



INSTRIDER

MAGAZINE



EXCLUSIVE

JENNY SELMAN
OPINION PIECE



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Our writers are back too – in this edition Danny Munro looks into cross country running’s possible inclusion at future Olympic Winter Games; while Feyi Awosika looks into the marketability of athlete expression.

We come bearing gifts too. New Q&A segments are added for 2026 with our ‘Getting Off Track’ and ‘No Skips’ interviews, and we are always keen to hear your feedback on what you want to see.

While we are here, a warm welcome to Ade Omitowoju and Bradley Francis, our newest additions to the Athlete Springboard for 2026. Having met both of them in person, they are fantastic role models for younger

athletes and I am sure they will do Stride Athletics proud going forward.

Last year, we said farewell to two Springboard athletes – British 1,500m champion Sarah Calvert who signed a professional contract with New Balance, and our Lake District sensation Jacob Smith, who has been eyed up by the University at Albany for a scholarship. Both were fantastic representatives and continue to be members of the Stride family, even in their departure.

By the time you read this, we will have wrapped up Flat ‘N Fast 6. Despite the challenging weather, we put together a great event and it was a pleasure watching people buzzing around the circuit.

Speaking of our events, be sure to mark 4 July for the Pursuit 5000, set to take place in Stirling – our first time hosting a track race.

While off the track 2026 has been a difficult one so far, we are sure that with more purpose in everything we do, this year will be our best yet. Let’s enjoy the next few months before the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games.

Michael Houston

Instrider Editor



EDITOR’S NOTE

DEAR READERS

At the time of writing, we have barely broken into the summer, yet Hogmanay feels like ten years ago.

It’s not just a vibe. The World Happiness Report 2025 found a downturn in happiness in the United States and a large chunk of European countries, linked to increased social isolation and distrust in our political systems.

But it is not all dark. Happiness in a country is linked to acts of benevolence. If you see a wallet dropped, do you return it? If yes, congratulations, you’re literally making the world a better place, according to that aforementioned report.

And this quandary is what we have had to wrestle with in this edition, our first of 2026. We are less happy than ever, yet where can we find comfort?

In the athletics bubble, we continue to see challenges that affect its landscape. A topical example would be the war taking place involving the United States, Israel and Iran. The politics aside – we could write a book about that – this war affects major competitions.

I touch on this in our wider opening piece, where we study the implications of geopolitics on athletics and try to shake off the feeling that things...have been better.





BY MICHAEL HOUSTON

IT SURELY GETS BETTER, **RIGHT?**

We come off the back of a year of normalised AI slop, human rights going backwards in three of the five regions of the world, and another 12 months without a Frank Ocean album.

These are disturbing times, indeed.

For athletics, the success of the 2025 World Athletics Championships was a high point, finally bringing massive crowds to the National Stadium in Tokyo, just four years after the COVID-19-affected Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games (held in 2021).

It took place under the looming threat of hot and humid conditions which were expected in the Japanese capital. While temperatures were lower than first predicted, it was another competition with heat safety precautions. World Athletics President Sebastian Coe has even suggested the calendar could be “re-engineered” due to climate change.

The longer you work in sport, the more you understand the dilemmas that haunt presidents from across the industry. Their power is miniscule when looking at the bigger picture. They are, effectively, at the whim of world’s leaders and major conglomerates.

World Athletics is a great example of attempting to be ethical in their partnerships - great examples include Seiko and Mondo - but the nature of sportswear manufacturing still comes with inescapable issues without losing millions in funding. For the principled, maybe it is an easy decision; for the pragmatic, it is not so straightforward.

Yet even with the organisation’s Athletics for a Better World sustainability campaign, so little is in Coe’s hands. Influence can be used, but can it stop those who have no regard for the environment? Fossil fuels companies lobbying politicians is a relationship that is in with the bricks, and the overconsumption of data centres has further exacerbated a problem we were warned about at the turn of the millennium. The 10 years between 2015 and 2024, according to the World Meteorological Organization, have been the hottest on record.

The impact this has on the sport, particularly long-distance running, should not be ignored. The decreasing number of suitable hosts for the Winter Olympic Games should have been a sign of what is to come. Will we start to see more nighttime racing to placate for the heat or elongate the season for cooler temperatures? How long can that can be kicked down the road?

We are just over two years from the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games, set for July and August. Tokyo 2020 was the hottest on record and Paris 2024 was affected briefly by a heatwave. Both required safety protocols, including the marathon moving to Sapporo when Japan held the Games.

And as we have seen with the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup, uncertainty surrounds the United States geopolitically. Donald Trump's comments discouraging the Iranian national football team from attending the tournament is the latest complication to consider in the ongoing war between the US, Israel and Iran.

We have seen how much this war has affected other countries not involved. Several had to exercise caution with their next steps, heavily disrupting sporting events soon to take place and leaving people stranded abroad when all they wanted to do was watch EastEnders in their pyjamas and talk about how the weather was nice today. The Formula One Grands Prix in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia at the time of writing, are the latest to be axed over safety concerns. These cancellations will cost the Formula One Group more than £100 million in commercial revenue, while teams had to divert their logistics to not fly over the region.

