

The Bath Bullet

With the Olympic games just five months away *The National Student* will be conducting a series of interviews in the build-up to Beijing with student athletes in the reckoning for a place in the Great Britain team. Mariam Farookhi gets the ball rolling with sprint star Craig Pickering.

Young sprinters such as Harry Aikines-Aryeetey, Simeon Williamson and Craig Pickering have exploded onto the athletics scene in the last few years, and their progress towards one of the most renowned sporting events, to be hosted by London in 2012 for the first time in 64 years, has already commenced.

However, when asked about where he sees his role in the Great Britain squad leading up to Beijing this year, Pickering has set his sights firmly on competing well in the indoor arena, before turning his thoughts to the outdoor track. "Well, hopefully I'll get picked for the World Indoor Championships and then in the outdoors. I'm part of the relay team that will defend the Olympic title and then I'll try and make the individual final as well."

Inevitably, with such a successful season in 2007, it is easy to understand why so much hope is invested in Pickering's promising career. Slashing his personal bests during both the indoor and outdoor seasons last year, he smoothly continued his transition into the senior ranks, retaining the British Universities 100m title with a time of 10.29s, before collecting medals at both European and World Championship level. When he looks back at his performances last year, it must be difficult not to set targets about where he sees himself in a few months' or years' time. "I try not to look too much for times, more for competitions. I try and win as many competitions as I can."

In the indoor season last year, Pickering set a new standard for Great Britain qualification in the European Indoor Trials and went on to clinch the 60m silver behind Jason Gardner, his former training partner, at the European Athletics Indoor Championships. He acknowledges the friendly rivalry with Gardner, winner of an unprecedented four European Indoor titles and an impressive competitor on the outdoor track. "Jason was one of three Europeans to run under 10 seconds, so he can obviously do it at the 100m as well, it's just overshadowed by his indoor achievements."

Pickering beat Gardner several times last year, emphasising his growing presence in the sport, but does not see this as the major turning point in his career, despite these comprehensive victories. "It wasn't just beating Jason, it was also the times I was running which was the major step-up for me."

With Gardner's recent retirement from athletics, friendly com-

petition with some of the other younger GB talents has developed. "Yeah, we're friends. Me and Simeon (Williamson) have been competing together for a few years and we know each other very well. Ryan Scott is also one of my competitors. I train with him all the time and get on really well with him so there's no nasty rivalry really."

Pickering is based in Bath, whilst studying for a Sports and Exercise Science degree at the university. He admits, "It is quite hard to fit in all the work and everything but I've split my final year, which I'm in now, so I've got my dissertation next year and all my modules this year which makes it a bit more manageable." This allows him to focus a lot more time and energy into his intense training schedule, which consists of "three days in the gym and three days on the track, and each training session lasts between three and four hours each day."

Now, in the middle of the indoor season, "We're not doing so much work and just trying to stay sharp - that's the main thing at the moment." Once the outdoor season begins, and thoughts turn to the slightly longer 100m sprint, the training will remain almost the same. "We do a bit more stamina work for the 100m, but you still have to have a reasonable amount for 60m because you've usually got quite a few rounds. But

with the 60m, we work a lot more on the start than we do for the 100m, so that's the main difference."

Although other successful GB athletes have based themselves in Loughborough, notably longer-distance runners such as Paula Radcliffe, Pickering chose to train at Bath. "There are no sprint coaches at Loughborough, but the coach in Bath (Malcolm Arnold) used to coach Colin Jackson and Jason Gardner so I thought it would be good to go to someone with a good track record."

In fact, Arnold has achieved worldwide success in the past with many athletes, among them Jackson, in his role as a UK Athletics Senior Performance Coach.

Although he collected a silver medal and recorded a new personal best of 10.14 seconds in the 100m at the European Under 23 Championships last year, Pickering feels his greatest sporting achievement to date is the



bronze medal he won as part of the 4x100m relay team at the 2007 World Championships in Osaka. "That's a World Championship so that's good, and I've got an individual medal from the European Indoor Championships, but I reckon the relay medal from the World Championships just shades that."

