

# GOING FOR



As London gears up for the games, **Joanna Bale** talks to an LSE competitor, a researcher and an LSE volunteer about the Olympics – from medal chances to legacy.

**N**ext month London will host the world as it stages the 2012 Olympics. For LSE, a university where the world has long come to study, the great event is a cause of much excitement. Situated on a major route out to the Olympic stadium, the School is well placed to watch the fun, and many students and members of staff have volunteered their services. LSE researchers have also been busy undertaking studies on a range of areas, from cost and security to the impact on deprived communities and the likely legacy. This article provides just a snapshot of people, events and research.

## **The competitor: Mara Yamauchi**

(Née Myers, MSc Politics of the World Economy 1996)

Mara Yamauchi will compete for Team GB in the 2012 women's marathon, alongside the current world record holder, Paula Radcliffe. She was selected after overcoming a series of injuries to finish third in last year's Yokohama Marathon in Japan, comfortably inside the team-qualifying standard of 2 hours and 31 minutes. The second fastest British woman of all time behind Radcliffe, she finished sixth in the Beijing Olympics and hopes to win a medal in 2012.

Born in Oxford in 1973, the daughter of the British environmentalist Norman Myers, she was named after



the River Mara in Kenya where she spent her early childhood. She took up cross-country running while a PPE undergraduate at St Anne's College, Oxford. After a master's at LSE, she put her career as a diplomat with the British Foreign Office on hold to pursue her Olympic dreams.

Here she explains her gruelling training regime for the Olympic marathon, which takes place on 5 August, and reminisces about her "stimulating" year at LSE.

"I was really delighted to be picked early for the Olympics, in December 2011, because it means I don't have to run another marathon before the games and I can really concentrate on my training for the Olympics.

"Typically I run between 80 and 100 miles a week and that is a mixture of different types of training. I run at least once, normally twice a day. That can be easy running or speed sessions. Sometimes I also do swimming or the bike in the gym to prevent injury. I also do weight training, drills, stretching.

"I took unpaid leave from the Foreign Office in January 2006 and since then I have been a full-time athlete. My husband, Shigetoshi, is my coach, training partner, agent and manager, although he has no real background in athletics. He also does massage for me and most of the cooking. Because I am training a lot and need a lot of rest, it's really essential to have that kind of support. I'm very lucky in that respect. He was working until 2007 in an investment bank, but I wasn't really able to train, rest and do all the other stuff by myself. Going to the Olympics is a dream, so he agreed to leave his work and help me.



"I came sixth in Beijing which was a good result for me, so we decided to carry on, especially as the next Olympics is in London. It is an incredible privilege as an athlete to be able to compete in a home Olympics because it's really just pure chance if it comes to your home country while you are competing. Most athletes' careers are quite short, less than ten years, so in that sense I am incredibly lucky. It will be a fantastic event and the public will really get behind the British athletes. But at the same time the expectation and pressure is, I would say, more than it would be otherwise, especially in athletics because it is the blue riband sport of the Olympics.

"I will be nearly 39 when I compete, but many top marathon runners have performed at that age and even into their 40s. Priscilla Welch, who represented Britain in the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, ran her best races in her 40s. The winner of the Beijing Olympics marathon, Constantina Tomescu, was 38 and so is Paula Radcliffe.

"You do have to adjust things, because you can't recover like you can when you are 20. Changes take place in your body – ligaments and tendons become a bit stiffer. If you are aware of that and adjust your training and your recovery accordingly then there is no reason why you can't compete with the best.

"I remember my time at LSE very fondly. It is, of course, a very international university and there were people from all over the globe in my year group, whereas at Oxford I was in quite a British environment. Also, there were lots of public lectures and eminent people visiting LSE, so it was a very stimulating environment. Being in London was also exciting – I shared a flat in Belsize Park and commuted by bicycle. I was running quite seriously during that year as a member of Harrow AC so I did my studies and went home to train. I wasn't hanging out drinking with other students. I suppose I am quite competitive and want to achieve things.

