

IAAF YEARBOOK
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365



ACCESSIBLE DIGITAL EDITION

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This content has been modified from the original version to optimise the reading experience on mobile devices.
The document is designed to be fully accessible to people with visual impairments.



President's Message

I am pleased to take the annual opportunity of the IAAF Yearbook to briefly review 2013, a great year across our sport

Looking at the IAAF World Athletics Series (WAS) events in 2013, we had three outstanding competitions: the World Cross Country Championships in Bydgoszcz, Poland in March, the World Youth Championships in Donetsk, Ukraine at the beginning of July, and the World Championships in Moscow, Russia in August.

On a snow-covered parkland course in Bydgoszcz, runners from Bahrain, Britain, Morocco, and USA medalled alongside the dominant east African teams of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Kenya. While four months later in the much warmer climes of Donetsk, the largest ever number of countries and athletes took part in the history of the 'World Youths',
an encouraging sign for the future of our sport.

The highlight of the IAAF's competition programme was of course an unforgettable IAAF World Championships in Moscow with 2000 athletes from 203 nations which was a record for this event. The World Championships, which celebrated their 30th anniversary in 2013, have come a long way since the inaugural 1983 edition in Helsinki. Back then 1333 athletes from 153 countries took part.

In Moscow, 18 countries won gold, 38 countries took medals and 60 placed athletes in the top eight, thus proving once again that athletics is the most universal of all sports and has a unique role to play.

The IAAF has also been active in our fight against the cheats to ensure the credibility of the sport.

Since the adoption of the current WADA Code in 2009, the IAAF has implemented an increasingly aggressive anti-doping campaign and we have been in the vanguard of new measures to combat doping. Reflecting that position, IAAF representatives at the recent WADA Conference communicated the IAAF Congress's strong desire to return to a 4-year sanction for any athlete committing a serious doping offence.

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Yet we must not be complacent about our place in the world of sports. We are adapting our competition programmes to reflect the increasing diversity of the sport and entertainment world from which the public can now choose. Next year's exciting inaugural World Relays, the adoption of a new qualification system for the World Championships to ensure that the 'very best of the best' are competing, and our Kids' Athletics programme which is now activated in over 120 countries, are among our sustained efforts to attract and most importantly retain the young as both participant and spectator. We must achieve this goal if athletics and the whole Olympic Movement are to retain their appeal.

To ensure that the IAAF possesses the organisational structures to achieve that central goal, in 2013 the IAAF Council agreed on a new strategic initiative called the IAAF Strategic Plan which will closely scrutinise every aspect of the IAAF's organisation and management from now until 2016.

I am also determined to make the IAAF's relationship with the IOC a key priority so as to underline and enhance the IAAF's role in the Olympic Movement and the continuing contribution of athletics to the success of the summer Olympic Games.

We must also consolidate commercial stability by looking for significant new sponsorship deals not only for IAAF but for the IAAF Areas to allow them to become increasingly self-sufficient by building access to key markets, especially emerging markets in the Gulf and Asia.

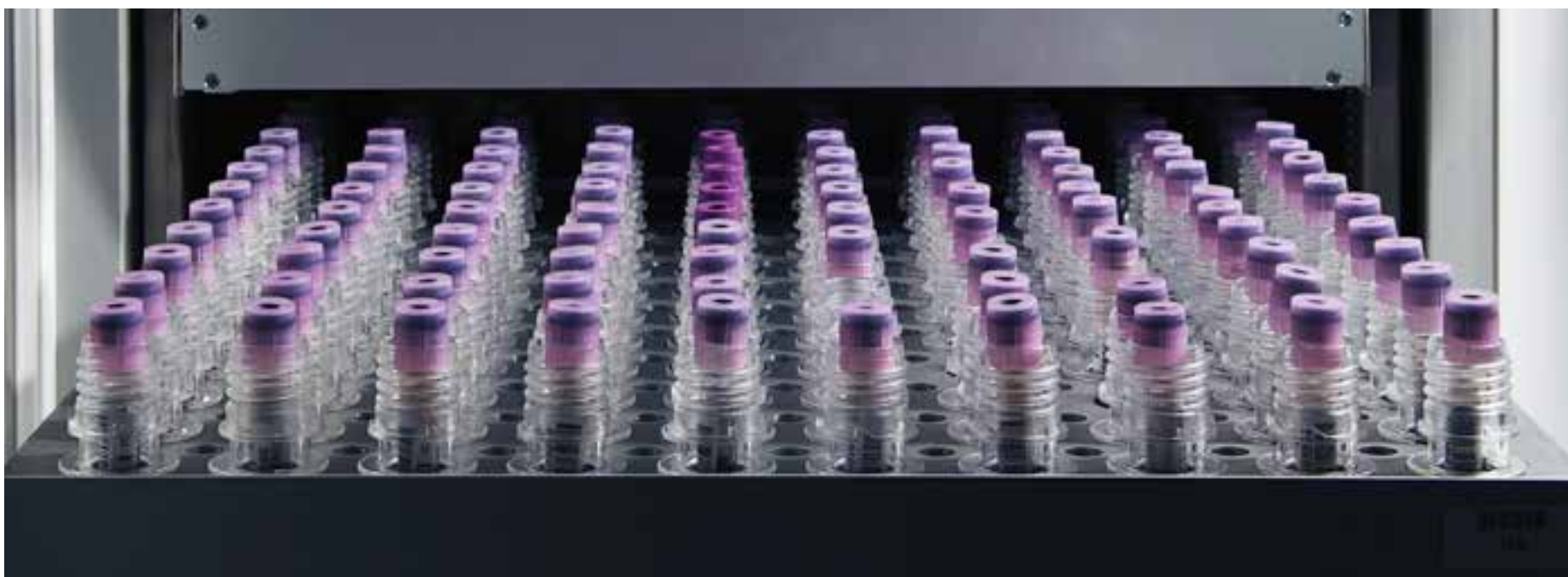
We will continue to make a considerable investment in new media – IAAF website, Facebook, YouTube, etc. – to improve the appeal of athletics to young people with new products and more direct communication methods.

In terms of our competition 'product', we will continually review competition structures and harmonise national, Area and international calendars, gathering the key players under the IAAF umbrella for long term decision making.

We will also continue to promote fair play and ethics, not only in the fight against doping, but against illegal betting and other threats to the integrity of sport, and we strongly support the work of the Sustainable Development Commission who are finalising a new Social Responsibility programme for athletics which will help us to build a better world.

I am confident that with an approach based on teamwork, best practice, firm financial foundations and the support provided by its Official Partners, the IAAF will be more than ready for the challenges ahead.

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In The News

Unprecedented anti-doping programme.

The 2013 IAAF World Championships saw the most comprehensive anti-doping programme in the event's history. A total of 1,919 blood samples were collected for profiling in connection with the Athlete Biological Passport.

This extensive and sophisticated programme built on the success of the equivalent project at the 2011 World Championships in Daegu. It was carried out in partnership with WADA, with haematological screening conducted daily in the WADA-accredited laboratory in Moscow. The corresponding serum samples were then transferred to the WADA-accredited laboratory in Lausanne for further analysis of various blood bio markers.

Testing on this scale relied on full support from the Russian Ministry of Sports, excellent logistical administration from the Local Organising Committee and a dedicated team of volunteers and chaperones.

In addition, the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) contributed their professional team of blood sampling and doping control officers, while the Moscow Anti-Doping Centre, from its new laboratory, managed the largest number of tests ever conducted by the IAAF.

A key part of the programme was an IAAF Athlete Outreach initiative at the main athletes' hotel. This was managed by an experienced team from RUSADA. Hundreds of athletes and support personnel benefited from a large choice of educational documents, quizzes and other free materials.

In addition to the blood sampling, analysis of all urine samples collected at the IAAF World Championships was completed by the Moscow Anti-Doping Laboratory, including the numerous specialised analyses such as EPO and IRMS.

A total of 538 athletes were urine tested during the competition and 132 during the pre-competition period. All urine samples collected in Moscow have been transferred to long-term storage provided by the Lausanne laboratory for re-analysis at a later stage.

From the urine testing carried out, seven athletes, including one finalist, reported adverse findings. All were either sanctioned or provisionally suspended.

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“I am delighted that with the assistance of our partners the IAAF has been able to carry out such a comprehensive anti-doping testing programme in Moscow,” said IAAF President Lamine Diack.

“The specialised analyses and the blood samples taken in connection with the Athlete Biological Passport emphasise the IAAF’s firm commitment and resolve to use the most sophisticated methods at our disposal in the fight against cheating in sport.”

→MORE ANTI-DOPING

Investing to understand injury

A new survey covering the four-week period before the World Championships in Moscow was included in the IAAF’s biennial study into athletes’ injuries and illnesses for the first time last year.

The survey will provide the IAAF with information on problems athletes suffer preparing for a major championship, and help it to develop and implement future prevention strategies to decrease the number of illnesses and injuries at championships themselves.

The studies are part of the IAAF’s work for the IOC Injury Study Group and have set the basis for injury and illness surveillance in all Olympic sports. Their goal is to provide national medical teams with information to help them prevent injuries among their athletes.

Legacy in action at Moscow 2013

Russia’s first IAAF World Championships provided a significant boost for athletics in a country that has long been one of the sport’s greatest exponents.

More than 390,000 spectators turned out over the eight evenings of the event, including sell-out crowds for the final weekend of competition.

In Russia, state broadcaster VGTRK reported record TV ratings for athletics, while a further record was achieved with more than 200 networks broadcasting the championships worldwide.

The 2013 IAAF World Championships marked the first time athletics has been staged in the huge Luzhniki Stadium since the Moscow 1980 Olympic Games.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was present at a breathtaking Opening Ceremony, where he spoke to personally welcome athletes from a record 203 nations to Russia.

As usual, the World Championships provided a platform for outstanding performances from the sport’s greatest names, led by Jamaicans Usain Bolt and Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, who both completed remarkable sprint trebles.

Moscow 2013 also witnessed a number of innovations – including the use of video scoreboards by IAAF Partner Seiko.

→ESSAR GABRIEL ON MOSCOW 2013

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2013: The year of a single world record

When Wilson Kipsang won the Berlin Marathon on 29 September in a new world record time, the Kenyan ensured that 2013 would not be the year that ended one of Athletics' most enduring statistical sequences.

A world record in an Olympic event has been ratified every year since 1907. Technical advancements, better facilities for training and competition, and greater incentives to achieve have all played their part in keeping this record-breaking run going for almost a century.

Although world records are becoming harder and harder to break, leading some experts to suggest that we are nearing the limits of human performance in certain events, men's Marathon seems to be an exception.

In September 2003, the world record was Khalid Khannouchi's 2:05:38. Since then, 62 performances by 40 men have bettered Khannouchi's mark, culminating in Kipsang's time of 2:03:23.

→MORE COMPETITIONS

Congress 'an absolute success'

Delegates from 208 Member Federations took part in the 49th IAAF Congress, which was held in Moscow ahead of the 2013 World Championships in the city.

The biennial Congress had a new look this year, with the inclusion of a one-day World Athletics Forum (see below). The major announcement of 2013 was a new, even tougher Anti-Doping statement, approved by acclamation of the IAAF's highest decision-making body.

The Congress meeting was also the stage for the launch of a new, four-year IAAF Strategic Plan (see right) to replace the Athletics World Plan that concluded at the end of 2012.

IAAF President Lamine Diack presided over the two-day event, which began with a glittering Opening Ceremony, held at the magnificent Gostiny Dvor located next door to the Kremlin.

President Diack hailed the "absolute success" of the Moscow Congress at a media conference following the event.

He said: "Yesterday we had a forum on a series of issues and the delegates were able to discuss many of the challenges and issues that face us.

"This morning it was the beginning of the Congress and we dealt a lot with the future of our sport, and the various actions necessary to ensure a good future for athletics."

→MORE MOSCOW 2013

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Forum for the future

The first World Athletics Forum proved a popular addition to this year's IAAF Congress.

The one-day event, a brand new initiative from the IAAF, was designed to provide an environment for lively and open debate on the future of athletics around the world.

The Forum took place ahead of the main IAAF Congress meeting in Moscow. It featured seven keynote speakers and 17 panellists, each from different countries, who provided perspectives from both inside and outside the Athletics Family. They included guests from Dentsu, the IOC and the World Health Organisation.

Speakers and delegates together addressed issues ranging from the international sports marketplace and changes to competitions structures to the role of the Athletics Family in raising health standards worldwide.

The second part of the forum saw a series of breakout sessions. A workshop on the promotion and development of athletics was conducted by Kenya's Tegla Loroupe. Meanwhile, IAAF Vice President Sebastian Coe and Marathon World record-holder Paula Radcliffe tackled the question of ethics in athletics, while IAAF Council members Abby Hoffman and Frank Fredericks led a discussion on IAAF governance.

Hoffman summed up the success of the new initiative, saying: "We had a terrific level of engagement in our forum. I really hope we'll do it again soon because there was a lot of demand for people to participate in meaningful discussion."

→MORE INNOVATION

A new-century Plan

The IAAF has unveiled its new Strategic Plan – a four-year strategy to propel the sport forward into the future.

The new document picks up the baton from the previous Athletics World Plan (AWP), which came to the end of its 10-year lifespan with the IAAF Centenary in 2012.

The Strategic Plan is designed to build on the success of the AWP with an even more focussed and defined, four-year programme of actions.

It began with a comprehensive strategic review, which ran from April to December 2012.

This process produced a series of insights that have informed the structure of the Strategic Plan document, which is based on the well-established 'pyramid' of Vision, Missions and Objectives.

The three pillars are in turn broken down into an action plan, including four annual operational plans, with a dynamic monitoring system based on year-to-year iteration of the objectives, results and allocation of resources.

The IAAF Council approved the new IAAF Strategic Plan at its meeting in April 2013.

Speaking at the launch of the Plan at the IAAF Congress in Moscow in August, IAAF President Lamine Diack said: "We have carefully defined the core values and role of the IAAF today, but most importantly, what should be our objectives and how we need to change and adapt to meet the challenges of a rapidly-changing world.

"The Strategic Plan aims to ensure that the IAAF in its traditional role as custodian of elite performance athletics provides not only a vision of how our sport can remain strong, but also branch out beyond these boundaries and be able to demonstrate that our values have great relevance to society as a whole."

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Bolt and Fraser-Pryce the toast of Monaco

Once again, the IAAF World Athletics Gala provided a glittering setting for the stars of the sport to be honoured, and this year it was the Jamaican sprinters Usain Bolt and Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce who were named as the Male and Female World Athletes of the Year for 2013.

Bolt, who won the award for a fifth occasion, and Fraser-Pryce, taking the plaudits for the first time, received their trophies in the spectacular Salle des Etoiles at Monte Carlo's Sporting Club d'Été.

The awards were hosted by International Athletics Foundation (IAF) Honorary President HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco and IAF & IAAF President Lamine Diack, who also presented the main trophies. Both athletes also received a prize of US\$100,000 each as a reward for their efforts over the year.

However, as has become traditional, Bolt and Fraser-Pryce were not the only award winners.

The IAAF Rising Star Award went to American teenager Mary Cain, who set numerous US junior and high school middle-distance records and age-bests during 2013, when she became the youngest athlete ever to represent the USA at the IAAF World Championships. Her coach, Alberto Salazar, received the IAAF Coaching Achievement Award in recognition of his work in recent years, notably guiding the career of Great Britain's double Olympic and World Championship gold medallist Mo Farah.

The IAAF Distinguished Career Award went to two field event exponents: the recently retired US long jumper Dwight Phillips and the queen of the pole vault Yelena Isinbayeva - both wonderful ambassadors.

Meanwhile, the IAAF World Journalist Award went to Italy's Gianni Merlo while the USA's Charles Allie and Christa Bortignon from Canada were named as the Male and Female Masters Athletes of the Year.

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Athletics greats join IAAF Hall of Fame

Twelve of the sport's most famous figures were inducted at a special ceremony during the World Athletics Gala in Monaco in November.

Among the legends were British double Olympic decathlon champion Daley Thompson; Russia's multiple middle-distance gold medallist Svetlana Masterkova; the late Parry O'Brien, two-time Olympic Shot Put gold medallist from the United States; American quadruple Olympic sprint champion Harrison Dillard; Australian sprinter Marjorie Jackson, a double Olympic gold medallist; and the late Finnish multiple long distance champion Hannes Kolehmainen, who won his first Olympic gold at Stockholm 1912.

When the Hall of Fame was launched in 2012, it was open to athletes who had won at least two Olympic or World titles, set a world record and been retired for at least 10 years. The criteria were extended in 2013 to admit athletes whose achievements "had an extraordinary impact on the sport."

This allowed French triple Olympic sprint champion and double World Championships gold medallist Marie-José Pérec and the late Grete Waitz of Norway, an Olympic Marathon silver and World gold medallist, to be chosen.

Also in the line-up were Natalya Lisovskaya, multiple Shot Put gold medallist for the Soviet Union; Algerian Olympic and world 1500 metres champion Noureddine Morceli; three-time Olympic Triple Jump gold medallist Viktor Saneyev and his Soviet Union compatriot Yuriy Sedykh, who won gold in the Hammer at both the Montreal 1976 and Moscow 1980 Olympic Games.

The athletes were proposed by the IAAF Hall of Fame Selection Panel, chaired by IAAF Senior Vice President Bob Hersh.

