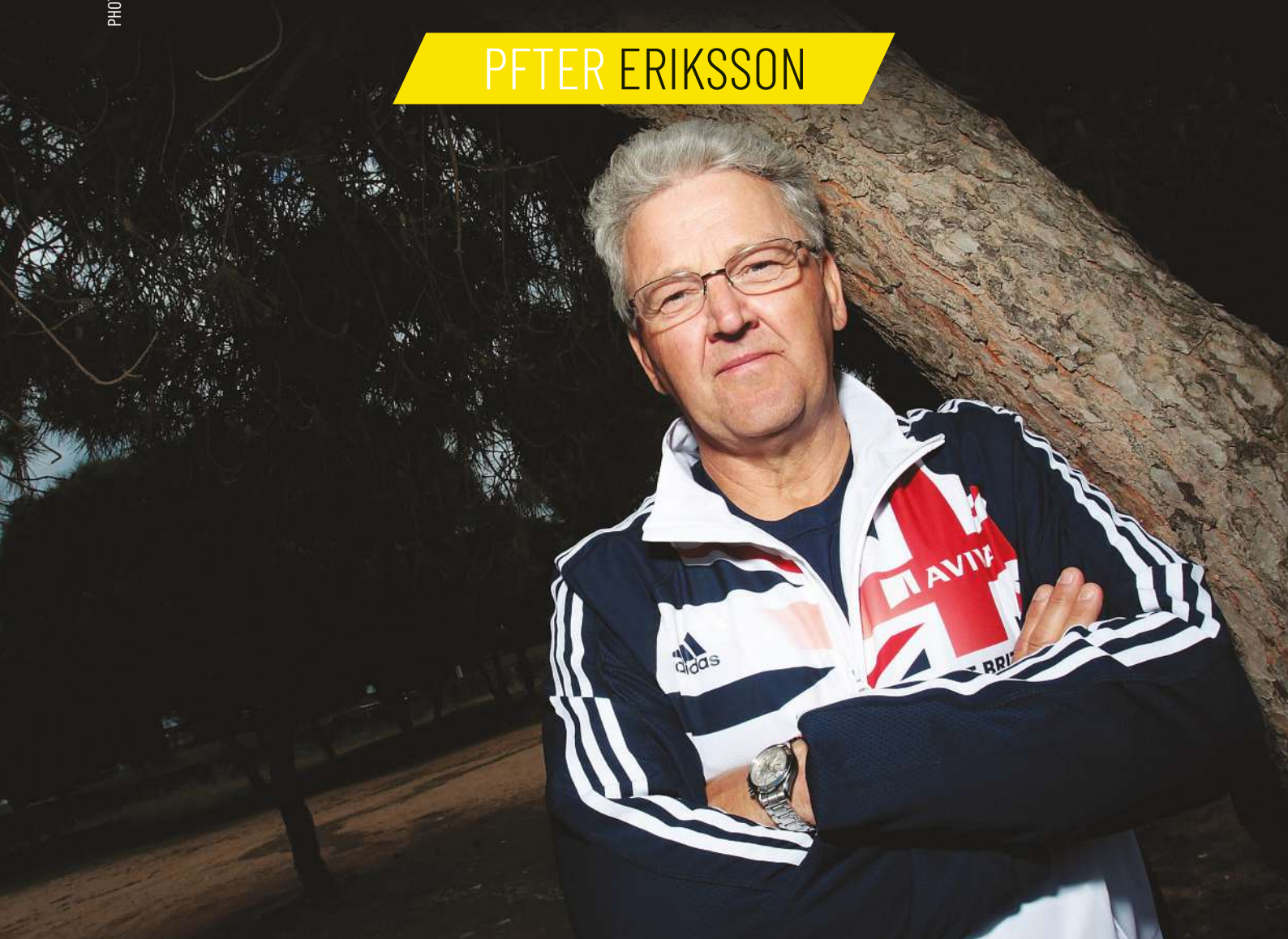
**Favourite session: speed session:** 300m, 250m, 200m (off 12 minutes)

**Least favourite session:** Long run

“Be able to  
listen,  
learn  
and  
adapt”

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

PETER ERIKSSON



COACHING

CONVERSATIONS

## Katy Barden talks to the former international speed skater about the journey and philosophy that led him to great coaching success on the international stage

**P**eter Eriksson is the most successful track and field coach in Paralympic history. As a personal coach, the Swede has guided athletes including Hannah Cockcroft and Shelly Woods (Great Britain), Chantal Petitclerc and Jeff Adams (Canada), and Tatyana McFadden (USA).

