

The concluding pages of *British Athletics 2014* are reproduced below.

The Final Pages – by Rob Whittingham

Last year I published a table of the number of track and field athletes by age and this was met with incredulity by many, with the numbers being so small.

I have carried out a similar investigation this year and extended the research into other areas.

Using Power of 10 as a source this is the breakdown by age group for track and field athletes in 2013.

	Men	Women	Total	Athletes Per Year
Under 13	5,610	6,349	11,959	5,980
Under 15	7,020	7,172	14,192	7,096
Under 17	5,620	4,460	10,080	5,040
Under 20	3,165	2,004	5,169	1,938
Under 23	1,845	986	2,831	944
Senior 23-34	3,163	1,507	4,670	389
Masters 35-39	711	378	1,089	218
Masters 40-44	791	364	1,155	231
Masters 45-49	811	397	1,208	242
Masters 50-54	731	299	1,030	206
Masters 55+	1,078	330	1,418	
Totals	30,545	24,246	54,791	

Note the following –

Because the age groups contain different numbers of years, the athletes per year column gives a better indication of the fall off per year.

The athlete numbers were taken from athletes identified on results from Power of 10 by mid January 2014 and are unchecked.

Age groups for juniors were the age group they competed in up to September.

Age groups for masters were taken at the end of the year.

Athletes who competed in 2 age groups during the year may be duplicated.

It would be good to do a direct comparison with 2012 but this is not possible. In 2013 97% of all British meetings were entered in full on Power of 10, this compares to 90% in 2012. Also from January 2014, athletes with low level performances in 2013 who had not been identified were investigated and added. I did not see this exercise being carried out for 2012 in early 2013. It is likely that around 5% extra data was collected for 2013 and this should be considered when comparing with the table below.

2012 Track and Field athletes from Power of 10

	Men	Women	Total	Athletes Per Year
Under 13	4,791	5,261	10,052	5,026
Under 15	6,609	6,286	12,895	6,448
Under 17	5,297	4,157	9,454	4,727
Under 20	2,988	1,993	4,981	1,868
Under 23	1,856	991	2,847	949
Senior 23-34	3,161	1,509	4,670	389
Masters 35-39	671	344	1,015	203
Masters 40-44	762	348	1,110	222
Masters 45-49	775	442	1,217	243
Masters 50-54	709	261	970	194

Thus if the 5% extra data is factored in, the following is appropriate

Under 13	up	13.3% in 2013 compared to 2012
Under 15	up	4.8%
Under 17	up	1.5%
Under 20	down	1.2%
Under 23	down	5.3%
Senior 23-34	down	4.8%

This is in the year following a home Olympics. Where is the legacy?

Drop Out Rates

A major concern for the sport is the drop out rates and with the substantial increase in the number of athletes recorded by the tops database it is now possible to give accurate figures for all the age groups.

From the 32,968 track and field athletes in the database in 2012, 19,976 had track and field performances in 2013. This is a dropout rate 39.5%.

Breaking this down by age group and gender

	Men	Women	Combined
Under 13	46.1%	34.9%	40.3%
Under 15	44.8%	33.2%	39.4%
Under 17	44.0%	40.7%	42.6%
Under 20	37.4%	40.1%	38.5%
Under 23	31.5%	34.1%	32.4%
Senior 23-34	37.8%	39.6%	38.4%
Masters 35-39	36.3%	40.3%	37.6%
Masters 40-44	40.2%	36.5%	39.0%
Masters 45-49	32.9%	32.8%	32.8%
Masters 50-54	31.7%	31.3%	31.6%

Over the age of 54 numbers are very small and insignificant.

The percentages shown above are likely to be lower than the figures obtained if all athletes were considered. Power of 10 has more athletes recorded in 2012, but these are below the level of the normal rankings shown. The lower the athletes level of performance the more likely they are to drop out. To verify the figures above a small sample group was taken from Power of 10 and a detailed analysis was made.

The group chosen was men born in 1992 (this being one of the lowest drop outs).

Power of 10 had 687 athletes with performances in 2012 of whom 466 had performances in 2013, a drop out rate of 32.2%

For tops the figures were 532 in 2012 and 371 reappearing in 2013, drop out 30.3% (exactly as predicted).

Of course the numbers for athletes in each age do not drop by the percentages shown above since new athletes will come into the sport and many will reappear after a year's absence.

The detailed study of the Power of 10 1992 men showed 44 new athletes and 77 returning athletes in 2013. This produces a decrease in male athletes from age 20 to 21 of 14.6%. This number is much greater than any that have previously been published and this is for an age where minimum drop out is being experienced.

Endurance trends

It is very difficult to make a simple statement as to whether Britain is progressing at the higher levels since the evidence is so mixed. While areas like the sprints are moving forward there are some 'black holes' and endurance running is one.

