



Fit 4 Gold: Sports Links Profiles



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◆ **Keri-Anne Payne**

Themes: 1st Brit to qualify for London 2012; training; more than...

Event: Swimming: 200 m, 400 m & 10 km open water marathon

From: born Dec 1987 in Johannesburg as her parents worked there, now Manchester;

Date	Event	Result/Medal	Age
2004	European Championships, 400m freestyle	Gold	16
2008	Olympic Games, Beijing, 10km open water Marathon	Silver	20
	Olympic Games, Beijing, competed in 200m & 400m individual medley		
2009	World Championships, 10km open water	Gold	21
2010	Commonwealth Games, 400m individual medley	Bronze	22
2011	World Championships, 10km open water	Gold	23
2012	London 2012 Olympic Games		24

Qualifying

Keri-Anne Payne hit the headlines last July because she was the first British athlete to qualify to compete in the London 2012 Olympic Games. She did this by once again becoming the World Champion in the 10km open-water race in Shanghai.

It's a difficult and sometimes dangerous race. At times, swimmers have had to encounter problems such as huge jellyfish, floating dead animals, extremes of temperature and tourist boats that churning up the water making it hard to see. They have no choice, they just have to swim through it all even if it means getting stung by the jellyfish. The race takes about 2 hours and swimmers find they swallow a lot of salty or poor quality water they usually have a can of coke as soon as they finish to kill off the bacteria.

Keri-Anne says:

"To be on that Olympic team at a home Olympics is going to be absolutely amazing. It's a weight off my shoulders. To know I've qualified for the Olympics with a year to go is such a confidence boost and it's such an honour being the first British athlete on the London 2012 team. The whole team is very excited about next year.

Everything I have done for the last 3 years has been geared around making the Olympic team. I've had to go through four stages of qualification to secure my place, the last part being a top 10 finish at the World Championships. The process was long but absolutely worth it.

I can concentrate on training now for next year and I don't have to worry about qualifying because I've already done it."

Training: as outlined in Keri-Anne's web site

Keri-Anne's daily training programme is:

- 2½ hours in the pool in the morning
- 2½ hours in the pool in the afternoon
- About 30 minutes of cardio workouts in the gym
- About an hour of injury prevention exercises
- Total 33 hours a week!



Question: Hi Keri, You have do a lot of training and exercises apart from swimming. What do you think while you are doing exercises and workouts? How do you keep yourselves motivated?

Keri-Anne: "Music is a huge help to me! I'm addicted to Above and Beyond's new album and their weekly podcasts. The music is **so** inspiring and has a great beat to workout to! Other than that I think happy thoughts!!

Q: What keeps you motivated to train when you don't feel like it?

Keri-Anne: It's hard training when tired and sore but having a great team and exciting goals always keeps me going.

"After major competitions it's important to have a break to reflect and to recuperate the body and mind before the real work begins again."

In preparation for the Olympic Games, Keri-Anne is in the middle of several blocks of training. First she did a long stint of training in Stockport followed by an altitude training camp for 3 weeks in December in the snowy mountains of Sierra Nevada, Spain.

"The altitude there is 2300m above sea level and the oxygen is thin! This makes training so much harder than normal but it's worth it. I have been up these mountains three times now and the first two times had such a big impact on my performances last year. So as boring and hard as it seems training up this mountain it is totally worth it! And another bonus about being up this mountain is the breath taking scenery."

"The countdown is on and everything seems so real now. My 10k is being held at the iconic Serpentine in Hyde Park and I really hope you will be there supporting me."

However Keri-Anne is also getting married this year. She and her fiancé David Carry say that the swimming is very important to them – it's their job, but it's not as important as their forthcoming wedding.

◆ Tom Daley

Themes: Chosen as young & gifted; bullying; family support; losing his Dad to cancer

Event: Diving; 10 m platform single + synchro events

From: Plymouth; May 1994

Achievements:

- ◆ British Champion
- ◆ European Champion
- ◆ World Champion
- ◆ Young Sports Personality of the Year

Even if you don't know the names of many athletes, you have probably heard of the diver, Tom Daley. He is famous for being one of the youngest-ever Olympic competitors in Beijing in 2008.

Tom was talent spotted by a coach at a young age and was soon entering competitions. He won his 1st national medal when he was 8 and from the age of 12 he was competing against adults at international level.

2008 was an amazing year for Tom. He became British champion, European champion and won a bronze medal in the World cup with his diving partner, Blake Aldridge. This meant that he could compete in the Olympic Games in Beijing.

The Olympic Games are different to any other sporting event. The atmosphere is different and there is far more of a build up to it. Tom did not expect to win a medal and as the youngest ever finalist, he was happy to come 7th and 8th in his events.

Tom has continued to compete successfully adding to his medal collection and is now world champion, but he doesn't win everything. Everyone has good days and bad days and like everyone else, injuries sometimes prevent him competing.

Tom also knows what it's like to be bullied at school. In fact it became so bad after the Olympic Games of 2008 made him famous, that his parents had to withdraw him from school for a short while. Speaking out about the problem helped to solve it. He was offered a place at another school and managed to do extremely well in his GCSE's despite having to fit his school work around his training. He is now studying for A Levels as well as training for the London Olympics where he is hoping to get a medal this time.

Sadly Tom's Dad died from cancer in May 2011 so he will not be there in person this time. His influence and support for Tom will live on however. Coach Andy Banks said of him,

"Even if Tom wasn't performing up to his usual standard, his father would be really supportive. He was very much part of Tom's team and Tom wouldn't be where he is today without him."

On 27 July 2011, Tom Daley took the first dive in London's newly-built Olympic Park Aquatics Centre to mark the one year countdown until the start of the games.

◆ John Boland

Themes: an expected competitor; surprise win

Event: Tennis

From: Ireland; 1870

Achievement: Olympic gold medals in tennis

Two gold Olympic medals were certainly a surprise holiday souvenir for Irishman John Boland who was in the right place at the right time for the Olympic competition.

John was a law student at Oxford but he loved Greek mythology. When he heard about the revival of the Olympic Games, he decided he just had to travel to Athens to watch them as a spectator. However, his friend, Thrasyvoalos Manaos, Secretary of the Athens 1896 Organising Committee, entered him for the tennis competition.

Despite not having the right shoes – they were leather-soled shoes with heels rather than sports shoes, John won the men's singles and the mixed doubles. He later became a Member of Parliament and a supporter of Irish independence and the Irish language.

◆ Eric 'the Eel' Moussambani

Themes: Had to learn to swim; surprise crowd support

Event: Swimming

From: Equatorial Guinea; May 1978

Achievement: Taking part in the Olympic Games, Sydney, 2000

Eric wasn't chosen to compete in the Olympic Games because he was the best at swimming. In fact he couldn't swim at all. He was chosen because he was willing to learn. So, aged 21, with only 8 months to go, he started to learn to swim in a 20m pool. He was prepared to take on the challenge and risk being humiliated by coming last, just for the honour of being there.

Eric was from Equatorial Guinea which is one of the smallest African countries and where 70% of the people live below the poverty line. They do not have many sports facilities so it can be difficult to take part in international competitions such as the Olympic Games.

One of the ideals of the Games is to bring nations closer together and to help people to understand cross-cultural differences. The Olympic Games Organizing Committee therefore gives some 'wild card' entries to encourage developing countries whose athletes struggle to qualify to enter the competition.

So Eric learned to swim. He used a 20m pool in a hotel and he had never seen a full Olympic-size swimming pool which is over twice as long! The pool in Sydney must have looked quite overwhelming. Eric wasn't daunted. He bravely swam his heat taking twice as long as everyone else. Never mind! It was a personal best time for him and a national record for his country.

Surprisingly he got through to the next round because two of the swimmers were disqualified for a false start. He was a bit faster this time, but although he did come last again, he wasn't humiliated. Something he had not expected was the way the crowd got behind him and cheered him all the way. It was one of those 'oh wow' moments in life.

The gold medallist broke the world record, but more people remember 'Eric the Eel'. He didn't win a medal but he did become an Olympic champion simply because he was willing to have a go at something.

On rare occasions, a 'wild card' competitor does succeed in winning a medal. Kye Sun-Hui won gold in judo at the 1996 Summer Olympics, and Goran Ivanišević won the 2001 Wimbledon Championships.

◆ **Nick Willis**

Theme: Choosing to be on God’s team; team mates; more than gold

Event 1500 metres

From New Zealand; April 1983

Nick's timeline			
Date	Event	Result/Medal	Age
2002	World Junior Championships 1500m	4th	19
2003	Became a Christian		20
2004	Olympic Games, Athens 1500m	semi-finalist	21
2006	Commonwealth Games 1500m	Gold Medal	23
2007	World Championships 1500m	finalist	24
2007	Married Sierra		
2008	Olympic Games, Beijing 1500m	Silver Medal	25
2010	Commonwealth Games	Bronze Medal	27
2011	World Championships 1500m	semi-finalist	28
2012	London 2012 Olympic Games		29

Choosing to be on God's team

Nick got into sport for several reasons. His family were very much into sport, so it was a natural thing for him to follow in their footsteps and hit the running track at an early age. There was a local club for him to join.