He has also operated as head coach of Olympic and Paralympic Programmes for both British Athletics and Athletics Canada – leading Canada’s Olympic programme to record medal performances at the 2014 Commonwealth Games, 2015 World Championships and 2016 Olympic Games – and has worked for the US Paralympic Committee (head coach for track and field) and Saudi Olympic Committee (director of high performance and strategy for all Olympic sports).

Eriksson was an international speed skater and competed at major events including the World Sprint Championships. He also worked as a fireman. In 1983, following his Masters graduation from university, he started research into the physiology of athletes with spinal cord injuries with the backing of Swedish professor Per-Olof Åstrand (considered a pioneer and one of the ‘founding fathers’ of modern exercise physiology). He moved to Canada in 1987 to continue his research – and his coaching – and published over 18 articles on his work. The 73-year-old retired (officially) at the end of 2025.

### How did your experience as a competitive speed skater influence you as a coach?

The Swedish national [track] coach Herman Buuts took care of my summer training during the last two years of my career. He explained a lot about the planning of training and periodisation, so I was really interested in that.

I read a really good book called *A Coach's Handbook* written by a Finnish track and field coach. It talked about planning and periodisation and I realised how many years I’d actually thrown away, because we didn't have coaches in speed skating that knew s\*\*\* about those things. It was just: “Train as hard as you can, the more tired you are, the better it is.” Sometimes you were so tired you could hardly walk.

And when I was reading this book, I thought: “There must be more to this, I need to help other people so they don't make the same mistakes as I did.” I was done by then, anyway. I’d decided that I would spend eight years focusing on getting to the 1980 Olympics and, when that was over, I was over, too. I was only 28 when I quit, but then I got into coaching with the junior speed skating team.

### How did you move into athletics and what did you do to build your coaching knowledge in those early years?

I was always interested in track and field but I was never very good. I was going out with a Swedish javelin thrower and she was going to



the 1980 Olympic Games with a university apprentice programme. In the end one guy couldn't go, so I was asked if I wanted to go as an apprentice coach and I jumped at the opportunity.

When I was there, I met [former Swedish and Finnish national coach] Gusti Laurell. At that time he worked as a coach at a high school or in a club, but he also translated a lot of articles from *Leichtathletik*, a German magazine that wrote everything about training at the time. He had a tremendous amount of knowledge.

We went running every day. He wasn't so keen on that. I asked him: "Dude, can I run with you?", and he was like: "No, you're running too fast for me". I said: "Well, if I run your speed, can I do that? And, by the way, can I ask you some questions?"

So every morning I ran with him, and I'd say: "Tell me about tempo training", for example, and after every 30 minutes of running – and he talked non-stop – I wrote all of it down. I still have those notes. I did that for three weeks and I thought I knew everything.

Then when I was studying – and I was still coaching speed skaters at the time [around 1981] – I met this guy at the school who told me he was a track athlete and wheelchair racer. We started talking about training and periodisation and he asked if I could help him with his training. I was like: "I don't know anything about what you guys are doing", so he told me to come down and watch them race. I went, and I thought it had a lot of similarities tactically to how you set up a race in speed skating. I started to help that guy, and then within a couple of years I coached 18 athletes from eight different countries.

The other thing I did was that I went to the best coaches in the world. When I went to the 1984 Paralympic Games in New York, I picked the best athletes and their coaches, and I was like: "Can I talk to you for 15 minutes?", and then I started to ask them about training, planning, whatever it was, and I always wrote it all down afterwards.

**How would you describe your coaching philosophy?**

The philosophy for me has always been one thing, that this is not about me – this is about me helping the athletes achieve their goals. I'm irrelevant after that, really, right?

In the beginning you're teaching the athlete so they learn about why they are doing certain things in training. And I always said to the athletes, if you have a training session and you ask me: "Why am I doing this?" and I can't answer the question, then don't do it. I have to be able to justify that, and I have to teach them why they're doing it.

After a certain period of time you become the consultant. And then, in the third step, you're the advisor. You have to educate the athletes, you have to educate yourself and you have to listen to athletes' feedback. A lot of it is learning from them.

As a coach, if you think you know everything, it's time to quit. I think it's better to make sure that you're always learning from somebody or something, or you're reading about it. And if you stop learning, I think it's time to stop coaching. You don't have to apply everything you learn, but you have to fit it into the picture.