There is not as much reliance on the Middle East in the athletics calendar, but there are still a few events that could be affected by travel restrictions or due to safety.

You have the Diamond League meeting in Doha which has been pushed back to June for the meantime, with Qatar also hosting the GCC Games, the regional event for the Gulf nations, in May.

The US will host the Prefontaine Classic in Eugene on their Independence Day too, 4 July. A month later, Hayward Field welcomes the World Athletics U20 Championships, followed by the Chicago and New York City Marathons in the autumn.

And most importantly, economies rely on peace. We saw how most of the world was heavily affected by the invasion of Ukraine. Over 30 sporting events were originally scheduled to take place in Russia, including the 2022 UEFA Champions League Final, before they were cancelled.



Countries with cash to splash – the US, Saudi Arabia, Qatar to name a few – are affected by this war and so will businesses associated with these countries. This could affect funding models across the sector, with less incentive to be lured by Saudi or Qatari money particularly.

Geopolitics aside, two competition series have caused a major stir in athletics: Grand Slam Track and the Enhanced Games.

The first of these was formed out of desire to make athletics more of a commercial success for athletes and stakeholders; the second, a cynical attempt to normalise doping with a gimmick that has tarred anyone associated with it.

A legend of the game and often seen as the voice of reason as a pundit on the BBC, Michael Johnson conceptualised Grand Slam Track as an opportunity to create global stars and pay them handsomely for their time.

There would be four “Racers”, considered the best in the world; and four “Challengers”, emerging athletes looking to upset the favourites. Four Slams would take place across the early outdoor track season, with athletes competing in two events – such as the 800m and 1,500m or the



400m hurdles and 400m flat.

Most of all, it came with lucrative winnings on the line. If you finished last in every Slam, you would take home \$40,000, just for showing up. For the American sprinters Kenny Bednarek or Melissa Jefferson-Wooden, they were on course for the maximum \$400,000 prize.

I say on course, because it was marred with issues.

The debut leg took place in a city of sprinting royalty, Jamaica's

capital Kingston, but the 35,000-seater National Stadium struggled to reach five-figure attendances. \$10 tickets may be a bargain in some markets, but in a country where the minimum wage is currently around \$2.50, it's not exactly cheap.

While momentum built over the weekend, estimates suggest the maximum capacity was around 10,000 people, which included giving out tickets for free. Miami hosted the second leg in a stadium that can hold

approximately 5,000 people, and did not sell out. Only around 50% of tickets were gone heading into that weekend. The Philadelphia leg fared better with the Sport Examiner estimating around 20,000 tickets being sold over two days for Franklin Field, which welcomes over 50,000.

This last leg also saw long-distance runners given only half the prize money - as they raced just once - meaning prize money now stood at over \$9 million from

just three weekends of racing. Even the quick and generous estimates of 65,000 tickets sold, that is an average ticket price of \$141 to recuperate the prize money, never mind other costs. Johnson then announced the cancellation of the final leg in Los Angeles due to financial strains, promising to focus on the 2026 season.

While there were positives - the presentation and feel of the event were considered successful - problems continued. Outstanding debts to the tune of \$30 million were, and at the time of writing, are still owed to more than 150 athletes and companies, including over \$168,000 to Scotland's Josh Kerr. Johnson also paid back a \$500,000 fee to himself, which he initially received days before filing for bankruptcy. All of this came from the collapse in a reported \$40 million deal between the organisation and Eldridge Industries, who unexpectedly withdrew backing.

And unfortunately, we must talk

about the Enhanced Games.

Its existence can be ignored to some degree. Organisations have warned athletes that they will cut all ties with them if they choose to join, and any International or National Federation would have a one-way ticket to losing their recognition if they tried to either. Yet, defections have occurred.

To date, 13 track and field athletes have crossed the divide, of varying degrees of talent. The biggest name is American sprinter Fred Kerley, a two-time Olympic medallist in the men's 100 metres, the 2022 world champion in the distance and two-time world relay gold medallist.

The man who finished behind him the year he took the world title, Marvin Bracy-Williams, is also on the roster. Notably, both had been given bans for anti-doping rule violations in 2025. Bracy-Williams faces allegations from fellow sprinter Rae Edwards of asking for the phone number of a drug dealing network specialising in performance-enhancing drugs.

More investment has been put into the men's field, with continental medallists Jasmine Abrams, Shania Collins and Tristan Evelyn the biggest names in the women's field. South African Clarence Mungai, Liberia's Emmanuel Mitadi and, disappointingly, Great Britain's Reece Prescod have all made the switch too.

And that feels like just the tip of the iceberg.

But sport is cyclical. Athletics has had golden moments just years after doping controversies, financial mismanagement and through periods of low interest. What can we look forward to?

In moments of hardship, people come together when it matters. When you grow up in a town that became greatly deprived due to deindustrialisation in the 1980s, I often wondered where the joy came from. My grandparents' response? "You just got on with it".





So it feels apt to focus on what the athletics community can do.