"After I finished my master's, I joined the Foreign Office. I worked in London for a year then was put onto Japanese language training and entered the British Embassy in Tokyo for three years. During that time, I found it difficult to carry on running with a full-time job. So when I left Japan to return to London I decided to have another attempt at being an elite athlete and am now on unpaid leave." ■

## 2012 Olympic medal predictions

Rankings of nations predicted to win 5 or more medals in 2012 according to Olympic tradition (gold medals ranked first, then totals)

Predicted ranking 2012	Nation	Gold medals			All medals		
		Predicted		Actual	Predicted		Actual
		2012	2008	2008	2012	2008	2008
1	United States	34	34	36	99	98	110
2	China	33	40	51	67	79	100
3	Russia	25	26	23	82	84	73
4	Great Britain	20	12	19	45	36	47
5	Germany	19	19	16	60	53	41
6	France	11	11	7	37	36	41
7	Italy	10	10	8	31	26	27
8	Japan	9	9	9	31	22	25
9	Australia	8	12	14	38	42	46
10	Hungary	7	8	3	19	19	10
11	Romania	6	6	4	14	14	8
12	Netherlands	5	4	7	19	18	16
13	Poland	5	5	3	14	14	10
14	India	5	5	1	7	7	3
15	Canada	4	4	3	17	17	18
16	Brazil	3	3	3	14	13	15
17	Bulgaria	3	3	1	12	12	5
17	Kenya	3	3	9	12	12	25
19	Ethiopia	3	3	4	8	7	7
19	Norway	3	3	3	8	8	9
19	Turkey	3	3	1	8	7	8
22	Greece	3	3	0	7	7	4
22	Jamaica	3	3	6	7	7	11
24	Spain	2	2	5	13	13	18
25	Sweden	2	2	0	9	9	5
26	Czech Republic	2	2	3	7	7	6
26	Denmark	2	2	2	7	7	7
26	Indonesia	2	2	1	7	6	5
26	New Zealand	2	2	3	7	7	9
30	Argentina	2	2	2	6	6	6
30	Switzerland	2	2	2	6	6	7
32	Belgium	1	1	1	5	4	2
32	Iran	1	1	1	5	5	2

Predictions by Daniel Johnson, assisted by Rafael Alonso-Arenas

For full predictions and more information see: [faculty1.coloradocollege.edu/~djohnson/Olympics.html](http://faculty1.coloradocollege.edu/~djohnson/Olympics.html)





### The researcher: **Daniel Johnson**

(MSc Economics 1992)

Daniel Johnson, now professor of economics at Colorado College, has become known across the world as the man who predicts the Olympic medals. Using just a handful of economic variables, his forecast model has demonstrated up to 96 per cent accuracy between predicted and national medal numbers at every summer and winter games since the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

He explains that pure economics, rather than an in-depth analysis of athletic ability, is key:

"I'm not a sports fanatic but I find something about the Olympics compelling. The fact that we line up athletes from around the world, the starting pistol goes off and we assume that they are all on a level playing field – there is something about that that really troubled me and therefore inspired me to carry out this research.

"I remember thinking: why is it that we think that a British ski jumper like Eddie the Eagle, who competed in the 1988 Winter Olympics, belongs in the same competition with people who have much greater access to resources specifically for ski jumping?

"In 1999 I co-wrote a paper explaining that, while Olympic medals are a function of athletic ability and we mean in no way to detract from that excellence, there is a clear development economics question at play here. All athletes don't start from the same starting blocks. There are ways in which we are all equal but we don't all have equal opportunities and I wanted to do something to show that for the world.

"Unfortunately the angle that we chose has been skewed a little by the popular press, who are more interested in the predictions for the medals. The paper is all about explaining historical patterns. It is utterly reliable that rich, populous, cold nations, by and large with democracies, but also with single-party communist regimes, win far more medals than nations with smaller

populations or smaller incomes or military regimes. We have shown that this advantage is entirely quantifiable, even predictable, using only macroeconomic variables.