**Who has been your greatest coaching influence?**

Gusti and Herman obviously had a big influence on me from the beginning. There were a lot of really good coaches in the

ABOVE: Peter Eriksson in conversation with Shelly Woods

UK that I admired, too, like Lloyd Cowan, Shaun Pickering and Frank Dick. Listening to other Paralympic coaches has also been very important.

I think people sometimes get caught up in other coaches' philosophies and that person then becomes the guru and their philosophy becomes the only way to do something, but I don't think there's just one way of doing things, so I listened to a lot of people.

**Did integrating Great Britain's Olympic and Paralympic programmes make a difference in terms of raising the profile of the Paralympic team and changing perceptions?**

Definitely, but it would never have changed if it wasn't for [former UK Athletics chair] Ed Warner and [former UK Athletics Chief Executive] Niels de Vos, because if you don't get buy-in from the top, it will never happen.

A lot of sports in the system – in Canada in particular – say they have integration, but they don't, they have two different departments, but because UKA bought into the concept of the Paralympic programme being “the same, the same, the same” [as the Olympic programme], they made it happen.

I remember Paula [Paula Dunn, UKA's performance director] saying to me when she came into the programme: “I don't know anything about Paralympic athletics”, and I said: “Don't worry about it. You know a lot about the sport. I can teach you the Paralympic side in five minutes.”

The first two coaches I called to be on the US Paralympics team for a big competition were Joaquim Cruz [Olympic 800m gold medallist in LA 1984] and Al Joyner [Olympic triple jump gold medallist in LA]. I said: “I know you've never been involved with this, but I need a guy that knows middle distance [or in Al's case jumps and sprints], to be with me on the team. I can't pay you, but do you mind doing it?”, and they go: “Okay”. So it was the same here in the UK, it was no problem to get Olympic coaches involved in the programme.

**What would you say are the characteristics of a good coach?**

Being able to listen, learn and then adapt. Different athletes have different personalities and need a different approach. You can't have one box and fit everybody into that same box.

**And you have to be in charge, right?**

I remember in Formula 1 there used to be a guy with a lollipop, and when a driver came into the pit lane all of these people around the car were



**If you think you know everything, it's time to quit. It's better to make sure you're always learning from somebody or something**

changing the tyres, filling the gas, whatever they were doing, and the driver wouldn't drive off until the guy lifted the lollipop.

I see the coach being that guy, because now you have all the service providers around the athlete and somebody has to be controlling that environment so that everyone stays in their place and does the job they're there to do.

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

Coaching has changed so much, so I'd say be careful. You're at risk when you're coaching these days, because if somebody accuses you of something, your career is over. There are too many examples of coaches who have been suspended without any due diligence. Coaching has become a “thin ice” situation, so be aware of what you say and do.

I've also learned not to promise anything. When you talk to an athlete, listen and then think, because if they believe that you promised them something, they can hold that against you forever.

The position of being a head coach versus a personal coach is also very different. As a head coach everybody wants to be your friend, but they're not really your friend, they only want something from you. You have to be clear on who are your friends and who are not.

At UKA, I think the people I worked with were my friends. They were the people that made a difference because, if we hadn't agreed on things, our success would never have happened – that's how simple it is. Being at UKA was the best time of my career ever, and I shouldn't have left it. That's my biggest regret in sport. **AW**

ABOVE: Hannah Cockroft wins gold in the T34 200m at the 2012 Paralympics

# READY TO RACE

**AW**

With spring marathon season firmly upon us, **Paul Freary** runs the rule over some speedy footwear options for the road ahead



**NB**

**SUPERCOMP ELITE V5**

[newbalance.co.uk](http://newbalance.co.uk)

**£230**

Designed with input from Olympic triathlon champion Alex Yee, the SC Elite v5 is definitely race-day proven, helping him to his 2:06:38 marathon best in Valencia in December.

The shoe features the brand's uniquely shaped Energy Arc carbon plate, working with strategically placed midsole voids in the 100 per cent PEBA midsole foam. The result is an

increase in stored energy and higher energy return.

Yee's input ensures a great fitting upper, important for triathlon but also making it excellent for pure road racers. A new outsole also improves traction and is excellent in both wet and dry conditions. The Supercomp Elite brings versatile performance over any distance to anyone from parkrun pacers to marathon PB chasers.

**UNDER ARMOUR**

**VELOCITI ELITE 3**

[underarmour.co.uk](http://underarmour.co.uk)

**£225**

Quietly and consistently placing on podiums at big city marathons, the Velociti Elite returns in this third-generation model. With a newly engineered geometry, the shoe provides a high stack HOVR+ foam midsole with an embedded carbon plate sitting at a ramped angle to create a rockered forefoot and excellent energy return on toe-off.