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App Star

A new IAAF multi-platform app brought the 2013 IAAF World Championships to smartphone users as a rich, interactive experience.

More than 110,000 people have now downloaded the free application, which is available on both Android and iOS systems.

Developed by Delatre, the app features rich content and live streaming with an easy-to-navigate design.

During the Moscow World Championships, the most popular feature was the multi-event live coverage, which benefited from an exceptionally fast 'refresh' rate, allowing users to keep up with every second of their favourite events.

The IAAF app has already won rave reviews from technology experts. The developers explain: "We wanted to showcase the many aspects of athletics while making it intelligible and user-friendly even to casual fans.

"The architecture hides the complexity of the sport without sacrificing the quality of an 'official' app – as well as carrying the depth of data that the hardcore fans want."

→MORE COMMUNICATION

Kids lead world athletics day celebrations

Activities to mark the IAAF World Athletics Day took place in 122 Member Federations this year.

The sport's annual worldwide festival of youth has become one of the busiest events in the athletics calendar. Held over a weekend in May, its goal is to build strong links between young people, athletics and environmental awareness.

All those Member Federations entering before the deadline received a pack of promotional items including T-shirts, pins, posters and certificates.

This year saw highlights across all of the IAAF Area Associations. In Bridgetown, Barbados, more than 140 young athletes were the first to compete in the newly refurbished National Stadium. Meanwhile, New Zealand marked World Athletics Day with a team road race organised by the Otago Secondary School Sports Association.

In Mauritania, 3,000 youngsters took part in an event described by Mauritanian Athletics Federation general secretary Boïbou Ould Guig as "anchoring athletics in the shanty towns of the capital."

The Cook Islands celebration in Rarotonga included athletics-themed poetry and song writing. One winning entry read: "Look at you now/Everyone is looking up to you/Your dream come true/All because of these special words/Faster, stronger and ambitious."

To build awareness of environmental issues among young people, the IAAF Sustainable Development Commission also encouraged Member Federations to promote the IAAF Green Project on the day.

Activities included tree planting, inviting athletes to take part in environmental protection projects at training and competition venues, and working with local ecology organisations to develop responsible use of the environment for sport.

In Singapore, the Singapore National Olympic Council and the Singapore Environment Council launched the country's Green Champions programme, with athletes championing sustainable development and delivering important conservation messages.

→MORE DEVELOPMENT

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News from the IAAF partners

Canon Inc has become an Official Partner of the IAAF World Athletics Series from 2013 to 2016.

The agreement covers all WAS events, including the IAAF World Championships in Moscow in 2013 and Beijing in 2015.

Canon has a long history of partnering the IAAF World Championships, having supported the inaugural event in Helsinki in 1983 and also the Rome 1987 staging.

IAAF President Lamine Diack said: “Through their products, we are convinced that Canon can help us connect further people with the emotions of the IAAF’s top events and with athletics in general.”

As well as providing kit to many athletes competing at the 2013 IAAF World Championships, **adidas** clothed the thousands of volunteers working across Moscow. Adidas also tapped into the emerging running market in the Russian capital by organising a 10km road race in June.

Mondo once again provided the competition track for the IAAF World Championships, together with an 80m sprint straight under one of the main stands at the Luzhniki Stadium and two 400m warm-up and training tracks.

SEIKO’s team of more than 60 specialists ensured every run, jump and throw was diligently recorded at the IAAF World Championships. Among the limited edition items available at the Seiko Pavilion was a commemorative edition watch bearing the inscription: ‘The choice of the IAAF since 1985’.

Sinopec, one of the world’s largest integrated energy and chemical companies, has supported the IAAF for three years. As the fourth largest company in the Fortune 500 list, Sinopec has a responsibility to its global consumers and consistently strives to create a successful and environmentally friendly business. These credentials were promoted extensively in Moscow.

TDK has been a bib sponsor since the first IAAF World Championships in Helsinki in 1983, and is contracted as an Official IAAF Partner through to 2019. TDK and Toyota supported the IAAF’s World Record Programme at the 2013 IAAF World Championships, where any athlete achieving a world record was eligible for a special award of US\$100,000.

Toyota, like TDK, supported the IAAF’s World Record Programme at Moscow 2013. It also provided more than 100 low-emission, full hybrid vehicles to transport athletes and officials, and the official lead car for the men’s and women’s Marathon events.

VTB became the first ever Russian company to sign up as an Official Partner of the IAAF World Athletics Series in 2007. In Moscow, VTB used the opportunity of the Championships being staged on home soil to run an extensive hospitality programme for clients, media and VTB employees.

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Just for the record

IAAF World Championships

With 1974 athletes from 206 nations, the Moscow IAAF World Championships was the biggest single sporting event in the world in 2013, the nine-days of action in the Luzhniki Stadium broadcast to a record TV audience in almost 200 territories around the globe.

Jamaican sprinters Usain Bolt and Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce emerged as the individual stars of the championships, winning three gold medals apiece, while host nation Russia topped the medal table for the first time since 2001 with seven golds. The 141 medals from 47 events were distributed across 38 nations. The United States won the most overall with 25, while 18 nations won gold medals and 60 had athletes in the top eight. In all, 14 London 2012 Olympic champions triumphed in Moscow, while 10 World champions from Daegu 2011 were successful again.

Of the three championship records set in Moscow none received a bigger cheer than Bohdan Bondarenko's winning high jump of 2.41m which was greeted rapturously by the vociferous Ukrainian fans who were present every day and helped to swell the overall attendance to nearly 400,000. Almost 60,000 filled the Stadium on the eighth and busiest night of the event, while the noisiest night was undoubtedly the fourth when Russia's poster girl Yelena Isinbayeva delighted her home crowd by winning a third Pole Vault title after a six-year hiatus.

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→FULL RESULTS

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IAAF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS:

Moscow reaches record TV audience

The Moscow World Championships broke all previous records for TV coverage with almost 200 territories across the globe broadcasting the Championships.

The 14th edition of the IAAF World Championships was the largest global sporting event of 2013, and the nine days of action reached a cumulative audience of almost six billion TV viewers worldwide, up on the five billion who tuned in to coverage of Daegu 2011.

Total hours of coverage were up 35 per cent on 2011, with 2876 dedicated programmes and 6036 cumulative broadcast hours.

Most notably, in the host country, Russia, coverage of the Championships almost doubled compared to 2011 - and the cumulative audience grew by almost 400 per cent.

IAAF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS:

A Championship Of Firsts In Moscow

The Championships may not have yielded any world records but there were still a number of notable firsts at the Moscow Worlds.

Usain Bolt became the first athlete to win triple gold twice as he notched up his sixth, seventh and eighth world titles to become the most successful World Championship athlete of all time.

With his two golds, **Mo Farah** became the first European to win the distance double while **Ashton Eaton's** Decathlon victory made him the first man to hold three global multi-event titles at the same time – Olympic, World and World Indoor.

The Decathlon itself broke barriers with 13 men scoring more than 8300 points for the first time. Similarly, seven men cleared 2.32 metres in the High Jump for the first time, while **Teddy Tamgho** became the first man this century to Triple Jump more than 18 metres.

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Although he didn't win a medal, **Julius Yego** became the first Kenyan ever to reach a World Championship field event final while race walker **Robert Heffernan** – Moscow's oldest victor – defied his age to become Ireland's first male World Champion for exactly 30 years.

On the women's side, triple sprint champion **Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce** became the first woman to win the World 100m final by more than a tenth of a second (she won by 0.22s) while **Zuzana Hejnova's** commanding 400m Hurdles win made her the first woman to win the World title by more than a second.

Valerie Adams became the first woman to win four consecutive titles in the same event, becoming the second most successful thrower in World Championship history (one behind German discus great Lars Riedel).

Yelena Isinbayeva became the first woman to win three World Pole Vault titles, **Edna Kiplagat** was the first woman to retain the Marathon crown, and **Christine Ohuruogu** became the first British woman to win two individual World titles.

Silver medallist **Murielle Ahouré** became the first African to win a World medal in the women's 100m, and triple jumper **Caterine Ibargüen** brought history to her country as she became the first Colombian to win a World Championships crown.

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IAAF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS:

Unfinished business

With a fourth successive World title secured in Moscow, **Valerie Adams** boasts one of the finest records of any athlete. But her journey to glory has been far from straightforward. **Steve Landells** reports.

It is tempting to ask: what next for Valerie Adams? The Kiwi titan of the Shot Put circle has won everything the sport has to offer. Besides her four World outdoor titles she also owns two Olympic golds, a pair of World Indoor crowns and is on an unbeaten streak stretching back 42 competitions and more than three years. It is some record.

Nobody would blame the 29-year-old if her motivation wavered. Yet her hunger and desire to be the best remains as strong as ever.

She talks excitedly of extending her Games Record at the 2014 Commonwealth Games. She has a thirst to win titles at the IAAF Continental Cup, IAAF World Indoor Championships and also secure a fourth successive Diamond League crown.

So when asked what motivates the straight-talking New Zealander to keep producing her best season after season, the answer comes from the heart and in one very special three-lettered word: mum.

“When you lose such an important person at such a young age that is where the motivation comes from,” explains Adams, who was aged just 15 when her Tongan-born mum died of cancer. “When she passed away in 2000 that was the moment which made me determined. I could have put my grief and anger into something really stupid, like drinking or smoking, or I could have chosen this road, a road where I knew I had some talent.” From that moment on she has not squandered her gifts.

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Valerie was brought up in a loving family of five (she has two sisters) in South Auckland but life was tough. The whole family lived off just \$40 (NZ dollars) a week and she never owned branded shoes, a watch or jewellery as a child. Clothes were either hand-me-downs or bought second-hand.

Yet Adams always had total admiration for her mum who 'miraculously' managed to put food on the table every night and also set the then-shy Kiwi girl on the road to success.

"She sacrificed a lot of the personal finances to get me to training," she explains. "I loved everything she did for me and she formed what I am today. When she passed away it was the hardest thing I could have experienced in my life."

Vowing to honour her mum's memory, Adams began her athletics career with vigour. She showed her prowess by landing a World Youth title in 2001 and adding a World Junior crown 12 months later. At her maiden World Championships in 2003, aged just 18, she finished fifth and followed that up with seventh place at the Athens Olympic Games.

Her first major senior championship medal was a bronze at the 2005 Worlds in Helsinki. World Cup and Commonwealth titles were snared the following year.

Winning streak

After recovering from serious shoulder surgery, Adams landed her maiden World title in Osaka 2007. So began one of the great championships streaks in modern sport. Olympic gold was secured in Beijing, her World title retained in Berlin 2009. Her career seemed to be heading towards serene perfection. Yet the athletics road is rarely without its pitfalls.

In 2010 Adams endured her 'annus horribilis'. Off the track she underwent a painful divorce and her life quickly started to unravel.

"All I did was compete, party and drink alcohol," she says of a season which failed to reach the majestic heights of previous years. Her body weight started to soar and she contemplated walking away from the sport as her career hit a crossroads.

Dissatisfied with her then coach, everything changed when she met her current coach Jean-Pierre Egger, a Swiss national who had guided the career of three-time men's World Shot Put champion Werner Gunthor.

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If her mother was the motivating factor in the early part of her career, 'JP', as Adams calls him, has become the guiding light for the second phase.

"I'm blessed to have him and the honest to God answer is, if he wasn't here I'd be finished with track and field," she says. "He basically put me back on track again. JP has, honestly, saved everything in my life. Everyone thought 2010 was the end for me. In fact, I was just getting started."

After working together for only 10 days, the partnership showed signs of gelling as Adams produced a season's best performance in winning the Continental Cup in Split with 20.86 metres. Yet if she expected an easy ride under her new coach, he offered a few home truths by insisting she lose weight before flying out to Switzerland to train with him in January 2011. Adams did not disagree with his comments.

"I was a chunky monkey back then and accepted everything that was thrown at me," she says of Egger's remarks. "I didn't want to retire from the sport on someone else's terms; I wanted to retire on my terms."

Adams launched into a gruelling weight loss programme in late 2010, overhauling her lifestyle with a strict diet and exercise regime. Cardio training became a big part of her routine with 2.5km runs, hill running and bike sessions incorporated into the programme. "It was hard," she says, "but I had to mentally buckle down and do it. It was no big deal and I loved every single minute of it."

Adams was some 20kg lighter when she flew into Switzerland and JP set about reconstructing her as an athlete. He started developing Adams' core muscles, an area the Kiwi admits she had neglected in the past. By working on a series of exercises to strengthen her trunk she has had far fewer problems with her back.

"For the five or six years before I met JP I needed back injections three or four times a year just to get through training," she explains. "I haven't had a back injury for 15 months and that is thanks to work he and my physio (Lou Johnson) have done."

With a more solid base to work from she has been able to flourish technically under Egger's wise tutelage. A greater reliance on solid technique rather than sheer power and dynamism has led to far greater consistency and given her the confidence to perform well even on a bad day – something clearly illustrated by the fact she has never lost a competition since she hooked up with Egger.

Deep emotions

Adams completed a hat-trick of World titles under her coach and inspiration in Daegu 2011 – setting an area record of 21.24m in the process – but endured a much publicised tsunami of emotions at the London Olympics a year later. There she not only had to cope with the shock of an administrative error which initially meant she was not on the official startlist, but then was beaten in the final by long-time rival, Nadzeya Ostapchuk.

However, within days despair turned to joy when she was upgraded to gold following the Belarussian's positive drugs test.

It was unquestionably a time of deep emotions for the Kiwi who, although rightfully later presented with the gold medal, missed out on the jubilation of standing on the podium and hearing her country's anthem played inside the Olympic Stadium.

Much has been written about Adams and London 2012, and she is keen to move on. "London happened and I can't change it," she says. "It is part of history and people are always going to bring it up, but for me it is finished. Done. I've got my gold medal now."

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2013 brought further success, although it too was not without its problems when a knee injury plunged her season into jeopardy. However, supported by her outstanding medical team, a 20.88m winning throw in Ostrava in June, after a month sidelined from the competitive arena, came as a 'huge' relief. Adams then secured World title No.4 in Moscow with another throw of 20.88m, comfortably seeing off her rivals.

She then memorably celebrated becoming the first female athlete in World Championship history to win four successive gold medals by writing happy 70th birthday wishes to her coach in black ink on her hands at the medal ceremony.

On returning to her hotel away from the maelstrom of the Luzhniki Stadium, she sat alone in her room where the emotion poured out of her. "I felt empty. I cried for an hour. The 48 hours after a major competition can be very anti-climactic."

The tears quickly subsided. Goals have been reset and new targets drawn up. At the end of September she underwent surgery on her knee and ankle. Next year and beyond she hopes to come back stronger than ever.

"I want to try for World title No.5," she says. "I want to go to the Olympic Games and compete well for New Zealand. I'm 29, and I've had 14 years in the sport, but I feel that I have a little bit more to go.

"I've been very successful and worked very hard to be successful, but it hasn't been the easiest road. I've had a lot of bumps on the journey – personal, emotional, mental and physical. Whatever is left for me in the next few years I just want to enjoy it. I feel very humbled and privileged to know that I can still wake up in the morning and love what I do."

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IAAF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS:

The jump of the champs

BREAKING DOWN TAMGHO'S 18.04M

Teddy Tamgho's World Championships winning effort of 18.04m will be for many people the single most outstanding performance of 2013.

It was the longest Triple Jump in the world since 1998, the fourth best jump ever and the feat elevated him to third on the all-time list behind Great Britain's Jonathan Edwards and the USA's Kenny Harrison.

The Frenchman is now less than the length of his special jumping spike away from the world record of 18.29m. So just how did Tamgho uncork such a jump to clinch the gold medal, with the penultimate attempt of the competition?

Although he was in the lead, he could not relax completely as his Cuban rival Pedro Pablo Pichardo was still to jump.

"One of the reasons, was that I was lighter arriving in Moscow but retained my strength. At other championships I had been 81kg before arriving and lost a kilogramme or two through nerves and stress during the course of the championship," said Tamgho, reflecting on his momentous achievement at the World Athletics Gala in Monaco last November.

"This time I was 75kg. This meant my power pushed me a little further.

"I am also a more balanced jumper than some of the others, my first two phases are much more synchronized, but I have to work on my run up and final jump.

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“During my last jump in Moscow, I still didn’t run at 100 per cent and I was also six centimetres behind the board, so there was some distance to spare on that jump.

“The key to a really good jump is speed and it’s that component that I didn’t use fully in Moscow. To go very, very far, you have to hit the board at top speed.”

“The relative lack of speed means that I am not completing the final phase as well as some other jumpers.”

It is noticeable that Tamgho’s third phase was ‘only’ 6.58m, compared to Edwards’ 7.05m with his world record jump.

“I do think about the world record and other people have been telling me about it as well. In fact, my big foul in the fifth round was around the world record and I was just 1.6 centimetres into the plasticine.”

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IAAF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS:

Long walk to glory

Robert Heffernan

Irishman Robert Heffernan ended his nation's 30-year wait for a men's World Champion when he walked to 50km gold in Moscow. It was the end of a long journey for him too, as he told Paul Warburton.

So there was Robbie Heffernan outside the bank in Cork having just been told 'no' – he couldn't have a £1500 loan to get to a training camp.

Back in 2002, it wasn't the first setback for a walker who, despite all kinds of adversity, last August became the first Irishman since Eamon Coughlann 30 years before him to win an IAAF World Championship gold as he marched to victory in Moscow's 50km Walk.