The incredible success of Mo Farah is hiding just how far Britain has fallen back.

Consider the following table for Men's Marathon 1958 to 2013

Year	2:10:00 and under	2:12:00 and under	2:15:00 and under	2:20:00 and under	2:25:00 and under
1958					5
1959					2
1960				4	12
1961					4
1962					3
1963			1	3	8
1964			2	6	12
1965				6	12
1966				2	12
1967			1	6	22
1968		1	2	8	24
1969		2	2	10	32
1970	1	1	4	14	38
1971			3	25	58
1972			1	20	52
1973			2	22	63
1974	1	1	4	19	44
1975			1	23	55
1976			2	13	55
1977			2	25	54
1978			8	36	70
1979		1	6	33	86
1980		2	7	43	81
1981	1	4	16	48	125
1982	1	2	14	55	182
1983	3	8	25	102	227
1984	2	6	19	74	181
1985	4	6	15	72	183
1986		3	10	53	131
1987		2	12	49	105
1988	1	7	15	45	87
1989	1	3	12	36	82
1990		2	7	26	66
1991		4	14	34	76
1992		2	9	24	66
1993		4	10	27	51
1994		2	9	23	57
1995		4	6	12	43
1996	1	4	7	14	36
1997	2	3	7	17	38
1998		1	4	14	26
1999	1	1	1	8	32
2000		2	4	13	30
2001		2	3	13	24
2002	1	1	2	8	25
2003				7	23
2004			2	13	25
2005	1	1	3	12	26
2006		1	4	11	20
2007		1	2	5	11
2008			2	8	26
2009			1	7	18
2010			2	13	27
2011		1	2	13	33
2012			3	12	29
2013				11	26

But it is not just the Marathon

Peter Matthews comments in his merit listings

3000 Steeplechase – Men – 50th best - worst since 1959

5000 Metres – Men – just 3 in world top 100, compared to many more 1950s to 1990s

10000 Metres – Men – the situation remains bleak

Marathon – Men – leading time is second slowest since 1966

3000 Steeplechase – Women – only 34 women ran a 3k steeplechase in 2013

5000 Metres – Women – leading mark was the worst since 1993

10000 Metres – Women – leading mark was the worst since the event began 30 years ago

Marathon – Women – 9 of the top 10 are over 30

Of the 24 places available, in the 4 endurance events above, at the world championships in 2013, Britain sent only 5 athletes to fill 6 of the places.

With few signs of significant junior talent in endurance, the situation may get worse and if Mo Farah turns his attention completely to the marathon then medals at global championships in endurance events could disappear completely.

Active People Survey

First started in 2005 and conducted by Sport England, the main purpose of the survey was to find the numbers of people participating in sport. It consists of a 20 minute telephone interview of 164,000+ people each year, to arrive at an analysis for the 42,000,000 people in England who are aged 16 and over.

One must ask the fundamental question 'if the numbers taking part in sport are required, why not approach the various sports governing bodies for these figures and have them independently verified?'

Technology, including the internet, has improved so rapidly over the last 10 years that the volume of data involved no longer presents a problem.

Taking track and field athletics as an example, it is possible to store every performance, from every athlete in Britain, for the last 20 years on a mid range iphone and still have plenty of room for music, films, games etc.

The figures produced by this survey leads one to believe that they can serve no purpose and may even be harming the sport by producing impossible future targets.

For people surveyed, who stated track and field as their principle sport, the approximate number participating at the end of 2013 is 140,000. This is out of a total of around 2 million who participate in 'athletics'. (participating is defined as competing or training 30 minutes each week)

Comparing the size of the survey with the size of population, this number is formed from just 560 people saying they do track and field.

Because the number will vary from season to season, then in the winter months it will be around 70,000 participating and in the summer around 210,000. With around 210 tracks and equal numbers of under 16 athletes training, this would mean around 1,000 athletes on average at every track in the country on every summer training night!!

Of course, with Power of 10 recording almost every performance, it can show the number of athletes in England aged 16 and over who compete in track and field on a regular basis.

Total athletes in Britain aged 16 or over	23,600
After removing Scotland, Wales & Northern Ireland	20,060
After removing road runners who occasionally compete in track and field	15,045
After removing athletes who compete 4 times or less in the year (unlikely to train for the other 48 weeks)	7,000

There are 7,000 regular competitors in England aged 16 or over.

The APS survey shows 140,000 track and field participants.

An overstatement by a factor of 20!

As already stated, it is relatively easy to find the number of people competing in a particular sport, so why use a survey?

Can you imagine the government calculating the number of obese people in the country by contacting 164,000 people and asking – Are you fat?, are you very fat?