The shoe feels lighter and faster thanks to the new plate positioning, which rolls the foot forward smoothly from heel to toe; a welcome sensation, particularly in the latter stages of the marathon. It's a reliable and versatile race day option, and one which performs well for a wide range of runners and foot types.



361

FURIOUS FUTURE 2

361europe.co.uk

£200

Inspired by the blue line that typically marks the official marathon route, the Furious Future is tuned for the most effective path forward. The shoe has a rather unique geometry, with a slim heel and broader forefoot. This not only ensures stability but also provides a more cushioned and propulsive push-off. Its carbon plate has zoned hardness to maximise energy return and works effectively.

The shoe really does offer something a little different from many models and, once up to speed, its performance benefits are noticeable, maximising every stride. It's a great value option and one worth considering if you are willing to stray from the more familiar names on the start line.



MIZUNO

HYPERWARP PURE

emea.mizuno.com

£260

At just 137g, the Hyperwarp Pure is one of the lightest shoes ever to hit the road. Utilising a dual layer of Mizuno's Energy XP, a PEBA-based midsole along with a full-length, 3D-shaped carbon plate, the shoe offers exceptional softness and undeniable rebound.

Sometimes, ultra-light shoes can feel too light and not capable of offering sufficient cushioning and protection over longer distances, yet despite its minimalism this feels incredibly cushioned and capable of even a marathon on the roads.

The upper is a simple, single-layer woven design, with a close, sock-like fit, and the outsole a G3 design, which provides great traction in any conditions. For those seeking the very lightest high-performance model, this is a top contender.



SAUCONY

ENDORPHIN PRO 5

saucony.com

£250

Combining the premium PWRRUN HG midsole foam from the Endorphin Elite with the PWRRUN PB foam from the previous generation Endorphin Pro, Saucony have created a light, fast and responsive racing shoe that offers a beautifully

balanced, fast running sensation.

With the brand's Speedroll technology and full-length carbon plate, the Pro 5 has a more pronounced forefoot rocker that comes into its own as the pace gets quicker.

One of the more stable carbon-plated racing shoes on the market, it doesn't sacrifice speed for that stability and feels great at any pace, making it a versatile race day option. For marathon distance reliability, the Pro 5 delivers in a fast and confident manner.



**DIADORA**[diadora.com](http://diadora.com)

The third-generation model of Diadora's pinnacle racing product, the Gara Carbon 3 is lighter, with more energy return, and features a revised full-length carbon plate, making it their best-performing racing shoe yet.

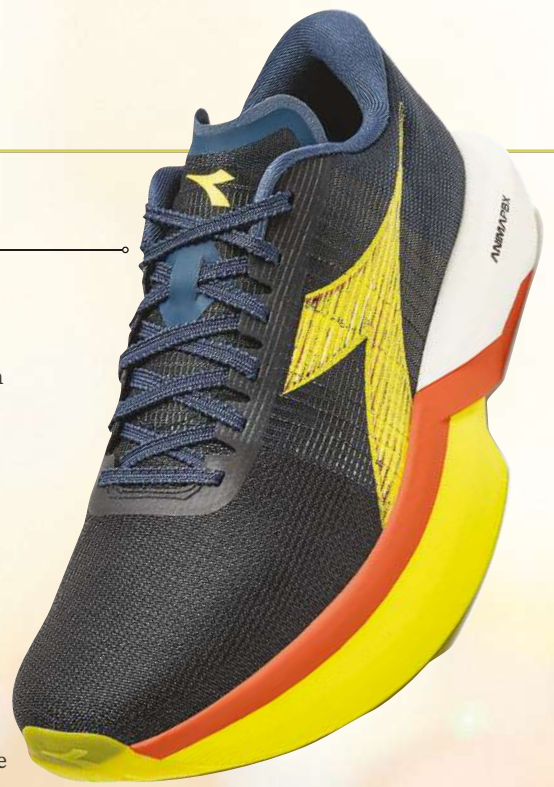
The carbon plate sits higher in the heel and lower in the forefoot, giving it

**GARA CARBON 3**

£250

maximum curvature and, as a result, added toe-spring. Engineered with an ANIMA PBX midsole, this compound improves midsole rebound by 55 per cent while reducing weight by 40 per cent compared to EVA Light. This combination of foam and plate gives an impressive 85 per cent energy return, verified through the brand's lab testing.