Heffernan can reel off a chapter of struggles before he made what he calls the 'breakthrough' in 2004. That was the moment he realised a talented athlete needed to become 'professional'.

It's a word the 35-year-old uses a lot – that and 'massive'. It was massive when he realised he needed to do something about his preparation, and wrote to walks superstar Robert Korzeniowski for help. And it was just as massive when he left the four-time Olympic gold medallist and World champion in 2009 to kick his career on another notch.

He did so to huge effect, sparking a response at home in Cork that has been bigger than massive. So intense is the attention that Heffernan has had to find new training routes so he can concentrate on what he does best.

He laughs when asked how many autographs, to the nearest 5,000, he's signed since his walk of fame. "Yeah, I'm recognised everywhere at home – but in a positive way," he admits. "You have to move on though, you can't just sit on what you've done. People are great: they shout, wave and clap and you want to acknowledge them, but I need to focus on the next thing."

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It was this single-mindedness, this dogged belief that he was getting better all the time, that made him stick at it through all the years, from the days when he was just a cocky hopeful on the eve of the 1999 IAAF World Cup ticking off a list of all those he and his Irish team-mates were going to beat the next day.

A year later, after a brilliant lead-up to the 2000 Olympics, the first thing he did following a relatively disappointing 20km was to pick up a pen. Korzeniowski opened the letter and for four years Heffernan followed the great man all over Europe to see what it took to make a champion.

This was the Irish walker's self-proclaimed 'hippy' phase, a time when he shared rooms and slept on floors, 'piggy-backing' off other walkers and physios, going to training camps, taking whatever could be scrounged to make progress – that and dealing with bank managers who said they weren't going to give him a loan for anything as daft as race walking.

"I wrote to Robert in 2000 after the Olympics," Heffernan explains. "I wasn't happy. I had walked 2:31 for 35km in training, which is still faster than what I did in Moscow and at the London Olympics. A day later I walked 11:30 for 3km, and a week later I set another Irish record for 10km – and all in the space of six days.

"And then I went out to Sydney and walked just 86 minutes. If you looked at me objectively, you might say here's someone with a massive talent – what's going wrong?

"So it was about observing Robert for four years up to Athens [the 2004 Olympics]. I trained really hard for it, but there was no proper professional structure and I got stress fractures and hernias and all kinds of things, but from 2004 I never looked back."

The nearly years

That's when things became more 'professional' with a programme that eventually took him to Moscow where Heffernan nosed ahead at 40km and widened the gap all the way to the line in the Luzhniki Stadium. What used to be hit-and-miss in his early career had become as close to certainty as he could make it.

"Robert made it clear what was needed," says Heffernan. "You didn't get a pat on the back for turning up and training. There were specific goals to be met and we tried to work out how best to achieve those."

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What followed were a string of near-but-no-cigar races where Heffernan was always up for a prize – but never quite made it. Fifth place at the European Cup at Leamington Spa in 2007 was particularly gutting. Heffernan felt sure there was a bronze to be won that day around Victoria Park in the Warwickshire spa town, but a last 230m inside 40 seconds by a Russian and a Belarussian relegated him to fifth.

It's often said the worst place to finish an athletics competition is fourth, for all the obvious reasons. However, only one of Heffernan's three such finishes rankles with the Irishman – the one from Metz at the next European Cup. His fourth place in the Barcelona European Championships 20km was "a bit disappointing", he says, but Heffernan was delighted to be fourth again in the 50km just days later as he broke yet another Irish record. His fourth in the London Olympic 50km was a personal best by a distance and, in fact, two seconds quicker than his winning time in Moscow.

"People talk about winning a medal as the most important thing, but if you can see you're making progress that's also important," he says. "All these races were the things that made me believe I was still on the right track."

In between came the moment when Heffernan felt he needed to ditch the man who had guided him so far, the decision finally coming after he'd finished a distant 15th in the Berlin 2009 World Championships 20km.

The Irishman needed to do it his way, with like-minded people around him and in the right environment – and to that end there was no place like home.

"I needed to create my own set-up in Cork and at camps, and I walked away from Korzeniowski in 2009 – that was a massive jump to do something like that to him," he says. "I was going to pack it in after Berlin, but decided to put a load of people around me because I always believed there was the chance of a genuine improvement if the resources were around me.

"You're always evaluating, progressing, growing, and this was a time when I needed to do a bit more."

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The winning team

Heffernan's wife Marian was among the first to greet her ecstatic husband after he won in Moscow, and she is her husband's day-to-day manager. Heffernan's conditioning coach is Robbie Williams and his physio is Emma Gallivan, whose schedules have been tailored to suit her charge. Gallivan reckoned the walker was calmness itself before the gun in Moscow.

"He was chatting away, cracking jokes," she says. "He puts everyone at ease around him. Rob was quiet, but he still put us all at ease. He is not one of those athletes you have to be careful what you say around him before a big race. You can act normal around him. He was the same as ever.

"We spent about 15 minutes mobilising the key areas just before he went into the call room. He was great, quietly confident."

The race itself was the culmination of a year geared to performing in the Moscow 50km. In fact, it was probably a blessing in disguise when he pulled out of the Rio Maior IAAF Challenge walk in April with a chest infection.

He took a tumble in the European Cup 20km in Dudince in May to finish ninth, way outside his personal best of 1:19:22, but was focused and ready for Russia when it mattered. Now he admits the follower has become the Pied Piper.

His training group, searching for new routes around Cork, includes Brendan Boyce, who was 25th in Moscow, and Alex Wright, a Briton who, like Heffernan way back, has gone to learn at the feet of the new master.

"It's the new generation, and Alex and Brendan are hopefully getting the advice and mentoring they need by watching me daily," says Heffernan. "You take Alex, there's no money as usual in walking, but he's there coming over on the bus to try to improve. For me, it's a way of putting something back as well as having a decent group."

Now, it's heads down again for the European Championships in Zurich next August, with a warm-up 20km at the World Cup in Shanghai in May. And then there'll be another two years build-up to Rio 2016 and his last Olympics.

After that, the man who will then be 38 reckons he is going to have a bit of fun and milk the longest encore known to athletics.

"What I would like is a last year or more where I can be a journeyman," he says. "You know, having it a bit easier and maybe high-fiving a few people at races or whatever. Maybe the last race will be the [2017] World Championships in London – that would be a massive way to finish."

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The team boss

Q&A

Patrick McGonagle

Senior team manager athletics Ireland

As senior team manager for Athletics Ireland in Moscow Patrick McGonagle had special reason to celebrate when ‘Robbie’ Heffernan crossed the line, as he explained to Paul Warburton.

Where were you watching the race in Moscow?

I was out on the road, and when it became obvious that barring a disaster Rob was going to win, I had to think on my feet and make sure there was a grand reception for him back in the stadium. I belted back, and rallied any Irish around as well as making sure I had his wife Marian with me.

At the end when he crossed the line, I made sure Marian got on the track to greet him – not an easy thing, I can tell you, in Moscow with all the security – but it was a great bit of PR for Robbie and Irish athletics.

What was the importance of Robbie’s win to Irish athletics bearing in mind only two athletes before had won World gold wearing the Irish green?

That’s right: the wins by Eamonn [Coghlan, 5000m 1983] and Sonia [O’Sullivan, 5000m 1995] were a way off. Robbie’s win was very, very significant because he had taken on the Russians, who were expected to win in their own backyard, and beaten them.

He’s now a household name in Ireland and it’s given everybody a boost back here. When you get 80,000 people at a Gaelic football match cheering a race walker, as they did at a half-time presentation, you know you’ve made an impact.

It’s a bit difficult to say in the short term whether this will see more Irish walkers, or even other athletes – but when you get the man in the street debating the rules of walking, you’ve got to think there are possibilities.

You go back a way with Robbie, I understand?

He first came to my attention in an U23 match in 1999, and there’s been a lot of water under the bridge since then. But he’s the last man standing from a talented group, and is already something of a role model for the new generation leading up to Rio 2016.

I always knew he was a great lad and a deserved winner as Irish Athlete of the Year – but I’ve also discovered since his win that he handles himself well given all the publicity and attention. It’s great promotion for the sport of athletics.

It must have been particularly gratifying for you to witness the win in Moscow as you were the person who told him his mother had died just before the World Championships in Daegu?

Absolutely. That was a trying moment, the sort of thing you can’t prepare for.

I got a call from back home and needed to get to him before anyone else did. I understood he had gone out for an afternoon stroll, and I was waiting for him at the gate to the village when he got back.



IAAF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS:

Moscow gains

Essar Gabriel sets out the benefits of staging the IAAF World Championships in Russia

Q&A

Essar Gabriel

Secretary General IAAF

Why did the IAAF want to take the World Championships to Moscow?

There were three main reasons. First, in terms of performance, Russia is one of the best nations in our sport. It is a country with a proud tradition and a history of great champions and accomplishments. So it's logical that at some point we would want to take our World Championships to Russia. Second, Russia is part of the BRICS group of nations and therefore important for the development of athletics – both today and in the future.

Finally, Moscow's bid for the Championships in 2007 received very strong support from the Russian Federation and the city of Moscow.

Were the Championships a success?

A great success. More than 390,000 spectators attended the evening sessions of the Championships, which is more than we had in Daegu in 2011. The huge Luzhniki Stadium had not hosted an athletics event since the Moscow 1980 Olympic Games. Apart from football, no other sport has succeeded in filling this venue – let alone for nine days in a row. It was also nice to see how the stadium got more and more full as the event went on.

In addition, we had a record 200+ networks broadcast the Championships, and we expect final viewing figures to far exceed the 5bn we achieved with Daegu 2011.

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I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you – to the All Russia Athletics Federation and its President; to the Russian Federation and its Minister of Sports; the city of Moscow and its Mayor; to all the staff of the Local Organising Committee and also to the people of Moscow who rallied to come out and celebrate this great event with us.

What were the legacies of the Championships?

In Russia, they saw record TV ratings for athletics, and thanks to the great performances of their champions such as Isinbayeva, it is certain that the tradition of athletics in the country has been reinforced.

In the context of the World Championships, the IAAF also signed a landmark agreement with the Russian Federation's Ministry of Education in 2012 to implement our Kids' Athletics programme through the national education system. That is one of the ways we were able to optimise and maximise the legacy of staging the World Championships in Russia.

What were some of the promotional initiatives implemented by the local organisers?

The city of Moscow ran a strong communication campaign in the lead-up to the Championships to reach out to the youth. They also ran a spectator programme to have young people from across the city and region come and enjoy the event.

Promotion was also spread throughout all the country. As an example, the organisers engaged the community of the Chuvash region of Russia, which is the real hub of race walking worldwide. Buses were organised to bring fans down to Moscow to support the athletes. It was wonderful to see that community lit up to celebrate our beautiful sport.

Were there any significant 'firsts' achieved at Moscow 2011?

I have already mentioned the record broadcast figures. In addition, our partner Seiko introduced their new scoreboard technology, moving from LED to video. I believe this is a very positive move, placing them at the forefront of innovation. We also had our IAAF app which gave every fan with a handheld device immediate access to results and has been very well received.

What are the key criteria for a successful World Championships?

There are three main ones. First, the choice of partners – the city and the national federation – which conditions how well we collaborate in the preparation. Second, the location itself and its ability to maximise what the Championships are about, both in terms of the long-term and also the event experience with the involvement of the local community. Finally there is the sporting side: the performance of the local team. But really the IAAF World Championships are up there among the mega-events. They are an attraction in themselves beyond athletics for any sports fan.

Will the IAAF continue to take the World Championships to new territories?

Yes, we will pursue this as part of our overall strategy for developing the sport in all its components, whether at the grassroots or the highest level. We are looking to stage events both in countries where the sport can – and needs to – develop further, alongside territories where athletics is already mature and cherished locally. If you look at the next two editions – in Beijing in 2015 and London in 2017 – that gives you a good illustration of what the IAAF is looking to do as we enter our second century of existence.

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Just for the record

IAAF World Cross Country Championships

After taking a year's break in 2012, the IAAF World Cross Country Championships returned to the world athletics calendar in 2013 when 398 athletes from 41 countries tested themselves over the challenging terrain of Myslecinek Park on the edge of Bydgoszcz in northern Poland.

Kenyan athletes won all six gold medals when the championships were held at the same venue in 2010, and Kenya again emerged as top nation winning three of the four individual races and five of the eight gold medals on offer overall on an icy cold day in March.

The impressive Hagos Gebrhiwet upset the Kenyan train when he won the junior men's race for Ethiopia, helping his nation to the team title in that event, while Ethiopia also won the senior men's team gold.

Teklemariam Medhin from Eritrea was the only athlete from outside Kenya or Ethiopia to win an individual medal while USA's senior men provided the surprise of the championships by claiming silver in the senior men's team competition.

Britain was the only European nation to make the podium – the UK's junior women bagged a team bronze medal.

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IAAF WORLD CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS:

Spotlight on Hagos Gebrhiwet

Winner of the Junior Men's race in Bydgoszcz, Ethiopia's Hagos Gebrhiwet has progressed at such a rate that many commentators are already asking whether the 19-year-old could develop into one of the all-time distance greats.

Gebrhiwet switched to athletics from football as a teenager, running his first inter-school 5000m race at age 15. Two years later, in 2011, he was representing Ethiopia on the international stage at the IAAF World Youth Championships.

Gebrhiwet credits his experience in Lille, where he placed fifth over 3000m, as a significant factor in his subsequent development.

A breakthrough year in 2012 saw the then 18-year-old claim his first Diamond League race and a world junior record at 5000m on the way to securing a place in Ethiopia's Olympic team.

In 2013, he warmed up for Bydgoszcz by smashing the world junior indoor 3000m record at the IAAF Indoor Permit meeting in Boston, USA.

Football's loss, then, is athletics' gain. And Gebrhiwet has no intentions of turning back: "I think that (playing football) has given me the endurance I have now," he says. "But my ambitions for football are finished. I am not a frustrated footballer; athletics is my destination."

Nevertheless, there is one thing that continues to frustrate the young sensation: the up-and-down performance of his beloved Arsenal FC. "I am disappointed every time they are defeated," says Gebrhiwet, whose own trajectory is proving much more even.

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IAAF WORLD CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS:

Hosts with the most

The 2013 IAAF World Cross Country Championships marked the second time the event has been held in Bydgoszcz in just three years. Phil Minshull examines Poland's impressive legacy as one of athletics' most frequent host nations.

Not long after Sopot's Ergo Arena opened in October 2010, the singing superstar Lady Gaga brought her audience to its feet and received rapturous applause and adulation.

In March, it will be the turn of athletics diva Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce to attempt the same trick at the 2014 IAAF World Indoor Championships, arguably the biggest event to be staged in the indoor arena (notwithstanding the night Lady Gaga took The Monster Ball Tour to Poland).

To accommodate a Mondo track and provide the best viewing for athletics fans, the Ergo Arena has been reduced in capacity from its pop concert configuration of 15,000 and will become an all-seater venue able to accommodate 10,731 paying spectators, athletes, VIPs and media, making it one of the biggest arenas ever to stage the World Indoors.

As with previous editions, the seats will be occupied not just by the host country's athletics fans but by visitors from around the world, making the championships a truly global event both on and off the track.

"We already know we have big groups of fans coming from across Europe and, indeed, from all around the world, including the USA," says the Local Organising Committee Competition Director Jerzy Smolarek. "Ticket sales domestically have been as we have expected so far and so we expect very good crowds."

Lady Gaga found that Polish pop fans are a very appreciative bunch when their heroes rise to the occasion, and athletics aficionados in the country have gained the same reputation in recent years when Poland has hosted a series of top class events.

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Both the 2010 and 2013 IAAF World Cross Country Championships were staged in nearby Bydgoszcz and although Polish athletes didn't get close to a medal on those occasions, the local fans charmed everyone, providing a warm welcome and generous reception to the overseas visitors, including the runners from east Africa who swept all the individual medals in all four races on both occasions.

The 2008 IAAF World Junior Championships and 1999 World Youth Championships were also held in Bydgoszcz and, turning the clock back a bit further, the 1987 IAAF World Cross Country Championships were staged in the Polish capital Warsaw. In addition, last year's WMRA World Mountain Running Championships were also in Poland, held in the mountain resort of Krynica-Zdroj.

Safe hands

So just why is Poland such a frequent destination for top class world and European athletics events?

"Poland has been a regular and well trusted host of IAAF competitions. In 2013, the city of Bydgoszcz, for the second time in its history, delivered an exceptionally well organised and atmospheric edition of the IAAF World Cross Country Championships and we can rest assured that the organisation of Sopot 2014 rests in similarly safe hands," commented IAAF President Lamine Diack recently.

"And the IAAF World Indoor Championships represents the pinnacle of the year's competition in a season without an edition of the outdoor IAAF World Championships or the Olympic Games."

However, there is more to staging major international athletics than just being a safe pair of hands. Indeed, it's about more than just making sure that athletes arrive on time at the arena, or checking that the many rules and technical details for all 26 events are executed correctly.

"Athletics has a special place in the hearts of the public who are interested in sport in Poland," explains Smolarek. "We have a long history of organising good events and we have had great athletes, both from the past and the present, so the support for athletics events is always there."

Indeed, the history of event organisation and athletics success stretches back almost a century.