He found that he was very good at sport so it boosted his self-esteem. He did not experience failure until his teenage years when some of the other kids were going through their growth stages earlier than him.

He also used sport to work out his anger with God over the fact that his Mum died of cancer when he was only 4 years old. This was hard to come to terms with and he saw life as unfair for a long time. One of his Mum’s last prayers before she died was that God would take care of her children. Looking back he says he feels “very blessed to have inherited a lot of prayer” from both his Nan and his Mum.

However as a teenager Nick thought that being a Christian meant having to keep loads of rules which he didn’t want. What he did want was popularity, money, fame, and to feel in control of his life.

He also wanted to travel. When he was offered a running scholarship to the University of Michigan in USA, it seemed to give him everything he wanted. But then he found that it didn’t! He still felt empty.

Moving to the States gave him the space away from his school friends to discover things on his own. He found God putting certain people into his life to show him that God isn’t just some mystical figure up in the sky. He could see that God had a way of living inside people that gave them a power to love and to be loved at a different level. He realized that the things that he thought would be restrictions were actually freedoms. He slowly started to feel a sense of God’s



presence and began to realise that life was bigger than he had imagined. He chatted a lot with friends for months about God stuff. He continued to have this 'sense of God' and by the age of 20 he decided he wanted to 'sign up' and commit his life completely to God.

Living for gold and for God

Nick had only been a Christian a short time when he first competed at the Olympic Games in 2004. He found that socially he was in limbo. He hadn't as yet linked up with other Christian athletes but he no longer wanted to hang out with those who went a bit wild when relaxing. Hanging out on his own helped him to decide with more certainty which path he wanted to take in life.

His first international gold medal came in 2006 at the Commonwealth Games and he was a finalist in the world championship the following year.

In September 2007 Nick married Sierra. This partnership has helped both his running career and his relationship with God. Sierra manages the web site, gives a great deal of moral support and they pray together before and after races. They are a strong team.

At the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing Nick was ecstatic over winning the silver medal. "...that was just my little taste of heaven. To do something that you know is not possible in your own strength is a pretty incredible experience."

The world championships in 2011 didn't go so well though. Everything was fine until the last 100 metres of the semi-final when things took a drastic turn. Nick struggled to finish the race, just making it across the finish line but collapsing afterwards with exhaustion and dehydration. He reflected the following day, "The final did not go as I would have like. Finishing last is a very humbling experience. Having had the night to let it settle down and evaluate it, I still can come away with some positives to take from this experience."

Nick's motto for life is 'Power Love Discipline'. On his web site he says "Whether I win or lose, I believe that God gets great joy when I approach my training, working, and racing with an attitude of power, love, and discipline. I try to adopt this same view in other areas of my life besides running."

"Running with all my heart is a way for me to thank God for the opportunities and gifts he has given me. Through the ups and downs of training, racing, and injury, I constantly remind myself that all I have comes from God and without Him, I would not be the person I am today."

"Every day is an opportunity for me to thank Him. At this point in my life, I get to do this through the awesome experience of running with all my heart for gold."

◆ **Michael Edwards aka 'Eddie the Eagle'**

Themes: Being chosen; difficulties

Event: Ski jumping

From: Cheltenham, England; December 1963

Achievement: The first competitor to represent GB in Olympic ski jumping, 1988

'Eddie the Eagle' as he came to be known was chosen to compete in the Winter Olympic Games in 1988 because he was determined to be chosen and was prepared to go to extreme lengths to ensure that he was chosen.

Michael Edwards had first gone skiing on a school trip when he was 13 and he became good enough to compete internationally.

Although he was a good downhill skier, Edwards missed being chosen for the GB team for the 1984 Olympic Games. Desperate to make his dream of competing in the Olympics come true, he switched to ski-jumping. This was despite the fact that there are no ski jumps in England and even Scotland doesn't have enough snow to allow the sport to be pursued seriously. There were few, if any other British competitors.

Edwards moved to Lake Placid in the US in order to train and enter races of a higher standard. It wasn't easy. He was totally self-funded and he was so hard up that he had to borrow ski boots and use 6 pairs of socks to make them fit. He was also handicapped by the fact that he was very farsighted and had to wear glasses all the time. When he was skiing, they got so steamed up, he couldn't see properly.

Nevertheless Edwards persevered and he represented Great Britain at the 1987 World Championships. He was ranked 55th in the world. This qualified him for the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. It was in Calgary that he was nicknamed Eddie the Eagle.

It was so unusual to have a British entry for ski jumping, the British press soon homed in on him. They portrayed him as some crazy guy with next-to-no skiing experience and a fear of heights. Eddie played up to this because he realized that it could help him with funding. "I made a big deal about being scared at the top of that big slope. It was true. I defy anyone to be up there and not be terrified, but the point is I wasn't scared enough to stop doing it."

Although Eddie finished last in both his events, he wasn't that bad. He set a British record of 73.5 m in one of his Calgary jumps. He was also the world number nine in amateur speed skiing (106.8 mph) and the stunt jumping world record holder (10 cars/6 buses).

Shortly after the Olympics finished, the entry requirements were made much tougher. Eddie never managed to qualify for the Games again but he was chosen to be a torchbearer for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. He has earned a living doing stunts, commercials and talk shows.

There was never any chance that he could win against competitors who learn to ski as soon as they can walk. It was about taking part and seizing life with both hands. When people refer to him as our 'greatest-ever loser', he points out: 'How can I be the loser when I'm the one who is remembered. How many people actually know who won the gold?'

◆ **Dai Greene**

Themes: Choosing a certain lifestyle to reach a goal; rewards

Event 400m hurdles & 400 m relay

From: Llanelli, Wales; April 1986

Dai Greene timeline			
Date	Event	Result/Medal	Age
2002	Decided against a professional football contract		16
	Switched from football to athletics		
2003	Epilepsy diagnosed	☹	17
2005	European Athletics Junior Championships	Silver	19
2006	Senior European Athletics Championships,	heats only	20
2006	Came off medication for epilepsy	☺	
2007	European Athletics U23 Championships	Gold	21
2008	Bad season & failed to qualify for the Beijing Olympics.	☹	
2009	World Championships 400m hurdles	7th	23
2009	World Championships 400m relay	Silver	
2010	European Championships 400m hurdles	Gold	
2010	Commonwealth Games 400m hurdles	Gold	24
2011	World Championships 400m hurdles	Gold	25
2011	European Team Championships 400m hurdles	Gold	
2012	London 2012 Olympic Games		26

Deciding not to become a footballer!

Being offered a contract to train as a professional footballer would have been a dream come true for many boys but Dai Greene didn't think it was right for him. Not long afterwards, some temporary knee problems cause him to swap football for athletics. Looking back he sees this as having been a life-saving decision. "The training I've done and the way I live for athletics has turned my life around."

Why? Because at 17, Dai had been diagnosed with epilepsy, a condition that causes life-threatening seizures or fits. The seizures were horrible. Something as simple as a late night, too much to drink or not eating properly at the right time could set one off. Most people control it using medication. However by the age of 19, Dai was competing internationally as an athlete in the 400 m hurdle event and was doing well. He won the silver medal at the European Athletics Junior Championships. By the time he was competing at senior level, he felt that the medication was interfering too much with his training because it made him so drowsy. In order to achieve his goal of becoming a world class athlete, he needed to come off the drugs that controlled the epilepsy.

Dai visited his consultant to discuss the situation. He had worked out what triggered the fits. He explained to her that he had changed his lifestyle dramatically. He had stopped drinking alcohol, avoided late nights and was careful to eat regularly. He was also very physically fit.

The doctor not only agreed that it could be safe for him to come off the drugs, she said that she wished that more people would make similar decisions.

An uphill struggle – literally!

There was still a long way to go to become a champion though. Money was tight for several years. Dai had a part-time job at McDonald's when he was at College and then at Next when he tried to become a professional athlete. "I lived on the breadline a while and you get used to it," The little money I had went on food because I wasn't prepared to eat beans on toast every day."

He won the gold medal at the U23 Championships the following year but the next season was a tough one. "There were moments that year when I thought it might never happen, I'd had lots of injuries and I thought I'd maybe reached my limit."

Dai continued to train hard. He was based in Bath by now and part of his training schedule involved a gruelling run up and down 'the unforgiving hill of Claverton Down'. Running up an icy hill in the middle of winter is harder than any race. It helped to prepare him both physically and mentally, building his confidence. "I know on the start line I've done everything to be ready. So if someone beats me they are going to have to run a special race."