The result is a lightweight, highly responsive and very smooth-riding shoe, perfect for the marathon distance for a wide range of athletes.

**MOUNT 2 COAST**[global.mounttocoast.com](http://global.mounttocoast.com)

Mount 2 Coast's new super-trainer aims to add more fun and energy to midweek miles with a high stack of premium and responsive cushioning. The 42mm stack certainly gives a soft and welcoming feel, soaking up the impact of every stride with a balanced yet reactive feel that adds a little "pop" along the way.

**C1**

£180

The broader base and higher sidewalls of the cushioning give it a stable feel, meaning most runners should be catered for.

The brand's signature dual-lacing system also allows for a personalised fit, as well as being able to accommodate a wider range of foot widths and requirements.

**JOMA**[joma-sport.com](http://joma-sport.com)**R5000**

£180

Targeted specifically at marathon racers, this model combines cushioning, stability, responsiveness and durability in a high-performance and good value model. A breathable mesh upper wraps the foot neatly, while the Fly Reactive midsole foam, combined with a carbon plate, provides the cushioning and responsive toe-off.

While not the lightest model at around 247g, it is very capable of providing a stable and responsive feel for the whole marathon distance – and it's in those latter stages where those qualities will be most welcome.

The outsole rubber not only provides good traction but is also very durable, making this a great value racing option for spring marathons.





**BROOKS**

brooksrunning.co.uk

**HYPERION MAX 3**

£160

If you are looking for speed, but with a little added protection, the Hyperion Max 3 offers just that. Built with a combination of the brand's high-performance racing midsole foam and more stable offerings, this gives the best of both worlds.

The cushioning sandwiches a highly curved nylon plate and, as a result, gives a feel of both speed and stability. While not a purely race-day model, it offers great versatility and could be a racing option for heavier runners or those simply wanting a more durable and stable "fast shoe" option.

**PUMA**

uk.puma.com

**DEVIATE NITRO ELITE 4**

£210

Weighing in at 12 per cent lighter than its predecessor, the Nitro Elite 4 makes fast faster! A newly engineered nitrogen-injected NITROFOAM Elite is where the weight reduction has taken place, but it hasn't sacrificed performance. The shoe remains as responsive as ever with a particularly propulsive ride.

Whilst Puma now has two high-performance race day models, the FAST-R3 remains the more aggressive, with this model perhaps being more suited to longer distances. The choice is yours, but they both provide a high level of energy return.

The high-traction Pumagrip outsole still provides excellent grip in any weather, and the ultra-light woven upper remains breathable and foot-hugging for a locked-down performance fit.



**SALOMON**

salomon.com

**S/LAB PHANTASM 3**

£260

The Phantasm 3 has performance levels to match its exciting aesthetic. An upper designed by aerodynamics experts may not strictly be necessary, but it does help the shoe stand out from the crowd. Beneath that stretchy upper shroud are traditional laces and a fit that hugs the foot, ready for top speed action.

The midsole is a mix of PEBA and EVA that, combined with the

specially engineered carbon blade which allows rigidity as well as performance, means the shoe delivers at pace, giving an exciting level of energy return.

Built for speed, this is an out-and-out race day model, and simply pulling the shoe on adds a spring to your stride. It invites speed and certainly responds when you pick up the pace.



# A RUNNER'S SECRET WEAPON

You can train as hard as you like but, without recovery, you're leaving your best performances on the table. Let Enertor help to take the strain

**A**sk any elite runner what separates the good from the great and they won't just talk about mileage – they'll also talk about recovery. The run itself doesn't make you fitter, it just sets the process in motion. The adaptation, the strength, the speed gains – they all happen afterwards.

When you run, every foot strike sends a force of up to three times your bodyweight through your feet, ankles, calves and knees. Repeat that thousands of times over a long run and, by the time you hit stop on your watch, your lower limbs aren't just tired, they're still processing an enormous amount of stress.

This is the problem Enertor set out to solve with their new Recovery Slides. Developed by biomechanics specialists with over 25 years in injury prevention, the Enertor Recovery Slide was engineered specifically for the post-run window and every feature inside it has a precise biomechanical rationale.



## WHAT'S INSIDE?

The centrepiece is Enertor's UltraSole™ technology. Unlike the vague softness of a standard foam slide, this is structured, engineered absorption. It absorbs 50 per cent of impact with every step, dramatically reducing the force transmitted through tissue that has already been working hard.

The 20mm raised heel is also deliberate. After a run, the Achilles tendon and calf complex remain under significant residual stress. The raised heel reduces load on both by shortening the effective range of motion, the same mechanical principle used in Achilles rehabilitation protocols, delivered passively just by wearing them.

