

RUNNER'S
WORLD

HEROES OF RUNNING 2013

In what's been a memorable last 12 months for our sport, RW salutes the figures who have achieved greatness, transformed lives and inspired us all

The inspiration MO FARAH

The man whose two Olympic golds will drive runners on for years to come

WORDS: JOE MACKIE

The superlatives have almost run dry for describing the combination of will, tactics and sheer, hard-earned power that bagged double distance Olympic gold for Mo Farah last summer. But his achievement reaches beyond pure athletic prowess. By stepping on to the biggest stage and producing two era-defining performances that brought the Olympic stadium – and the nation – to its feet, he brought distance running out of the shadows and into the public consciousness. How many future stars will cite those golden moments as their inspiration? How many others will run at school meets, for local clubs or just in the park for the simple joy of a sport they may never have taken up without seeing Mo in full flow?

Much has been made of the importance of Farah's pre-Olympic move to Oregon and the tutelage of Alberto Salazar, and Mo is quick to credit the coaching mastermind's role. 'I came to Oregon because I wanted Alberto to help me find the additional two or three per cent to turn me from a contender into a winner,' says Farah. It also brought a dramatic change in Farah's life as he became a mainstream celebrity. 'Since the Olympics I am recognised everywhere I go in the UK,' he says. 'But I'm fortunate that I live in Portland, where things aren't so crazy. I'm able to live a normal life, and my family and friends keep me grounded.'

He also seems to carry the weight of being a role model lightly. 'I am happy to have inspired people,' he says. 'My advice to runners is to work hard and get a good

coach. Running is something everyone can get better at with good training.'

And after dipping a toe in the London Marathon by running the first half of the famous 26.2-mile course in April, and with a tantalising full marathon debut planned to finish on The Mall next year, what's next for Farah? Could we see a male British winner at London for the first time in over 20 years, even a 10,000m/marathon Olympic double in Rio? 'Right now I'm thinking mainly about this year's World Championships in Moscow,' he says. 'After that I will focus on the 2014 London Marathon. Then I'll talk to Alberto...'

We are clearly still far from the end of the Mo Farah story, but already his legacy is guaranteed to be felt for many years to come. So, Mo, with two 'robotic' hands atop our heads, we salute you. ➤

Photography: Nike Illustration: Kerem Shefik



The mastermind ALBERTO SALAZAR

The genius behind Mo's golden moments
WORDS: JOHN BRANT AND ANDY DIXON

Alberto Salazar's lifelong journey in the sport of running reached a new pinnacle last year. He was already a legend for winning three consecutive New York City Marathon titles in the 1980s, and for his successful 11-year tenure as coach for the Nike Oregon Project – an initiative to elevate non-African distance runners to the level of the dominant Kenyans and Ethiopians.

Then came the moment when Salazar's protege Mo Farah ran the final lap of the 10,000m at the London Olympics in just over 53 seconds to win gold. In second place, by less than half a second, was Farah's training partner and fellow Oregon Project member Galen Rupp – breaking a 48-year medal drought for US male 10,000m runners.

Salazar says he was so tense before watching his runners in action he had to resort to desperate measures. 'Before the 10,000m final, I stopped and chugged two beers on the way down to the track,' he says. 'I probably shouldn't have, but I definitely felt better by the start of the race!'

'I was really nervous throughout the race until Mo broke 400m from the finish. Then I just knew.' Their pre-race plan – sit back, run as easily as possible, then outkick the competition in the last lap – panned out in textbook fashion.

The image of Farah clutching his head in wonder after his triumph galvanised a global TV audience.

'Everybody assumes that Mo was celebrating his own victory with that gesture,' Salazar, 54, says. 'But in fact, he had just turned back after crossing the finish line and learned that Galen had won silver. That's when Mo clapped his hands to his head – he was ecstatic at the achievement of his friend. Here you had two guys who are training partners and the best of friends finishing one-two. It was just an incredible thing. Of all the special moments in 2012, that might have been my favourite.'

Seven days later things got even better, when Farah won a second gold in the 5000m. Farah's decision to uproot his family and relocate to Oregon had paid off beyond all expectations. It was when his raw ability and work ethic were allied with Salazar's focus on strength and conditioning that his potential was realised. Amazingly, Farah didn't stretch very often, so Salazar introduced more gym and flexibility work, as well as lots of technique drills to fix what he thought was 'lots of wasted motion' in Farah's form.

'I don't regard our success as a vindication,' says Salazar, who suffered a near-fatal heart attack in 2007. 'It's the culmination of steady work and improvement. The results validated our belief that we train harder – and smarter – than any group of runners in the world.'

'Both Mo and Galen are like part of my family now. I'm so proud of what they've both done.'