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The Polish athletics federation was founded on 11 October 1919, one of the earliest athletics federations in the world to formally come into existence, just a few years after the formation of the IAAF in 1912.

The first Polish national championship was held the following July, which makes it one of the oldest established national championships in the world, and the first Polish athlete to win an Olympic gold medal was the discus thrower Halina Konopacka in 1928, the first Games which allowed women's events on the programme.

Poland has frequently won places on Olympic Games and World Championships podiums ever since, its athletes claiming a total of 23 Olympic and 12 World gold medals.

Perhaps the greatest of all Polish athletes is Irena Szewinska, who won three Olympic gold medals in the 1960s and '70s, as well as five European titles, and set 10 official world records. Now 67, she remains very visibly involved in the sport as a member of the IAAF Council and has been instrumental in campaigning for major championships to be awarded to her home country.

"There has never been an athletic event of this magnitude in Poland before," she says. "There has never been an outdoor World Championships or European Athletics Championships here but we wanted to continue to stage top quality athletics events, so hosting the World Indoor Championships was an excellent proposition.

"It is a great honour and privilege, not only for Polish athletics, but Poland as a whole, and Sopot with its Ergo Arena is an excellent place to have these championships."

The two IAAF inspection visits last year reflected Szewinska's optimism that the championships will be a success, especially from a technical and promotional perspective. The only uncertain thing still is how well the Polish athletes will perform.

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Polish hopes

In Istanbul two years ago, the only time the Polish flag was raised at a medal ceremony was when Tomasz Majewski finished third in the Shot Put. In Sopot, Poland will be looking to Majewski to lead the way again and hopefully upgrade his two bronze medals from the 2008 and 2012 Championships.

“I’ve got to be honest, before Sopot was awarded the championships in 2011, I did not believe that I would be fighting for a world title in front of the Polish audience,” confesses Majewski. “It will be my sixth championships so I know how difficult it will be to win there. I’ve never won a World Indoor title, but it would be wonderful to hear the national anthem on home soil.”

The championships, which have a budget of US\$6.5 million, will certainly put Sopot on the map internationally.

The Black Sea resort is already well-known within Poland. It is often referred to as the summer capital of the country due to its long sandy beaches, its plethora of bars, restaurants and cafes, and its historic pier. However, it’s also fair to say that its international profile remains a little modest, despite its obvious attractions.

This is something the public authorities hope to change and one reason why the city council is contributing approximately a third of the budget, with additional help coming from Poland’s Ministry of Sport and Tourism.

“These championships are a chance for a huge, global promotion of Sopot and the whole region,” says the current mayor of Sopot Jacek Karnowski.

There is expected to be a global television audience of around 140 million viewers with live coverage in no less than 90 countries, and highlights available in another 90, which means that Sopot’s non-athletics attractions will have an unparalleled global reach.

The athletics legacy of the Sopot championships will in fact be a legacy for the whole of Polish athletics, for after the championships the Mondo track will be moved permanently to the city of Torun.

As Polish athletics and public authority officials have been keen to stress, helped by a buoyant economy which has bucked the trend of the recessions that have beleaguered many other European nations, Bydgoszcz 2013 and Sopot 2014 are just the beginning of their ambitions.

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Just for the record

IAAF World Youth Championships

A record 1532 athletes from 162 nations took part in the eighth IAAF World Youth Championships in Donetsk's RSC Olimpiyskiy stadium, the first World Athletics Series ever to be staged in Ukraine. The beautiful weather provided perfect conditions for the young athletes, yielding three world youth bests, 12 championship records and scores of personal bests.

As many as 22 nations won gold medals, and 37 had athletes on the podium. Jamaica topped the medal table, their six golds coming exclusively from sprints, hurdles and relay events, while the United States claimed most medals overall with 17.

Kenyan and Ethiopian athletes dominated the middle and long distances, winning all races from 800m upwards, including both steeplechases, bar the girls' 800m where Aníta Hinriksdóttir utilised her singular low-slung, widearm style to bag Iceland's first ever World title at any level.

There were significant firsts for other nations too, not least in the boy's 100m where Mo Youxue became the first Chinese athlete ever to win a global sprint title (see page 50), and in the girls' Pole Vault where Robeilys Peinado became Venezuela's first athletics World Champion.

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IAAF WORLD YOUTH CHAMPIONSHIPS:

Breaking through

Donetsk 2013 saw two nations achieve their first-ever global athletics titles.

Robeilys Peinado vaulted to an historic first for Venezuela (see right), while 800m runner Aníta Hinriksdóttir was front page news in her native Iceland as the country celebrated an unprecedented gold.

Silver medals at the Olympic Games and IAAF World Indoor Championships had been the best previous result for the Volcanic island located in the middle of the Atlantic.

But Hinriksdóttir's strong run – in a championship record of 2:01.13 – ensured the Icelandic national anthem of Lofsöngur rang out in the RSC Olimpiyskiy Stadium for the very first time at this level.

"I have such a good coach that I will stay and train in Iceland until at least the Rio Olympics," said Hinriksdóttir.

"I think it's a good place to be. We have nice paths in the woods that are very good for running, a track, and in the winter we have an indoor track. I do a lot of training indoors but I also like running in the snow, it makes you stronger."

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Q&A

Robeilys Peinado

Pole Vault Venezuela

Eumar Essa spoke to the history-making Venezuelan about her plans in the sport

What does it mean to you to be the first world athletics champion from your country?

It means a huge amount – not because it's athletics history, but simply for myself. This is my medal; a reward for my effort and dedication, and the sacrifices I've had to make. The fact that it's the first athletics medal for Venezuela is just a coincidence. It's my first, plain and simple.

How has your life changed since that win in Donetsk?

It's changed, and I don't know if for better or worse. I have a lot less privacy now; less time for myself. It's become impossible for me to separate my athletics and my personal life. Any place I go in my free time – whether to a movie theatre or a store – somebody will come up asking for a picture and taking me back into the world of athletics when I'm trying to have a break.

So what's the upside?

Spending time with young kids, which I love. I've always loved being around children, and now I'm surrounded by hundreds of them telling me that they want to follow in my footsteps, and that they see me as a role model and an inspiration. That's something that makes me very happy.

How did your classmates react to your achievement?

I attend a school for talented athletes, where there are champions in many sports, such as judo, wrestling and cycling. The other students are happy for my success, but this kind of achievement is pretty much normal in my school.

What do you think your medal means for sport in your country?

In reality, it's not a major breakthrough. Venezuela has improved a lot in all sports; many athletes from different disciplines are reaching the same or similar goals that I achieved. I feel we can all get there. Only an Olympic medal would be something really extraordinary.

What does the future hold for Robeilys Peinado?

I'm at the start of an Olympic cycle that I hope will take me to Rio 2016. I'm moving up into the senior squad, and I also have two very important commitments in my age category for 2014: the World Junior Championships in Oregon, where I hope to make the final, and the Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing. I'm top of the rankings for that competition, so hopefully I'll confirm my 'favourite' status.

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IAAF WORLD YOUTH CHAMPIONSHIPS:

Blazing a trail

At the World Youth Championships in Donetsk, Mo Yuxue made history as the first Chinese sprinter to win a World 100m title. Is China about to become a force in world sprinting? Yan Xiaoyan investigates.

In the world of sprinting, rarely do we think of Asian athletes among the challengers for top titles. Chinese male sprinters in particular have long been lagging behind. But since Beijing 2008, there have been signs that China is at last catching up. In fact, Chinese men's sprinting could be heading for a golden age.

Look at the stats: between 2010 and 2013, more than 10 national men's sprint records were broken in China, many of them in 2013.

Lao Yi started the ball rolling with a surprise performance at the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou where he claimed titles at both 100m and 4x100m relay, setting a national and Games relay record with his team. He was followed by the youngster, Xie Zhenye, who took 200m gold at the first ever Youth Olympic Games that year.

The following year, Su Bingtian, a fairly stocky athlete from Guangdong, grabbed his moment to shine, breaking the national indoor 60m record and then lowering the Chinese 100m record to 10.16 seconds.

In 2012, China's male sprinters went from strength to strength. Su progressed to the semi-finals of the World Indoor Championships in Istanbul and continued making history at the London 2012 Olympics when he qualified for the 100m semi-final. Over the same period, China's relay team established four new national records, and Xie Zhenye set a 200m record of 20.54.

China's sprinters continued to reach new highs in 2013. At the Nanjing indoor meeting, Su and Xie refreshed the national records for the men's 60m and 200m respectively. A few weeks later, at the Beijing Sport University indoor meeting, Zhang Peimeng further improved Xie's brand new 200m mark, and later in the year, at the Zhaoqing Grand Prix, Zhang set another national record, running the 100m in 10.04.

Then came last summer's string of successes. Mo made Chinese athletics history in Donetsk while Zhang ranked ninth overall in the Moscow 100m, his time matching the Asian record of Japanese athlete, Koji Ito, set in 1998.

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At the National Games, just a few weeks later, the showdown between Zhang and Su once again set sparks flying – Zhang ran 10.08, the fastest 100m recorded at the event since the introduction of electronic timing.

To the outside world, all this may look like a sudden change. But in reality – although China's male sprinters have long paled beside their counterparts from the great sprinting nations, and were outrun in Asia by Japanese athletes – they have never relented in their pursuit of speed.

Su Bingtian's coach, Yuan Guoqiang, was himself a famous Chinese 100m runner in the 1970s, setting national records in his time. His coaching has produced a string of stellar sprinters, including Lao Yi, Liang Jiahong and Su. These runners now form the mainstay of China's sprinting future and its current relay team. Since the Chinese Athletic Association adopted a strategy of using the relay to improve individual event performance, China's sprinters have been working towards this goal, although arguably their progress in individual events has also boosted their relay performances.

Following Liu's lead

Liu Xiang's success in the men's 110m Hurdles was a shot in the arm for Chinese athletics, and particularly for China's male sprinters. When Liu took the world No.1 spot in a speed-based event, he overthrew past assumptions, proving that Chinese people could also be fast runners.

Encouraged by Liu's success, China's sprinters have since adopted a training programme with a scientific focus. Luo Chaoyi, former director of China's Athletics Administration Centre, said many years ago that if China wanted to perform well in the men's 100m, it would first have to find promising youngsters and put them through a long, scientifically-sound training programme.

However, training methods were outmoded and modern technology lacking. If China wanted to perform at international level, the most direct solution was to learn from the major sprinting nations. With this in mind, the Athletics Management Centre introduced an 'Invite in, Go global' approach.

'Invite in' means inviting high-level coaches from overseas to introduce advanced coaching practices to China. While boosting Chinese athletes, these coaches also help to train up Chinese coaches. 'Go global' implies seeking more opportunities for Chinese athletes and coaches to head overseas for training and competitions.

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This strategy began with race walking and throwing events, where Chinese officials not only recruited famous coaches from overseas, but allowed a number of its athletes to train with foreign coaches and compete abroad. There is plenty of evidence to show that the strategy had a positive impact and, judging by performances over the last two years, this clearly extends to men's sprinting too. Zhang and Su have both had stints training overseas, and both have had more opportunities to attend international competitions than has been the case in the past. Since 2011, Su has spent nearly every winter in the United States. In 2012, he trained at the Michael Johnson sprinting club in Allen, Texas, adapting his technique according to recommendations from his coach.

As Su remembers: "The US sprinters were complete muscle machines. I told my coach that there was no way I could put on that sort of muscle, but he didn't give up on me. He said that it wouldn't be easy for me to build myself up like them, but if my technique improved, my running could still move up a level.

"In the past, I focused on being faster, on upping the pace. Now I know how to break this into stages and distribute my strength. Since last year, and through this year, I have constantly been changing my training strategy.

"I used to be really fast out of the blocks, but my coach told me that if I was too fast at the start, I would run out of steam in the latter stages of the race, so I took his advice and made some changes to my start. This year I've trained better than in past years; both my technique and strength have seen some improvement."

Zhang has been spending his winters in Florida, while Xie, a pure 200m sprinter, has studied in the States in the past, generally training with Olympic 110m Hurdles champion Aries Merritt under the direction of Carl Lewis's former coach.

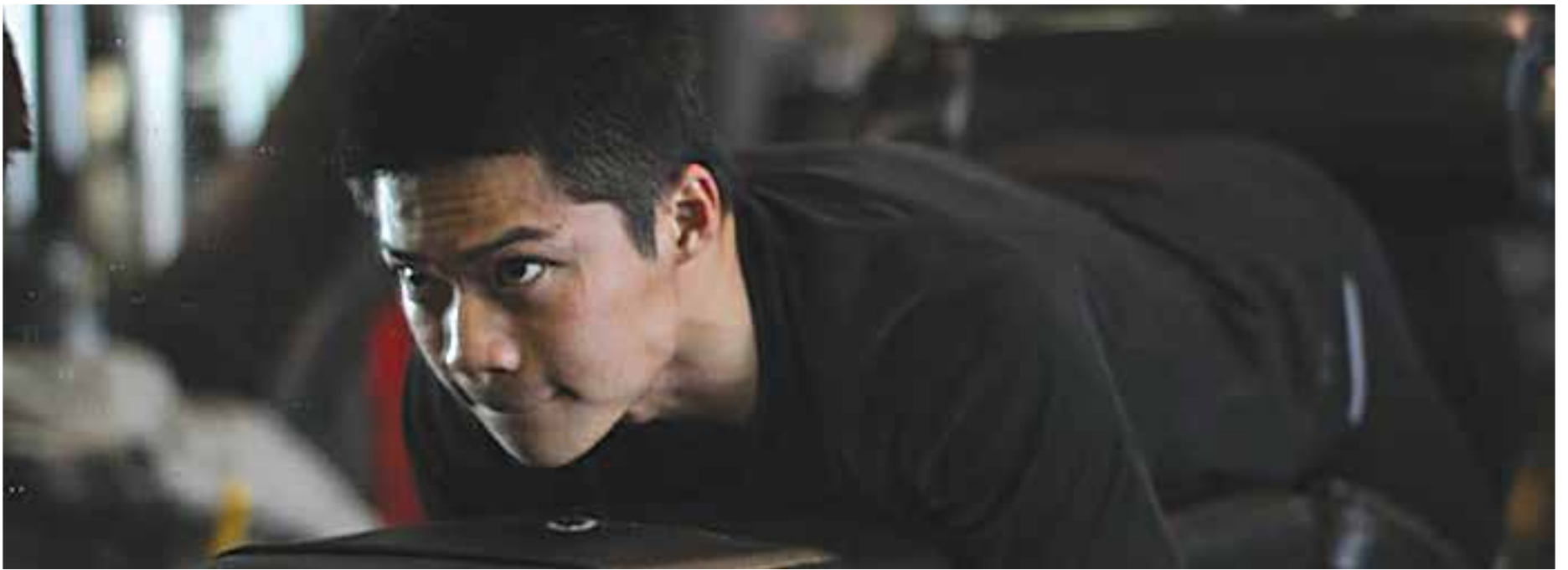
Making headway

These exchanges and learning experiences have helped Chinese sprinters make considerable headway. As coach Yuan Guoqiang puts it: "A lot of our training methods were passed down by coaches or predecessors, much of it borrowed from the Soviet model.

"Now, the world has changed and our training methods and approach are also being adjusted. Training overseas can't produce results in just a month or two, or with the odd trip every couple of years, but if we keep chipping away, we will see results. It pays to persevere."

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Zhang's coach Li Qing was formerly a researcher at the National Research Institute of Sports Science. He studied abroad in Germany in the 1980s at the universities of Mainz and Freiburg before finally earning his Masters degree at the University of Gottingen.

As a returnee to China with considerable overseas experience, Li believes the main gain from studying and training overseas is that it widens horizons. "Foreign coaches aren't necessarily any better than us, nor do they necessarily know more about sprinting than we do," he points out. "All they have to do is put together an effective, tailor-made training package for their athletes. Many US athletes are born fast, so it's enough for coaches to work on their technique. Chinese athletes, on the other hand, need more training to run at such high speeds.

"But we must head overseas, and see what the competition is like. We must be part of this scene – we won't improve if we don't compete against other athletes. We used to train away in Chinese universities, but that never allows you to compete at international level."

In recent years the Chinese sports establishment has also focused on encouraging Chinese athletes to make breakthroughs at international competitions by setting up incentives for them to participate and excel. "We have established a clear incentives mechanism," reveals Qiu Zhenxian, a former triple jumper and head of second tier sports at the Chinese Athletics Administration Centre. "If you produce a good performance at an international event, then you'll be rewarded.

"In February, pole vaulter Yang Yansheng jumped 5.80 metres, ranking fifth globally and surpassing our target of 5.75m. We presented him with an instant 100,000 RMB reward. The same sort of mechanism is being developed for sprint events. I'm sure that athletes will continue to improve their performance and I expect to see a sub-10 100m time very soon."

In 2015, Beijing will host the IAAF World Championships. Although it may be too early to talk of medals for China's sprinters, Zhang's 10-second time in Moscow – just 0.009s from qualifying for the final – reminds us just how close Chinese sprinters are to competing for major medals.

"We are much closer to realising our dreams," says Zhang. "I want to be the first Asian athlete to run under 10 seconds.

"What is success? Success means having a name that will be remembered."

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Just for the record

IAAF Diamond League

Three continents, 14 cities, 15 days, 31 winners – the 2013 IAAF Diamond League series lived up to its promise to present ‘the best of the best’ of world athletics, pitching the sport’s biggest stars in intense competition over four months.