The built-in metatarsal pad redistributes pressure away from the forefoot – one of the most heavily loaded areas during running.



The subtle arch support addresses the plantar fascia directly. Together they create a slide that supports the foot in precisely the ways that matter most post-run.

Put them on after a session and the effect is immediate – genuinely cushioned and supported in a way that makes you quietly aware of how little you've been giving your feet after training until now.

### THE PROOF

Independent consumer trials have shown that 92 per cent of Enertor Recovery Slides users felt less pain and soreness after training, while 89 per cent felt less fatigue and 87 per cent felt

they recovered faster. They have been spotted on the feet of Usain Bolt, who described them as “like walking on air”, and British international marathon runner Ben Felton, as well as being endorsed by physiotherapist Aidan O’Flaherty.

The people who best understand the importance of recovery seem to be wearing them already. **AW**



**Enertor Recovery Slides available now at [enertor.com](https://enertor.com)**

A LAP WITH...

## LOUISA STONEY

**Jasmine Collett** talks to the British international who hasn't looked back since swapping ski season for racing spikes



**A**winter spent in the French Alps is not the most obvious springboard into a major championship, but for Louisa Stoney it marked the turning point. Working as a chalet host two years ago in Val d'Isère, she stepped away from athletics entirely, embracing a different pace of life. Yet it was there, away from the track, that her direction became clearer than ever.

"It was the most unbelievable six months of my life," she says. "I gave myself that time to have fun, but also to figure out what I wanted to do. It was during that period that I realised track was what I wanted to give a proper go again."

That decision has propelled her into one of the most significant seasons of her career. Speaking before the World Indoor Championships in Toruń, Stoney was preparing not only for 4x400m duty but also an individual 400m appearance.

She has now gained valuable championship experience, competing in the 400m heats and relay final on the global stage – another important step in her progression. A sense of belief has been a constant, even if the timeline of her rise has exceeded her own expectations.

"I wouldn't say I expected it, but I definitely knew it was possible," she explains. "It was about consistent training, finding the right set-up and being happy in the sport again."

Central to that renewed happiness has been a change of environment. The 24-year-old linked up with coach Marvin Rowe just six months ago, joining a new training group and embracing a fresh start that has already paid dividends.

"It's the best decision I've ever made," she says. "We

work together so well, and we're both really happy. That's when you get the best out of each other."

Stoney's journey back to the sport has been anything but straightforward. Having shown early promise as a youngster, she spent years training without fully realising her potential. A lack of consistency and the disruption of the pandemic eventually led her to step away altogether.

"At the time, I thought I was done," she admits. "I'd been training for so long and nothing really materialised. During Covid, it was hard to keep doing something I wasn't fully in love with."

Her focus shifted towards university and a potential career in finance. She also explored her entrepreneurial side by setting up her own online vintage clothing shop, but the desire that had driven her as a child never truly disappeared.

"Once I came back from the ski season, there was this massive sense of unfinished business," she says. "It's always been my dream to be one of the GB girls. I just had this belief that I could do it."

Since recommitting, that belief has been matched by consistency – something she identifies as the key difference in this latest chapter. The results have followed, most notably at the British Indoor Championships, where she claimed a breakthrough silver medal ahead of Amber Anning.

"I went in not expecting it, but believing it was possible," she says. "If I ran my best and felt good physically and mentally, I knew I could be in the mix. It felt surreal, but also like part of the process."

That performance also brought a Welsh Commonwealth Games B standard of 51.83, lifting a weight off her shoulders before the final.

"I decided to go for it in the semi-final," she explains. "That took the pressure off, so in the final I could just relax and enjoy it. It was super fun."

Now, with her first global championships under her belt, Stoney has already gained a taste of the level required and the environment she aspires to return to.

"I've always had that self-belief," she says. "It was just about putting everything together and giving myself the chance to prove it." **AW**



**If you could train/compete with any athlete past or present, who would it be and why?**

I would have to say Jessica Ennis-Hill. I watched her at the 2012 Olympic Games, and my teacher at school used to say to me, which has really stuck with me through my life: "You're going to be the next Jess Ennis". Obviously I don't do the heptathlon, but she was a key figure for me growing up.



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# AW LETTERS

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## HAVE YOUR SAY



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### A 400m mystery

I was left rather mystified as to why the 400m finals at the World Indoor Athletics Championships were decided on who ran the fastest out of two separate heats.