His crowning moment so far was on 1 September 2011, at the World Athletics Championships in South Korea, when he won the gold medal and became world champion.

It took a while for it to sink in. Looking back he reflected, "...all those tough times made me mentally stronger. I wouldn't change it for the world because, even now, it's helping me deal with my success. When you've been at the bottom of the pile, like me, it's easy to keep focused on the next goal."

The next goal is of course the London Olympic Games 2012. Oh, and not forgetting his ambition to break Kriss Akabusi's British record.

◆ **Alistair and Jonathan Brownlee**

Theme: Teamwork

Triathlon champions Alistair and Jonathan Brownlee compete against each other but they also support and encourage one another both in training and in races. In 2011, Alistair was world champion and younger brother Jonathan was runner up.

◆ **Debbie Flood**

Themes: Being equipped for gold and for God; training; disappointment turning to victories; oh wow God moments; more than gold

Event Rowing, quadruple sculls

From Yorkshire; Feb 1980

Date	Event	Result/Medal	Age
early life	judo and athletics	☺	
1996	attended summer rowing course	decided to make rowing her sport	16
1998	World Junior championships in the Double sculls	Bronze	18
1999	Double sculls at the World Under 23 Championships	Gold	19
2000	did not qualify for Olympic Games, Sydney	☹	20
	Under 23 Championships	Gold	
	Henley Royal Regatta	Gold	
2004	Olympic Games, Athens, Quadruple sculls	Silver	24
2006	World Championships	Gold	26
2007	World Championships	Gold	
2008	Olympic Games, Beijing, Quadruple sculls	Silver	28
2010	World Championships	Gold	30
2012	London 2012 Olympic Games		32

Getting started

Debbie grew up in a very sporty family. She excelled at both judo and athletics from an early age. She competed in junior international judo competitions and at county level in 1500m, cross country and shot put. She might never have thought of taking up rowing had it not been for her Dad getting a knee injury when running (he did marathons) and being advised to use the rowing machine at the gym. Debbie, who was 16, went with him, as she often did and was so good at it that her Dad encouraged her to go on a summer rowing course at Eton College. Here she was noticed by Mark Banks, a top rowing coach and she has never looked back.

Handling the ups and downs

In order to train at top level, Debbie had to move from Yorkshire to Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire. She made great progress and at the age of 20, came close to qualifying for a place on the team for the Sydney Olympics in 2000. But she didn't quite make it. At first she was hugely disappointed at being left behind. 'It seemed like a hammer blow'. "I was devastated. I thought, 'God, why have you put me here? I've just wasted two years for nothing.'"

However this meant that she could compete in both the Under-23 Championships and the Henley Royal Regatta. She became the first British woman to win both events in a single rowing shell. This gave her one of those 'oh wow, God...!' moments.

“At that point in my life I looked back at the random events and thought, ‘Wow, I’m in the right place. If I could choose to go to the Olympics instead of what I’ve done, I wouldn’t. It made me think that God’s totally got my life in his hands.”

In 2004 Debbie did make it onto the Olympic team for Athens. To their great excitement, they won the silver medal. By the next Olympic Games, her quad had been world champions 3 years in a row and they were very much hoping to get the Olympic gold medal. The team led for 6 minutes of the 6 ½ minute race, before being beaten by China in the last 30 seconds. “We were gutted to the core” said Debbie. It can be devastating to put in so much effort and not achieve your goal. Her rowing career isn’t over however and there is the chance for an Olympic gold medal again this year.

Training

Being in training for the London 2012 Olympics is a tough life.

Rowers train:

- 6 hours a day, in 3 sessions
- Only 3 weeks a year holiday after the summer.
- In all weathers – sun, rain, wind, hail ...

Debbie says “It can get very intense, but for me, as a Christian, I’m able to look at the bigger picture ... I keep coming back to that: my life is in God’s hands. If things aren’t going the way I want them to go, yes, I might be moody. But at the end of the day I’ve got to trust that God’s got me where he wants me to be.”

More than Gold

So maybe Debbie will become a gold medalist in 2012 or maybe she won’t. Either way, what will she do afterwards?

After the Games in Athens, she visited many schools, doing assemblies and talks. She started mentoring kids who were three or four years below where they should have been academically. “I guess I really felt God putting on my heart to work with kids. I began to think that was maybe the way forward after my career.”

In order to see what she could really cope with, she took a break from rowing after the Beijing Games, and worked full time in a prison for young offenders. She now feels that working with disruptive youngsters is the way forward for her.

A Christian in Sport

Debbie grew up in a Christian home and decided to become a Christian herself when she was 15. She is an active member of the organization ‘Christians in Sport’

"My faith is really important to me. I look back on my life and see that I have been put in these places which appear to be random, but as I see it I have found something that I am really good at and God has put me here as a witness for him. He has got my life in his hands and this is where he is taking me," she said.

"Everyone in my team knows that I am a Christian but they see that I am just a normal person, I get on with my rowing, I train hard. I'm not strange because I'm a Christian but I believe in God and it's a big part of my life."

◆ Ellie Simmonds

Themes: Surprise win; self-discipline; positive attitude

Event Paralympic swimming; 50m, 100m and 400m freestyle, 50m butterfly, and 200m individual medley.

From Walsall, England; November 1994

Achievements:

- ◆ At the age of 13, she was the youngest British athlete in China. She came 5th in the 200 m individual medley and won gold medals in the 100 m and 400 m freestyle events. She swims in the S6 disability category.
- ◆ She has won 6 other gold medals
- ◆ She won the 2008 BBC Young Sports Personality of the Year award.
- ◆ In 2009, age 14 she was the youngest person ever to be awarded the MBE (a Member of the Order of the British Empire)
- ◆ She took part in All Star Family Fortunes which was broadcast on 29 November 2009, making her the youngest team captain they ever had on the show. She played the game with her aunt, trainer, cousin and brother and won £1,520 for her chosen charity.

Out of the nowhere

Few people had heard of Ellie Simmonds until she won 2 gold medals for swimming at the Paralympic Games in 2008. At the age of 13, she was the youngest British athlete in China but she took the Games by storm. She became famous overnight but she had been training quietly and steadily in the background for several years.

Eleanor was born with dwarfism. "Being small never stopped her doing anything and there was never anything she felt she couldn't do!" said her mum. She was supported in this by her parents who took a positive attitude towards life. She therefore learned to swim when she was 4 years old as well as doing ballet, horse riding and other activities.

Ellie was competing against able-bodied swimmers from the age of eight and was inspired by watching the 2004 Athens Paralympics when she was nine. "I looked at the swimmers and thought, that's cool. I want to do that." "I've always been focused," she says, "ever since I was a young girl, and I've always been really determined."

How did she do it?

At the age of 10 she was talent-spotted by UK Sport. When she started secondary school she persuaded her mum to arrange for the two of them to live in Swansea during the week so that she could train at the Wales National Pool which is one of British Swimming's five Intensive Training Centres, with top coach Billy Pye.

At weekends after her Saturday-morning training session, they go back home to Birmingham to see her Dad and her older brother and three sisters. This has been the biggest sacrifice they have had to make as a family but her mum feels that it's been worth it as it's only for a few years and they all get so much pleasure from Ellie's swimming success.

Most days Ellie gets up at 5:30am, has a quick breakfast and then trains between 6:00am – 7:30am. After school there is more training from 3:30pm – 5.30pm. After dinner, she does homework which hopefully leaves time to catch up with friends online or watch TV before going to

bed early. Having a good routine helps her to balance training with school work. In her spare time Ellie does normal teenage things like shopping, going to the cinema and listening to music.

Her GCSE's did interfere with her training in 2011 so she didn't do quite so well in competitions but she achieved 9 good grades and has started her A levels. School work is likely to take a back seat in 2012 however as she trains for the London Olympic Games which are going to mean a great deal to everybody. Her school is giving her an extra year to complete her A Levels.

In 2008, it was an overwhelming surprise when she won 2 gold medals in the Olympic Games. Her school which had been very supportive gave her a wonderful hero's welcome when she arrived back. This sort of thing hasn't turned her head though and she is the sort of person who keeps her feet firmly on the ground (when she isn't in the pool)

Looking ahead

In the London 2012 Olympic Games there will be much more pressure as people will be expecting her to win. She is likely to swim in the 50m, 100m and 400m freestyle, and the 200m medley, "I'm not going to say I'll get four gold medals. I'm just going to try to swim my best."

Ellie plans to also compete in the Rio Games in 2016 but she hasn't yet looked beyond that. She doesn't want to devote her whole life to swimming. She likes to have other things to think about such as a job, a social life and so on. She has been involved with ventures such as 'Active Kids' which give thousands of children across the country a better chance to enjoy games, regardless of ability or fitness level.

She hopes her achievements will inspire others. "There are people out there who think they can't do anything, so just sit around all day. But they can do things – not just in sport but in anything."