From the tippity-top, we have intrigue around the World Athletics Ultimate Championship, set to be held every second year in the absence of the World Athletics Championships. The format is simple - eight field eventers, 16 track athletes and eight relay teams in each of the 28 selected disciplines compete for the crown and prize money over one weekend of competition. Set to take place in Budapest, the Ultimate Championship will reward winners with \$150,000.

The World Athletics Relays are back too, but importantly, in Gaborone, Botswana.

The men's 4x400m relay world champions and Olympic silver medallists had the opportunity to race on home soil, winning the race. It was the first time Botswana had held a major World Athletics event and a sign that African nations are receiving more opportunities - all in front of a well-attended, passionate crowd, which came close to selling out the 25,000-seater stadium.

Most of all, these major events are a reminder to never take for granted the heroes of the sport and those who will one day take up that mantle. Noah Lyles turns 29 this year and will soon be regarded as a veteran against young pretenders. Mondo Duplantis was once this before becoming unstoppable in the men's pole vault.

Men's middle-distance running is seeing a Keely Hodgkinson/Mary Moraa-esque moment with 17-year-old American Cooper Lutkenhaus becoming the world indoor champion this year and 16-year-old New Zealander Sam Ruthe well within the Commonwealth Games standard for the Mile after dropping a 3min 48sec effort to set new senior national records.

Italian Kelly Doualla turns 17 in November and just made her World Indoor Championship debut in the women's 60 metres where she made the semi-finals. Great Britain's Phoebe Gill could be the next middle-distance star too, while the men's sprints are slowly seeing the emergence of Australian Gout Gout, who has

been compared to Usain Bolt for years before his senior debut.

Most importantly, elite athletics is not safe without the investment at grassroots level. Sometimes we are fortunate enough to receive grants. Other times, we do what we can.

Every time we see the gloom of the news, we have a choice to catastrophise or ask ourselves: "What is within my control?" Local racing, engaging with your community, and providing experiences for the wider public that are far removed from the professional bubble.

Focusing on those roots shows the sport is in a good place. Mass participation running events continue to sell out quickly and run clubs have provided a space for casual joggers to find their people.

Our sport has changed a lot since I laced up a pair of spikes for the first time 20 years ago, but it continues to thrive. You sometimes just need to look a little closer.

GETTING OFF TRACK

WITH ANDREW MCGILL



Born and raised within a stone's throw of Flat 'N Fast's home circuit at Linlithgow, Andrew McGill comes from running family royalty. Here, he talks Joy Division, Clint Eastwood and a dance he's dying to try...

Who would play you in a film?

Someone like Daniel Day Lewis, he's the GOAT. If you want someone to do a good job, he's your man, like a method actor.

What are your four favourite films and why?

Lost In Translation. The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: It's one of those classics where the character's really struggling, and then they work through it, and then they get the best comeback of all time. It's a bit like a sportsman, in that way. Barry Lyndon, and then Human Traffic. I actually watched that recently. Just a mental film. It felt like it was getting run on two-times speed the full time.

Who is your athletics hero?

Overall Scottish sporting person, Andy Murray. I just love how blunt he is and deadpan, and he just gets on with it. He was never the most skilled person, but just worked really hard. My Grandad [Frank Clement] is a big influence, just in terms of someone in the family's been there and done it. Whenever I've been doubting myself, I just look to that and think, why not? He's in my genetic code. I've got a bit of him in me, so why not?

Who are the four people dead or alive you'd invite to dinner?

Peter Kay and Andy Murray, they can bring the patter. Maybe Amy Winehouse, she seems a bit mental, but she's an unbelievable singer. And Judi Dench. That's a total Traitors line-up, such a random mix of people.

Do you have a favourite book?

I really like Ivanhoe. Just all action, Robin Hood somehow appears in it some way through. I quite like all the battles, and the knights, and I guess the chivalry as well. I read that going down to race at Loughborough for the Scotland meet last year and I was able to completely switch off from that, just get taken away to this different world.

Who's your favourite musical artist?

Paul McCartney seems like a pretty cool guy and he's done it all hasn't he?

What's your favourite album?

Unknown Pleasures by Joy Division. There's nothing like it, and there's not even loads going on but it's the way it's been produced and everything in there is doing something.

What is the best meal you can cook?

I make a pretty good sweet potato and chicken curry. That sounds like a weird combo, but get some coconut milk in there, and a Thai red curry sauce, and that can slap. Chicken thigh, obviously, over chicken breast as well. Way more succulent.

Do you have any hidden talents or fun facts?

I can roller blade and I can play guitar, but everyone knows I know how to do that. It's just a good way to get a bit of a release, especially if you're injured and you can't exercise or it's a rest day.

Where's the best place you've visited, and where is top on your bucket list?

Probably the coolest was Kotor in Montenegro. I went there on a cruise with my family in 2022, and I was in a bit of a party phase at that point. I wasn't drinking much, but I was staying up really late at the club, and I remember rolling out of bed, just looking out and being like, what the hell? You've got hills on both sides coming to the port there and then the water was just a crazy colour.

I'd love to go to more of the Balkans?