From the steamy heat of Doha to the final fireworks in Brussels, the world’s top athletes competed for Diamond Race points in 32 disciplines with the aim of clinching a coveted Diamond Trophy and a winners’ cheque for US\$40,000.

At the end, two athletes emerged with spotless Diamond League records having won all seven contests in their events. Czech 400m hurdler Zuzana Hejnova and Croatian Discus thrower Sandra Perkovic both achieved ‘perfect sevens’, between them covering all 14 meetings in the series (read their Diamond League diaries on page 56).

Four other athletes went unbeaten in 2013 – Valerie Adams in the Shot Put (five meetings), triple jumper Catherine Ibarguen (six), sprint hurdler Dawn Harper-Nelson (five) and high jumper Svetlana Shkolina (four).

The most consistent men were Ukrainian high jumper Bohdan Bondarenko – who provided one of the season’s highlights in Lausanne (see page 62) – and US shot putter Ryan Whiting. They each won five meetings despite having never won at a Diamond League meeting before.

Hejnova and Perkovic scored the most points for one event with a maximum 32 each, but top scorer overall was Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, who notched up 35 points from 10 appearances to win both the 100m and 200m races – a feat even her countryman Usain Bolt has yet to achieve.

→**FULL RESULTS**

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Meeting notes

While no world records were broken on the track or in the field in the IAAF Diamond League, several meeting directors set new benchmarks for their events in 2013. Here are some of the highlights.

DOHA, QATAR

10 MAY

Billed as the best meeting ever held in Doha, the season-opener lived up to expectations, featuring 10 Olympic Champions and seven meeting records.

EUGENE, USA

1 JUNE

A sell-out for the 17th consecutive year, the 2013 Nike Prefontaine Classic also achieved the considerable feat of 'trending' on Twitter in the USA with the hashtag #preclassic.

ROME, ITALY

6 JUNE

For the first time, an innovative 'Golden Gala pass' was made available to fans, giving them the opportunity to move around the Stadio Olimpico and enjoy reserved seating close to all of the events.

OSLO, NORWAY

13 JUNE

Usain Bolt lit up a rainy night in the Norwegian capital. He arrived at the Bislett Stadium in some style – in a Formula E car – and left with a huge meeting record of 19.79 seconds at 200m, finishing the night with a turn on the decks at an after-meet party.

LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND

4 JULY

More than 1,000 children in six Swiss cities were able to participate in the pre-Athletissima Kids' Clinic, which sees the stars of the meeting turn coaches for the day.

LONDON, GREAT BRITAIN

28-29 JULY

Tickets for the Sainsbury's Anniversary Games sold out in just 75 minutes, guaranteeing that London's 80,000-capacity Olympic Stadium would be full for both sessions of the IAAF Diamond League's only two-day meeting.

ZURICH, SWITZERLAND

29 AUGUST

A week of special athletics events to coincide with the Weltklasse 2013 culminated in the all-Switzerland finals of the UBS Kids' Cup, held in the legendary Letzigrund Stadium. World Champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce was on-hand to present the medals.

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HEJNOVA
PERKOVIC



IAAF DIAMOND LEAGUE:

The Perfect Race

Hejnova Perkovic

Two athletes dominated the IAAF Diamond League in 2013, each recording a maximum seven victories out of seven. As luck would have it, Czech 400m Hurdles star **Zuzana Hejnova** and Croatian discus thrower **Sandra Perkovic** achieved their wins in alternate meetings. **Mike Rowbottom** collated the pair's diaries to create a full review of the season

DOHA

Qatar Athletic Super Grand Prix

10 May

Sandra Perkovic: 68.23 (WL, MR) I was really prepared for this competition, but I was also afraid as I hadn't competed for six or seven months because I injured my shoulder and didn't throw for a whole month.

At 11.00 in the morning on the day of competition, I got a pain in my right ankle. I was so angry. I thought "Oh my God! I don't believe it. I have trained, trained, trained and now this happens."

It was hard for me to walk, but I kept going because in competition I don't feel anything. And I threw 68.23, close to my personal best of 69.11. It was the best start to a season I have ever had.

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SHANGHAI

Shanghai Golden Grand Prix

18 May

Zuzana Hejnova: 53.79 (WL) It was my first time in Shanghai and it was a very good meeting with a good atmosphere, although the weather was not so good.

It was a good start to the season for me. I was very surprised – I think it was one of the most demanding races for me because although I had prepared very well for the season and I expected I could run 54 seconds I couldn't know how my body would feel after the long journey and with the time difference. So I was very satisfied with my race.

I watched the men's 400m because Pavel, my training partner, was running. But he had a false start. He was very disappointed – it was a long way to go for a false start!

NEW YORK

Adidas Grand Prix

25 May

SP: 68.48 (WL, MR) When you fly in you see the Statue of Liberty and you feel like you are in some kind of movie. It was nice too to meet up with old friends and other competitors who had not been in Doha – I spent some time with Blanka (Vlasic).

I wanted to keep up with the distance I had thrown in Doha, but it was a very hard competition. We threw at 9.00am, in 10 degrees, with wind and rain. I went to the bathroom three times during the competition to put warm water on my hands and neck. They couldn't do anything about the rain where we were sitting because it was coming in from the side.

When I threw 68 I realised "Sandra, when you are awake, when you are asleep, you can throw 68." I knew after that competition I was going to be the No.1 in Discus that year.

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EUGENE

The Nike Prefontaine Classic

31 May

ZH: 53.70 (WL) The atmosphere in Eugene is really perfect because there is a smaller stadium there than say in Shanghai or London. It is better for the athletes because they feel the spectators are very close to them.

It looked like an easy run for me in the end but it wasn't so easy because there was a very strong wind over the first 200 metres. I concentrated on trying to run easier than normally there so I saved my power for the end. I was surprised to finish clear of the field because I was racing against the other seven girls from the London 2012 Olympic final, which meant I was very nervous before the race.

ROME

Golden Gala

06 June

SP: 68.25 I love competing at the Olympic Stadium with all the statues outside it. When you see such things it is as if all the blood inside you rushes up.

But I didn't feel well. Before the competition I was warming up and I couldn't do things quickly. The next day I had flu – I had a terrible flight back to Croatia.

The Rome circle is a perfect circle. Not too fast, not too slow. If it is like this I can feel the throw all over the circle. And so I had another very good performance.

OSLO

ExxonMobil Bislett Games

13 June

ZH: 53.60 (SB) This was quite a hard race for me as the weather was not so good and I was feeling very tired. Coming over the ninth and tenth hurdles I felt I was level with Perri Shakes-Drayton, but in every competition this season I had a really good finish because of all the work I have been doing in training racing against male athletes. I was stronger over the final few metres – but after the race I was very tired.

BIRMINGHAM

Sainsbury's British Grand Prix

30 June

SP: 64.32 The day before Birmingham I threw at the Mediterranean Games. It was a crazy journey. My competition in Mersin ended around 9pm, and I had to catch a 10.15 flight from Adana – which was an hour's drive away. Our driver got there in half an hour, he was driving like crazy. When we got to Istanbul it was 11.00, and I had four hours' sleep in a hotel before the flight to Birmingham. I got there at 11am, went to the hotel, threw down my bags and had a shower, and at 11.35 we were travelling to the stadium for the competition.

When I got there the other girls were thinking, "She was competing in Turkey last night. Why is she here? How could she make it?"

I was in the lead with 64.17, and I made 64.32 in the last round. It was enough to win.

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LAUSANNE

Athletissima

04 July

SP: 68.96 (WL, MR) I love Lausanne. I always like to visit the Olympic Museum. When you go in you go under Javier Sotomayor's world record in the High Jump. You stand and think, "Oh my God, this is so high!" Of course I am very proud to go there as Croatia's first Olympic champion.

It was a great competition in Lausanne. When I compete I don't watch the other results, because you have to concentrate on yourself. But when (Yarelis) Barrios made her throw there was a big noise in the stadium and in that moment I needed to watch what happened. When I saw on the screen it was 67.36. I thought, "Oh my God, that is a good throw." And my coach was teasing me, he was saying "Aha Sandra, what happened to you now? You are not No.1." I said, "We will see about it." And I threw 68.96.

I wanted to throw 70 in Lausanne because it is a stadium that deserves it, but I couldn't focus on my other throws. For my victory I got a 7kg cheese which I cut up into small pieces for my friends and family.

PARIS

Meeting Areva

06 July

ZH: 53.23 (NR) I love Paris very much – the city, and the stadium as well. It is quite close to the Czech Republic so when I run there my family and friends can come and watch me, and my coach was there as well. My boyfriend, Jan [Jan Zalud, the Czech national record holder at the Pole Vault] was there this year, so it was good. My elder sister, Michaela, was also there – she is a former heptathlete who now works as a policewoman. So it was like a home atmosphere for me and I wanted to do my best for them.

I spent an extra day in Paris so we could go sightseeing. We went to Montmartre, and the Eiffel Tower, and the old city. My boyfriend's cousin lives in Paris, so we visited him and celebrated my national record by drinking some champagne.

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MONACO

Herculis meeting

19 July

SP: 65.30 I had trained very hard before Monaco. I like it very much– people recognise me there and like me. It is a special place in the world – all the fast cars and the shops – and I love competing at the Herculis Stadium. The athletes are treated so well. But the circle is too fast, too slippery for the Discus.

I wanted to win it because I knew then I would get the Diamond Trophy, but the circle wasn't good for a great result. All the athletes were down on their normal distances. I think we need to tell the meet director because the meeting is always interested in what the athletes have to say.

Barrios had a great first and second round throw, but I woke up with my fifth to win with 65.30. If they fix the circle next year I can throw 70.

LONDON

Sainsbury's Anniversary Games

26 July

ZH: 53.07 (NR, WL) I knew that if I won in London I would be the overall winner of the Diamond Race in my event before the World Championships began in Moscow, so that was a big motivation for me.

Perri Shakes-Drayton also ran her PB in this meeting. It was a strange race because she was very fast at the beginning – faster than she had been in our previous races. I think she was excited about running in London – because she was disappointed in other races she wanted to show her home crowd what she could do. I was 5m behind her at one point, and I was a little bit nervous because Perri was running very fast. But at the end I was stronger again so I was very happy.

STOCKHOLM

DN Galan

22 August

ZH: 53.70 (MR) I didn't feel well, because it was very close to the World Championships and I was very tired. The weather was not good. It was difficult to find motivation after already winning the Diamond Race and the world title, but I told myself that I did not want to lose any race in the season and this became my strong motivation.

ZURICH

Weltklasse Zürich

29 August

ZH: 53.32 I had raced in Zurich maybe a couple of times before and loved the atmosphere in the Letzigrund Stadium. Everything was well organised there. The spectators really know their athletics. It was a very good race for me because I ran my fourth best time at the end of a long season, so I was very satisfied. It was perfect, and I could finish the season unbeaten.

My boyfriend was with me in Zurich and the day after the race we visited the city and walked through the Old Town. It was a really nice way to end the season.

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BRUSSELS

Belgacom Memorial Van Damme

06 September

SP: 67.04 After I won the gold in Moscow I felt like someone had kicked my ass. I had a back operation in 2009 and on the day of the Moscow qualification I couldn't move properly. It was a big problem. Some people said I needed to stop, but I said, "No, I must win this gold." So I got medical help and I was able to qualify, but after the final I could hardly walk.

Next was the meeting at my home in Zagreb, and I had my only defeat of the season, which was a big shame. But when I got to Brussels I did a first round of 67.04 and so I stayed unbeaten in the Diamond League. I don't know how I did it.



IAAF DIAMOND LEAGUE:

Nearly man

For all that 2013 was a year of great success for **Bohdan Bondarenko**, the new World Champion's Diamond League season was defined by a string of agonisingly close attempts at the High Jump world record. **Jon Mulkeen** asked the Ukrainian to reflect on a summer that ended with the consolation of a coveted Diamond Race title

Q&A

Bohdan Bondarenko

High jump

Ukraine

You opened 2013 with victory in Doha with a PB. Were you surprised?

I was very surprised because it was my first competition of the season. For a couple of weeks before the competition I had to ease off in training because I had pain in my knee. Once my season got underway, I realised I was in the best shape I had ever been so I tried not to peak too soon as I knew my results would progress.

At some early competitions you stopped jumping for higher heights after you had won the competition. Why was that?

I either had little injuries, or the weather was bad. Also sometimes the long flights to competitions made me tired. For example, I arrived in Gateshead only 12 hours before the competition. With it being a long season with big competitions, I didn't want to burn out.

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At what point did you realise you were capable of breaking 2.40m?

I watched my jumps in Birmingham and realised I had it in me.

Which Diamond League meeting was your favourite?

I liked Lausanne most of all. It's a great stadium with great support. The food is also wonderful, especially Swiss sweets. Without the stiff competition I faced in Lausanne, and at some of the other meetings, I wouldn't have been able to produce such good results.

Perhaps my most challenging competition was the one in Berdichev at the end of the season. I was tired and it was pretty cold and rainy. As the newly-crowned World Champion, I didn't want to lose so I decided to take only two attempts: one at the beginning and the second when the bar was at a winning height. I began at 2.20m and didn't jump again until the bar was at 2.34m. I didn't clear on my first attempt, putting me in a pretty precarious position. That was when I realised it was my most difficult competition. Thankfully I went on to clear 2.34m to share the victory with Yuriy Krymarenko.

You attempted the world record several times. Which do you feel was the closest?

I was really well prepared for London because I'd been training seriously for two weeks without any competitions. I now realise that was probably the best chance I had at breaking the world record, but I was overcome with emotions.

Your attempts at 2.47m in London looked really close. Do you regret not trying at 2.46m; it looked as though you could have cleared that?

I have no regrets because I believe I can achieve that height in future. The journey to the top is much more interesting than being at the top.

What do you feel it will take for you to break the world record next year?

I'd love to do it, so I'll try everything in my power, but I don't think it will be easy.

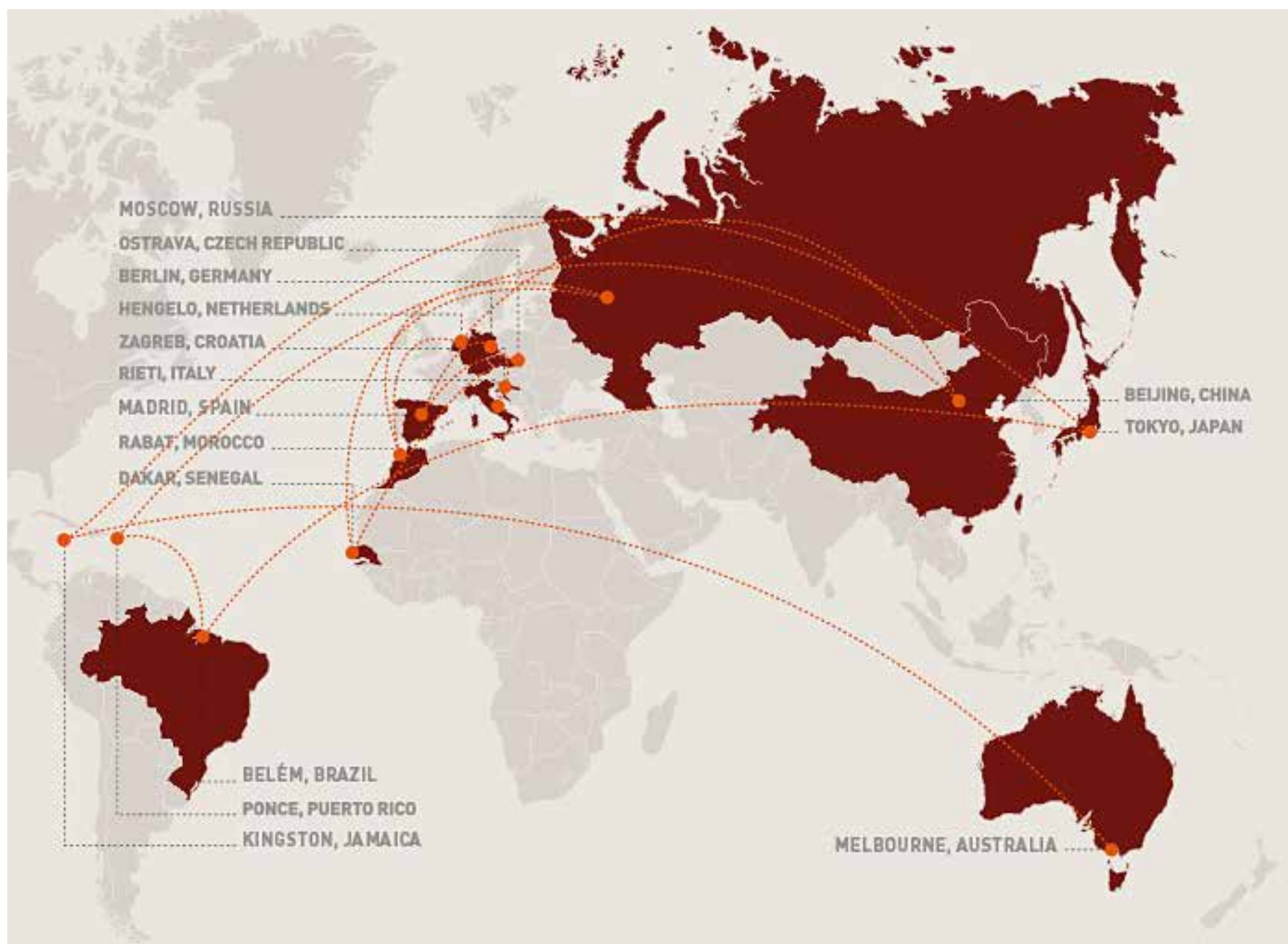
With no global outdoor championships next year, what are your goals for 2014?