Inspirational Video clip

A personal account of Britain's youngest Gold medallist from Beijing, Ellie Simmonds by her coach Billy Pye (1 min 40 sec)

[British Paralympic Gold medallist, Ellie Simmonds \(London 2012\)](#)

◆ Steph Cook

Themes: 'Oh wow' God moments; unexpected winner; more than gold

Event: Modern Pentathlon

From: Scotland; February 1972

Achievements: Olympic gold medal and world champion

Steph never set out to become an Olympic athlete. Her main goal was to become a doctor. What started out as a hobby just grew and grew as God opened doors for her. After a short successful career as an athlete, she went back to being a doctor.

At school Steph was 'reasonably sporty, but no remarkable athlete or anything like that'. She did love horse riding and long distance running however. When she went to university she met some students who were into competing in the Modern Pentathlon but she didn't think of trying it herself until she moved to Oxford for the second part of her training as a doctor.

The event consists of 5 sports including shooting, fencing, riding, swimming and running 3000 metres. Steph was running regularly but she had never done shooting or fencing. She took to it very quickly however and in 1997 she was chosen to compete for both Oxford and Great Britain. She also had to sit her medical finals. The following year when she was working as a junior doctor she qualified for the World championship team. She came 8th in the Pentathlon but also won a bronze medal in the relay and silver in a team event.

Trying to combine serious running with being a doctor was really quite difficult but Steph was then given an unexpected opportunity to do medical research. This made it much easier for her to find the time to train regularly. A few months later she found that she could get a grant making it possible for her to train full time for the Olympic Games. In March 2000 she won the world cup. When she arrived in Sydney for the start of the games she found that she was ranked number 1 in the world. She could have felt pressured over this but decided to take it as a positive sign/encouragement. She had taken a small book of Bible verses with her to use a focus for her 'quiet time' with God each day. This was very important to her. Her team were given the opportunity to attend the opening ceremony and then returned for their event the following week. The event started at 6.45 in the morning and finished at 5.30 in the afternoon so it was a very long exciting day. When Steph started the 3000m race which was the last event, she was in 8th place. Fortunately running was her main strength. With 300m to go she took the lead and won by 2 seconds.

Winning an Olympic gold medal turned her life upside down for a while but it didn't change her as a person. Steph went on to win the World championship in 2001 and then she returned to her medical career as a doctor, happy that she had used the gifts that God had given her in a meaningful way. It had been an 'Oh wow, I never expected God to do **that** in my life' episode.

◆ Steve Bradbury**Theme:** Achieving the unexpected**Event:** Speed skating**From:** Australia; October 1973**Achievement:** Unexpectedly winning Australia's first Winter Olympic gold medal

Australians love sport as a nation but are generally better at 'summer' sports than 'winter' ones. However they have produced some good speed skaters and their team won the 5,000 metre relay at the World Championships in 1991. Steve was a very good speed skater and was part of this relay team. He was also in the team that won a bronze Olympic medal in 1994.

Speed skating is different to many sports as it is particularly prone to crashes and Steve had been involved in some nasty accidents. By 2002 when he competed in 1000 m in Salt Lake City, he was older and slower than many of his competitors. He just wanted to enjoy the experience of being in the Olympics one more time. He wasn't dreaming of winning a medal at all.

Steve reached the final partly because one of the semi-final skaters was disqualified. Expecting to come last, he decided to stay at the back of the pack out of trouble. To quote the press, 'He looked like a tortoise behind four hares'.

However on the final bend the other four skaters got into a pile-up, leaving Steve to skate across the finish line and win the gold medal. Ever since, the Australians have used the phrase 'doing a Bradbury' to mean achieving something way beyond all natural expectations!

The fastest runner does not always win the race,
the strongest soldier does not always win the battle,
the wisest does not always have food,
the smartest does not always become wealthy,
and the talented one does not always receive praise.
Time and chance happen to everyone.
Ecclesiastes 9:11 NCV



◆ **Emil Zátopek**

Themes: Sportsmanship; surprise victories

Event: long-distance runner: 5000 m, 10,000 m

From: Czechoslovakia; 1922

Achievement: gold medals & records in all 3 long distance races; the Pierre de Coubertin medal

Emil Zátopek was the son of a Czech carpenter and worked in a shoe factory when he first left school. He never thought of himself as being particularly talented but he trained harder than many other athletes of his day. He had won medals in London in 1948 for both the 5000 metres and the 10,000 metres.

In the lead up to the next Olympic Games he was seriously ill and the doctors advised him not to compete at all but he decided to dose himself up on a homebrew of tea and lemons. He arrived at the games expecting to defend his title in those two events. He not only won the gold medal in both races, he also set a new world record for both.

They had been long hard races but instead of resting and enjoying the moment, he suddenly, at the last minute, decided to enter for the marathon as well, even though he had never run this distance before (26.2 miles) in his life. Amazingly he not only won the marathon, he broke the Olympic record in that as well.

Emil was nicknamed the "Czech Locomotive" because of the way he often panted when he ran. Not only was he one of the most outstanding athletes of his day, he was always ready to give advice to other competitors. His wife Dana also won a gold Olympic medal for throwing the javelin.

He was awarded the Pierre de Coubertin medal for sportsmanship posthumously in December 2000.

◆ **Jessica Ennis**

Theme: Setback through injury

Event Heptathlon (7 events)

From Sheffield England; January 1986

Achievement: World champion but not yet an Olympic medallist

Date	Event	Result/Medal	Age
2005	European Junior Championships	Gold	19
2006	Commonwealth games	Bronze	20
2007	World Heptathlon Championships	4th	
2008	Setback - stress fracture so not in the Olympics	gutted	22
2009	World Heptathlon Championships	Gold	23
2010	World Indoor Pentathlon Championships	Gold	24
2010	European Heptathlon Championships	Gold	
2011	World Heptathlon Championships	Silver	
2012	London 2012 Olympic Games		26

Jessica’s event is the Heptathlon. For this you have to be a good all-rounder at athletics as you have to compete in 7 different events: 200 metres; 800 metres; 100m hurdles; high jump; long jump; shot put and javelin.

She joined an athletics club when she was 11, began competing at the age of 14 and won a bronze medal at the Commonwealth games aged 20.

She suffered a huge disappointment in 2008 though because although she had qualified for the Olympics, she hurt her ankle really badly shortly beforehand. It turned out to be a stress fracture and the doctor had to tell her that she would not be fit enough to compete.

She made a strong comeback winning the World championships in 2009. In 2010 she became the World Indoor Champion in both the Heptathlon and the Pentathlon. She also set a new record. In the World Championships in 2011 she won the silver medal. Jessica hopes to win the Olympic gold medal in 2012.

◆ **Christine Ohuruogu**

Themes: Setbacks; rewards; teamwork; more than gold

Event: 400 metres

From: East London; May1984

Date	Event	Result/Medal	Age
2003	European Junior Championships	Bronze	19
2004	AAA champion		
2004	Olympic Games, Athens 400m	semi-finalist	20
2004	Olympic Games, Athens 400m team relay	4th	
2005	Degree in Linguistics UC London	degree	
2005	World Championships 400m	semi-finalist	21
2005	World Championships 400m team relay	Bronze	
2006	Commonwealth games	Gold	22
2006	SETBACK	BAN	
2007	World Championships	Gold	23
2008	Olympic Games, Beijing 400m	Gold	24
2009	New Year's honour	MBE	
2011	disqualified for a false start at the World championships	gutted	
2012	London 2012 Olympic Games		28

A good start

Christine grew up in East London, just around the corner from the new 2012 Olympic stadium. She did well at school. She was also a keen netball player and was good enough to play for England at junior netball level. She wasn't really interested in athletics at this point. "I never actually followed it when I was younger - I used to find it so boring," she said. "If it came on television, I would either change the channel or leave the room."

All this changed at a school sports day one year. No one wanted to run the 800m, so she trained for it, running laps at lunchtimes "to get used to the pain". She won, and then joined Newham and Essex Beagles club, age 16. At the club she specialized in the 400 metres, again because no one else at the club wanted to do that distance. Her times were impressive so she was often chosen to run for her team. "She won her first race and she has never looked back," the club's chairman said. "She is an athlete we have pretty much developed from scratch and this makes us all incredibly proud."

At 20, she qualified to compete in her first Olympic Games and made it as far as the semi-final. Two years later she won a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games. In between all this she also gained a good university degree.

Oh no!

Then it all fell apart. Sadly, so many athletes were using performance enhancing drugs a few years ago that the athletic governing bodies had to introduce random drugs tests in between competitions as well as during them.

They set up the "whereabouts" system where an athlete had to send details of where they would be on specific days at set times to the athletic authorities. If your schedule changed you had to tell them where you would then be. So imagine you are meeting a friend for coffee and you have told

the authorities that you will be at Starbucks from 10am-11am. Your friend rings and asks to meet at Costas instead. You would have to ring the Drug agency to tell them that you will be at a different coffee shop. Then supposing your friend has to leave early, so at 10.30 you either stay on your own until 11 or ring in to say you will be somewhere else. Well Chrissy didn't always remember to do this so on three occasions drug testers turned up where she said she would be and she wasn't there.

