

Full team ahead

HOW GREG RUTHERFORD'S SUPPORT SQUAD KEPT THE LONG JUMPER IN ONE PIECE TO WIN OLYMPIC GOLD

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GREG RUTHERFORD's therapist, Gerry Ramogida, likens the long jumper to a thoroughbred racehorse. Immensely talented, finely tuned and occasionally a bundle of nervous energy – it is an exciting formula that can lead to triumph or disaster.

Ramogida says Rutherford is the fastest long jumper on the runway since the great Carl Lewis. Channeling that kind of raw speed into a medal-winning jump, though, is easier said than done, especially when the thoroughbred racehorse is so fragile.

Upset by the death of his grandfather on the eve of the Beijing Olympics, Rutherford finished 10th in the final and left the Games in the back of an ambulance with illness. At last year's IAAF World Championships in Daegu things looked good, until he tore his hamstring in qualifying.

Blighted with such problems, Rutherford was beginning to resemble an injury waiting to happen. So it is testimony to the athlete's perseverance and his coaching and medical team that they managed to overcome the obstacles to strike gold in the greatest show on earth.

Step forward Dan Pfaff, the American coach headhunted by UKA to become centre director at the Lee Valley High Performance Centre in 2009, his therapist Ramogida and

Dr Paul Dijkstra, UKA's chief medical officer. Together, Pfaff says they operate in the fashion of a Formula One pit crew – fine-tuning every aspect of the athlete in the quest for the additional centimetres that can make the difference between first and fourth.

When Pfaff was signed by UKA, his coaching resume included guiding 33 Olympians to seven Olympic medals and 45 athletes to the IAAF World Championships, where they had won 10 medals. Famously, the 1996 Olympic 100m champion Donovan Bailey was among his former charges. Today, he also coaches Goldie Sayers, Steve Lewis, Christian Malcolm and Rhys Williams, among others.

Ramogida, meanwhile, is a Canadian consultant chiropractor for the Seattle Seahawks and performance therapist with UKA. Dr Dijkstra is a long-standing member of the UKA medical team and has worked with athletes such as Kelly Holmes in the past, in addition to being a contributor to *AW*.

"It's been a massive team effort and it's down to those guys that I am where I am now. The difference for me this year is I'd actually competed a fair bit in the run up to the Olympics. The guys had got me into great shape"

The trio had a key role in Rutherford's success, although they were not the only people involved. Therapists Andy Burke and Liz Soames also helped keep Rutherford on track, the former long jump international Kareem Street-Thompson acts as a mentor, while his parents, of course, have been instrumental over the years by ferrying their son around the UK, often in different sports as a child.

Rutherford, therefore, was hardly a one-man band in London 2012. The 25-year-old did the majority of the hard work by handling the pressure and unleashing an 8.31m jump to win gold, but he was quick to acknowledge in interviews straight after the Games the immense help he was given by his team.

"It's been a massive team effort," says Rutherford. "And it's down to those guys that I am where I am now."

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Rutherford tells *AW* there was a further, less publicised injury hiccup earlier this year, too. "In January I had another injury on my hamstring which wasn't ideal," he reveals. "But because I had so much faith in what my team were doing, I was able to get back quite quickly. And Gerry and Dan worked so hard in South Africa to get me back together again."

He adds: "Last year my hamstring went and I was left in pieces and the guys were gutted. But this year I can reward everyone for all their hard work by producing a medal."

OPPOSITE:
Greg Rutherford:
suffered
heartbreak and
frustration in
Beijing and Daegu
before striking
gold in London

RIGHT: Victory
came on a Super
Saturday that
also saw wins for
Jessica Ennis and
Mo Farah







"When Dan (Pfaff) came to me with the idea, I'd been watching Carl Lewis for so long and he is as close to perfect as you can get as a long jumper. So when Dan said we should try it, I got right behind it"

ABOVE: Technical twist: Rutherford now makes a lateral step at the end of his jump which eases stress on his hamstrings

RIGHT: Club man: Rutherford visited Marshall Milton Keynes last week to help inspire the next generation



Change of technique

MUCH has been written about Greg Rutherford's change of technique to follow the "Carl Lewis" approach. For those unfamiliar with what happened, Ramogida explains: "Greg's history of hamstring issues goes back throughout his career. It was primarily a technical error that he tended to make on his approach to the board and Dan saw that early.