Albania, I'd love to go there. I'd love to go to Bulgaria, and I've been looking at going from Istanbul through Bulgaria to Serbia, and Kosovo after.

If you could travel back in time or into the future, when and where would you go?

Maybe, Prohibition, New York. I'd go to a Speakeasy, see people doing that dance [the Charleston]. I'd have to get kitted out with, like, a three-piece, and some slicked back hair!

In the event of a zombie apocalypse, what's your strategy, and where are you hiding?

I've actually thought about this before, I've read enough books about it, and watched Shaun of the Dead. I think Scotland's a pretty good place, in general, but maybe not in the winter. Somewhere like a supermarket because you have all the food there already. You'd want something that's kinda isolated and I think the last place you'd want to be is in the city with narrow streets. Number one would probably be a military base.

What do you think is the best thing about people your age and those who are older?

People my age, you're going through the same stuff as them and you're sharing a lot of experiences and learning things at the same time and you share a lot of views and politics. Older people I think are less self-centred, they're less wrapped up in it and are generally able to not just talk about themselves and they have some good stories. And just their wisdom.





Photo Credits: Kenny Phillips

CROSS COUNTRY IS SNOW JOKE

BY DANNY MUNRO

Milano Cortina 2026 was a resounding success. Across the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, over 3,500 athletes competed across 195 events, shifting 1.5 million tickets in the process. Globally, the official social media channels accumulated more than 113.5 million interactions, while the BBC recorded its biggest Winter Olympics audience ever, with 26.3 million viewers tuning in. From freestyle skiing and skeleton to curling and snowboard cross, athletes from Team GB picked up a record-breaking medal collection at their best-ever Winter Olympics. Though one sport was missing - just as it has been from every Olympic Games since 1924 - cross country running.

Introduced at the 1912 Summer Olympics in Stockholm, the inaugural cross country race took place on a 12-kilometre course, the route of which was kept secret from the athletes. Open only to men and contested by 45 runners, Finnish great Hannes Kolehmainen emerged victorious to win his third Olympic gold medal in just over a week, with 17 athletes failing to make it to the finish line.

“The course was not revealed to the participants prior to the start, but was marked just before the race began with red ribbons,” said Scottish Athletics historian Arnold Black, “It was very hilly, through the forest with steep inclines and descents, and many natural obstacles.

“The British and continental runners were not used to this kind of terrain, and the race was dominated by the Swedes and Finns.”

The event featured again in Antwerp in 1920 before an infamous race in Paris in 1924 saw the discipline ditched from the programme after only 15 athletes from a field of 38 managed to complete the 10.65km course, set against a backdrop of 40 degree heat.

Though World Athletics President Sebastian Coe’s calls for the sport to be reintroduced to the 2024 Summer Olympics fell on deaf ears, the former 800m world record holder is refusing to back down on the idea, suggesting the French Alps 2030 Winter Olympics would mark a “good opportunity” for the world of athletics and winter sports to collide. Could he be on to something?

Every winter, in boggy fields and parks across the United Kingdom, Europe and beyond, thousands of brave, albeit slightly deranged, runners lace up their spikes and face the mud. It’s an age-old tradition, starting at school age for many and continuing into retirement for the steely stalwarts who form the backbone of athletics clubs across the globe. The cross country season, in the Northern Hemisphere, typically runs from October to February, when the ground is at its softest and the nights draw in all too quickly for the post-work track

sessions that so many runners enjoy throughout the summer months.

According to running historian Jack Wilson, the police and the Red Cross spent hours searching for collapsed athletes in the aftermath of the ill-fated contest in 1924. With conditions at the forthcoming Los Angeles 2028 Olympics forecast to be ‘severe’ thanks to the high temperatures and low precipitation typical of LA in the summer, it makes sense to keep the Summer Games free of the arduous slog of cross country. But two years later, against the inevitably stunning backdrop of the French Alps, comes an opportunity to reintroduce the discipline in the same country where things fell apart 100 years ago.

One athlete in favour of Coe’s proposed change is Jamie Crowe. One of the most decorated cross country athletes to pull on a Scotland vest in recent history, he believes that adding the sport to the Winter Olympics would bring the athletics world much needed attention.

“Cross country is one of the most relatable parts of athletics as so many people have experienced it at school; so there’s already a connection there with a wider audience,” explains Crowe, who collected his fourth Scottish National Cross Country Championships title at Callendar Park back in February.

“Seeing it on a stage like the Winter Olympics would make it more visible and easier for people to engage with.

“It would also give cross country athletes the chance to represent their countries on a huge platform, which can only raise the platform of the sport.”

Crowe is right to highlight that athletics is due a lift in its global reputation. A rather concerning survey of 189 athletes carried out by the British Elite Athlete Association in October 2024 found that 64% of those surveyed said they planned to ditch their careers if they did not notice an improvement in their wages, with just 15% of respondents claiming to be content with carrying on at the same rate. Long-distance runner Ben Connor brought the issue of funding to the headlines in April 2025, when he was asked by British Athletics to pay his own entry fee to the European Road Running Championships.