"We ran the first prediction in the 2000 Sydney games and it was mind-bogglingly close. We did it again for the 2002 winter games and it was the same, so we decided to carry on doing this because we were getting a lot of press attention which was good for our institutions and good for economics generally.

"Over the years, the prediction power has fallen off slightly. We started off with 96 per cent accuracy. In 2010 that had fallen to 88 per cent, which is still good.

"This year we are going to recalibrate for all the things that have changed over the last 12 years, such as China, which has changed a lot, not just in terms of GDP per capita, or economic and political system, but in terms of how much emphasis they are placing on Olympic champions as a policy goal. We have underestimated China in every year since 2006 because they were gearing up for their home games in 2008 so invested a lot more in their athletes and therefore have done better than expected.

"As for Britain in 2012, the host nation advantage is dramatic. This is true for other sporting events too. There is something about the familiarity of the home field and not having to travel, particularly across time zones, and, of course, the backing of the home crowd."

This will help Britain achieve fourth place this year, according to his medal predictions for 2012 (see page 7).

Professor Johnson has maintained close links with LSE where he says he spent the most challenging but enjoyable year of his life:

"There is probably no single year of my life that comes close in terms of the amount that I learned about myself, about economics, about the world around me. There was a great deal of stretching so it was an enormously difficult but enjoyable year. I enjoy being pushed, being stretched, being challenged.

"I have been back many times to maintain relationships and I am also the LSE study abroad adviser for Colorado College, and before that for Wellesley College, Boston." ■

## “All athletes don't start from the same starting blocks”



### The volunteer: **Sooraya Mohabeer**

Knowledge Transfer Events  
Executive at LSE

Sooraya Mohabeer has been selected from thousands of volunteers for the role of Games Maker in the National Olympic

Committee (NOC) Services Team based at the Athletes' Village, London Stratford, which will be home to more than 10,000 athletes and officials during the games.

She explains: "My role will involve being a key point of liaison between LOCOG (London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games) and the athletes and their team officials. I will be assigned a delegation from a specific country in May and my position will last four to five weeks.

"I was born and raised in London and am incredibly proud to be involved in the biggest sporting event on the planet, happening practically on my doorstep. I've always been involved in sport, having won medals at local and regional level in gymnastics, trampolining, athletics and football." ■

Other LSE staff and student volunteers include: Dr Edgar Whitley, Rachael Elliott, Margaret Perkins, Lisa Trigg, Angela Ebner, Hoa Doan, Rachel Gregory, Tapinder Ghuman, Kaylie Sim, Eleanor Scott, Tao Yang, Neil Shah, Chetan Varsani and Manjula Kalliat.



**Joanna Bale** is a senior press officer at LSE.





## ALUMNI VIEWPOINT

## Kurt Barling on covering the Olympics



There are some stories that are so unique that you know you will never see their like again. To work that journalistic seam is a mouth-watering prospect. In 1989, just eight weeks out of LSE, I was extraordinarily lucky to report on the fall of the Berlin Wall for the BBC. Now, this summer, I'll be heavily involved in another significant broadcast challenge when the Olympic games come to London town.

The Olympic story has been unfolding at BBC London News for nearly a decade. We have been at the heart of the Olympic narrative since Ken Livingstone, when mayor, threw his political weight behind the bid in January 2003. Two years later, on 6 July 2005, IOC chairman Jacques Rogge announced that London had won the right to host the games. We reported the sense of euphoria that swept the capital. The following day, of course, London witnessed the carnage of the

Tube bombings. The security implications for the games have never been off the agenda since.

We've been very keen from the start to understand and explain the implications of hosting a modern Olympics to our audience. In 2006 I travelled to Atlanta to look at the consequences for an Olympic city of putting on the games. I saw for myself the transformational possibilities, from Centennial Park in downtown Atlanta to the new facilities adopted by the local university. A decade on there was still a huge pride in what had been achieved to pull the people of the city together.