This got her into big trouble. She was banned from competitions for a year which meant that she could not compete in the 2006 European Athletics Championships. Even worse, the British Olympic Association also imposed a lifetime ban excluding her from competing at future Olympic Games for Great Britain. She was devastated. She appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport but lost. She appealed again, saying that she would probably leave Britain and compete elsewhere if it was unsuccessful.

No one ever suspected her of actually using drugs, it just that the rules have become so very strict. UK Athletics confirmed there was "no suggestion, nor any grounds for suspicion, that the offence may have been deliberate in order to prevent testing".

Back on track

Just one day after she completed her one-year ban, Christine was selected for the British team at the World Championships. She had not been allowed take part in competitions for a whole year but she made a great come back, winning the gold medal in the 400 metres at the World Athletics Championships in Japan in August 2007.

She continued to fight her Olympic ban and it was finally overturned in November 2007 which meant that she could compete in Beijing the following summer.

Christine returned stronger and wiser. She had grown up in a close, large Christian family with eight brothers and sisters. Her mother encouraged her saying 'Life is like an elastic band - you can come down so far but when you let go you'll fly far higher than you ever expected'.

She won the gold medal in the 400m at the Beijing Olympics making her the first British female Olympic champion of the 400m.

Still some way to go

Since the last Olympics however, Christine has struggled with injuries and in 2011 she did not make the top 30 in the world rankings. She also suffered a shock disqualification for a false start at the world championships in Daegu, South Korea. The rule over false starts has got really strict in recent years. Originally you were disqualified after 3 false starts. Now you don't even get a second chance. If you leave the blocks before the starter gun has fired you are instantly disqualified.

False starts in 100 metres are not unusual because you can win by a fraction of a second, but they are almost unheard off in 400 metres so Christine was particularly upset.

Her team-mate Lee McConnell said: "We'll rally round, pick her up and get her ready for the relay team. We've all gone out of championships in ways we didn't want to do but she's strong and we will do what we can to help her."

Let's hope that 2012 will see her back on form. But if it doesn't, Christine knows that there is more to life than winning athletics. Although she has moved out of the family home in order to make it easier to relax after exhausting training sessions, she is still part of a very close supportive family who love her for being Chrissy rather than for winning medals even though they enjoy it when she does. She also has her church 'family' and her faith to support her as a person, not just as an athlete.

◆ Natalie du Toit

Theme: Setback when she lost a leg, but carried on

Event: Swimming, both Paralympic and able-bodied

From: Cape Town, South Africa; January 1984

Achievement: 2 gold Commonwealth medals not long after losing her leg

Natalie began competing internationally in swimming at the age of 14. When she was 17 she was hit by a car while riding her scooter back to school after swimming practice and had to have her left leg amputated at the knee. Three months later, before she had started walking again, she was back in the pool with the intention of competing in the 2002 Commonwealth Games where she won 2 gold medals against able bodied athletes. She has won gold medals at the Paralympic games in 2004 and 2008 and also qualified for the main Olympics, after finishing 4th in the 10 km open water race in the World Championships. In the 2008 Olympic Games she came 16th. She does not use a prosthetic limb when she swims.

South Africa's Olympic Committee chose her to carry their flag at the 2008 Summer Olympics opening ceremony, making her the first athlete to carry a flag in both Olympics and Paralympics in a single year

◆ Natalia Partyka

Theme: Disabled since birth but competes against able-bodied players

Event Table Tennis

From Poland; June 1989

Achievements Silver and bronze European medals; 2 x gold Paralympic medals

Born without a right hand and forearm, Natalie has won many medals in competitions for able-bodied athletes as well as competitions for athletes with disabilities.

She has consistently been ranked No. 1 in the para-sport world and has competed in the Paralympic Games 3 times and won 2 gold medals. She has also been ranked amongst the top 50 able-bodied table tennis players and qualified to compete in the last Olympic Games

◆ George Eyser

Theme: The 1st amputee to compete against able-bodied people, 1908

Event: Gymnastics

From: USA/Germany; August 1871

Achievement: Won 6 Olympic medals

George was the first amputee to compete in the Olympic Games, many years before the first official Paralympic Games (no longer open solely to war veterans) was held in Rome in 1960.

George had been born in Germany but his family moved to the States. He loved gymnastics but at some point when he was young he was run over by a train. He lost most of his left leg but he was given a wooden prosthetic leg. In the 1904 Olympic Games, at the age of 33, he won 3 gold, 2 silver and 1 bronze medal for various gymnastic events.

**◆ Ray Ewry****Theme:** Polio victim/survivor**Event:** High jump, long jump and triple jump**From:** Indiana USA; October 1873**Achievement:** 8 Olympic gold medals

Ray Ewry suffered from Polio as a child. This sometime leaves people crippled for life. For a short while, he was in a wheelchair, and his family were afraid that he might be paralysed for life. However, Ray did his own exercises and was able to overcome his illness. He went on to become a win a track and field athlete, winning a total of 8 gold medals for high jump, long jump and triple jump in 3 successive Olympic Games. This makes him one of the most successful Olympians of all time.

◆ Wilma Rudolph**Theme:** Polio victim/survivor**Event:** 100m & 200m**From:** USA; June 1940**Achievement:** 3 gold medals after overcoming polio

When she was very young Wilma Rudolph was paralysed by polio and the doctors doubted that she would ever be able to walk again. She had other health problems too, getting both scarlet fever and double pneumonia. Wilma was determined to fight back and by the age of 12, she was walking again. Not only that, she decided to take up athletics. Only 6 years later she was in the relay team that won the Bronze medal at the Olympic Games in Melbourne.

In 1960 in Rome, Wilma won 3 gold Olympic medals and was nicknamed "The Tornado". She was considered to be the fastest woman in the world. She was also a civil rights and women's rights pioneer.

- ◆ Ray and Wilma both had to choose between being a victim or being a survivor. They took the positive option.

◆ Kelly Holmes

Theme: Back-up support; setbacks; self-harm; perseverance; rewards

Events: 800m; 1500m

From: Tonbridge, Kent, England; April 1970

Kelly Holmes timeline			
Date	Event	Result/Medal	Age
1983	All England school championship, 1500m	Gold	13
1987	Joined the army - HGV, then PE instructor		17
	Turned away from athletics		
1992	Inspired by watching a former opponent compete in Olympic Games		22
1993	World Championships, broke the English record for 800m	5th in sf + ER	23
1994	Commonwealth Games, 1500m	Gold	
1994	European Championships & European cup, 1500m	Silver x 2	24
	World cup, 1500m	Bronze	
1995	World Championships, 1500m, 800m	Silver + Bronze	25
	European Cup	Gold	
1996	European Cup, 800m	Silver	
1996	Stress fracture at Olympic Games, Atlanta, 800m, 1500m	4th/11th	26
1997	British record for 1500m	Gold + BR	27
1997	Ruptured Achilles tendon at World Championships		
1998	Commonwealth Games, 1500m	Silver	28
1999	World Championships, 800m	4th in semi final	
2000	Olympic Games Sydney, 800m, 1500; 6 weeks after virus	Bronze / 7th	30
2001	World Championships, 800m	Silver	31
2002	Moved to train in South Africa		
2002	European Championships, 800m	Bronze	32
2002	Commonwealth Games, 1500m	Gold	
2003	World Indoor Championships, 1500m	Silver	33
2003	World Championships, 800m, 1500m	Silver / 9th	
	World Athletics Final	Silver	
2004	Olympic Games Athens, 800m , 1500m	Double Gold	34
2004	World Athletics Final	Gold	
2005	Retired from athletics		

Starting at the bottom

Kelly had quite a few jobs before she became a famous athlete. The first was at the local newsagents where she had a paper round and a Saturday job selling sweets. She sometimes ate more of them than she sold until her friend Carol set the challenge to see which of them could stop eating sweets for the longest. Carol managed 2 months but Kelly a whole year.

Although she had got herself a job so that she would have some pocket money, she says that it taught her a lot about communicating with people, being on time, dealing with money, being

responsible and having people trust you. She also used to wash cars and windows around her council estate. At 16 she had a job as a carer looking after elderly people (which included washing bottoms). She says it all helped her to grow as a person.

"I was always the kind of person who wanted to help others or do things – it made me grow up a bit, as well. It didn't always pay much, but helping in your community can be a big thing that people remember later on."

When she left school, Kelly joined the army, working first as an HGV driver and then as a PE instructor. She had shown a lot of potential for being a good runner from her early teens winning the 1500m All England schools championship at 13. The PE staff had been impressed by her ability to overcome her hatred of winter cross-country running in order to win races. A few years later an army coach encouraged her to return to athletics.