The majority of winter sports are not blessed with football-sized budgets either, and do not benefit from the platform provided by the Summer Olympics like athletics does. But for Crowe, a shake-up of the traditional Winter Games line-up would benefit snow sports.

“I think it’s a fair argument to raise [against inclusion] as the Winter Olympics is a key platform for traditional winter sports that don’t get much exposure elsewhere,”

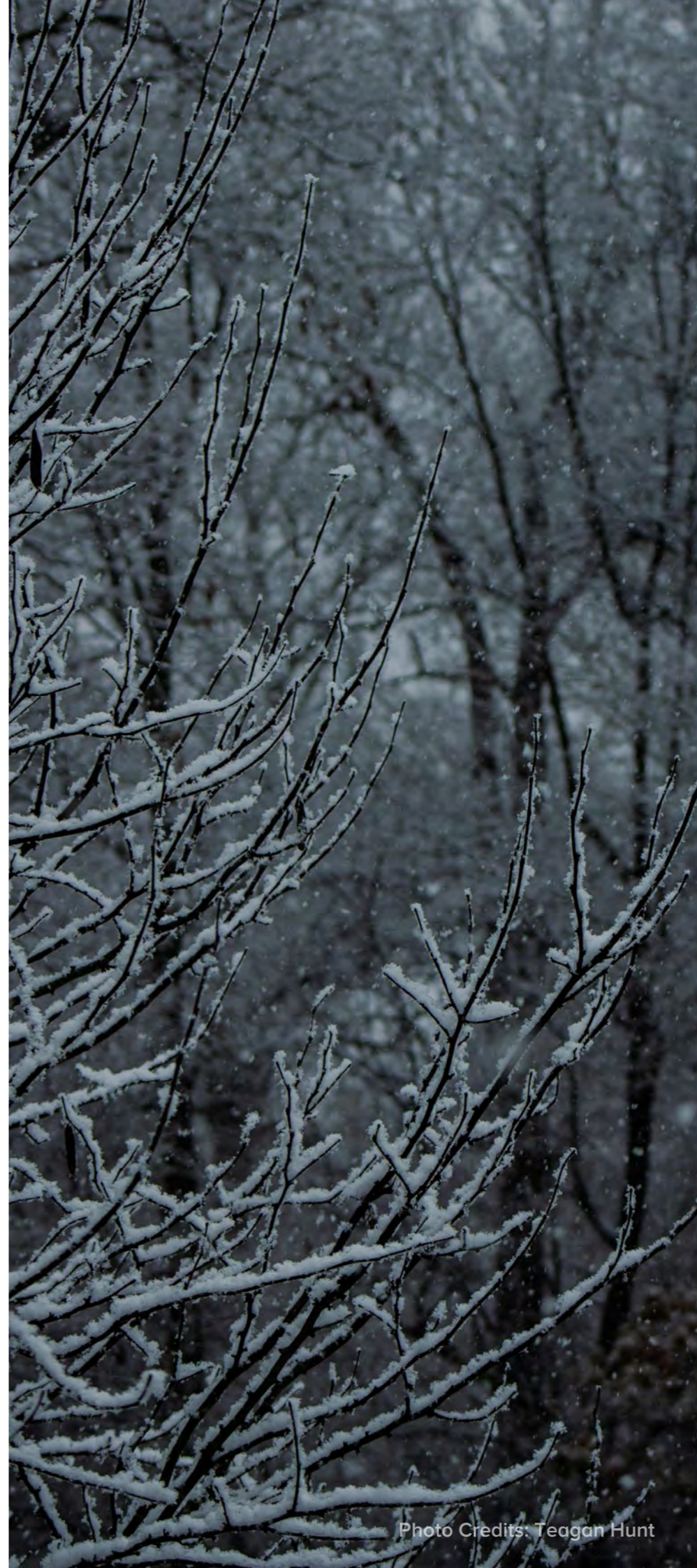


Photo Credits: Teagan Hunt

he states, “That being said, I don’t think it’s a strong enough reason to exclude cross country.

“Having a sport that links both the Summer and Winter Games could actually be a positive, helping to bring new audiences into the Winter Games.

“The main consideration for me would be making sure it fits the environment, so racing on snow or true winter terrain...if it’s delivered in that spirit, I think it would add to the Games, rather than take away from other sports.”

Whether we see Crowe and his peers switch Falkirk for France in four years time remains to be seen. What is clear is the athletics world needs revitalisation and those opportunities on the mud could bring more legitimacy to the discipline.

“If there’s the incentive of Winter Olympic selection, more top athletes might prioritise cross country rather than skipping it, which could raise the standard and profile of races across the season,” added Crowe.

With official confirmation of the 2030 sports set to be announced by the International Olympic Committee Executive Board this June, one hopes the cross country fantasy is more than just a halfpipe dream.



VIBE CHECK REMAINS ON TRACK

BY FEYI AWOSIKA

Photo Credits: Valerio Aiello

Self-expression can be described as an art form that involves sharing your thoughts, personality, and identity through different mediums such as music, speech, and fashion. It is something that makes sport so entertaining to watch. From Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce's vibrant wigs, to Noah Lyles' energetic anime hand gestures, athletes have been combining their personal interests with their professional career - something that has made them favourites with the fans and inspired those behind them to do the same.

