

Twell uses 2020 vision to stay focused on goal of emulating Radcliffe

Athletics

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Athletics Correspondent

The difference between the next big thing and the next-best one is a false dawn, but the teen tipped to be "The New Paula" has even whetted the appetite of the old one. Steph Twell has a 12-year plan and a 2012 pin. "I don't set boundaries because I want to exceed expectations," she said.

Twell is mirroring the rise of Paula Radcliffe, honing her stamina on the cross-country killing fields, where she goes for a record third European junior title in Brussels tomorrow, and planning Olympic marathon glory. This year she went to Beijing for the experience and was competitive in the 1,500 metres heats. But she was not

happy and did not linger in China. "I didn't want to go sightseeing," she said. "I wanted to be in that final."

Radcliffe used to mentor Twell and has seen enough of that attitude to be excited. "How promising is she?" the marathon world record-holder said. "Really, really promising. She has got her head screwed on. She has that mental toughness you need. People think you need a coach to push you in certain directions, but in Steph's case it's almost a case of holding her back. She does not need pushing. She knows where she is going and has great race intuition — you can't coach that."

Tomorrow marks Twell's last significant competition as a junior. She says she feels quite emotional about it but is incredulous when asked if she is fear-

ful of stepping up in class. It is doubtful that there is an athlete in any sport with such a meticulous game plan. After the 1,500 metres at the 2012 Olympics and the 10,000 metres in 2020, she is eyeing the marathon in 2020.

"Some people don't want to step out of the 1,500 metres and try to exhaust it," she said. "But it's good to challenge yourself in different areas. At my club in Aldershot we've been bred that it's all about the enjoyment of running and if you have that then why wouldn't you want to run 26.2 miles?"

In Beijing Twell caught the bus to Tiananmen Square for the start of the women's marathon. It was her 19th birthday. She had exchanged words with Radcliffe and was inspired by her heroic failure. "She asked how I was doing and she recognised my performance at the World Junior Championships [Twell won the 1,500 metres]," Twell said. "For her to take the time to acknowledge that was an honour."

Transport problems meant that Twell did not get to the Bird's Nest Stadium for the tear-jerking denouement so she went on a 30-minute morning run in Tiananmen Square. "I think she showed great Olympic spirit," Twell said of her inspiration. "She's prepared to put her body on the line."

The same goes for Twell. Her best time for the 1,500 metres is 4min 58.3sec, which is not enough to trouble the top 30 in the world this year, but her improvement, age and mindset set her apart. The Olympic experience has also helped. "I think about Beijing every day," she said. "I've come out a different athlete. Everyone is in their own environment and you don't see what's going on in other sports, but the focus the cyclists and swimmers had was great. It was incredibly valuable. I felt I belonged there and it's where I want my future to be."

"I'm getting stronger. The next step is to get to a major final and I don't want to just make a final. I want to be competitive there. I want to learn about the other competitors' strengths and weaknesses. I went to the Olympics and it was amazing to stand on the start line and look up at the flame, but I was not in awe of anyone."

Under the shrewd stewardship of Mick Woods, Twell is the most exciting prospect in British athletics. She believes that she has a better kick than before the summer and still wears her



GRAHAM HUGHES

Faster, farther, stronger: Twell's target for the Olympics is to contest the 1,500 metres in 2012, the 10,000 metres in 2016 and the marathon in 2020

2012 pin as a badge of honour. Their long-term goals were underscored this week when they sat down with Mara Yamauchi, the Briton who was sixth in the marathon in Beijing.

"I think that the marathon is the event that's greatest to accomplish," Twell said. "From a very young age I saw myself as endurance-based, but it's a Catch-22 because my endurance

has also enhanced my 1,500 metres." Twell has outgrown the junior ranks. Like Radcliffe, she was a world junior champion at 18 and now wants to ruffle feathers in the elite. "I don't want to limit myself on anything," she said, but she does know how she wants to be remembered. "For representing Britain at an Olympics and getting a medal — especially a gold one."

GB prospects

Mo Farah Fresh from a six-week training stint in Ethiopia, he leads the men's challenge in the 10km senior race at the European Cross-Country Championships tomorrow.

Hayley Yelling The 2004 champion heads a women's team looking for their ninth successive team medal.

Andy Vernon The bronze medal-winner in the under-23s last year, Vernon will hope for better in that event after winning the senior race at the trials.

Emma Pallant Won bronze in the 1,500 metres at the World Junior Championships and will face Steph Twell in the women's junior race.

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Grainger powers on with dream of golden 2012

Rowing

Patrick Kidd

Katherine Grainger has good news and bad news for the law faculty at King's College London. Firstly, she will be resuming work on her PhD on homicide in January, having let it slide for a year. However, what her teachers refer to as her "other commitments" will also resume in the new year. Grainger, the only British woman to win a medal in any sport at three consecutive Olympic Games, has decided she will push on for 2012. "At no point leading up to Beijing



Grainger is aiming for the 2012 Games

did I think I was doing this for the last time," Grainger, 33, said yesterday. "I needed to put some distance between myself and rowing immediately afterwards and look at what else was out there, but I decided that I still wanted to do this. I'd rather go through it all again and try to get a gold in London than to play safe and never try."