Time trials have their place in athletics, but not at major championships where, in my view, spectators want to see the best athletic stars clash openly with one another and where heat one competitors are not disadvantaged through not having a time to gauge their effort and pace on. Parity is

everything. If that means only four or five finalists, so be it.

*Martin Ferguson*

### A worrying sign

Your January edition gave a comprehensive fixture list for 2026. As with Euan Crumley and Katharine Merry it whetted my appetite for the season ahead. On the other hand it also highlighted one of the problems with being a British athletics supporter. There is so little to see in this country.

It happens that this year Britain will host the Commonwealth Games and European Championships but that is a one-off. In a typical season if you wish to watch good class athletics you have the Diamond League in London and the UK Championships. And that's it. Season over. No wonder the sport is losing support.

I have been an athletics fan for 70 years and once it was not unusual for me to go to London six or seven times in a season. Sadly those days are long gone. We badly need more home fixtures or the sport could die.

*Alan Currie*

### Devil in the detail

I found the recent feature on athleticsweekly.com about the fitness trackers that the likes of Josh Kerr has been using a very interesting read. It highlighted a growing trend across so many sports where just about every conceivable element is now monitored, analysed and picked over. As anyone who owns even the simplest of GPS watches will tell you, the amount of information available can be overwhelming.

I completely understand why a top level athlete would want to delve into the detail in an attempt to find that small percentage of improvement that could make the difference, but I would still argue that it's never going to replace the very human ability to respond under pressure when it counts.

I'm sure Josh wasn't thinking about any analytics in that 3000m final at the World Indoor Championships when he needed to rely on his wits, nerve and racing smarts.

*Phil Hunterson*

# WHAT'S ON



PHOTO BY LONDON MARATHON EVENTS

## APRIL 4-6

- CARIFTA Games  
Grenada  
[teamathleticsvg.com](http://teamathleticsvg.com)

## APRIL 9-12

- Australian Athletics Championships  
Sydney  
[athletics.com.au](http://athletics.com.au)

## APRIL 11

- English national 12 and 6 stage road relays  
Sutton Park, Birmingham  
[englandathletics.org](http://englandathletics.org)

## APRIL 12

- World Athletics Racing Walking Championships  
Brasilia  
[worldathletics.org](http://worldathletics.org)
- Brighton Marathon  
[londonmarathonevents.co.uk](http://londonmarathonevents.co.uk)
- Paris Marathon  
[schneiderelectricparismarathon.com](http://schneiderelectricparismarathon.com)
- Rotterdam Marathon  
[nmmarathonrotterdam.nl](http://nmmarathonrotterdam.nl)
- BMC Regional Races  
Gillingham  
[britishmilersclub.com](http://britishmilersclub.com)

- Leigh Harriers Spring Throws Open  
Leigh  
[leighharriers.org](http://leighharriers.org)

## APRIL 15

- Watford Open Graded Meeting  
[watfordharriers.org.uk](http://watfordharriers.org.uk)

## APRIL 18

- Loughborough Open inc.  
BUCS 10,000m  
Loughborough  
[bucs.org.uk](http://bucs.org.uk)

- Boston 5km  
[baa.org](http://baa.org)

- B.A.A. Invitational Mile  
Boston  
[baa.org](http://baa.org)

## APRIL 19

- adidas Manchester Marathon  
[manchestermarathon.co.uk](http://manchestermarathon.co.uk)
- Vienna City Marathon  
[vienna-marathon.com](http://vienna-marathon.com)
- UK Youth Development League (upper age group)  
[ukydl.org.uk](http://ukydl.org.uk)

## APRIL 20

- Boston Marathon  
[baa.org](http://baa.org)

- scottishathletics 10,000m Track Championships  
Glasgow  
[scottishathletics.org.uk](http://scottishathletics.org.uk)

- Kip Keino Classic  
Nairobi  
[kipkeinoclassic.co.ke](http://kipkeinoclassic.co.ke)

## APRIL 25

- TCS Mini London Marathon  
[londonmarathonevents.co.uk](http://londonmarathonevents.co.uk)

- Devil O' The Highlands Footrace  
Tyndrum  
[devilthehighlandsfootrace.co.uk](http://devilthehighlandsfootrace.co.uk)

## APRIL 26

- TCS London Marathon  
[londonmarathonevents.co.uk](http://londonmarathonevents.co.uk)

## APRIL 28

- Trafford Grand Prix  
Stretford  
[traffordac.co.uk](http://traffordac.co.uk)