One of the immortalised moments from the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games saw a towering Jamaican celebrating his impending win in the men's 100 metres, 20 metres from the line and celebrating with his "To Di World" or "Lightning Bolt" celebration. Usain Bolt may have stolen the headlines that summer and created a generation of similar athletes, but a future star had also announced their arrival in the women's 100m final.

Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce was not only a powerhouse, but she made sure she looked good while doing it too. First stepping onto the Olympic scene with curly

long hair, dominating the 2008 Olympics, she secured Jamaica's first gold medal in the women's 100m at just 20 years old. From that point on, she continued to light up the track with style, grace, and energy.

Then, she proudly retired as a two-time Olympic champion, a five-time 100m world champion, and a 200m world champion and silver medallist. Besides being a generational talent, the Pocket Rocket has built a reputation for sporting very bright hair across different competitions.

She never hid from rocking her island's national colours either,

sporting green, yellow, and occasionally black with streaks of other colours. In an interview with The Mirror, Fraser-Pryce shared how selecting fun wigs alleviates the anxieties and pressures surrounding high-calibre events.

"It's like my wigs are a superpower and I'm able to go into character and it's almost like you feel invincible," she said, "It makes me feel good to be able to express myself in that way because as athletes we are all unique and there are different ways we want to celebrate who we are."

Her retirement left a fluorescent void in the hair department, but expression can be found in so many ways. Italian high jumper Gianmarco Tamberi has established himself as a candid, dramatic athlete, who first caught the eye before he was winning

medals with his half-shaved face during competition.

British long jumper Jazmin Sawyers still has an online following that outranks many world champions from Great Britain. Her success comes from a combination of factors, including her vulnerability.

Having gone viral for her positive self-talk at the 2023 European Indoor Championships where she took gold and set a new British record with a marvellous mark of 7.00 metres, Sawyers is someone who understands the importance of self-belief and cherishes the value of personal interests.

When the Stokie isn't defying gravity, you can find her singing at major sports awards, sewing beautiful dresses to wear at sports awards, enjoying home-

brewed cups of coffee, or creating content about her long jump journey.

Sawyers has mastered the life-after sport conundrum many face. In 2017, she competed on The Voice UK, giving her a national platform as a musician. While recovering from a recent Achilles injury, she also undertook media duties with the BBC. All with unique haircuts, a bright smile and a positive attitude that shines through the screen.

Different in events and allegiances yet similar in mindset to Sawyers, Noah Lyles is another athlete who truly cherishes the value of personal interests. When racing at the 2025 London Anniversary Games, I had the opportunity to ask the 100m Olympic champion about the importance of personal interests in the sport:



Photo Credits: Boom Photography

“You never know by sharing your passions and interests with somebody else who you’ll connect with,” he said, “I’ve been fortunate to have people who do connect with me because of all the things I do, especially when it comes to anime.”

“I have a lot of projects, Adidas recently came to the track, Adidas Tokyo, and we did a whole campaign that is going to be very anime-based. So, when Tokyo comes around and we’re all there, well I hope to see you all there, you’re gonna see me doing a lot of anime things like anime poses, and it is gonna be a lot of fun.”

“Bringing out a Yu-Gi-Oh! at the Olympic Trials, who would’ve known that would be the thing that got so many new people into say: ‘I’m gonna watch this 100m, not because I like track, because Noah Lyles might pull out a new card, and I wanna see what card it is!’. It is a lot of fun, but it also does provide peace of mind to know that it is not one thing that you are, it is the combination of everything that makes up you.”

Lyles has been incredibly open and involved when it comes to anime from his signature Dragon Ball Z hand gestures, to revealing different cards on the start line. Embracing the term “manga geek” and painting his nails, he has redefined what is considered cool in an environment that can be dominated by macho personas.

The reality is, athletics is full of these characters and they can be found all across a country. One example is Tolani Olatona, a sprinter from Nottingham Trent University who combines her love for bright colours and uniqueness in her outfits from leopard-print hair to intricate nail designs.

During the 2025 BUCS Outdoor Athletics Championships, she

donned a grey and pink leopard-print wig, changing it up with a vibrant pink-and-white piece for the 2026 BUCS Indoor Championships, accompanied by curved, leopard duck nails and an assortment of facial piercings.

When asked what inspired her, she was very clear: “The look was mainly inspired by Lola from Shark Tale and NTU Pink”.

Jamie, a Brunel University athlete, is a competitor that does not shy away from pressure when the time comes. The Windsor and Slough sprinter also doubles as a model, swapping running for runway.

“With modelling and athletics, they’re already so similar in how they function, capturing the

human form, one in photography, and the other in performance, and the work itself only lasts seconds, and in terms of self-expression, I just do what feels right for me. I don’t think about anybody else,” said Haydock-Wilson, the brother of Olympian Alex Haydock-Wilson.

