

Paula Radcliffe

by Sean Hartnett

Prior to this year, Paula Radcliffe was best known for her bobbing stride and her penchant for setting a demanding pace—before giving way to kickers on the final lap. In '02, the 28-year-old Briton simply took her game to a new level—and a new event and left her competitors behind.

Moving up to the marathon, Radcliffe embraced a high-altitude, high-volume, and high-quality training regime that produced a level of fitness that was most evident in both her 2:18:56 marathon debut in London and her 2:17:18 World Record in Chicago.

In a limited track schedule, she set three notable PRs: 8:22.20, 14:31.42 and 30:01.09. Add the defense of her World Cross title and it becomes clear that Radcliffe's '02 season redefined women's long distance running.

Radcliffe's climb to the top has been aided by her dedicated support crew: husband Gary Lough (see sidebar), coaches Alex and Rosemary Stanton, and physical therapist Gerard Hartmann.

We sat down with her the day after her WR and reviewed her historic campaign:

T&FN: Coming off 4th-place finishes in the Olympic and Edmonton 10K races and the EPO

issue, you probably began the year a bit frustrated.

Radcliffe: I was definitely frustrated coming out of the Olympics because I had really worked hard and it was disappointing to come away in 4th position when you've given it all you have. I was thinking, "What do I have to do to beat these girls?" I got myself together and thought, "Well, I'll just have to go away and train harder and come back stronger."

I decided that I didn't want to finish 2000 on the disappointing note of the Olympics so I chose to do the World Half-Marathon Championships. I won that, and that was my first [Senior] world title and I went into 2001 much more positive.

Winning the World Cross in 2001 was really, really important because I've been trying to win it since I won [the World Junior] in Boston in '92. I've taken 2nd, 2nd and 3rds, and so to win that was really special.

Achieving that goal and working hard through the summer left me frustrated with Edmonton because I didn't feel that I ran right. I tried to change my tactics because the Olympic experience had scared me a little bit from leading the whole way. But I would rather had given everything and run how I did in the Olympics than finish feeling, "OK, I didn't run hard enough."

The drugs thing was an issue because I'm the type of a person if I feel strongly about something I'm going to make that statement rather than just moan about. It was like saying to the IOC and the IAAF, "Look, we have to do something because this is not a good situation." It wasn't like an attack on Yegorova, or anything like that. It was just the fact that situation shouldn't have happened. We should have had tests that were watertight, so there could be no question that somebody with EPO would be able to compete.

After I made that statement I don't think that I really carried that into 2002 because things had turned positive. Federations were getting EPO testing in place, so I decided in 2002 I'm just going to run, and run my races how I run best.

At the beginning of this year I said my goal for the year was to really run well in my marathon debut in London. Then I really wanted to win a title on the track because I won one in cross, I won the world half on the road, but I hadn't won one on the track.

A Day In The Life

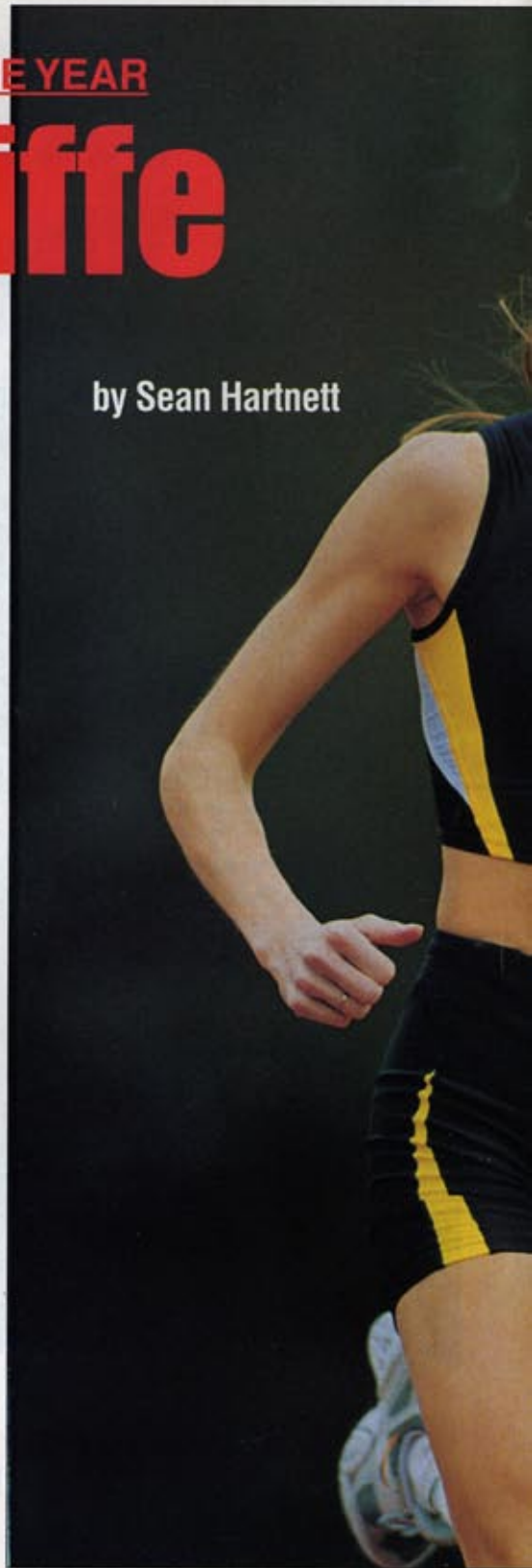
Paula Radcliffe's description of a typical day this year: "It's kinda boring. We sleep a lot, we get up at about 9, and I'd have a cup of coffee and maybe a little nibble of biscuit. Then I go out and run. If I'm doing a workout, I'd have an energy bar and drink and go and do a workout. So that is the main session of the day, because I feel better in the mornings at altitude. It is either the longer run or a workout.