Apart from the world record, one thing I'd like to try is opening a competition at a height above 2.30m.

Long-term, what would you like to achieve in athletics?

I have a lot of goals. Obviously, I'd love to be an Olympic Champion. I never get tired of winning and I love jumping in front of a passionate audience and feeling their support. And I won't sleep until I've broken the world record.

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2013 IAAF WORLD CHALLENGE

With 15 events spread across five continents, the second tier of global one-day meetings provided a platform for some home talents to shine alongside the sport's greatest names. It was a year of record success - on and off the track

→FULL RESULTS

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Just for the record

Elsewhere in 2013...

IAAF Challenge event series and sanctioned events

Race to Talence

IAAF COMBINED EVENTS CHALLENGE

Ukraine's Hanna Melnychenko added the IAAF Combined Events Challenge to her 2013 World title when she won her third contest of the series at the final competition in Talence, bringing her overall tally to 19,310.

By contrast, men's winner Andrei Krauchanka of Belarus finished only 11th in Moscow, but withstood a late-season challenge from Canada's Damian Warner to take victory with an overall total of 25,084.

Lashmanova: winning worldwide

IAAF RACE WALKING CHALLENGE

World 20km Race Walk champion Elena Lashmanova of Russia dominated the women's IAAF Race Walking Challenge, notching up three victories over that distance to give her a winning tally of 38 points. Australia's world bronze medallist Jared Tallent regained the men's title he won in 2008.

Poles on top

IAAF HAMMER THROW CHALLENGE

For the first time in its four-year history, the men's and women's titles were won by athletes from the same country as Pawel Fajdek and his Polish compatriot Anita Wlodarczyk topped the standings with record scores.

Fajdek's best mark came in Dubnica (82.27m) and at the World Championships (81.97m). These distances combined to give him a narrow 6cm advantage over Hungary's Olympic champion Krisztian Pars, winner of the Challenge for the past two years.

Wlodarczyk was beaten in Moscow, but her consistency across the season paid off and she won the Challenge by more than six metres from World Champion Tatyana Lysenko.

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Boston breakthroughs

IAAF INDOOR PERMIT MEETINGS

With no World Indoor Championships to aim for, the 2013 Indoor Permit meetings gave athletes an early-season opportunity to shine – and no-one took their chance with more gusto than Hagos Gebrhiwet.

The 18-year-old Ethiopian brought the Indoor Grand Prix in Boston to a rousing finale by smashing the world junior 3000m record, beating Olympic silver medallist Galen Rupp in the process.

That proved to be the stand-out performance of the six-meeting series, although it was far from the only highlight. Indeed, the Boston meeting gave the world its first glimpse of US high school star Mary Cain as the 16-year-old chased Tirunesh Dibaba home. Cain went on to finish 10th in the World Championships 1500m, the youngest athlete ever to represent USA at senior level.

Also in Boston, Murielle Ahouré broke the meeting record for 60m, signalling her intentions for the year, which came to fruition with two World silver medals in Moscow. The Ivory Coast sprinter also stole the show from Mo Farah in Birmingham by running the seventh quickest 60m of all time, beating both Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Carmelita Jeter.

A tale of two continents

30TH WMRA MOUNTAIN RUNNING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Kenyans may command the worlds of cross country and road running but it was Uganda's men who dominated the WMRA Mountain Running World Championships in Krynica-Zdrój by filling the first four places.

Philip Kiplimo led three of his compatriots across the line in the senior race after completing the three-lap 13.56km course in 54:22. His better known countryman Geoffrey Kusuro was second with Nathan Ayeko third.

It was a bad day for former champions as Eritrea's 2012 winner Azeria Teklay could only finish ninth and USA's 2011 victor Max King dropped out with a twisted ankle after stepping on a loose rock.

By contrast, the women's race belonged to Europe as Italy's Alice Gaggi celebrated her 26th birthday by beating Britain's Emma Clayton. With Gaggi's teammate Elisa Desco third, Italy also picked up the team honours.

In all, 329 athletes took part in the World Championships, with the medals spread among 10 of the 39 competing nations.

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Records and surprises

IAU WORLD ULTRARUNNING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Unexpectedly sweltering weather conditions greeted competitors in the last of two IAU World Championships staged in 2013.

The 4th IAU Trail World Championships, held in the tough forest terrain of Llanwrst, North Wales, saw 120 athletes from 18 countries tackle a 77km course in hot sunshine.

Ricky Lightfoot took gold in the men's event, leading Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the team gold, while Nathalie Mauclair achieved the same feat for France in the women's competition.

Earlier, the IAU 24 Hour World Championships celebrated their 10th anniversary in Steenbergen in the Netherlands.

The day-night race attracted some of the world's best runners, with both team titles going to the USA.

The individual crowns were won by Jon Olsen (USA) and Mami Kudo of Japan, who clocked up a superb new world best of 249km in the women's competition.

The final event planned for 2013 – the IAU 100km World Championships – sadly had to be cancelled owing to local issues.

New ground for Masters

20TH WORLD MASTERS ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

The World Masters Athletics Championships came to Latin America for the first time as the 20th edition was celebrated in Porto Alegre, Brazil in October.

There can be little doubt over the stars of the meeting. US sprinter Charles Allie and Canadian all-rounder Christa Bortignon were so dominant in their respective events that between them they left with no fewer than 11 gold medals.

Allie not only won M65 golds in the 100m, 200m and 400m (a rare triple even Usain Bolt wouldn't contemplate), he obliterated the competition in all three events, winning the 100m by 0.64 seconds (in 12.55), the 200m by 2.32 (25.00) and the 400m by an astonishing 7.85 (56.60).

The 76-year-old Bortignon meanwhile clinched an incredible eight golds in sprints, hurdles and jumps, proving that she is far and away the top W75 athlete in the world.

Not surprisingly, the pair were named IAAF/WMA Best Masters Athletes of the Year at the IAAF Gala in Monaco.

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Meet the class of 2013

IAAF KIDS' Athletics / Nestlé healthy kids

The IAAF's flagship development programme continued to extend its global reach in 2013 with more than 20 new activations across all of the Area Associations. Children in more than 123 countries have now benefited from the programme, which was launched in 2007 as a fun and accessible way to introduce athletics to the six to 12-year-old age group.

Kids' Athletics has been supported by Nestlé Healthy Kids since 2012, and this year also saw a major promotional event for the partnership staged at the company's headquarters in Switzerland. The International Olympic Committee is now promoting IAAF Kids' Athletics / Nestlé Healthy Kids, which is among the world's biggest grassroots programmes, as a best-practice case study.

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What is Kids' Athletics?

Your guide to the events

Kids' Athletics is a mixed team event for children which introduces the basic skills of running, jumping and throwing. The programme has three age categories (7-8, 9-10 and 11-12) and features a different set of fun, athletics-based events for each group. Every child competes in every event, with all team members contributing points towards the results. Here's the lowdown on some of the most popular disciplines.

FORMULA ONE

A relay race over a 60-80m circuit made up of sections for flat sprinting, sprint hurdling and sprinting around slalom poles. Teams compete concurrently with a distinctive soft ring used in place of a baton.

CROSS JUMP

On a cross-shaped mat, the participant completes a sequence of two-footed jumps – forwards, backwards and from side-to-side – as many times as they can in 15 seconds. One point is scored for each time a jump lands in one of the four outer squares.

SPEED LADDER

One at a time, participants run up and back through a ladder as fast as they can. The finish marker is moved back by 1m for every area of the ladder that is missed.

LONG JUMP WITH A POLE

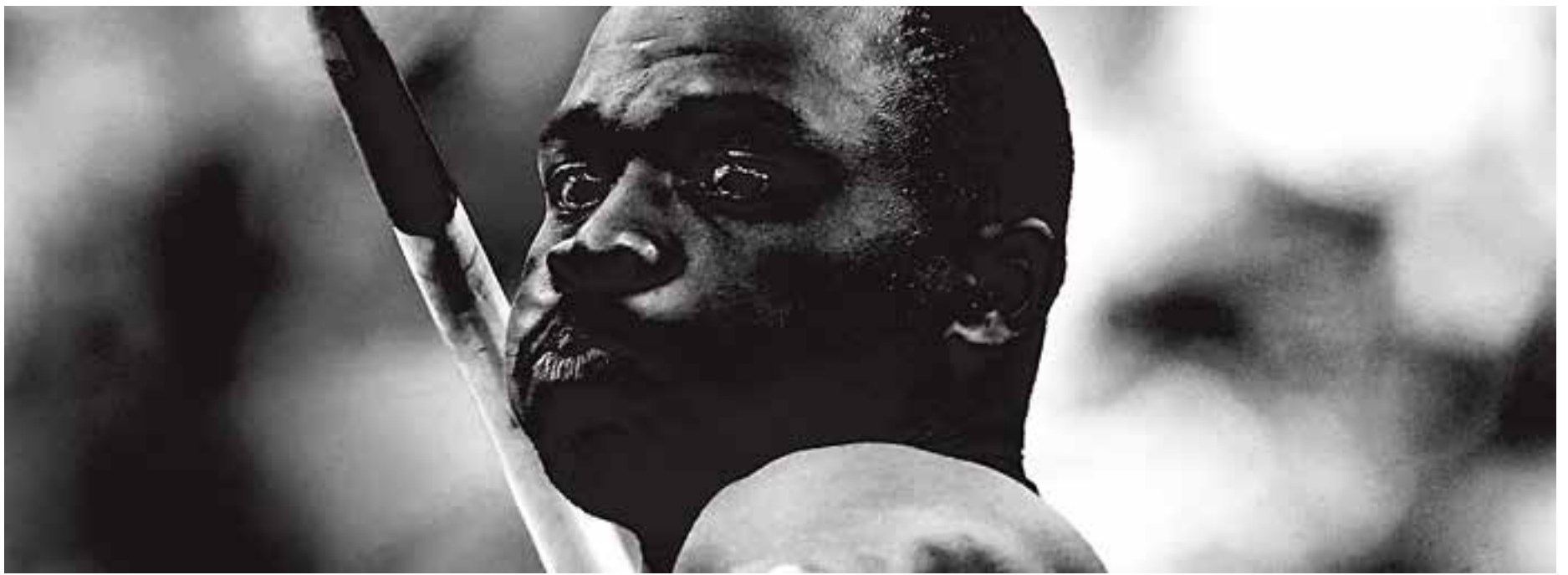
From a 5-metre run-up, the competitor plants the pole in a hoop and swings past it to land on one of five target mats. Points are scored depending on the distance of the target from the hoop.

KIDS' JAVELIN

Using soft-javelins in a 5m area, each child has two attempts to throw as far as they can. Throws are recorded in 20cm intervals marked out in advance.

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Pioneer in the field

Julius Yego

Steve Landells profiles Kenya's groundbreaking Javelin thrower **Julius Yego** whose long road to success included an IAAF scholarship and help from Finland's IAAF development centre in Kuortane

HE has been flippantly not to mention slightly patronisingly described in some sections of the media as the 'YouTube Javelin thrower' – a man who has learned the art of his discipline by watching endless repeats of two-time Olympic champion Andreas Thorkildsen. Yet while that may be true in part, the success of Julius Yego should not be distilled into one simple sound bite. The recipe for his success is far more complex and layered than any homespun YouTube philosophy.

It has been a long, tough road for the man from western Kenya who has had to battle against preconceptions about where a Kenyan's athletic strengths should lie, and has stubbornly sought out help from Finland in an effort to reach world-class.

At the 2013 IAAF World Athletics Championships in Moscow in August Yego very nearly provided the most heartwarming moment of all nine days of pulsating action. A national record throw of 85.40 metres in the fifth round elevated the stocky javelinist into bronze position and he stood on the verge of becoming his country's first ever global championship field event medallist.

Yet his dreams were ripped apart in an agonising final round as home thrower Dmitri Tarabin launched the spear out to 86.23m to deny him a place on the podium.

Not that his 'failure' to grab a medal should diminish his accomplishments. What Yego achieved in the Luzhniki Stadium – becoming Kenya's first field event finalist at a World Championships – was groundbreaking and pioneering. His near medal-winning feat should not be underestimated.

Hailing from the village of Cheptonon in the Tinderet area of Nandi County – an area known as 'the home of champions' for producing many of the great Kenyan running greats – Yego dreamed of emulating one of the region's welter of endurance stars, such as Kip Keino, Henry Rono and Bernard Lagat.

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However, his aspirations received a harsh reality check when, aged 13, he was lapped by the leading two runners in a school 10,000m race and from then on his athletics future was set to take a very different course.

“I thought I could do well at throws when I watched the guys throwing wooden javelins at primary school,” explains Yego. “At that time I was mostly running, but I had an inner feeling that I could throw better than the other boys, if I tried it.”

Yego also had another motivation. His older brother, Henry Kiprono – Julius is the fourth of eight children – was performing impressively in Javelin at primary school. Yet Yego beat his sibling at the school championships on his competitive Javelin debut.

“My confidence started to grow because he was two years ahead of me at primary school and was four years older than me,” he adds.

A lack of competitive opportunities stunted his development until secondary school when another victory over his brother further piqued his interest.

“I remember we were at home and my brother said I would never beat him again, although my mum told me never to accept this, just because I was younger.”

Yego was true to his mum’s word. His brother never beat him and he set out on a personal crusade to raise the profile of Javelin in Kenya – a discipline traditionally dominated by European athletes.

“I have a personal inner desire and will to achieve the best I can in sport,” he explains. “I wanted to be like Keino, Tergat and all those Kenyan running icons, but when I knew I couldn’t be [like them], I decided I wanted to open the way for the marginalised field events in Kenya because we have great talent in these areas as well.”

Major challenges

Yego’s journey to the top was far from straight forward. He faced major challenges, such as limited access to basic facilities and equipment. On several occasions he considered quitting the sport.

Yet in 2006 he hurled the spear out to a national junior record of 71m despite competing in running spikes. And he did indeed study the likes of Thorkildsen and Finland’s 2007 World Champion Tero Pitkamaki on YouTube to pick up technical tips.

Two years later he was crowned Kenyan senior champion and in 2010 emerged on the international scene, winning bronze at the African Championships in Nairobi.

He flew out to New Delhi for the Commonwealth Games later that year full of confidence after throwing a national record 75.44m at the Kenyan Commonwealth Trials. Yet in India he wound up a disappointing seventh with a best of 69.60m. It was a watershed moment.

“I learned a lot,” he says. “I knew I was good enough to win a medal, but it was there I discovered my technique was pathetic. And Javelin surely requires a good technique if you are going to be a good thrower.”

In 2011 he hurled a lifetime best 78.34m to secure the All Africa Games title in Maputo, but he still wanted more. And so at the end of that season, in the winter of 2011-12, Yego arrived in the city of Kuortane on an IAAF scholarship.

There, enthused by the prospect of working with a coach from Finland, he was introduced to Petteri Piironen, the man who also guides the Egyptian thrower, Ihab Abdelrahman El Sayed.

As Piironen recalls, the Kenyan experienced a major culture shock when he arrived for an initial two-week stay in Kuortane to find temperatures of -30 °C. “I remember I had to give him all my winter clothes to wear,” he says.

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Piironen described Yego as “quite explosive with a good upper body but quite weak in the legs”. Yego himself describes the quietly-spoken Finn as “a brilliant coach”, and there is no question about the improvements he has made since that initial meeting.

Yego returned to Finland for a further three months during the countdown to the London Olympics, where he set a national record of 81.81m to become the first Kenyan thrower to reach an Olympic final.

“My Olympic experience was huge,” admits Yego.

“To be in the Olympic Stadium and be introduced to the crowd even during the qualification rounds was very emotional. It boosted me to want to throw my best, and it did as I threw a PB.”

Yego could not quite match his qualification performance in the final where his best distance was 77.15m, placing him 12th. Yet he felt privileged to be rubbing shoulders in such exalted company: “I got huge experience from London competing alongside the world’s best throwers.”

Yego has not had the opportunity to return to Kuortane since 2012 but has diligently followed Piironen’s training programme from his base in Nairobi. The 24-year-old believes this helped him iron out deficiencies in his run up, which allowed him to flourish in 2013.

After competing more regularly on the international circuit this year, he set another national record of 82.09m at the Kenyan World Championship trials. He felt primed for an 85m performance in Moscow and was as good as his word.

Qualifying eighth best with 80.88m, Yego then hurled the spear out to 85.40m in the final to improve his personal best by more than three metres and elevate himself into bronze position. Yet Tarabin lay in wait to wreck his podium ambitions and in so doing spoil a fairytale in the making.

“I knew Tarabin was capable of making a killer throw because he was the world leader,” he explains. “In my heart I wish he hadn’t taken that ‘golden bronze’ from me, but that is sport and I was happy. I had met my target of 85m. In fact, I hugged him when he threw that 86m to show my appreciation.”

Yego proved his fifth round throw was no fluke by ending the season with the second and third longest throws of his career in Zagreb (84.92m) and Brussels (82.46m).