Ultimately, these athletes, amongst many others, understand the balance of athletics, hobbies, and personality as they climb the ranks of the sport. It is the beauty of self-expression that helps athletes connect with audiences, each other, and themselves.

Whether you are authentically yourself or want to create an entertaining persona, athletics continues to thrive from those who inject a bit of colour to it.

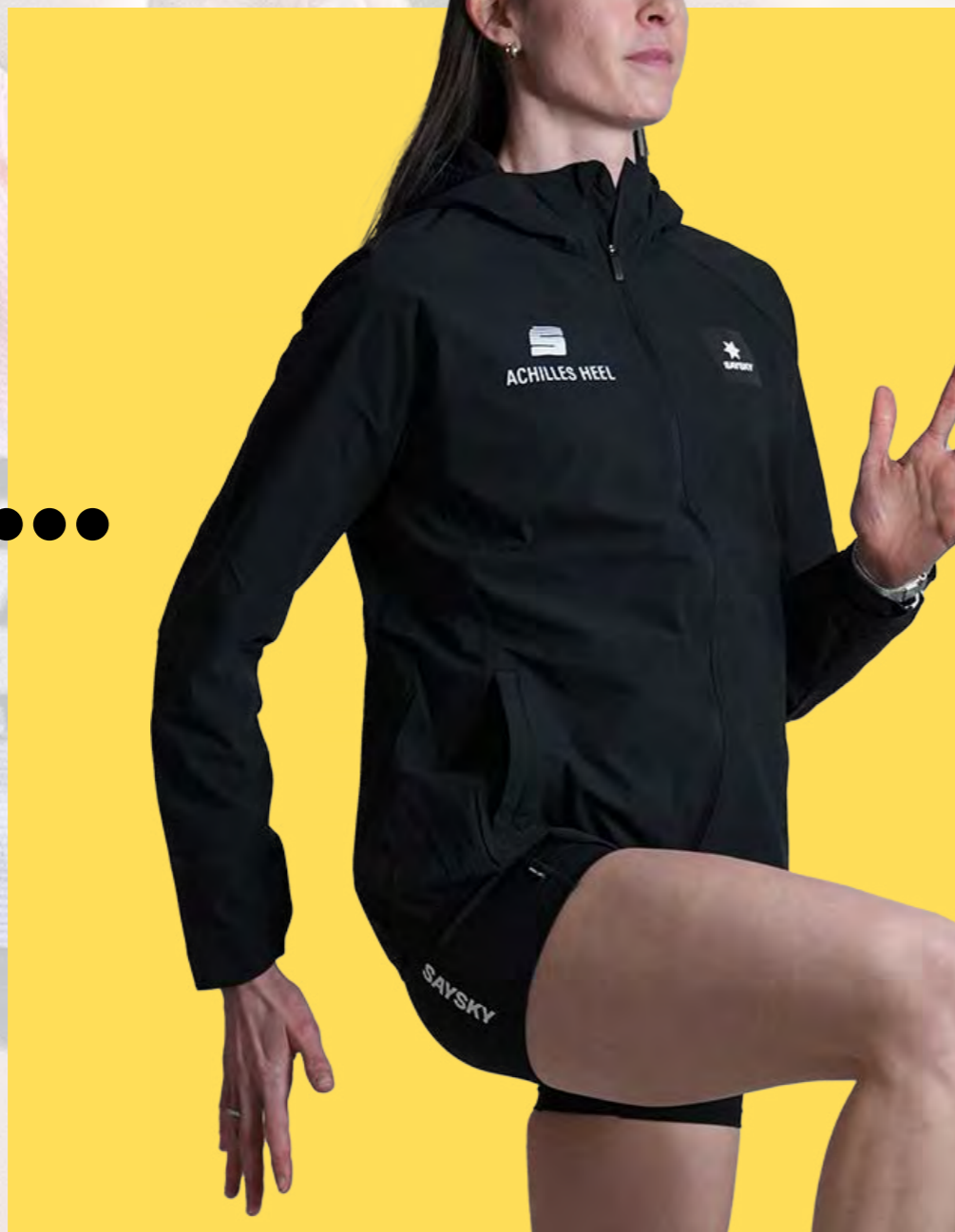


Photo Credits: Tolani Olatona



NO SKIPS...

WITH HANNAH CAMERON



Hannah Cameron has often been the Scottish middle-distance runner's worst nightmare on the start line, wracking up a medal tally that can strain necks. Musically, her taste has been described as "Cultured White Girl" by her partner. Here, she speaks of her love for disco, her latest obsession with Olivia Dean and why she sings about eating so many lemons...

“What’s a song that reminds you of your childhood?”

I would say anything ABBA related.

My mum brought me and my sister up watching the Mamma Mia movie and she would always play ABBA with us. So I actually would say anything ABBA, particularly Super Trouper. That is the one I would say reminds me of growing up listening to that in the kitchen with my mum and sister.

What song describes you best?

The Kooks - She Moves in Her Own Way, because I just sort of do my own thing. Like, go with the flow. I feel like I'm on my own path sometimes, especially with athletics, because a lot of people pursue it and they only do athletics and that's their job. I work and have my own life outside of athletics.

