

April 15 2010 £2.95

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WEEKLY

STEP ASIDE, PAULA

Mara Yamauchi
chases her first
Virgin London
Marathon crown

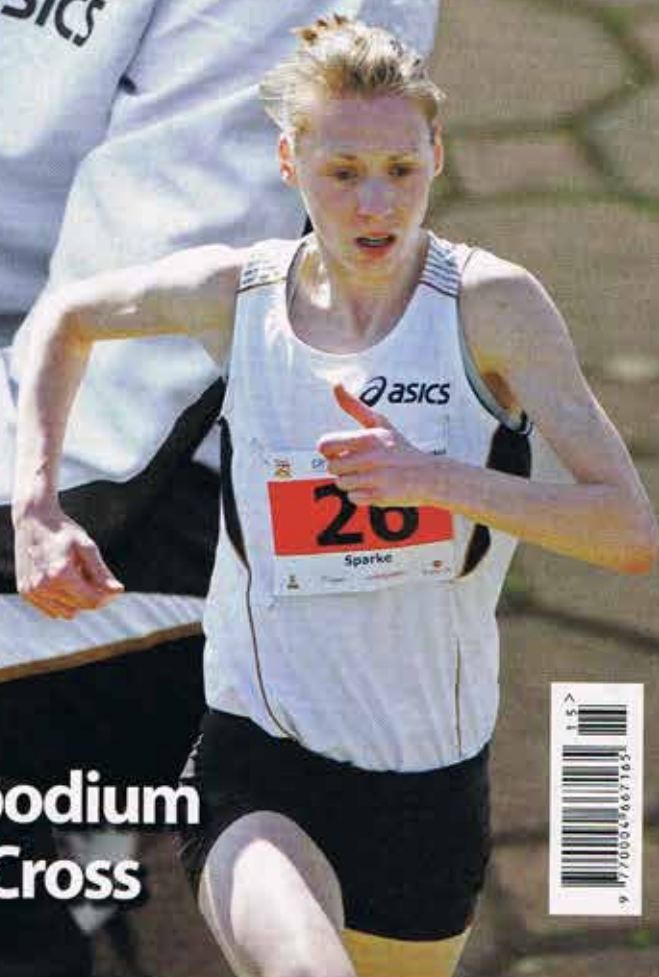
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Mara ready to hit the heights

MARA YAMAUCHI has been in Albuquerque putting the finishing touches to her Virgin London Marathon preparation as she hopes to become the first Brit to win the race since Paula Radcliffe in 2005.

The Japanese-based Harrow AC runner is hoping the large volumes of hill running she has been doing at her altitude training base in New Mexico will help her improve on her runner-up position of 12 months ago.

Yamauchi enjoyed her best marathon to date when clocking 2:23:12, 61 seconds behind Germany's Irina Mikitenko in the capital last year.

She then took a high-profile victory at the New York Half-marathon in 69:25 on an undulating course last month.

Having confirmed she is well on her way back following recovery from a foot injury that kept her out of last year's IAAF World Championships, she then headed straight to Albuquerque, which is 5000 feet above sea level.

However, she has been taking her training to new heights, quite literally, by employing continuous uphill runs in the hilly city.

"Last week I ran from the river up to our apartment in the mountain foothills



along Albuquerque's famous Tramway Boulevard," the Oxford-born runner wrote on her blog last week.

"The rise in altitude was about 500m – enough to make it hard work but a mere doddle compared to what I gather Martin Lel and his fellow Kenyans run up the side of the Rift Valley!"

She explained how she hopes the long climbs up the hills will help her on the flat 26-mile trek around London in 10 days' time.

"Running continuously up one straight road is mentally tough, but it's good practice for the marathon, and

there are a few distractions along the way, such as a field of bison halfway up!"

"I'll do one more uphill run before London, and hope it gives me the leg strength and mental fortitude to fly along the Embankment on the way to the finish."

The 36-year-old will be keen to ensure her marathon times remain as upwardly mobile as her recent training Stateside. Since her debut at the distance in 2004, the former foreign diplomat has set PBs in all but four of her 11 subsequent attempts.

The only exceptions have been in championships, or in races used as training runs and the 2007 London run in 20.5C heat.

Defying the so-called rule that athletes can only run three or four good marathons in their career, she is yet to disappoint and her progress shows no signs of abating.

However, after two foot injuries last year and illness in January, the 36-year-old would pull off her one of her most remarkable runs to date if she can improve still further in London this year – especially given she also has to contend with opposition from the likes of Mikitenko, Berhane Adere, Deena Kastor and Lyudmila Petrova.

Her 70:46 half-marathon in Marugame in February was two and a half minutes slower than she achieved in the same race 12 months earlier. However, the woman who lies second on the UK all-time lists was happy with that result and her New York win proved she was heading quickly in the right direction toward achieving her goal of her first win in London.

■ **SEE next week's AW for more from Yamauchi and the other leading Brits in our extensive preview of the Virgin London Marathon**

■ Yamauchi's steady climb

LIKE her recent training runs in Albuquerque, Mara Yamauchi's marathon career is on an upward curve.

Time	Position	Location
2:39:16	17	London, April 2004
2:31:52 PB	10	London, April 2005
2:31:26 PB	18	Helsinki, August 2005
2:27:38 PB	5	Tokyo, November 2005
2:25:13 PB	6	London, April 2006
2:25:41	6	London, April 2007
2:32:55	9	Osaka, September 2007
2:25:10 PB	1	Osaka, January 2008
2:46:58	5	Beijing, April 2008
2:27:29	6	Beijing, August 2008
2:25:03 PB	3	Tokyo, November 2008
2:23:12 PB	2	London, April 2009

Bolt plans season

TWO more dates in Usain Bolt's racing schedule have been confirmed and both are over 200m.

The Jamaican, who clocked a world record 19.19 for the distance at the IAAF World Championships in Berlin last year, will compete in Kingston on May 1. He will then run at the IAAF Diamond League in Shanghai on May 23.

Bolt will also run in Brussels in August and Paris in July, two other legs of the Diamond League series.

Liu Xiang, the 2004 Olympic 110m hurdles champion, will also appear at the meeting in his home city.

Radcliffe expecting her second child

PAULA RADCLIFFE made one of the least surprising announcements in athletics last week when she revealed that she was expecting a baby in September.

The world marathon record-holder and her husband, former GB international 1500m runner Gary Lough, were thought to have been hoping for a second child this year to give her chance to build up in good time for London 2012.

Adding to the speculation, the 36-year-old – the biggest draw in

world distance running – had never been lined up to compete in the Virgin London Marathon later this month.

"We are very lucky that everything so far has worked out as we had hoped," said Radcliffe.

"As always when nature is involved it's very hard to plan, but the idea was that I could get pregnant this year and have 2011 to comfortably come back to racing.

"I plan to run through as before but to come back a bit slower than

last time when I was back a bit too quickly. 2012 is the big goal and we think this works out perfectly for that."

Radcliffe had earlier said she did not want to wait until after 2012 in provide a younger sibling for daughter Isla, who was born in 2007.

At the London Games, Radcliffe will be seeking to make up for disappointment at the Athens Olympics in 2004 when she failed to finish and in Beijing in 2008 when she was 23rd after another injury-hit build-up.