Yego’s efforts in 2013 will long be remembered, but next year he is chasing even greater success on the international stage. “I want to be focused on throwing more consistently over 85m, to build on my confidence and be among the best in the world,” he adds.

And he has a secondary ambition: to inspire more Kenyans to take up Javelin.

“We have tremendous talent here,” he says, before adding with a chuckle, “I hope that we are supported in field events in Kenya and – guess what? – one day Kenya and not Finland will become the home of the Javelin.”

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We are family

It's 9am on a cold London morning - the sort that once drew only dog walkers and super-fit athletes to Bushy Park. Today, however, more than 800 runners of all ages and sizes are enthusiastically preparing for the start of their weekly mass run. They are representatives of the fastest-growing section of the Athletics Family: people who run for fun and fitness. **Mike Rowbottom** examines the phenomenon of **parkrun** - an event that's coming to a city near you.

Like all great ideas, parkrun is simple: every Saturday morning, all over the world, people run for five kilometres around a park. It's free. Then they go for coffee, which may not be.

At the latest count - after getting off to a slow start nine years ago, parkrun does not stand still - this phenomenon of social and sociable running regularly involves more than 50,000 participants a week in 350 events all around the world.

Of those, around 70 per cent are UK-based, but parkrun is now established in Australia, Denmark, South Africa, Poland, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, the United States, Singapore and, most recently, Russia. There is even a regular parkrun for service personnel at Camp Bastion in Afghanistan.

The idea, originally, belonged to Paul Sinton-Hewitt, who organised a Saturday morning 5km run around Bushy Park, London, in 2004.

The first run - which had just 13 participants - was conceived of as a free time trial for regular runners, based on Sinton-Hewitt's experience of weekend time trials while club running in South Africa.

The enterprise was not exactly quick off its blocks - the next run did not occur until 2007 - but since then the idea of time trialling has evolved into something far more relaxed, picking up the monicker of parkrun along the way, and, according to Tom Williams, who manages events in the UK, embracing, above all else, a sense of togetherness. "The social element is fundamental to parkrun," said Williams, a former triathlete and multiple marathon runner (with a best of 2hr 49min) who has himself embraced and nurtured this new approach to running.

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“Our events start at 9am, not too early for people to get out of bed, but not too late to prevent them doing other things with their day. It gets the weekend off to a good start.

“The fact that it is free is also fundamental. The difference between £0.50 and £2 as a charge is not a lot, but the difference between paying nothing and £0.50 is huge.

“There is the opportunity to get together in a relaxed atmosphere, to meet friends, to have a smile and a chat while doing something that improves your fitness and your health.

“I always think parkrun is a bit like going to church – a lot of people with a common vision who come together on a regular basis.”

The ethos of parkrun is an altogether inclusive one. Those taking part are involved in a run, and not a race. There are no ‘winners’, only first finishers. There are no ‘losers’, only final finishers.

But human nature being what it is, the element of competitiveness cannot be erased from the proceedings – and there is no wish for it to be. After registering with the website – www.parkrun.org.uk – runners are emailed a barcode to print off which is scanned at the finish, thus recording their time.

The men’s parkrun record is held by British Olympian Andy Baddeley, who recorded 13:48. But the emphasis, emphatically, is not on elite performance.

Dog runners

“The other day my wife and I went down to a parkrun to support one of our friends who was trying to do the distance in under 40 minutes,” said Williams. “She had been running it for a year, and her first time was 58 minutes something. Everybody was so excited for her when she did it. A time of 39 minutes is celebrated in the same way as 29 minutes, or 19, or 15. It is all about people getting a sense of self-improvement and confidence.”

Results are usually posted on the site by lunchtime of the run day, along with a score which takes into account the intrinsic value of their effort depending on their age. Thus, it is possible to log your own progress, and – if you wish – to compare your result with others running elsewhere. In this sense, parkrun is like one giant time trial taking place at the same time all over the globe.

The format clearly works. People of all ages take part. Around eight per cent of regular parkrunners are juniors aged 4-14. There are 80-year-olds who run regularly. There are people running with their dogs. There are mums and dads pushing buggies. Who knows, perhaps babes in buggies will soon be provided with their own barcodes to compare their performances?

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But behind the ease and relaxation of events, there is – naturally enough – hard graft. The UK operation has four full-time employees, and the conundrum of presenting a free event which nevertheless costs money to put on is something which has exercised Williams and his fellow organisers considerably in recent years.

The event is supported by a small but carefully chosen group of sponsors, but the challenge is to ensure the support is low key.

“We are only interested in enabling parkrun to continue and to grow,” said Williams. “We could probably raise a lot of money by doing things like selling off the database, but we are not a commercial operation and we are not interested in making money.

“Our event depends upon volunteers. We have 30,000 of them who help with maintaining the course and scanning the runners. If parkrun was ‘owned’ by some huge corporation, they wouldn’t want to volunteer for it.”

The website contains weekly newsletters and testimonials which make it clear that the event is widely appreciated for a wide variety of reasons.

To take a few recent entries: “After having a double heart bypass on February 14 this year I decided to start running with my wife at our local running group in May,” writes Peter Morris. “After a few weeks I decided to give parkrun a go. What an experience that was... I have now finished 14 parkruns and run 10 PBs. I can’t wait for each Saturday to come...”

Life-changing

Michelle Hindmarch writes: “I started running in September as it seemed like a good idea at the time. My first parkrun was a walk/run that took quite a while. I vowed that if I ever managed to run the whole way then I would volunteer. Week eight and I volunteered, week nine and I got my first running PB. Thank you so much to parkrun because I am sure I would never have run this far, this fast, without you...”

For Jasbir Bangerh, parkrun has been a life-changing and life-enhancing experience.

“I first started running in May 2007 and I came to the very first Leeds parkrun in October of that year. It’s probably one of the few things that I’ve managed to stick at (well, if you exclude shoe shopping and chocolate, that is!). I’ve done 209 to date.

“There are so many things I’d like to say about parkrun. I’ve lost weight; got fitter and improved my health. I’ve met hundreds of truly inspirational lovely people including Olympic and Paralympic medallists. I’ve improved my parkrun time from 44:34 to 28:12.

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I've gone from believing that 5km would be the only distance my little legs could cope with to having competed in my very first London Marathon in April this year.

"Probably for me the best thing about parkrun is the sense of community; great friendship and of family. No one cares about your shape, size, ability, age, background or what you do, etc. You are a parkrunner. It's as simple as that.

Anniversary

"To share the same ground with the fittest and the fastest is awesome but to see the ordinary become the extraordinary is so inspirational. I love to meet new parkrunners and watch them improve, get confident and then fly!

"I love the fact that parkrun celebrates achievements no matter how great or small. I love the courage and persistence in people whether it's to just get to the start line; to finish the course; to simply put one foot in front of the other. It really is a beautiful, heart-warming, soul-lifting experience.

"It's so exciting to see the junior parkruns develop. A perfect place to nurture the next generation of Olympic medallists.

"Of course parkrun would not happen without the volunteers and honestly this can be just as rewarding and enjoyable as the actual run itself. There are so many roles you can volunteer for and it's a fabulous way of learning new skills and gaining confidence.

"One of my favourite quotes is: 'Do something today that your future self will thank you for,' and I am thankful and proud to be a parkrunner."

The parkrun phenomenon is set to expand further with new countries planned for its 10th anniversary year of 2014.

"We started 82 new events this year, and next year we plan to start another 100," said Williams. "We have also re-launched our junior parkrun over a 2km distance. We have six junior parkruns, and we plan to add another 20."

Aside from the numbers and the times, however, parkrun is a phenomenon which has its value in the testimonials provided by those who have found it enjoyable, enriching and strangely important. It is a phenomenon which is ready to run and run...

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WHY WE RUN

BEA DOWNIE

"We usually run as a whole family – my two boys, my husband and me. I used to be a serious athlete when I was younger, but hadn't done any running at all for eight years before I found parkrun. It's brought me back to sport."

RICHARD

"I needed to do something to get fit, and very quickly got hooked. It's so simple and easy. You get addicted to checking your times every week. I feel terribly guilty now if I ever miss a run."

SAM, AGE 10

"I come with my friend Albert and our parents. I've done 27 parkruns now and Albert has done 14. We both play football and it's good training. What I enjoy most is trying to beat my time every week. I'm hoping to join an athletics club soon."

CHARLOTTE, AGE 14

"I come every week with my friends and parents. I needed to lose weight and thanks to parkrun I've already lost a stone (6.3kg). I especially want to thank my friend Niamh who runs with me and encourages me."

NEIL HANKIE

"Originally I did it for my dog Sam's benefit – and also to prove my daughter wrong. She never thought I had it in me to run 5km. Well, I've done 95 parkruns now! It's such a social thing – for the dogs as well. My goal for 2014 is for Sam to be the first dog home."

ANDREW MILLS

"I'm a family doctor so doing parkrun is partly about setting a good example. It's great to get out into the open air on a Saturday morning. Running with friends gives a bit of an edge to it as well. It's an incentive to push yourself."

GHOTRA FAMILY

"We do everything together. We used to do karate as a family but then we found parkrun and haven't looked back. Even when we travel, we always try to find a local parkrun. We've done Plymouth and Warwick so far. The routes are very different but it's exactly the same spirit that you find here. It's such a wonderful initiative to look after people's health."

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MARIA, MUM

“parkrun is my first venture into running. It does get competitive, but it’s only ever about beating your own time. Nobody’s judging you here. I always say it’s the only place I will ever come without makeup!”

SALLY

“Today is my 200th parkrun. Five years ago I couldn’t even run around the block! Every person here is an inspiration to me. I have some serious health issues, but I know that every runner is here with their own personal challenge. I always thought sports people were another breed. I never thought I could be one of them. Now, I feel like someone who enjoys their body at last. When I’m actually doing the run, I just love being alive.”

KATRIN FROM GERMANY

“I used to run alone until my boyfriend introduced me to parkrun. Now it’s become part of my social life. It’s like a huge family. And it’s addictive too. I’m on 98 runs now, and I know that when I reach 100 I will be entitled to a special shirt, so it’s an incentive to come every week. Even when I’m injured I come down to volunteer.”

TIM WOOD

“I’m proud to say I’ve clocked up 210 parkruns. I do it every single week. I was camping at the Reading (music) Festival this year and on the Saturday morning, I put on my running shoes and ran all the way from the festival site to the start of the local parkrun.”

RICHARD TAYLOR & KATHRYN WHITE

“We found parkrun in 2008 and have been running ever since. We were both getting a bit older and wanted to lose a bit of weight. The appeal of parkrun is the community spirit, and the fact that there’s really no pressure. You can walk the route if you want.”

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Star of the south

A dedicated new home for athletics opened this year on Africa's Southern Cape, as the \$8.5m reconstruction of Cape Town's Green Point Athletics Stadium reached completion.

The 4,500-capacity facility, complete with a state-of-the-art tartan track, replaces the old Green Point Stadium, which was partially demolished as part of construction of the neighbouring Cape Town Stadium, a venue for the 2010 FIFA World Cup finals in South Africa.

The new Stadium is designed in every respect to meet international athletics standards and boasts many unique features for athletes, media and spectators, including seating for disabled fans, a physiotherapy room directly off the finish line and TV platform directly above.

The facility also houses a new club house for CPUT Athletics, which is hoping to set up a new regional training centre there in the near future.

As well as day-to-day training, Green Point Athletics Stadium will also host 20 school meetings, 15 club meetings and two South African national meetings every year. Plans are even afoot to revive Cape Town's international meeting, which last ran in the 1990s.

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Integrity Matters

Sport is facing new and increasing threats of corruption. IAAF Legal Counsel **Huw Roberts** explains how athletics is developing robust responses.

There's a perception that sport integrity threats are becoming more significant and diverse. What is driving this view?

An increasing number of high-profile cases of corruption have come to light recently in a variety of sports such as football, tennis, cricket and snooker. Doping has been perceived as a threat to the integrity of sport for some time now but other threats such as match fixing or spot fixing have until recently been relatively uncommon. It is inevitable when such cases do emerge that public debate turns to focus on the integrity of sport at large. Sport is all about an unpredictability of outcome and, when that fundamental notion is challenged, alarm bells quickly start to ring.

What are the specific threats to athletics?

Doping is a recognised long-term threat to the integrity of athletics and the IAAF has had robust anti-doping programmes in place for many years. Other areas such as match fixing, the misuse of inside information, betting-related misconduct, age manipulation and other forms of corruption are newer threats to the integrity of our sport and ones that we are treating just as seriously as doping. Programmes are being developed all the time to respond to these new threats.

What does athletics need to do to stay ahead of this problem?

First, it needs to make sure that it has clear rules and regulations in place to address the identified areas of risk, including a range of appropriate sanctions in case of breach. It needs effective education and information programmes to ensure that the risks are communicated to and well understood by the athletic community. And, finally, it needs effective monitoring systems to identify breaches of the rules when they occur, so that meaningful sanctions can be imposed on those who offend. This year, for the first time, we monitored betting activity connected to the IAAF World Championships in Moscow.

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What are the threats to athletics if the public perception is that the sport fails to deal with integrity threats effectively?

The ultimate threat is that sponsors, the paying public and the next generation of star athletes could all be forced to take their custom elsewhere and the sport will suffer irreparable damage in the long term as a result. That's why preserving the integrity of athletics is a number one priority.

In terms of scale, how do other integrity threats compare to doping?

Match fixing and related forms of corruption are perceived potentially as being an even bigger threat to the integrity of sport than doping, not least because of their associated links to the criminal underworld. We have seen little evidence of this form of corruption in athletics to date but we are certainly not underestimating it as a potential threat to rival even that of doping.

Athlete education is clearly critical. What initiatives are in place?

We have had robust anti-doping education programmes in athletics for some time already and equivalent programmes are being rolled out in other areas such as betting and anti-corruption. We are now considering how to develop new online tools in these areas to supplement the programmes that we already have. Education will remain a key priority for us.

How can athletes feel empowered to come forward with any knowledge they have of integrity threats?

We have had an anti-doping hotline for some time now and we set up a specific anti-corruption hotline for the first time at the World Championships in Moscow. We also have mechanisms in our rules that are designed to encourage athletes who commit breaches of the regulations to share information about third parties in return for reduced sanctions. At the same time, at least so far as the betting and anti-corruption rules are concerned, an athlete who fails to report any breach of the rules by a third party of which he is aware, or fails to report any approach by a third party to commit a breach, will himself be considered to be in breach of the rules for which a sanction may be imposed.

Are you confident that athletics has the cooperation, coordination and commitment needed to retain its integrity?

Yes, I am. The IAAF dedicates significant resources already to the fight against doping and is taking these new risks to its integrity very seriously, including putting in place a new Code of Ethics with effect from 1 January 2013. These measures were given the full support of the IAAF Congress when it met in Moscow so the sport's commitment is not in doubt.

In terms of implementation, the IAAF accepts, as a private association based in Monaco, that it has limited powers and a limited long-arm jurisdiction to be able to conduct this fight effectively on its own. But, as we have learned from the fight against doping over the last decade, this simply emphasises the importance of developing a network of international partnerships with government, law enforcement and national regulatory authorities. We know from experience that strong partnerships can serve as a powerful collaborative tool. This is where our focus will be as we seek to tackle the newly emerging threats head on.

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How important is the work of the IOC Working Group on Irregular Betting, of which you are a member?

Very important, for the simple reason that it has brought all relevant players around the table. Sport, government, regulators, law enforcement and the betting operators all have a voice. This has facilitated a full and frank discussion of the issues but also created an effective platform for sharing experience and best practice. Now its conclusions need to be put into practice.

Are you confident that all sports can work together to combat these threats?

The IOC leadership in this area has been important and other organisations like ASOIF (Association of Summer Olympic International Federations) have also taken important steps such as in developing model rules on betting and anti-corruption. The new IOC President, Thomas Bach, has been very clear in pledging the IOC's ongoing commitment. Ultimately, though, each sport will need to assume individual responsibility: to assess what the greatest risks to its integrity are and to put in place a practical and proportionate response to those risks. This is a process in which the IAAF is already fully engaged. I am confident that we are moving in the right direction.



Testing, Testing

What goes on in an anti-doping laboratory? **365** takes a privileged peek behind the scenes.

On the top floor of a concrete office block in an unassuming quarter of Lausanne, the Swiss Laboratory for Doping Analyses (LAD) is discreetly dedicated to drug-free sport.

Set up with a staff of six more than two decades ago, 23 scientists now manage around 11,000 tests each year. These experts in their field also have a key educational role to play, and deliver cutting-edge research and development through the Stop-Doping Foundation, which LAD set up in 2006.

The environment is calm, controlled, clinical. White lab coats invest each individual with a degree of anonymity. Yet the passion of everyone who works here is clear. They speak of a fervent belief that misuse of the science they study should not destroy the integrity of the sport they love.

“We conduct analysis according to set protocols,” explains certifying scientist Dr Neil Robinson. “It is an unemotional business. However, you cannot help but feel emotion when there is a ‘B’ analysis because you know you are probably destroying a career. For us, though, a positive test is a victory – a victory for all who are working for clean sport.”

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THE ANTI-DOPING STORY ALWAYS STARTS WITH A AND B...

An athlete selected for a drug test urinates in a cup, supervised by a Doping Control Officer of the same gender. The urine is poured into a pair of identical bottles, A and B, and the bottles are sealed.