"There were also alterations in his actual sprinting technique that initially became the focus. So improving his foot position and footstrike and placement of those which would take the stress off the hamstrings.

"In a jumping situation often he would reach and his step to the board would be too long. So he'd get the leg well out in front and just put that hamstring under enormous stress trying to generate the forces to jump far.

“The final alteration that Dan came up with was similar to what Carl Lewis used to do, which was a kind of lateral movement from the penultimate to the take off which allowed Greg a little more time in a sense to think about the foot placement. But in changing that it seemed to make him more consistent with his foot placement on the board and avoiding that over-reaching.”

Did Rutherford enjoy the change? “I completely embraced it,” the Olympic champion says. “When Dan came to me with the idea I’d been watching Carl Lewis for so long and he is as close to perfect as you can get as a long jumper. So when Dan said we should try it, I got right behind it.”

Rutherford feels he has lots of improvements still to make, too. “In the latter stages I have so much tidying up to do,” he says. “I’m still technically very poor and have a huge amount of distance to gain. The next two years will see me have plenty of time to nail it down and turn me in to a regular eight-and-a-half-metre jumper.”

Ramogida adds: “Greg is the fastest in the world on the runway. He is the fastest in the world since Carl Lewis. The force that’s generated on that take off step is almost 10 times body weight so you can’t mimic that situation in the gym. There’s no way to recreate that impulse, that speed in which it happens, the ground contact time in tenths of a second, so there had to be a technical correction in order to allow him to better manage those stresses.

“We developed hamstring specific programmes which Greg did on a daily basis. The biggest predictor of future hamstring injury is past hamstring injury – and that’s the same of most muscular-skeletal injuries. Once you have an injury in an area, there is always a degree of risk related to the area because it never comes back to 100% function.

“So there were a lot of strategies and also challenges due to Greg and his body make up – he’s a little bit bow legged and there are things that put him at greater risk – so there was a significant team approach. Myself and Paul probably lost about 10 years of our life with the stresses and dealing with the niggles and things with Greg.”

Crystal Palace decision

COMPETING in Madrid on July 7, Rutherford jumped only 7.81m with a big tailwind but did not feel himself. This then led to the decision to pull out of the London Grand Prix at Crystal Palace – it was a key moment as it allowed the team to take stock and focus on preparing for the Olympics.

Dijkstra says: “People like myself offer our best advice but ultimately the decision to pull out of a meeting like that is down to the coach and athlete. It is their judgement call.”

Dr Dijkstra adds: “The change of technique definitely eased the pressure on Greg’s hamstrings and it’s been very satisfying to see the plan come off.

“There has been a real integrated or holistic approach with Greg’s preparation for the Games, with correct amounts of rest and good nutrition and it paid off at the Olympics.”

On the Crystal Palace withdrawal, Rutherford explains: “I had a strange nery reaction in my hamstring after Madrid. So we thought ‘what’s the bigger picture?’ Did we want to win another Diamond League or get ready for the Olympics and give it my best shot and collectively we made the right decision.”



LEFT: Dan Pfaff: embraces Greg Rutherford in the Olympic Stadium after the duo celebrate victory

The wet and cool weather was also crucial in helping them make the decision to pull out and instead Rutherford headed to the holding camp in Portugal to prepare in the warmth for the Games.

London victory

YEARS of painful preparation came to fruition on Super Saturday at the Olympics as Rutherford soaked up the atmosphere, kept his cool and jumped to gold.

Ramogida remembers: “We told Greg to be patient in the build-up of the run, to be aware of his technique in the run up and the rest will take care of itself. I think that helped him manage his excitement.

“Greg is like a thoroughbred racehorse. In past competitions he might be really excited and has really ‘gone for it’ but jumping harder doesn’t always make you jump further.”

With Pfaff watching intently from the stands, Rutherford’s other support team also managed to see some of the action. Dr Dijkstra, for example, spent most of the Games occupying an area between the warm-up track and the mixed zone, but he got into the stadium for a couple of Rutherford’s jumps and Jessica Ennis’s 800m.

Ramogida remembers: “Greg had an area of discomfort after the preliminary round. I told him everything was fine but I didn’t sleep well that night!