Alongside Christian Malcolm, Marlon Devonish and Mark Lewis-Francis, Pickering ran the second leg to help the squad better the time set by the 2004 Olympic gold medal winning team and run the third fastest 4x100m relay time in British history.

Despite recently being described as the 'saviour of UK athletics', Pickering has so far not felt the weight of expectation too much to bear. "I don't feel it at all. I'm quite separate from it and, to be fair, I think it's necessary, because if we were American we wouldn't be that good running these times at all. Just because we're British, we get more media coverage really. If I was in America running my times, no one would really take any notice of it."

But in the past, there has been a selection of young British talent that has failed to live up to its promise at the top level. Sprinters such as Mark Lewis-Francis and Christian Malcolm showed brilliance at a World Junior Championship level, but Pickering puts it down to bad luck that these athletes have not performed as well at the senior stage. "Christian Malcolm has been injured constantly for the last five or six years, so obviously there's that aspect. Mark I know has been suffering with some injuries recently,

so I'm sure that contributes to it."

In the past, there has been mention of the race issue, and of Pickering becoming one of the first white sprinters to break the 10 seconds barrier. "I think it's been made into a big issue. Recently, my stance has been that I don't want to be the first white sprinter to beat 10 seconds because I'm the first white sprinter, I want to break 10 seconds because that's what I've got to do to win medals at major championships which is more important to me."

The start of the 2008 indoor season saw Pickering continue in the same vein of good form as he ended last year. "Things have started off alright. I opened the year with a good time and I ran well in Germany as well. They (the 60m World Trials and UK Championships in Sheffield where Pickering finished fifth behind a victorious Dwain Chambers) didn't go that well, but I've been very ill. I think I'll have a chance to put that right when I run next but I'm not sure when that will be." He refused to be drawn into a discussion about Chambers, but it comes as no surprise that he has been said to comment that he disagrees with the disgraced athlete's return to competitive sprinting.

Unfortunately, a virus and a hamstring injury have most likely brought an end to Pickering's indoor season. But his rehabilitation continues, and attention moves to the outdoor track. Around the country during the summer however, thoughts will turn to London 2012 and how well our young sprinters will perform on the world stage in front of their home fans. "I think we will have quite a good team. Obviously the others are doing well at the moment, my generation are all doing really well, so it looks good for 2012."



Steph Twell

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...last month, managed to stay with Gerrard and out-sprint him up the final hill to strike gold in 33 minutes 16 seconds, just two seconds ahead of his team mate. UWIC's Rob Budgen took third in 33 minutes 42 seconds.

St Mary's took the team title with 34 points, as Loughborough finished runners-up on 89 points and Birmingham took third with 109 points.

In the men's 'B' race Frank Baddick led Loughborough to team victory by winning the 7.8 kilometre race in 26 minutes 38 seconds.

He was backed up by Thomas Carter in third in 26 minutes 53 seconds and St Mary's' Bertie Powell finished second in 26 minutes 56 seconds to give St Mary's the team bronze while Birmingham won the silver.

London Met steal the show at Individual Table Tennis Championships

LONDON METROPOLITAN University showed they are the new dominating force in university table tennis with a fantastic performance at the Individual Championships in Nottingham.

The team took four out of the five titles on offer and in doing so put on a display of high quality and exciting table tennis.

Middlesex were the only university to stand in their way with Egle Adomelyte and Sarah Brown proving triumphant in the Women's Doubles and beating the pairing of Fe Ming Tong and Heather Knight.

Tong got her own back in the Women's Singles Final beating Adomelyte after also taking the Mixed Doubles title with partner Tiang Chang Hong in an all London Met final.

In the Men's Doubles Stephen Jenkins and Chris Brown of UWIC battled hard but were beaten into the silver medal position by Hong and his partner Zhang Hong Ming.

The Men's Singles saw another all London Met final with Hong beating Ming in what was almost an exhibition match. The two bronze medals went to Jiang Zhi Tao (London Met) and Tim Yarnell (Loughborough) who, along with the rest of the Loughborough team, put up a strong fight against the London Met contingent.

In the Plate event Joanne Meads (Loughborough) won the women's event with Devesh Shete (Cambridge) taking the Men's title.