The extreme fundraiser PAT FARMER

Farmer risked death to save lives
WORDS: NICK WELDON

Thirty-one miles into his run through the Peruvian desert, Pat Farmer got nervous. His support crew was not at the checkpoint. Anticipating the worst, Farmer refilled his two empty water bottles with his own urine. Then he ran 12 miles to the next checkpoint, but still no crew (radiator problems with their vehicle, he would later learn). He drank the urine and slept in the desert. If not for a passing convoy of miners who gave him water the next morning, Farmer says he would have died.

This harrowing account is one of many that Farmer, 50, can relate after completing his 10-month running journey from the North to the South Pole last year. The Sydney native has long been a successful ultra runner, having circumnavigated Australia on foot and run across the USA twice. The 13,000-mile top-to-bottom effort was a 'lifelong dream', but also an opportunity to raise hundreds of thousands of pounds for the Red Cross. His main objective was to support clean-water projects, although in some of the countries he traversed, he tailored fundraising towards local initiatives, such as building hospitals in Mexico. 'I'd been to communities in south-east Asia that didn't have clean drinking water,' says Farmer. 'I watched kids die of simple things like diarrhoea. It's something that can be so easily prevented.'

Farmer took roughly 21 million steps on his pole-to-pole run. Some were harder than others. In the Arctic, his photographer nearly died after falling through the ice. In Nicaragua, a group of drunk, machete-wielding youngsters accosted him. Amazingly, Farmer never took a day off, despite blisters, bruises, and swollen and torn tendons. 'It's about gutting out the tough times,' he says. 'With ultra marathon running you have to keep coming up with something that's more difficult in order to capture people's imagination.'



The sensation JONNIE PEACOCK

An incredible talent who delivered on the big stage
WORDS: JOE MACKIE

That the decibel levels in the Olympic stadium eclipsed even those reached for Mo Farah's 5000m win says much about the chord

Jonnie Peacock's explosive triumph in the Paralympic T44 100m struck with the nation last summer.

He may not have been a household name before that moment, but the then 19-year-old Cambridge-born sprinter was already a world-class athlete, world record holder at the distance, and a man in top form. 'My journey to the Games was amazing, everything just fell into place and it felt like fate,' says Peacock. 'There were some nerves in the buildup as it was my first Paralympic Games, but I felt ready to run fast and thought it was my opportunity to do something special in front of a home crowd. The first few days in the Athletes' Village were nerve wracking, but once I saw my team-mates compete and win, I got excited. I just wanted to go for it.'

It couldn't have gone much better for Peacock, as along with the gold medal came a new Paralympic record. 'I've been on a high ever since,' says Peacock. 'After has been crazy! But my friends and family are still there with me and I've still got the same life and go training every day. Sure, there are massive perks and I get to meet some crazy people, but overall I'd say life hasn't changed too much.'

Life has certainly been quite a journey for Peacock. Aged five, he contracted meningitis, which did so much damage to the tissue in his right leg that it

had to be amputated below the knee. 'Growing up, there were some tough times,' he says. 'At school I was sporty, I played football and rugby, but I didn't get into athletics until I attended a talent day and got selected for trials. Over 18 months, it snowballed from there.'

He's always defined himself by what he can do, rather than what he can't, and that positive mindset flows out of him. 'My experiences to date have certainly shaped who I am. I feel very lucky as a person. I'm still young and I'm keen to learn more about myself, to better myself and hopefully along the way inspire a few people to do the same.'

He's also very positive about how the London Games has improved the profile of Paralympic sport in general. 'Disability sport is now viewed in a better way, people realise how competitive it is,' he says. 'Going into London 2012, the public probably only recognised a couple of the Paralympic athletes, but now it feels like everyone knows more about us and appreciates the hard work and talent involved. I think people find it easier to relate to an event when they know some of the people involved, and there are now maybe 15 or so athletes with that kind of profile, so hopefully we can build on this in the lead up to Rio and beyond.'

For Peacock himself, as reigning Paralympic champion, his goals are reassuringly simple. 'My key target is to better myself, simple as that. This year is a growing year on the road to Rio and I hope I can get faster and faster. My aim in Rio is to retain my 100m title.' ➤



Photography: Noah Kalina, Getty, Adidas



The rising star ADAM GEMILI

At 18 years old, Gemili was faster than Bolt at the same age

WORDS: KERRY MCCARTHY

In January 2012, Adam Gemili was an 18-year-old apprentice footballer learning his trade at non-league Dagenham and Redbridge. By July he was walking out into an 80,000-seater cauldron to compete in the Olympic 100m semi-final. As career decisions go, this one has to rank as, to put it

mildly, a fairly astute move.

It was a chance trip in 2011 to this local athletics club Blackheath and Bromley that changed everything. 'I went to work on my pace and one of the coaches suggested I try a competitive race,' says Gemili. 'At my first race I was the only person to run under 11 seconds, which was when I realised I might be quite good at it!'