She had been inspired by watching Seb Coe win a gold Olympic medal in 1984 but it was when she saw Lisa York, her former junior opponent run in the 1992 Olympic Games that really stirred her Olympic ambition, so she asked the army to allow her the time to train seriously.

"I believe that the discipline, respect for other people and myself, the physical strength and focus I gained in the Army, stood me in good stead for when I returned to Athletics at 22." says Kelly.

Only a year after her return to athletics, aged 23, she broke the English record for the 800m at the World Championships. From then on she believed that she could get to the top. It certainly looked as though she would soon be Britain's new golden girl of athletics.

The roller coaster years

It was not to be that easy or straightforward however. All athletes suffer from injury at times but Kelly seemed to get more than her fair share and at particularly critical times. "Every single year I've said 'Oh, if only I hadn't had that injury I'd have done even better,'"

A stress fracture ruined her hopes of a medal at her first attempt at the Olympic Games in 1996. Then 1997 was a real roller coaster year for her. She says "Breaking the British record for 1500m was a highlight of my sporting career." But... "Rupturing my calf and tearing my Achilles tendon at the World Championships when I was 5 seconds faster than anyone else in the world was a lowlight in my career." She had arrived expecting to become world champion. Instead, she limped off the track in tears in the first round of heats.

Her training for the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 was seriously interrupted when she went down with a virus. By the time she had recovered, she had only 6 weeks in which to prepare. She won a bronze in the 800m nevertheless.

On more than one occasion she considered retiring from athletics. She was one of those athletes who seemed destined to be remembered as a good runner who never quite fulfilled her potential.

In her early years, she found it hard to accept criticism. Steve Cram, the former world 1500m champion, remembers upsetting her while working as a commentator at the 1995 world championships. Some weeks later they talked it through. Steve said "We talked about channelling her aggression and not letting what people think worry her, and I think she has increasingly done

that as her career has progressed ... She's able to keep a much more level head on the track when you need to make the right decisions under pressure."

In 2001 Seb Coe wrote that Kelly was a "Rolls Royce athlete being given back-street servicing" and that was what had contributed to her failure to turn all that potential into gold medals.

Only one more Olympic opportunity lay ahead, the Games in Athens in 2004. Better funding enabled her to move to train in South Africa with a top American coach. She also received the best medical back-up. A physiotherapist was on hand to fly to South Africa to treat her during training and the team doctor monitored her closely during the pre-Olympic training camp. Nevertheless, just a year before her historic win, Kelly hit her lowest point ever. She was yet again facing injury problems that left her unable to run properly. She became depressed and started to self-harm. It was a cry of despair. She soon realized that this wasn't a good way to deal with her feelings and she didn't want to seriously harm herself help so she went to see her doctor in order to get professional help.

The rewards

When you reach your goal, all the disappointments, traumas and difficulties along the way look different somehow. They no longer matter. Kelly won not just one, but two gold Olympic medals in 2004. How did she feel about it?

"Winning two Olympic Gold Medals at Athens Olympic Games in 2004 was more than a dream come true, and breaking the British record for 1500m again when winning my gold was extraordinary!"

"Winning double gold made all the fighting worth while, it has given me the opportunity to voice my opinions to powerful people with things I am passionate about."

"My career has been such a roller-coaster but I just kept sticking in there and I knew in my heart that there was something in there for me to fulfil my dreams."

Since retiring from athletics in 2005, Dame Kelly Holmes has set up her own charity to 'create life chances for young people'. She has a passion to try and help inspire children to do something positive with their lives through sport. Her team of sports celebrity champions know what it takes 'to overcome adversity, and still have the will to succeed, not only in sport, but in life too.'

Helpful video clip 5.53 min:

<http://www.mya4e.com/media/secrets-to-success/dame-kelly-holmes>

◆ **Derek Redmond** won several gold medals as part of the 4x400m relay team but his attempts at an individual medal were often hampered by injuries. He is famous for his determination to complete his Olympic semi-final race after he tore his hamstring. His father pushed past security to help him hobble across the finish line. The crowd gave him a standing ovation.

◆ **Usain Bolt**

Theme: World record sprinter despite scoliosis; right kind of training; being polite and respectful to people;

Event: 100m, 200m rewards;

From: Jamaica; Aug 1986

Achievement: World record holder and Olympic gold medallist 2008 in 100m & 200m

Date	Event	Result/Medal	Age
2001	World Junior Championships	a personal best	14
2002	World Junior Championships	Gold 200m+ 2 Silver	15
2003	Pan American Junior Championships	Gold 200m+ Silver	16
2003	World Youth Championships	Gold 200m	
2004	Turned professional		17
2004	Set a new Junior record, but injury problems		
2004	Olympic Games Athens	Injury problems	18
2005	new coach, new attitude, different type of training		19
2005	CAC Championships	Gold 200m	
2006	Injury problems so could not compete		20
2007	World Championships	Silver 200m + relay	21
2008	Reebok Grand Prix	100 m World Record	
2008	Olympic Games Beijing	3 x Gold medals + 3 WR	21/22
	(He won his 2nd gold the day before his birthday)		
2009	World Championships	3 x Gold medals	23
2009	World Athletics Final	Gold 200m	
2011	World Championships	2 x Gold + 1 disqualification	25
2012	Olympic Games, London		26

With one leg half an inch shorter than the other, Usain Bolt should not be able to be the fastest man on the planet, but he is. This has made him very popular in Jamaica now that he is an Olympic gold medallist and world record holder, but it wasn't so easy getting there.

His parents noticed that he was unusually active when he was only 3 weeks old. They eventually took him to the doctor because he couldn't stay still. "I was all over the place, climbing things. My mum goes, 'There must be something wrong with this kid', and the doctor goes, 'Nooooo, he's just hyperactive.'

His parents are ordinary people who run the local grocery shop. They have taught Usain to be polite, respectful and honest. Knowing how to treat people well has helped Usain a lot in life.

Not surprisingly, Usain Bolt was really good at sport at school. By 12, he was the best 100m sprinter at national school level.

His first world class competition was the 2001 World Youth Championships in Hungary when he was just 14. He did ok (he set a personal best) but he didn't get through to the final and he didn't seem to be taking life very seriously. In fact he got into serious trouble for playing a practical joke.

He hid in the back of a van when he was supposed to be preparing for a race and was detained by the police. This was very embarrassing for his coach McNeil who was a former Olympic athlete

By the next year, things were very different. Larking around on a trip abroad had been one thing but the 2002 championships were in his homeland of Jamaica. Usain was now a skinny 15 year old who had shot up to 6 ft 5 in and stood head and shoulders above everyone else. He felt that he had to prove himself in front of his home crowd and was afraid of losing to boys who were more powerful than him. In fact he was so nervous that he put his shoes on the wrong feet! But Usain Bolt won the 200m gold medal making him the youngest-ever World Junior Champion. He says that the experience helped to make him the person that he is today.

"It was one of the toughest races of my life. I was so nervous running in front of my home crowd. It's on your mind that you've got to win for them. After running at the world juniors and then going somewhere else to run in front of people you don't know, come on, that's going to be easy." His times were so good that expectations of him were sky high. People were wondering whether he might break Michael Johnson's world record. At 18 he was set to compete in the Olympic Games in Athens.

But there were underlying problems. His technique was poor and he was repeatedly suffering from injuries. He didn't get past the first round of the Olympics and he came in for a lot of criticism at home in Jamaica. "People were saying he was faking those injuries. They were very cruel. They said he failed, he's faking, he's giddy headed, he's partying too much."

Usain does like to relax by dancing in night clubs but he doesn't drink. For him the late nights are not a problem because he is hyper-active and it helps him to unwind. He did start to take his training more seriously though.

Bolt was getting so many hamstring injuries, they checked him out thoroughly with x-rays and discovered that he has a condition called scoliosis which means that his spine curves from side to side. It also means that for him, one of his legs is half an inch shorter than the other. He should never have been able to consider a running career at all and yet he had already broken many of the junior records.

His new coach, Glen Mills developed an exceptionally well balance training programme in order to cope with the problem. He cut back on the high-intensity workouts and focused more on strength and flexibility. It took a couple of seasons to overcome the problem but 2008 started out well for Bolt when he broke the 100m world record at the Reebok Grand Prix. It was looking good for the Olympics in Beijing.

Usain Bolt's performance at the Olympic Games in 2008 was amazing. The men's 100m race is usually a photo finish but Bolt had a clear lead and broke the world record despite slowing down a fraction just before the finish line. He went on to win the 200m and break that record too. He also helped the Jamaican relay team to set a new record for the 4x100m.

Since then 'Lightening Bolt' has won many more medals. He is the first man to hold both the 100 and 200m World and Olympic titles at the same time. He recently had a disappointment at the 2011 World Championships where he was disqualified in the 100m race for a false start, but he quickly put it behind him and went on to win gold medals in the 200m and the relay.