"Then we would get back by 11:30 or 12 and I'd have a big brunch. Then I would do some strength and stretching exercises, and then sleep between 2 and 4. Twice a week I'd go and do free weights for an hour and then run afterwards.

"The days I didn't do that I'd have another half an hour of leg strength exercises. Then go do the shorter run which probably takes about an hour, or hour-ten in total because I always warm up—I always jog for 10 minutes, and then do the run, then jog and stretch afterwards.

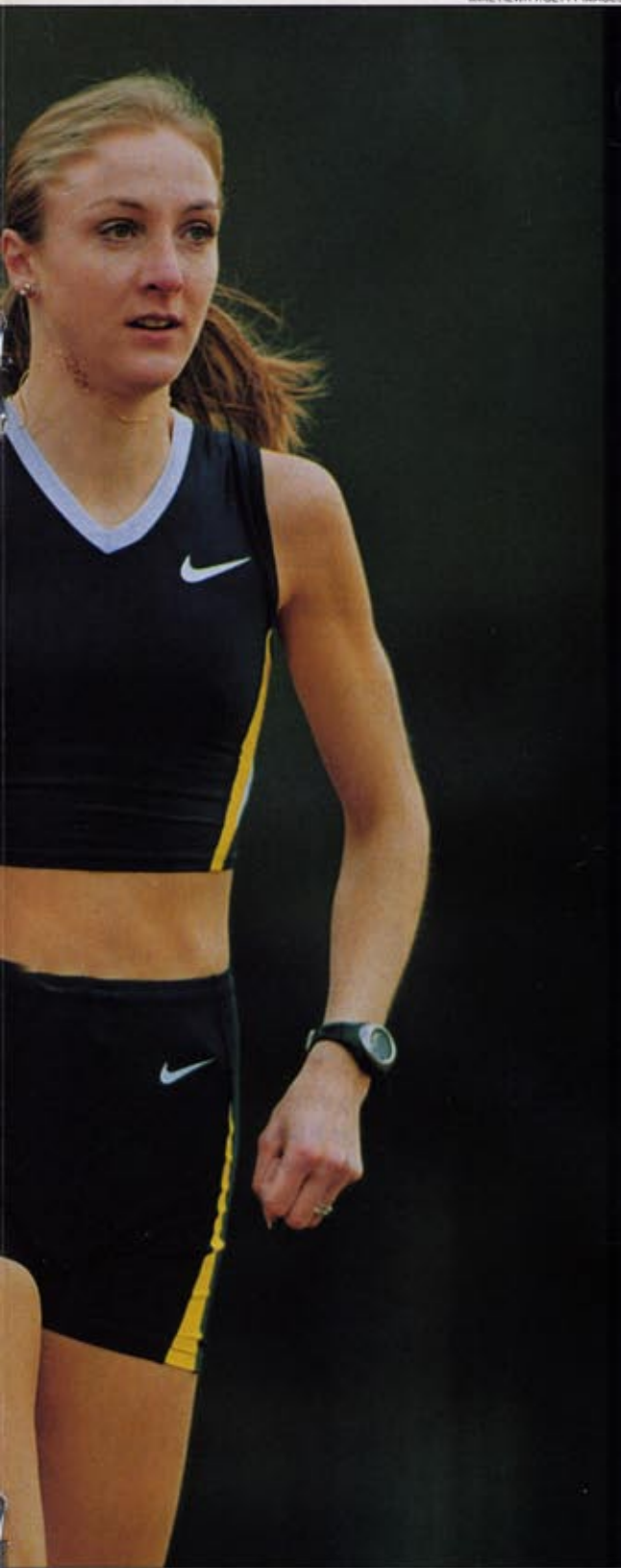
"Then we eat and we're usually in bed by 10:30. Ten hours of sleep is pretty much the norm a night. I just spend my life sleeping, I think.

"On the rest day we just do everything I can't do on the week. Like if I want to go watch a movie or go shopping, just little things like that and try to just have a mental break from the training. I like to read a lot. Oh, I read everything, but I actually like mystery novels, crime things, suspense."



The World Cross was important to defend it but my mind was really focused on London. Then London just set the year off so amazingly well, and straight away I loved the marathon and wanted to run again. I thought, "I was so close to the World Record that I'm going to give it a shot. I'm going to make it so that I really just run the two track championships, and give myself a chance of winning those."

