

2015 Athletics Facts

ABAC Fact File 29

The performances of European and GB Track and Field athletes in 2014 compared to the rest of the World

Cross Country. At the recent European cross country championships GB teams gained a majority of medals. This weekend, Steve Cram commented that perhaps Britain should stop comparing itself to Europe and take a more global view. He was referring to cross country. We wondered whether the same comparison for track and field performances would be enlightening. After all, GB athletes produced many notable track results at the 2014 European Championships, in stark contrast to the field events in general and the throws in particular. So we asked Rob Whittingham to find a way of determining where European and GB track and field athletes stand on the World stage.

Basis for comparison. The basis for comparison used in this analysis is the 2014 world merit rankings for the top 10 athletes in each event. 1st place has been awarded 10 points down to 1 point for the 10th spot. So for any event there are 55 points to be distributed. Then for each event the points earned by European and GB athletes appearing in the top 10 have been totaled and the events ranked from the strongest European (Women's High Jump) to the weakest events where there are no European athletes represented in the world top 10. (Six events).

With 55 points for each of 43 events there are 2365 points available. Here is the comparison table

Table. 2014 Ranking of European events with GB performances listed separately.

Rank	Euro	%	Event	GB Pts	%	GB Medals at 2014 Euro Champs	Pts
1	49	89%	High Jump (W)	0	0	0	
2	48	87%	Hammer (M)	0	0	0	
3	43	78%	Hept. (W)	10	18%	0	
4=	42	76%	Decathlon(M)	0	0	0	
4=	42	76%	20kWalk (W)	0	0	0	
6	39	71%	Discus (M)	0	0	0	
7	37	67%	50kWalk (M)	0	0	0	
8=	36	65%	Long Jump (W)	7	13%	0	
8=	36	65%	Hammer (M)	0	0	0	
10	35	64%	Javelin (M)	0	0	0	
11	34	63%	Pole Vault (M)	0	0	0	
12	30	55%	Long Jump (M)	9	16%	Gold	
13=	29	53%	20kWalk (M)	0	0	0	
13=	29	53%	Discus (W)	0	0	0	
13=	29	53%	Javelin (W)	0	0	0	
16	28	51%	Hammer (M)	0	0	0	
17	27	49%	Pole Vault (W)	0	0	0	
18	26	47%	Triple Jump (W)	0	0	0	
19	24	44%	Shot (W)	0	0	0	

20	23	42%	110H (M)	4	7%	Silver
21	22	41%	200 (W)	6	11%	Silver
22	21	38%	400H (W)	9	16%	Gold
23	19	36%	1500 (W)	2	4%	Silver
24	18	33%	800 (w)	6	11%	Silver
25	14	25%	Triple Jump (M)	0	0	0
26	13	24%	400H (M)	0	0	0
27	12	22%	Shot (M)	0	0	0
28=	11	20%	100 (M)	11	20%	Gold, Bronze
28=	11	20%	100H (W)	6	11%	Gold
30=	9	16%	800 (M)	0	0	0
30=	9	16%	3000St/C (M)	0	0	0
32=	7	13%	200 (M)	4	7%	Gold
32=	7	13%	100 (W)	0	0	Bronze
34	4	7%	400 (W)	0	0	0
35=	2	4%	400 (M)	2	4%	Gold, Silver
35=	2	4%	5000 (W)	0	0	0
37	1	2%	10000 (W)	1	2%	Gold
38=	0	0%	1500 (M)	0	0	Bronze
38=	0	0%	5000 (M)	0	0	Gold, Bronze
38=	0	0%	10000 (M)	0	0	Gold, Silver
38=	0	0%	Marathon (M)	0	0	0
38=	0	0%	Marathon (W)	0	0	0
38=	0	0%	3000 St/C(W)	0	0	0

Trend over the last 12 years. In order to determine the trend in the strength of European track and field over recent years the same points scoring exercise was conducted for 2002. In that year European athletes totalled 1202 points on the world merit rankings. In 2014 this total has fallen to 869, a drop of 28% in just 12 years.

Comments and conclusions. Track and field performances in Europe compared to the world as a whole have declined dramatically over recent years. In 2014 Europe did very well in the field events, but almost all the track events were weak in world terms. In the last European Championships the majority of GB's medals were won mainly on the track where Europe is very poor.

So, to answer our earlier question raised by Steve Cram's comment regarding cross country, we should not judge our track and field performances against Europe. To do so gives a false impression of strength. This can best be illustrated by looking at the decline in women's distance running. While we all praise Jo Pavey's gold medal in the last European 10,000 metres it should be noted that that Jo only ranks 10th in the world on merit and 28th on performance in this event. Looking back at 2002,(when weather conditions were much worse) Jo's winning time in 2014 would have placed 14th in 2002, 4 athletes would have lapped her and Paula Radcliffe would have lapped her twice.

If Britain wishes to understand where it really ranks in world track and field it must measure itself against world levels and not satisfy itself with comparisons to weak and declining European performances.

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