◆ Michael Phelps

Themes: Self acceptance; rewards

Event: Swimming

From: USA, June 1985

Achievement: He holds the record for the most gold medals won in a single Olympics

His arms are 'too long' his legs are 'too short', his ankles flap like flippers and his feet are size 14! He was also diagnosed with ADHD* at an early age. Yet all this has helped to make Michael Phelps the top swimming champion of all time.

Michael took up swimming when young as a positive way to release his energy and he has never looked back. He was soon winning competitions. He qualified for the Sydney Olympics in 2000 at the age of 15, and came close to winning a medal. The following year at the World championships he became the youngest swimming world record holder. He won 6 gold and 2 bronze medals at the Athens Olympics in 2004 and 8 golds in 2008 in Beijing. He broke Mark Spitz's record for the most gold medals won in a single Olympics. Michael is hoping to win even more in 2012 in order to become the world's all time top Olympic medal winner.

ADHD* = Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder

◆ Chris Hoy

Theme: Rewards

Event: Cycling: Sprint, team sprint and Keirin

From: Edinburgh; March 1976

Achievement: 3 gold medals at the same Olympic games.

When Chris was 16, many of his friends laughed when he said that he intended to win a gold Olympic medal in cycling. In 2008, age 32, he became the first Briton to win 3 gold medals at the same games since 1908 and the most successful Olympic male cyclist of all time. He is now Sir Chris Hoy although his nickname is the 'Real McHoy'.

◆ Yelena Isinbayeva

Themes: Self acceptance; rewards

Event: Pole vault

From: Russia

Achievement: Champion & world record holder

When Yelena was young, she desperately wanted to become a champion gymnast. Her parents worked hard to find the money to support her in this. She started off really well and became the Russian National champion when she was 10 years old. But then she grew too tall for gymnastics. She dealt with this by changing her event. She used the skills and fitness she had developed in gymnastics and decided to focus on pole vaulting instead. Being tall works well with pole vaulting. She has been the World and Olympic pole vault champion and is the world record holder.

Like other celebrities, she sometimes uses her prize money to help local deprived children. She is also a member of the 'Champions for Peace' club.

◆ Sir Steve Redgrave

Theme: Health setbacks; rewards

Event: Rowing

From: Marlow, Buckinghamshire; March 1962

Achievements:

- ◆ Steve Redgrave is one of only four Olympians to have won a gold medal at five consecutive Olympic Games, 1984 to 2000. (Aged 22-38) This achievement led to him being hailed as Britain's greatest Olympian
- ◆ He won gold medals at five consecutive Olympic Games,
- ◆ Also 3 Commonwealth Games and 9 World Rowing Championships gold medals
- ◆ He has carried the British flag at the opening of the Olympic Games on two occasions.
- ◆ April 2006 he completed his third London Marathon, raising a record £1,800,000 for charity.
- ◆ 2001 he received a knighthood from the Queen
- ◆ In 2011 he received the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Lifetime Achievement Award

School wasn't Steve's favourite place at all.

"My pass in woodwork remained my main claim to fame at school, until Mr Smith took a few of us likely lads down to the Thames and introduced us to the sport of rowing. Without that single event – and I only went to get out of schoolwork – my life would have been different indeed."

When he began to realise that he was pretty good at rowing, it became his ambition to win an Olympic gold medal. Just one! And so he did, in Los Angeles in 1984, sooner than he had expected. But why stop there? Surely he could do better and win another one.

By his fourth Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996 he felt he had had enough. When the BBC interviewed him immediately after the race and asked if he was going to compete in the next Olympic Games, his famous response was "Anybody who sees me in a boat has my permission to shoot me,"

Although Steve has won an amazing number of gold medals, he has had to cope with some serious health problems. When he was 30, he was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis (very painful stomach problems). At 35, he developed diabetes. He had to be very careful to get the right balance with his diet and his training in the lead up to the Sydney Olympics. Too much sugar and he could be ill. Too little sugar and he could be ill.

"I had been told by my doctors that they had no idea how my body would respond to the six-and-a-half minutes of unparalleled effort I was about to put in, and I might perhaps fall into a coma because of the sudden drop in blood sugar levels."

Steve therefore popped into the canteen just before the race and picked up a packet of sugar which he sellotaped to the bottom of the boat so that if he felt faint during the warm up he could quickly eat it. Fortunately he didn't need it and he won his race. The rest is History!

Steve Redgrave is one of only four Olympians to have won a gold medal at five consecutive Olympic Games, 1984 to 2000. (Aged 22-38) This achievement led to him being hailed as Britain's greatest Olympian.



Looking back he says "... when I was competing at the Olympics, I wanted to win. But honestly, had I ever been beaten by a better crew, I would have been disappointed but not inconsolable. For me, the point was to be the best I could be.

Since retiring from competitive sport, Steve has set up a charity that aims to use the power of sport and sporting activity to bring about positive change in the lives of disadvantaged children, young people and their communities. It has raised over £5 million and has now joined forces with Sport Relief.

◆ **Kriss Akabusi**

Themes: growing a talent; changes and disappointments; more than gold

Events: 400 m; 400 m hurdles; 400 m relay

From: London; November 1958

Kriss' timeline			
Date	Event	Result/Medal	Age
1975	Joined the army		
	Army Junior Championship U17	Won	
1979	Advised to give up football & take athletics seriously		20
1983	Competed in World Championships - relay team	did well	24
1984	Olympic Games Los Angeles	7th in semis + relay Silver	25
1986	Commonwealth Games		
1986	Became a Christian		27
1987	Decided to switch to 400 m hurdles		28
1987	World Championships 4 x 400 m. relay	Silver	
1988	Olympic Games Seoul - new event 400m hurdles	6th	29
1989	World Cup 400 m. hurdles	Bronze	
1989	European Cup 400 m. hurdles	Gold	30
1990	Commonwealth Games, 400m hurdles	Gold	31
1990	European Championships, 400 m. hurdles; relay	2 Gold + British Record	
1991	World Championships, 400 m. hurdles ; 4 x 400 m. relay	hurdles Bronze; relay Gold	32
1991	European Cup, 400 m. hurdles	Gold	
1992	Olympic Games, Barcelona, 400 m. hurdles ; 4 x 400 m. relay	Bronze x 2	33
1992	MBE		

Kriss Akabusi is one of those larger than life characters. You may have seen him on TV recently encouraging Team GB or helping to promote the London 2012 Games. He used to present the children’s programme ‘Record Breakers’.

Kriss was a late starter with regard to athletics. In fact a games teacher told him that he had ‘no athletic potential’. When he left school he joined the army. Training runs showed that actually he did have potential as a runner. He entered the 400 metre race in the Army Junior championships and won, so he joined a running club. One day a coach told him that he had great potential as a runner, but he would have to give up football. This was because football injuries were interfering too much with the athletic training. He decided he was going to take running seriously and he worked hard at it.

“It was a cracking time of my life; a time when I learnt about discipline, where I learnt about dreams coming true and I walked that life from the age of 19 to 35.”

By the age of 24 he was good enough to be selected to run with Britain’s relay team in the World Championships. The following season, he knew that he could qualify for the Olympic Games if he worked hard - and he did.

The trip to Los Angeles was the experience of a lifetime for him. He achieved a personal best in the heats and came 7th in the semi-final. He was really pleased. His 400 m team mates had been disappointed with their individual performances but they pulled together as a team and absolutely excelled themselves in the 4 x 400 m final, winning the silver medal and setting a new British record. The amazing thing about that relay was that there was something about being in a team that lifted the performance of every one of them

After the Olympics, Kriss' times levelled out. By 28, he figured he had reached his peak at the 400 m event. He was still good but there were younger runners on the scene. He thought that his chances of being selected to run for Britain for much longer weren't looking so good.

Big Changes

However there was no one special to represent Britain at the 400 m hurdles event. He asked advice and decided to give it a try. A year later he was up to World Championship level at his new event. Mike Whittingham, the international hurdler and coach said of him, "Kriss has lifted himself by sheer effort from being a good club athlete to being an international runner."

At his second Olympic Games at Seoul in 1988, Kriss hoped to reach the final and possibly get a medal. He did make the final and came 6th despite a slight injury problem.

1989 – 1992 saw him at the peak of his career. He not only won 4 gold medals in the 400 m hurdles, he also set a new British record 2 years in a row. The only big prize left was an Olympic gold medal and the 1992 games in Barcelona would be his last chance to win one.

Kriss was now the best hurdler in Europe and his training had gone well with no injuries. It was looking good. He started the race believing he could win the gold. He was in the lead. Then at the 5th hurdle, Kevin Young went flying past him. He took care not to panic. At the last hurdle another runner passed him as well. He focused on hanging onto the bronze. He ran the best race of his life, breaking the British record for the 3rd time. But the winner, Kevin Young set a new world record.

