

2011 British Athletics Facts

ABAC Fact File 7 Performance.

2010 European Championships – best ever?

This is the first of the Performance Fact Files

1. Background. The achievements by British athletes in the 2010 European Championships have been used to claim proof of good progress towards a successful 2012 Olympic performance. In this Fact File we consider whether the recent European performances are in fact world class and whether the positive spin reported by many, including UK Sport, is justified.

2 Europe in World terms. It is well known that European standards are falling in world terms. But what are the facts? Well, at the first World Track and Field Championships held in 1983, European athletes won 72% of the medals on offer. By 2001 this ratio had declined to 53% and in 2009 it had fallen to 36%. So over a period of 27 years since the start of the World Championships the medal achievements of European athletes have halved.

In addition to this general picture we have compared in detail the relative strength of performances at European Championships with those at Olympic and World Championships. To do this we have compared the world rankings of all medallists at each of the major meeting over recent years.

At the 2009 World Championships the average world performance ranking for individual medallists (excluding marathon) was 4th. Similarly for the 2008 Olympics the average ranking was again 4th. In stark contrast, at the 2010 European Championships the average world ranking for individual medallists was 11th (At the 1998 European Championships the average world ranking of medallists was 9th place).

However, average rankings only give part of the picture. Some disciplines are much weaker than others with only the field events in the European Championships being up to world standards. The weakness on the track at the 2010 European championships is illustrated by the average world ranking required to win a European medal. In the 10 men's track events the average world performance ranking for all medallists was 27th. (At the 1998 European Championships the comparable average world ranking for male track medallists was 18th place).

3. Britain in Europe

In the 2010 European Championships Britain won 11 of its 17 individual medals in men's track. Only one of these medallists was highly ranked in world terms. The British team also won 2 relay medals

Although the total of 19 medals won in 2010 is a British record it was predicted by statisticians based on preceding year statistics. In 2009, Britain had 21 individuals and relay teams ranked in the top 3 in Europe. The correlation between these two periods indicates that rankings can give a very good indication of medal prospects.

4. Medal prospects for 2012

Our analysis, which processed data from the last 3 Olympic Games and World Championships, indicates that around 80% of medals won in Olympic Games and World Championships are won by athletes ranked in the top 5 in the world during the year of the championship.

It is this level of achievement that British athletes must strive for if they are to become medallists in 2012.

In 2010 Britain had only 2 athletes ranked in the top 5 in the world on performance.

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