What is your hype song before a competition?

Anything that's sort of like girl power. I quite often listen to Lizzo. Probably Truth Hurts or About Damn Time. Those are the two that I like to listen to before a race.

What song is an earworm for you right now?

There's Harry Styles' new one [American Girls] or pretty much anything Olivia Dean. Any of her new ones. Over the summer, I really liked Rein Me In and Man I Need. That or the 360 Bridgerton version from Charli XCX.

What album do you think has no skips?

Probably Olivia Dean's latest one, which is called The Art of Loving. I wouldn't skip any of hers.

What song makes you emotional?

There's one that makes me sad actually. How Do I Say Goodbye by Dean Lewis. It makes me feel sad but it's not necessarily a bad thing.

What is the first album that you bought?

It was a Taylor Swift one. It must have been Fearless in 2008. That and the Now That's Why I Call Music! CDs.

Which artist do you think doesn't get enough recognition?

I think if we were conducting this interview this time last year, it would have been Olivia Dean, but she's definitely coming through now. I quite like Sombr, but I don't know if he's a big name.

What song would you want played at your funeral?

I don't know, I don't want to think about that! (Her boyfriend suggests Harry Styles - Sign of the Times because of the opening line).

What is your karaoke song?

My go-to is Foundations by Kate Nash. It's a great song and she kind of speaks her way through the song, so you can get away with not being able to sing.

If you could collaborate with any artist on a song, who would it be?

Also would be Kate Nash, in a karaoke bar.

Who would be your four music dinner guests?

Does ABBA count as four? [editor's note: I'll allow them as one]. I've got Adele, purely because I think she's really funny. Also her music, me and my sister used to listen to her all the time when we were younger. So I think she'd be great. Well, I mean, I've mentioned her about ten hundred times now, but I could put Olivia Dean there. She'd be a great chat. Maybe Diana Ross, because I quite like her song Upside Down.

What is your go-to podcast?

I'm more of a sports podcast person. Usually it's the Citius Mag and Trackstaa podcasts. I also quite enjoy NearlyWeds with Jamie Lang and his now-wife Sophie Haboo [now called NearlyParents] and Sam Thompson and Pete Wicks' Staying Relevant.



OPINION PIECE

Being active is an important part of living a happy and healthy life. Moving our bodies isn't just good for our physical health - it can improve our mental wellbeing, help us to form friendships, boost our confidence and self-esteem, help us to feel part of our local communities, and build resilience so we feel better equipped to cope with challenging times.

Athletics is one of the most inclusive sports, with opportunities to enjoy being active at all ages and ability levels. Whether you're at the sharp end of Flat 'N Fast, a new mum looking for a social jogging group, or the parent of a child with a disability seeking Para sport opportunities, there is a place for you in athletics.

Despite this, we know that the recent nationwide "running boom" hasn't been universal. For example, still only 5% of Scottish Athletics membership comes from people affected by poverty.

For context, 17% of Scots live in relative poverty, according to the latest Scottish Government statistics.

The age-old phrase "all you need is a pair of trainers" forgets that barriers like the cost of memberships, lack of positive role models, language and cultural differences, lack of confidence, and the perception that athletics "isn't for me" mean that many people are unlikely to dip their toes into our sport without targeted support.

At Athletics Trust Scotland, we believe in the life-changing power of athletics and running. We are a charity committed to making athletics accessible for all, so that more people across Scotland can experience the wide-ranging benefits that our wonderful sport can bring.

We have funded the National Wheelchair Racing Hub, which seeks to reduce the financial burden for Para athletes by enabling them to borrow racing wheelchairs for free.

We also work in partnership with Scottish Athletics and community partners to fund free athletics sessions for children from areas of deprivation. They are designed to be delivered in familiar community spaces – football cages, sports halls and grass pitches – so that we can take athletics to children in their own communities with people they trust rather than expecting them to come to us at a track.

Our session in Dalmarnock - where over 35% of children are growing up in poverty – sees around 50-60 children taking part weekly. No sitting at home on their phones, no hanging around with nothing to do, no anti-social behaviour. Just two hours of running around, challenging themselves in a safe and supportive space, and, most importantly, having fun.

"FOR CONTEXT, 17% OF SCOTS LIVE IN RELATIVE POVERTY, ACCORDING TO THE LATEST SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT STATISTICS."



We have big ambitions to roll these sessions out more widely, so that more children affected by poverty across Scotland have the opportunity to enjoy athletics.

We're incredibly grateful to be the official charity partner of Stride Athletics for 2026. As a small charity, every donation made by runners taking part in Stride Athletics events this year will make a huge difference to the communities who access our support.

If you would like to find out more about Athletics Trust Scotland, we'd love to hear from you!

Email us at:

info@athleticstrustscotland.org.uk

For those interested, we are celebrating Scottish Running Week for the third consecutive year, from **1 to 7 June 2026**.

We'd love for you to join us!

BY JENNY SELMAN

 Athletics Trust
Scotland

ONE STRIDE AT A TIME



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