Grainger won silver in the women's quad in Beijing, her third second place in successive Olympics, but she has been world champion four times and said that she still loved rowing. This week she was made a Steward of

Henley Royal Regatta, one of only three women to be admitted to the body of 57 lifelong members who organise the annual event.

"There's something satisfying about falling into bed at the end of the day, knowing you've done everything you can to be the best in the world at your job," she said. "Even if that means waking up early in pitch black, hearing the rain on the roof, finding ice on the windscreen of your car and knowing that you have to spend the next two hours on a river being shouted at by someone from the bank."

Camels aim to get over the hump of long trip north in bid for more glory

Cornish minnows face 450-mile journey to take on Tynedale, of Northumberland, in EDF Energy National Trophy, writes **Patrick Kidd**

Betjeman v Bruce

Wadebridge Camels
Founded 1955

Play at Molesworth Field on the Camel estuary in north Cornwall
Play in Tribute Western Counties west division (seventh tier); 217th in English rugby's pecking order
County cup titles One
Colours Chocolate and gold
Famous residents Andrew Ridgeley, Wham! singer; Jethro, comedian; Sir John Betjeman, poet

Tynedale

Founded 1876

Play at Tynedale Park, Corbridge, in southwest Northumberland
Play in National League Two (third tier); 33rd in club pecking order
County cup titles 21
Colours Blue and white
Famous residents Catherine Cookson, author; Steve Bruce, Wigan Athletic FC manager



Camels are known for their ability to travel great distances and suffer hardship, but walking across the Sahara on a humpful of palm water is a doddle compared with the task confronting Wadebridge Camels this weekend. Last night the Cornish team began their trek north to Tynedale in Northumberland for today's match in the third round of the EDF Energy National Trophy, 450 miles away and 184 places higher in the rugby pecking order. Who says that football's FA Cup has a monopoly on tales of romance?

Wadebridge, the lowliest of minnows, are third in the Tribute Western Counties west division. Half of their players are farmers and their only paid employee is the cleaner. This is the first time they have qualified for the trophy, which is contested by all teams save the 12 Guinness Premiership clubs.

Tynedale are fifth in National League Two, 21 places below the Premiership. Six of their players have represented England or Scotland at age-group level and they have a loan deal with the Newcastle Falcons academy. They have been in the National League structure for eight years and have lost at home only once in more than two years.

To call it a daunting challenge for Wadebridge is an understatement, but for Tony Wilce, their manager, the ordeal is in just getting there. "We were delighted to beat Shelford [who are top of London One] in the second round, but we're playing for it now," he said. "Tynedale is almost in Scotland." There are usually flights from



Maclennan, the Wadebridge wing, at his day job among the cabbages, while Julian Wilce, below, soars in a lineout

Newquay to Newcastle, which would have left a 16-mile drive each end, but Newquay airport is temporarily closed this month because of licensing problems, so the team had to drive an hour and a half to Exeter airport. To keep costs down, they will not be getting a coach at the other end but will rely on a minibus making shuttle runs from the hotel to the ground.

Controlling the budget is crucial for Wilce. He has decided to drive to Tynedale rather than fly, to save money, while other club officials are doubling up their roles. For one day only the chairman will also be the physiotherapist. Even then the venture will cost £6,000.

"The money is a nightmare," Wilce said. "The RFU offer a grant of up to £1,300, but we have been contacting local businesses to get sponsorship. It's quite a task. I just hope the pitch isn't frozen when we get there."

Wadebridge, five miles from Padstow in north Cornwall, qualified for the National Trophy by winning the Cornwall Cup for the first time. "It was fantastic to see our name on that trophy along with such great clubs as Redruth, Launceston and Penzance,"



of rugby, half the team were absent at a wedding.

Everyone has made themselves available this weekend. The team will be captained by Wilce's son, Julian, a second-row forward who is also the coach and, by day, a primary-school teacher. Alasdair Maclennan, the star wing, is a 35-year-old cabbage salesman. Other players are fishmongers, tax collectors and bicycle repairmen.

"They may be lowly, but Wadebridge have some important connections to top-flight rugby. Will Carling, the former England captain, is a fan — "He didn't play for us, but most of his uncles did," Wilce said. "There's a team photo that has seven Carlings in it" — and the young Olly Barkley, the Gloucester and England fly half, first kicked a ball on Molesworth Field.

"All the time he was doing well with England no one ever mentioned that he started at Wadebridge colts," Wilce said. "Then he appeared in court [on assault charges that were dropped] and suddenly the press started to say that he was a former Camel."

Win today and the club will have new heroes. Wilce just hopes that they get a home draw in the fourth round. Blaydon away could bankrupt them.