## APRIL 29

- Watford Open Graded Meeting  
[watfordharriers.org.uk](http://watfordharriers.org.uk)

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# FROM THE **AW** ARCHIVE

We travel back in time 40 years to a challenging London Marathon

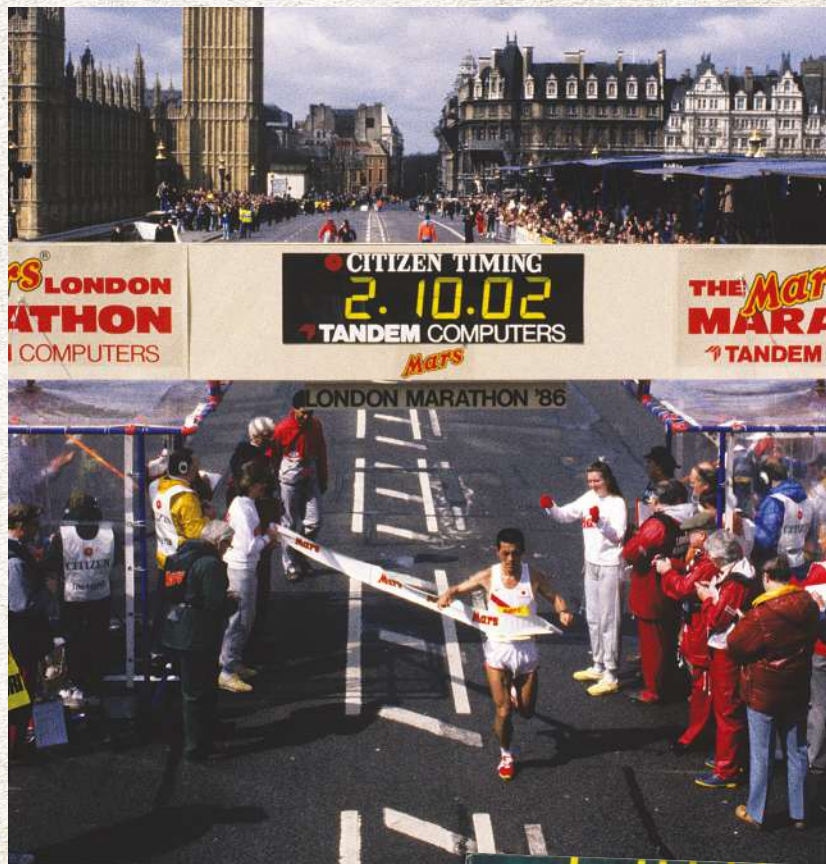
**D**ipping into the *AW* Archives always serves as a reminder of how much the sport has changed but, on this occasion, also how much the London Marathon has evolved.

The edition of April 26, 1986, reported on the sixth edition of the event and proclaimed it being: “The biggest in marathon history. There were 19,261 starters – well in excess of last year’s record figure of 17,500 – of whom 18,175 finished. A total of 200 runners broke two-and-a-half hours with 2317 (56 of them women) finishing inside three hours.”

That is in stark contrast to the world record-breaking figure of 56,640 finishers from last year’s edition.

At the head of affairs 40 years ago was Toshihiko Seko, whose plans for a rapid time were scuppered by the conditions.

“But for the vicious wind which blew against the runners over the final miles, Carlos Lopes’ world best of 2:07:12 might well have been imperilled by Toshihiko Seko,” wrote Mel Watman. “The 29-year-old Japanese displayed magnificent form until exposed to the full fury of the elements. Hopes of a record were high as he reached the half distance in 1:03:30, 15 miles in 1:12:34 and 20 miles in 1:37:16, that last split being one and a quarter minutes faster than Steve Jones’ during his 2:08:16 victory last year. But, whereas Jones covered the final 10km stretch in a dynamic 29:45 in the 1985 race, Seko took a weary 32:46 for a finishing time of 2:10:02.”



The women’s title went to the legendary Norwegian Grete Waitz.

“Any disappointment there may have been in Toshihiko Seko’s winning time was set to rights less than 15 minutes later as Grete Waitz lifted her second London title in great fashion, taking over a minute from her best, set in winning the 1983 event,” wrote Brian Smyth.

“As it turned out, she had to dig deep over the last few windy miles to make certain, but she was rewarded with a 2:24:54, the eighth fastest performance of all time.” **AW**



Every issue of *AW* going back to 1945 is available via our digital archive. To find out how you can access this vast collection of sporting history, visit [athleticsweekly.com/archives](http://athleticsweekly.com/archives)

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