The preparations for 2012 have certainly seen the radical reshaping of the skyline of East London. In the economic doldrums since the late 1970s and the collapse of the docks, the London "Olympic" boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Greenwich and Waltham Forest have seen levels of investment, pumped by the Olympic site. The inward capital investment even surpasses that secured to revitalise Canary Wharf and Docklands. It is clear that the regeneration and legacy story will continue long after the athletes have moved on.

Once the games begin, logistics are going to be a key issue for us. Movement in and out of the Olympic site will be heavily regulated, so we have to plan for how we get stories on air. The nature of modern broadcasting makes us extremely mobile, and we need to be, because movement around central London will be slow. We are putting in place facilities to broadcast live from different venues beyond the Park to reflect how the capital is enjoying the spectacle and how Londoners are being affected. BBC London will also be on the road with its own travel bus to make sure it can reflect how different parts of the capital are experiencing the games.

In the final analysis, our job as journalists is to bring the story of the 2012 Olympic games to our audience, which is drawn from the 15 million licence-fee payers in our patch. Whether it be in the competitions or in the capital, it will be our responsibility to make sure it gets on air on time.

**Kurt Barling** (MSc Government 1985, PhD International Relations 1989) is the special correspondent for BBC London and a former lecturer in international relations.

## Olympics research at LSE

**Ricky Burdett**, professor of urban studies and director of LSE Cities and the Urban Age programme – chief adviser on architecture and urbanism for the London 2012 Olympics, now advises the Olympic Legacy Park Company. He was part of the team of advisers and policymakers who promoted the notion of "a compact, well-connected and sustainable city" that made the most of ex-industrial brownfield land, especially close to good public transport links and which regenerated a swathe of East London.

He advised on running design competitions for all the main venues and helped to secure high quality and value-for-money building designs. The main objective of his contribution was to ensure that all the buildings remaining on the site could be easily accessed by existing and new communities, and that links to surrounding areas were prioritised to avoid creating an introverted development.

**Giles Atkinson**, Geography and Environment – valuing the intangible benefits of hosting the 2012 Olympics.

**Cities Programme** – master's studio in 2010-11 featured a focus on "High Street 2012" looking at the design implications of the Olympics on the changing nature of the high street between Aldgate and Stratford.

**Rosemary Davidson and Anne Power**, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion – report to Sport England on families' and children's experience of sport and informal activity in deprived Olympic neighbourhoods, providing policy recommendations on how to improve participation.

**Juliet Davis and Andrew Thorley**, LSE Cities – urban regeneration: issues of land acquisition and legacy. This explores the impact on the people living and working on the Olympic site in East London, many of whom were relocated to make way for it.

**Paul Dolan**, Social Policy – research following a group of people over three years to establish if there is a link between the 2012 Olympics and well-being, including happiness, national pride and social cohesion. This will provide policymakers with advice on how to promote well-being.

**Will Jennings and Martin Lodge**, Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation – tools of security risk management for the London 2012 Olympic games and FIFA 2006 World Cup in Germany. This comparison helps provide a better understanding for policymakers of the management of security risk at "mega-events".

**LSE Catalan Observatory** – 2010 conference on Sports, Socialisation and Economic Development.

This featured discussions with policymakers on the positive impact on Barcelona of the 1992 Olympics and comparisons with how London will benefit from the regeneration of deprived communities in 2012 and beyond.

**Max Nathan**, Geography and Environment – examination of government "Tech City" proposals for the post-2012 Olympic Park. This provides policy recommendations for support for the development of high-tech industries in East London.

**Kathleen Scanlon, Tony Travers, Christine Whitehead and Fernandez Arrigoitia**, LSE London – the impact of the 2012 Olympics on London borough expenditure. This was commissioned by London Councils and helped secure more government funding for them.

**Andrew Thorley**, Geography and Environment – the urban legacy of the Olympics and its impact on policy decision-making.

**Tony Travers**, LSE London – audio and video discussion of the London riots and their impact on the upcoming Olympics, on LSE YouTube channel.