Disappointed? Of course. Devastated? No.

No one had expected the world record to go that day, but Kevin Young was having a good season – his best in fact (although his career was much shorter than Kriss Akabusi's. He won only 3 international medals in comparison to Kriss' 7 individual and 5 relay medals.) Kriss knew that he had run his best all-time race. If it didn't get him a gold Olympic medal, it wasn't the end of the world.

Kriss has experienced his share of highs and lows in life. He grew up in a children's home for a start and without the kind of opportunities that his middle class friends had. He knows that his value as a person doesn't depend on his success. "When I came in contact with Jesus, it really blew my mind," he says. "Even with the ups and downs, the good days and bad days, I am secure that someone loves me like no other"

At the Commonwealth Games in Scotland in 1986, he had had an amazing experience. He had never thought about God much but he was 'going through a few issues', and started to seriously read a Bible and think about the character, Jesus. "One day I had a very powerful dream where

Jesus visited me, he spoke audibly and I woke up screaming at the top of my voice 'Jesus'. It wasn't very cool because I was sharing a room with Roger Black (relay team mate) at the time!" Becoming a Christian didn't solve all Kriss' problems, but he knows that in every situation God will be there for him. "I've got a very strong faith in Jesus," he says.

At the start of 2012, Kriss Akabusi's British record for the 400 m hurdles still stands but Welshman Dai Greene is hoping to beat it, perhaps at the Olympic Games in London. Kriss reckons he will! And he's cool with that.

◆ **Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson**

Theme: Rewards

Event: Wheelchair racing 100m – 800m

From: Cardiff, Wales; July 1969

Achievements: Record number of medals; MBE; OBE; life peerage

Carys Davina Grey, nicknamed "Tanni" by her sister, was born with spina bifida and uses a wheelchair. She is one of the most successful disabled athletes in the UK. Over her career she won a total of 16 Paralympic medals, including 11 golds; 13 World Championship medals including 6 golds and held over 30 world records. She also won the London Marathon six times between 1992 and 2002.

Since retiring from athletics she has developed her television presenting career. She is involved with a number of charities and has positions of leadership on various sports bodies. She is also an International Inspiration Ambassador

For services to sport she received first an MBE, then an OBE and in 2010 she was created a life peer.

◆ **Lord Sebastian Coe**

Theme: Rewards

Event: 800m; 1500m

From: London; September, 1956

Achievements: Gold and silver Olympic medals; life peerage

Britain had some great middle distance runners in the 1980's. Seb Coe was one of the best along with his rivals Steve Ovett and Steve Cram. In 1980 Seb won both a gold medal for the 1500m and a silver medal for the 800m. He did the same again in 1984.

He remains the only person to win successive Olympic 1500 metre titles.

When he retired from athletics he went into politics. He was made a life peer in 2000. He put a great deal of effort into London's bid for the Olympic Games and he is the chair of LOGOC. (London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games)

◆ Jesse Owens and Lutz Long

Theme: Friendship worth more than gold; sportsmanship

Events: 100m; 200m; relay; long jump

From: USA; September 1913

Achievement: 4 gold Olympic medals, Berlin, 1936

Jesse Owens is famous for being the top Olympic athlete at the Berlin games of 1936 where Hitler was hoping to show the world the superiority of his Aryan 'super race'.

The Germans did very well, topping the league table but Owens was the top overall athlete of the Games impressively winning 4 gold medals. In private, this 'highly annoyed' Hitler who was strongly racist.

Back home in USA, apartheid was still strong and Jesse did not receive the usual recognition and honours given to Olympic champions such as an invitation to the White House or a telegram from the president. In fact he had quite a tough time making a living. He was gradually recognised and was made both an 'Ambassador of Sports' and a US 'goodwill ambassador'.

Although Owens was a great athlete, he may not have won the long jump medal had it not been for the friendship and advice offered to him by a fellow athlete Lutz Long. Although Owens was the world record holder, his technique was poor and he often over-stepped the mark making his jumps invalid. He messed up his first two jumps in the opening round and he only had one chance left. He was feeling really down when the German athlete went up to him and gave him some valuable advice which helped Jesse tremendously. In the final, Owens won the gold and Long the silver. They became firm friends and stayed in touch writing to each other until Long was killed in the Second World War. Jesse continued to write to Long's son for many years.

When the Pierre de Coubertin medal was introduced for sportsmanship in 1964, it was awarded posthumously to Lutz Long. As Jesse Owens said "It took a lot of courage for him to befriend me in front of Hitler... You can melt down all the medals and cups I have and they wouldn't be a plating on the twenty-four karat friendship that I felt for Lutz Long at that moment."

When the World Athletics Championships were held in Berlin in 2009, 73 years later, the US team uniform included the initials JO. Jesse's granddaughter Marlene Dortch was a guest of honour along with Kai and Julia-Vanessa Long, the son and granddaughter of Luz Long. The two families have kept in touch for over 70 years. Together they presented the gold medal for the men's long jump. What a triumph for the aims that Pierre de Coubertin had for the Olympic Games when he re-established them in 1896.

More than Gold – Closing Reflection

I have never been gifted at sport myself nor especially interested in it but it has been really inspiring to read up on these people over the past few weeks. They have all left an impression on me in one way or another. Even without being a sporty person, I can identify with and be inspired by aspects of their lives.

I believe that Olympic type efforts and achievements reflect the fact that we are made in the image of God regardless of whether that person believes in him or not.

Late starters

Although many of these athletes knew at an early age that they had a gift, there are also a good number for whom it came as a surprise. They did not take up sport seriously until they reached adulthood and had no idea when they were school age that they would one day become a champion.

Many people go through school without having much idea of where their gifts lie. I hope these stories will provide some encouragement. God has gifted everyone but it takes longer for some to recognise their gifts than for others.

Late finishers

In some sports, people peak during their 20s and are past their best by the age of 30. In others there is a need to build up stamina as well as experience and skill. People can have a much longer career and do better when they are older than when they were young. Long distance running is one such sport and the equestrian and shooting events have seen medal winners who are in their 60s and 70s. There is hope for all ages!

'Have a go' people

Some of these athletes have taken a medium amount of talent and turned it into greatness.

Some people were just prepared to 'have a go'. There was no one else to compete, they were prepared to risk making a fool of themselves and they just want to be involved.

Some had a difficult start in life but were determined to be survivors rather than victims. Some have encountered huge stumbling blocks along the way.

Human beings are capable of achieving amazing things sometimes in the face of tremendous difficulties. And this, as a wise man once said many years ago, develops qualities such as patience, perseverance, strength of character and hope.

The best or the worst?

When we take a gift, whether big or small and develop it to its full potential, it can bring out the best, as well as sometime the worst in us. In order to achieve what they have, many athletes at times are self-centred, egotistical and difficult to live with. Some have the decency to admit to this. All of them recognize how much they depend on the support of others around them. We cannot do anything worthwhile on our own. If we think that we can it is because we are overlooking what others do for us.



Many are very 'OCD'¹ about winning. Is this good or bad? Sport has become much more serious since the Olympic Games were reinvented and the spirit of sportsmanship is harder to maintain but there are those who still succeed in showing courtesy and consideration to others. Those who are aware of failing in this area are not proud of it.

¹'OCD' = Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Becoming the best

Not everyone can be a medal winner. Many athletes give it their all but don't win the top prizes. They work for years just to get to the games with no guarantee of success. They could still be injured, fall ill during the games, or simply not be at their best. They could do their best all time performance but still be beaten by someone even better.

There is a huge build up to an Olympic Games for an athlete. *"...four years of blood, sweat and tears all hang on the performance of this day. There is no room for error. No second chance."*
Kriss Akabusi

When Kriss ran the 400 m hurdles Olympic final in 1992, he ran a personal best, breaking the British record. Most times this would have won him a gold Olympic medal but an even more talented guy named Kevin Young unexpectedly broke the world record. It was Kriss' last chance for a single gold.

Debbie Flood was part of the team that was excited to win a silver medal in rowing in 2004. By 2008 they had won the world championship 3 times and were hoping for the gold medal but were overtaken by the Chinese in the last few seconds.

Kelly Holmes struggled to accept herself until she won her 2 gold medals in 2004. What if she hadn't won them?

Kriss, Debbie, and others know that they are worth much more than a gold medal. They go all out for it but their sense of value as a person does not depend on winning one. They know that God loves and values them because they are part of his family and not because of what they achieve. The sort of people they are, the way they treat their team mates, fellow competitors and above all their relationship with God also matter tremendously to them.

God has a different view of success anyhow. At the end of all things, he longs for us to be the best that we can be at being ourselves, or rather of being the person that he intended us to be when he made us. There is only one person in the world who can be the best at that. Many of us find that with help from him we can do that so much better. We all have a chance of winning a gold medal at that one.

Writer: Brenda Lord, 2012

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