'Quite good' is something of an understatement. From there the south Londoner won two silver medals (100m and 4x100m relay) at the European Junior Championships in Estonia, which helped him decide to go full time, as did his preference for solo sports where the only person he had to rely on was himself.

The decision was fully vindicated

by his performance at the World Junior Championships in Barcelona last July. Gemili monstrosity the field in the final to claim gold and run a PB of 10.05 – making him faster at 18 than Carl Lewis, Tyson Gay, Yohan Blake and Usain Bolt.

Three weeks later he prepared for his first-round heat in the Olympic stadium on Super Saturday – the day that Jess Ennis, Greg Rutherford and Mo Farah all won gold medals. So no pressure, then.

'I wasn't scared at all actually,' says Gemili. 'It was just... exciting. It had all passed me by until the announcer called out my name and the crowd went absolutely bonkers! I saw my face up on the giant screen, and I just grinned. And then I thought, 'Hmm, there are a lot of people willing me on – time to concentrate.'

He did concentrate – enough to finish second and qualify for the semis, where he missed out on a place in the Olympic final by a mere three-hundredths of a second.

Former 100m world champion Tyson Gay described him as 'a phenomenon', and observed that for someone to have picked up all the technical aspects of sprinting in a little over six months and execute them so fearlessly at a home Olympic Games was a sure sign Gemili is destined for greatness.

And with the World Championships in Moscow just round the corner, does the man himself agree?

'Who knows?' he says. 'I have no idea what I will achieve or not, but put it this way: I believe in myself. I'm new to this but I feel like I belong. And when I look at the other guys – even Bolt and Blake – I think, on the day, there's nobody I couldn't beat.'

Photography Getty



The legend LIZZIE HAWKER

The unsung British world-beater runs for love, not fame

WORDS: KERRY MCCARTHY

She's a double world record holder, a former world champion, and has won the toughest event in her sport a record five times – and yet outside the pages of this magazine and other specialist titles, Lizzy Hawker is a virtual unknown to her fellow Brits.

The 36-year-old has been one of the world's top ultra runners since discovering her talent while on holiday in 2005. During a trip to the Alps with friends she was intrigued to discover that a little trail race by the name of the Ultra-Trail Du Mont-Blanc (UTMB) – 103 miles, 6,000m of climb – was taking place nearby. Deciding on a whim to take part, she borrowed a backpack from a friend, bought a cheap pair of running shoes and secured an entry. Twenty-six hours later, Hawker crossed the line as first woman and in 24th place overall. An endurance running career was born.

Hawker sidelined her career as a physical oceanographer to concentrate on running, and has gone on to win the UTMB an unprecedented further four times. She's also won the road race 100K World Championships, set a world record for distance covered on the road in 24 hours (247.07K), notched

up victories at 35 other trail ultras and set a world record for the quickest time from Everest Base Camp to Kathmandu (72 hours and 25 minutes).

This has all been achieved without the sponsorship riches, race winnings and top-notch coaching and medical support that our better known track and marathon athletes have benefitted from. So how has she done it?

'You have to love what you do simply for the sake of it,' says Hawker. 'I love the simplicity and freedom of making a journey under your own steam. And I enjoy the challenge. I just focus on running the very best I can, and the rest takes care of itself.'

In other words, Hawker runs because she can. It's not about money or fame; it's a constant spiritual journey of self discovery, which is something that most amateur runners can identify with. It's also an attitude that clearly contributes to Hawker's enduring success, and one of the reasons that she was named a 2013 *National Geographic* Adventurer of the Year.

'I never race to win; I do it just to enjoy myself,' she says. 'Competing is about searching for your 'edge', and the search to find it teaches you more about yourself. I'll continue to compete for as long as it is part of the expression of who I am.' ☺

The lifetime contributor JEAN PICKERING (1929-2013)

The 'fairy godmother of British athletics'

WORDS: JOE MACKIE



It was with great sadness that we bid farewell to one of the best-loved figures in British athletics in March this year. Jean Pickering contributed hugely to the sport for over 60 years, first as an elite competitor and then as a fundraiser and mentor.

A multi-talented athlete, her own career saw her claim European 4x100m gold in 1950 and Olympic

bronze in 1952. She was also an accomplished hurdler, reaching the 80m hurdles final at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, and became European Long Jump Champion in 1954.

After that she moved into fundraising, and in 1991, after the death of her husband (legendary commentator and coach Ron Pickering) set up the Ron Pickering Memorial Fund to assist aspiring athletes.

So far the fund has given over £1.3m in grants, supporting coaches, athletics clubs, grassroots associations and thousands of young prospects. Jess Ennis and Christine Ohuruogu are just two of the many to have benefitted. Often described as 'The fairy godmother of British athletics', in 2010 she was awarded an MBE in recognition of her work. She will be much missed.