From the start of this process – at a competition, a training venue or an athlete's home – to the end in a World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)-accredited laboratory, a sample is only ever identified by a unique code.

No-one but the sport organisation knows which code corresponds to which athlete.

RECEPTION

'Chain of custody' paperwork documents the moment an athlete's urine or blood sample is sealed, to its receipt at the lab, to the day when it's discarded.

Some Doping Control Officers bring samples to the lab themselves, others are sent by courier. Blood must arrive within 36 hours of collection from the athlete, using temperature controlled packaging.

The LAD keeps office hours but staff are on call day and night to receive deliveries – which are handed through a small glass window, next to a colourful IAAF poster featuring Coe, Kipketer, El Guerrouj and other athletics greats. All details are recorded and signed for, including the temperature in the package if it's a delivery of blood. Crucial to the process are transportation and storage arrangements that ensure the integrity, security and confidentiality of samples are maintained throughout.

'CRACKING' THE SEAL

A lab technician inspects the sample container and tamper-evident seal and checks the chain of custody paperwork.

With a loud crack, Violette Allora breaks the seal on an 'A' sample using specialist equipment – one machine for urine samples, another for blood. The sample itself remains protected from contamination and can now be readied for screening.

SCREENING

Testing urine is better than testing blood for most banned substances. Urine collection is non-invasive and yields a large sample, with higher drug concentrations than blood. There are also far fewer cells and proteins to complicate the preparation process.

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An 'aliquot', or portion, of the 'A' sample is screened for all the substances on the relevant (in- or out-of-competition) list. The analysis itself is carried out in small batches and takes around ten minutes.

The 'B' sample is stored securely in case an Adverse Analytical Finding means it, too, needs to be tested.

Analytical chemistry techniques known as gas chromatography (GC) and liquid chromatography (LC) separate the compounds contained in the sample. Mass spectrometry (MS) then identifies the compounds by measuring their mass.

Except for proteins such as erythropoietin (EPO), most prohibited drugs are identified by the GC-MS process. LC-MS is increasingly used for diuretics, some anabolic steroids and corticosteroids. Skilled interpretation of the data identifies any suspicious samples.

Dr Raul Nicoli supervises LC-MS analysis. The lab has just taken delivery of a new instrument, part of a constant upgrading process that poses financial challenges for every testing centre. How much did it cost? Raul smiles: "About the same as two or three Ferraris."

A suspicious sample must go through a confirmation procedure. This uses a fresh aliquot from the original 'A' sample and involves different personnel and tests that are more specific to the substance that has been identified. If this process confirms the Adverse Analytical Finding, then the sport organisation is given the sample code.

The athlete is now told and has the right to come to the lab or send a representative to witness the 'B' sample test. Some choose to watch the whole process, others just confirm that the sample is in the same condition as when it was sealed and leave.

Finally, the lab reports the findings of the 'B' analysis to the sport organisation, with a copy sent to WADA.

ADDITIONAL SCREENING

Many Federations go further than this general screening. The IAAF is among those requesting the more time-consuming (and expensive) urine testing for EPO abuse and blood serum testing for the presence of Human Growth Hormone (hGH).

With her red and black scarf and purple surgical gloves adding a dash of colour to the overwhelmingly white lab, technician Magali Wicht prepares test tubes for hGH analysis. "In five hours I will know if there is a suspicious sample," she says.

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ATHLETE BIOLOGICAL PASSPORTS

A row of large white fridges kept at a constant 4°C hold whole blood samples destined to form part of Athlete Biological Passports (ABPs).

“In the past, drug testing was based on finding a banned substance in an athlete’s body,” explains certifying scientist Dr Norbert Baume. “Now, it is much more focused on finding indirect evidence of doping – that a substance has been administered rather than the substance itself.” By collecting and monitoring data over time, an ABP can prove whether an individual has doped.

The IAAF is committed to rigorous use of ABPs in athletics, not only to enforce fair competition but for that other fundamental element of an anti-doping programme: to help protect athletes’ health.

THE FUTURE...

The name of room 129, ‘Chambre froide’, is both a statement and a warning. Behind the heavy door and air curtain are crates of samples from the London 2012 Olympic Games and the 2013 IAAF World Championships. They’re frozen at -20°C, ready to be re-analysed within the eight-year period allowed under the WADA code, when new scientific developments may be available.

It’s a policy that was first implemented by the IAAF at the 2005 World Championships in Helsinki, and expanded at the 2011 and 2013 IAAF World Championships when every athlete was tested at least once.

For an athlete who may have doped using a then-undetectable substance, the cold hand of exposure at some time in the future remains very firmly on their shoulder.

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Dr Clean

Dr Gabriel Dollé's job is not only to fight those athletes who are doping. It is to protect the many, many more who are not.

After a lifetime in sports medicine and anti-doping, and as Head of the IAAF's Medical and Anti-Doping Department since 1994, Dr Dollé is unequivocal about his team's role:

"We are here so athletes can be confident they are not competing against cheats."

The IAAF was at the forefront of the campaign to bring global consistency to anti-doping activities. This led to the adoption of the World Anti-Doping Code in 2004 – four years after WADA was set up.

Since then, the IAAF has played a prominent role in developing its testing programme in cooperation with accredited laboratories around the world, and establishing the principle that anti-doping is about education as much as detection and sanction.

"We now have tools to help athletes understand the dangers and implications of doping," Dr Dollé explains.

"Many of these are available online, which makes them accessible in countries where there are fewer facilities for athlete education."

He also points to important dialogue established through the IAAF Athletes' Commission, the role of IAAF Ambassadors in promoting clean sport, and key outreach programmes including a strong presence at world junior and youth championships.

Three of the most significant recent developments, according to Dr Dollé, are the adoption of the Athlete Biological Passport (ABP); testing all competitors at the 2011 and 2013 IAAF World Championships; and storing these samples for retrospective testing.

"We are becoming increasingly focused and intelligent in our work," he says. "All these measures are helping us to build profiles of athletes, so we can employ not only quantitative analysis, but qualitative. We can employ targeted testing and close monitoring where we have suspicions. What is already clear is that retrospective testing is now a major deterrent."

Dr Dollé knows only too well that determined dopers and those who aid them will always seek out new substances and methods. "All sports must be constantly alert," he insists, "and in athletics we need the support of Member Federations, not least to ensure we deliver sanctions that are proportionate to the offence. But I believe the goodwill is there."

"Our sport must teach athletes to respect rules and defend fair play. Then we can hope that the athletes who win are honest athletes."

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Greatest Hits

THE BEST OF IAAF INSIDE ATHLETICS TV IN 2013.

In 2013, the IAAF launched a whole new platform to promote the world's best athletes. IAAF Inside Athletics TV is a show for the YouTube generation of athletics fans: the first web TV series dedicated to revealing the sport's personalities as they are away from the track.

The series sees host Ato Boldon travel the world to meet the stars in their home environments. He explains: "The show looks the way it does because it's the way that I, as a track and field fan, want it to look. When I started, I wanted fans to go away from each episode feeling as though they wanted to root for that athlete because of what they said during the interview."

Thirty episodes later, Ato can look back on the year with pride, knowing that IAAF Inside Athletics TV is helping to take the sport to new, young audiences. "We have to be on social media platforms because that's where the fans are," he says.

Ato is already busy planning the show's output for 2014, when he intends to extend his focus to some legends of the sport. He explains: "It's not just about the current stars; you have to tie the present to the past greats. The one person I really want to talk to is Cathy Freeman. Everybody else I kind of feel like I know what they're doing, but Cathy has completely run from the spotlight."

While the Freeman episode remains in planning, there are already great highlights to look back on. 365 asked Ato to name his top five episodes of 2013...

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TOP FIVE EPISODES OF 2013

1. Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce (JAM) Episode 6

"I've known Shelly-Ann for a while. I'm a big fan of hers and in a lot of ways she may be my favourite Jamaican athlete. When I went to Jamaica to film her, I went during the Jamaican High School Championships, which for me is one of the purest expressions of our sport. I sat down with Shelly-Ann, who is a World and Olympic Champion and I'm not exactly sure how much she's going to share with me. This was in the early days of IAAF Inside Athletics when it's just me and two cameras and I don't know how to shoot, so it was not the best-looking episode, but in terms of content, she just poured her heart out.

She talked about her poverty, her mother, what it was like going from nobody knowing who she was to being one of the most popular people on that island. That was by far my favourite episode because I feel like she held the least back. She spoke about some of the most intimate things."

→CLICK HERE TO WATCH IT NOW

2. Valerie Adams (NZL) Episode 29

"I chose this one for a lot of the same reasons. I don't know Valerie that well, and again when you sit down with somebody you have no idea how much they're going to give you or how guarded they're going to be.

I asked Valerie one question in the interview: "Fill in the blank: it is important to me that I am remembered as ____." She looked at me and said "It's important to me that I am remembered as a great shot putter, but it's so much more important for me to be a role model. We have so many young talents and so few role models." And I thought, "Wow that's powerful."

She also explained that she was headed down the wrong path and watched the Olympic Games with her mother in 2000. Her mother died soon after and she decided that the Olympics was her connection to her mother and then she became an Olympic Champion soon after that. She was so giving and got teary-eyed."

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3. Mo Farah (GBR) Episode 19

“We interviewed Mo Farah in the UK, and when he is in the UK it is a totally different world for him.

Unlike a lot of the other people we’ve had on IAAF Inside Athletics, Mo’s biggest success has come literally in the past two years.

Before the Olympic Games, outside of the UK nobody knew who Mo Farah was. His fame has been meteoric because he had such a phenomenal Games in his home country.

Mo runs the longest distance, but he is always so close to his family. Not a huge amount of athletes are married, but here’s a guy who is married with children and he is always thinking about how he can connect to his wife and kids.”

→CLICK HERE TO WATCH IT NOW

4. Dawn Harper (USA) Episode 21

“Dawn is well spoken, but there’s also the honesty. To hear her talk about what it felt like for her in 2008 to have the Olympic gold medal but wanting to cry tears. Back home, because Lolo Jones didn’t win, Dawn was seen as someone who’d just got lucky. That to me took a lot of courage to say that on camera.

She did get very teary-eyed as well. This woman won her sport’s biggest prize and yet did not get recognition.

A king is not without honour except in his own country – here it is in the flesh. And yet she has persevered.

She has been USA’s best hurdler since that time, so she didn’t let that take her down. People thought she was a flash in the pan or a one-year wonder, but she has proven she is one of USA’s best hurdlers.”

→CLICK HERE TO WATCH IT NOW

5. Steve Hooker (AUS) Episode 11

“Steve is the consummate Aussie. The reason why he is good at the Pole Vault is because – and I need to say this carefully – it’s not because he doesn’t care, but he’s not afraid to fail. That’s why he’s been very successful; he goes out there very free-spirited and he’s not tethered by the expectations of his country. The reality is, Australia has one or two who can win medals these days, and yet he has not allowed that to bother him.

We talked about the restaurant he has set up with some other famous Australians. We had a good back-and-forth so I said to him that we’ve been friends for years so he should give me free beers when I go to Australia. He said “No, I’ll give you a good price, but I’m still a businessman” – that was one of the better endings to an episode that we had.”

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Relay Different

Phil Minshull examines the thinking behind an innovative new addition to the IAAF’s global competition calendar.

An exciting new competition will make its appearance on the international calendar in 2014: the IAAF World Relays, which will be held in The Bahamas’ capital Nassau on 24-25 May.

The competition was inspired by the hugely popular relay meetings in the USA as well as some thrilling relay battles at recent editions of the IAAF World Championships.

Teams from the sports’ most prominent nations will contest not just the familiar championship events of 4x100m and 4x400m but also the 4x200m, 4x800m, and 4x1500m.

“At the IAAF, we are always looking for ways to bring the sport to new audiences and also engage the world’s top athletes in different ways. We think this is one very exciting way to do it,” explains the IAAF Competitions Director Paul Hardy.

“Meetings like the Penn Relays in the United States have a huge and enthusiastic set of fans. They now get teams there from around the world and they are a great festival of athletics.

“In addition, the relays, whether it’s the 4x100m or 4x400m, are traditionally the climax of a global championship and really get the crowd behind the teams.

“There is also a great spirit within relay teams, and that is something special. Athletics is traditionally an individual sport but the relays are an exception; they show team members working for each other, not wanting to let the team down and striving to rise to the occasion.

“We wanted to embrace all of these aspects, and the response to having a World Relays event has been very enthusiastic.”

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IAAF Senior Vice President Bob Hersh agrees: “We believe there will be worldwide interest in a weekend of sport dedicated just to the relays. We will introduce exciting innovations in terms of both the event presentation and the TV coverage. I am also certain that the world’s best athletes will be excited about visiting Nassau.”

Why then was The Bahamas chosen to host the inaugural competition? “The answer is very easy,” says Paul. “First, The Bahamas is a successful athletics nation but, in particular, in the relays.

“Fresh in everyone’s mind still is the way their men’s 4x400m squad triumphed at the 2012 Olympic Games. That certainly captured everyone’s imagination, not just in The Bahamas but with athletics fans around the world.

“Looking back a bit further, their women’s team famously got the 4x100m gold medals at the 2000 Olympic Games. Pictures of the team’s delight and celebration made the front pages of newspapers everywhere.

“In addition, The Bahamas won the women’s 4x100m at the 1999 World Championships, with their men’s 4x400m team also winning at the 2001 World Championships, so the history is there.

“The local public there know their sport, know athletics, and know its history. “Secondly, it has been a little while since an IAAF event has been in the Caribbean so it was a good time to go back there. Everyone remembers what the reception for the athletes was like at the 2002 IAAF World Junior Championships in Jamaica. The atmosphere in Kingston was electric. I think we can expect more of the same in Nassau.

“Thirdly, we have had excellent support from the government and public authorities in The Bahamas; and that has been crucial to staging the event there.

“The event will be staged in a new stadium, the Thomas A Robinson Stadium, and I’m sure it will be a great event.”

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The Thomas A Robinson Stadium has a capacity of 15,000 and fittingly was named after the Bahamian sprinting hero of the same name, who was born in Nassau and sadly died in 2012.

Robinson was the first athlete from The Bahamas to compete at the Olympics when he went to his marks in the 100m at the 1956 Games.

He later won the 220 yards gold medal at the 1958 British Empire and Commonwealth Games and then the 100m at the 1962 Central American and Caribbean Games and was a stalwart of many relay teams of that era.

If Robinson is the historic image of the World Relays, then the contemporary public face of the competition has been local athletics legend and IAAF Council Member Pauline Davis-Thompson, who was part of The Bahamas' teams that won the 4x100m gold medals at the 1999 IAAF World Championships and 2000 Olympic Games.

"I'm spreading the word and trying to encourage as many nations as possible to come to The Bahamas," says Davis-Thompson, who also won the 2000 Olympic Games 200m title.

"The Bahamas has a rich athletics history. We love the sport, it's probably our most popular sport and it's also our most successful sport internationally. Taking all this into consideration, I'm sure there will be a capacity crowd across the two days of the World Relays.

"What we've achieved at Olympic Games and World Championships considering we are a country of less than 400,000 is something to be proud of; but it's also a matter of pride that we are going to be hosting an IAAF event so it's important we show to the world what we can do, both on and off the track.

"It will have a great impact. One thing you have to remember as well is that The Bahamas is also a prominent tourism destination, probably the number one in the Caribbean.

"In the short term, it will be great to welcome the world to the Relays; but long term, my country is focused on sport tourism and with the IAAF World Relays, the Bahamas will be on show and the world will see what we are all about."

One person everyone wants to see in Nassau is, of course, Usain Bolt. Time will tell whether the great man is able to grace the inaugural event but he's certainly a fan.

"I think having a World Relays is a great concept," he declared.

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The Mighty Penn

Relay racing has long existed in athletics, but it was the University of Pennsylvania which popularised the idea of an athletics meeting focused specifically on relay races. The event’s director Dave Johnson provides a brief history of the most famous relay meeting in the world.

The Penn Relays, inaugurated in 1895, began an American tradition of scholastic competition that elevated interest in track and field athletics beyond that which it already enjoyed at the turn of the 20th century. The Penn Relays proved so instantly popular that the first edition drew a crowd of more than 5,000 to the newly opened Franklin Field. The crowd, which overflowed the 1,000-seat grandstand, was the largest gathering ever to attend a track event in Philadelphia, one of the hotbeds of track and field in the United States. Designed as the first event on the outdoor calendar and slated more than one month earlier than the annual intercollegiate championships, the Relays allowed high school, prep school and collegiate teams a venue in which to prepare for the season’s competition. Originally meant to encourage broader participation within teams, the meeting was such a success that it quickly involved many of the best teams, driving the level of competition to unforeseen heights, creating the Relays as a championship-level event in itself. Within its first 20 years, the Penn Relays was drawing colleges from as far away as California and the United Kingdom, and had forced a renovation of the Franklin Field grandstand to one which seated more than 20,000. More remarkably, the Relays, which began as a means of returning track events to popularity among the University of Pennsylvania student body, spawned many similar meetings around the country, many of which are still contested. Today, relay races in the US are commonly crowd favourites, the ultimate at drawing out school, club or national loyalties. One runner is insufficient for team victory, but as much as team depth provides larger clubs and nations an advantage, the upset victory by the underdog is responsible often for the greatest of the races.

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