“I thought this moment may not happen in my career so I’m going inside. I missed his first jump and then after that like most people in Britain was counting down the rounds, thinking ‘this could happen’. And at the end I was in tears.

“I’m Canadian, but it was spectacular. For Britain, for UK Athletics, for the athletes, for the country it was an incredible, incredible event which I’ll never forget for sure.”

The future

RUTHERFORD feels he’s just getting warmed up, too. “This is just the start,” he says. “I said at start of this year I thought this could be the start of four to five years of me winning major medals year in, year out.

“With the changes we have made and distances we can jump, Dan reckons I can jump 8.60-70m. To hear that from someone of his knowledge and class is so inspiring.



From fifth in the English Schools to Olympic glory

ONE of Greg Rutherford's early appearances in the pages of *Athletics Weekly* was not a glorious one, but it is proof that you don't have to be a teenage superstar in order to succeed as a senior.

Aged 14, he was fifth in the junior boys' long jump at the English Schools Championships in Exeter. The young Rutherford jumped a PB of 6.16m but the competition was won by Danny Harris of Devon, who jumped 6.46m to win gold.

"I didn't win an English Schools medal apart from a relay medal (bronze) in 2001," he remembers. "I wasn't very good so probably didn't feature too regularly in AW."

"In my first few years I remember people telling me I probably wouldn't make it as a long jumper, so it was perseverance and stubbornness that got me through it. I wasn't particularly special when I was younger. I was just drawn to it."

The winner, Harris, went on to break the seven-metre barrier – just. But Rutherford has gone on to become a regular eight-metre plus man.

The class of Exeter 2001 had mixed fortunes generally. Like Rutherford, the middle-distance runner Hannah England was also fifth in the junior girls' 1500m but went on to win world championship silver ten years later.

The really big names from the 2001 English Schools, Aileen Wilson and Jonathan Moore, did not go on to enjoy huge senior success. Incredibly, the high jumper and all-rounder Wilson won her seventh English Schools title in Exeter.

But some winners in 2001 did go on to perform superbly as seniors. Among them were Kate Dennison, who won the senior girls' pole vault title by half a metre, plus inter boys 800m champion Michael Rimmer, who like Dennison has gone on to win multiple national senior titles.

ABOVE: Greg Rutherford caption here
Greg Rutherford caption here
Greg Rutherford caption here
Greg Rutherford caption here

RIGHT: Greg Rutherford caption here
Greg Rutherford caption here
Greg Rutherford caption here
Greg Rutherford caption here
Greg Rutherford caption here

"So I'm doing everything now to prove him right and depending on what everyone else jumps, that should win me some more titles."

Diamond geezer

THIS Sunday Greg Rutherford gets back on to the runway to compete in the Diamond League meeting in Birmingham. He faces Olympic silver medallist Mitchell Watt of Australia, fellow Briton Chris Tomlinson and London 2012 triple jump champion Christian Taylor, an American who has a long jump best of 8.19m.

Like many athletes, Rutherford suffered from a slight post-championship lull but he is keen to raise his game and win at the Alexander Stadium.

"I'm looking forward to it," he says. "There's always a post major champs deflation. I want to relax a bit, but I'm working hard to pick myself up from it and I've been training smart in recent days."

"I've not been training too hard and risking getting hurt. I'm ticking over so I do well in these last few competitions. If I can get on to the runway fresh and ready then I can jump well and hopefully win another Diamond League."

He added: "I did feel a bit flat in my first session back last week. It's about understanding that your body is going to have these little peaks and troughs and have to work through it."

Rutherford has

obviously been busier than most athletes, too, and not surprisingly capitalising on his new status as an Olympic gold medallist. He's been on Alan Carr's show on Channel 4, BBC's *Newsnight* and *Soccer AM* on Sky Sports.

So what's been the most surreal? "Just generally really," he says. "People knowing my name and asking for photos and autographs has been strange."

"Two weeks ago no one had any idea who I was and suddenly people want to have photographs with me. So in general it's been a bit mad."

Does Rutherford enjoy it? "Yes it's good fun and it's what comes with it. I've embraced it and enjoy it. First and foremost

I'm a long jumper so I schedule the training and competing around it, but it is fun and I enjoy doing it."

"And at the end of the season I can switch off and enjoy it a bit more and not be concerned about what time I'm up til at night."