T&FN: Your abbreviated track season consisted of three stunning performances; a fast 3K at Mo-



naco, an impressive win in the Commonwealth Games 5K in Manchester, and a remarkable 10K in the pouring rain in the Munich European Championships.

Radcliffe: Monaco was probably the one that surprised me the most, because I thought that, yeah, I'm in good shape to run well over 5 and 10, but I pretty much thought that I was at my limit at 8:25 or 8:26 for 3K. But we just got a perfect night there, and I felt really, really strong.

That really boosted my confidence going into the Commonwealth Games and the atmosphere there was amazing. It was a smallish stadium, it was only 38,000, but it was packed.

The time was incidental because I just ran to race. I was really worried about Edith Masai because she is so strong and she had beaten Szabo and Adere already. So I knew I had to kick it in hard in the middle really just to get rid of her.

I expected Edith to be able to go with that, and I was ready to kick in another one at three laps to go. As it happened the first one did the damage, and then I just tried to run in as hard as I could, but the crowd was just like pushing me big time. I didn't realize until a lap to go that I had made up so much time.

The whole Munich environment was really great, but because it was so wet the stadium was half-empty. So I was just trying to imagine the crowd, as usually German crowds are pretty good.

I knew I was in good shape so I wanted to go out and run as hard as I could. My main opposition was Sonia [O'Sullivan] and probably my best bet to beat her was to run as hard as I could. She is such a great racer that if she is there with 3K to go she's in her territory then.

T&FN: Then you began preparations for Chicago?

Radcliffe: Really, this year was about preparing for Chicago. We researched what was a fast course, where I'd get to race the top field, and what was the best time scale following the Europeans.

I had 9½ weeks. I took like five days complete break because I wanted to make sure that I was fresh going into it.

Where I had a 12-week buildup for London, I was starting from a higher point. I was coming in from a level where I was probably in the best shape of my life before I started to put the marathon base in. So it was really a case of being careful to make sure that I didn't overcook it, while at the same time put enough of the endurance in.

T&FN: Your marathon training was in the 130-140M range at altitude?

Radcliffe: Most of my marathon training was at that, but it averages less because what I do is work seven days, then I have the eighth day of complete rest. But I total my mileage for seven days, and the eighth day is chucked by the wayside.

I really don't like to run over 140 because I think that's a lot on your body. I usually try to put in a Nordic Trac workout once a week just to keep the mileage down. I find that it is the closest cross-training to running without getting the pounding.

It wasn't just the volume for me, it was the quality of the volume. Even at altitude, very few of my runs would be slower than 6:10 per mile. Some of my 20-milers I've been running in 5:15s. I hoped that if I could do that, then in a race situation when you have rested down I could keep going farther on.

The short tempo runs would still be 5:15 at altitude for like 10-milers. I try to do as much as I can at the pace that I'm going to race at, and that seems to work for me.

I am really lucky in that my talent is just that my body is very resilient, so it is tough to hurt. It can take a lot of the quality stuff that I throw at it. I try to back that up as much as possible with giving it as much rest, and proper nutrition.

T&FN: The volume and quality of your training was manifested in your World Record run in Chicago where you negative-split a 2:17:18.

Radcliffe: That is what I had hoped to do. I ran massive negative splits in London and I think that was too big of a difference. I ran 71:04 and then a 67:50 something. In Chicago I wanted to try and go out in 69:00, and then finish faster.

I've been working with exercise physiologist Andrew Jones since I was 17, and he has always predicted that I am suited for the marathon and I think it probably is my strongest event. On the track, I'm the one who has to do something early on. But in the marathon I am a fast finisher. I know that I can run it hard the whole way if I want to, or I can kick in.

T&FN: What makes you so tough?

Radcliffe: I don't really know. I don't really think of myself as tough. I guess it is just motivation, because I think you have to be tough to achieve. I don't think that it has really ever been, "I want to win," but it's been I want to get the best out of myself.

I roll my eyes back when I run. My mom reckons that is just another mechanism I have for escaping the pain. I guess mentally I can switch off from it. That is probably a big strength to just be able to block that out.

T&FN: If you began 2002 a bit frustrated, you must head into 2003 with great expectations?

Radcliffe: The big aim for me right now is to win that title on the track, the World Championships 10K. I definitely want to run more track next year because my PB for 1500 is still only 4:05 officially, but I've run a couple of 4:02s in training with Gary. So I think I can run closer to 4:00.

Then I'll have to sit down and decide about World Cross, and if I do another marathon. This year I had three peaks, but I actually raced fewer times than I ever have in my career. I've trained a whole lot harder, and I have had a lot more time blocks for training without races.

T&FN: Your success this year may complicate your plans for the 2004 Olympics?

Radcliffe: Every runner's dream is to win in the Olympics. That is the big one. I'll just pick my event there. I'm lucky now in that I have my Olympic qualifier in the marathon, and I'll get a 10K one next year, so I'll be able to decide in the spring of 2004 how the training is going and which is going to be the strongest event. So it is getting exciting. □