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University of Birmingham scholar and athlete Jonny Davies brings back the medals for GB



Jonny Davies, third year Biochemistry student and University of Birmingham sport scholar, last week brought home 2 medals for the GB Athletics team at the World University Games in Taipei. With a Silver in the 5000m and a Bronze for 1500m, Davies is proving to be one of the ones to watch on the track, especially given the extremely competitive nature of the 5000m.

Competing in 4 gruelling races over 6 days, in temperatures that exceeded 30 degrees and humidity that rarely dropped below 60%, Davies' latest success at the World University Games really showcases his progression. Davies has previously proved his talent by becoming the first ever British male to claim the U23 European Cross-Country title in 2015, followed by starting his senior career in the European Senior Championships 5000m in 2016. He has won numerous medals at the British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) track and cross-country events over the years, topping the list this year with a Gold in the 1500m. And if this latest achievement in Taipei is anything to go by, this is only the beginning for Davies.

However, every hero has an Achilles heel, and it was the collaborative team effort of Davies and the support team at the University acknowledging that where he was very successful in colder climate events, in the heat he tended to struggle. Prior to the World University Games in Taipei, the dedicated team of Performance Centre Sport Science and Coaching staff shaped a plan to work around the issues of acclimatisation. This ranged from discussing with experts such as Professor Myra Nimmo, Pro Vice Chancellor and Head of College of Life and Environmental Sciences and Chair of England Athletics; to putting Davies through his paces in an acclimatisation chamber to prepare him for the conditions; to executing a careful preparation and warm-up strategy. This immense amount of planning and nurturing led to what British Athletics termed Davies's 'confident mood...and all or nothing attitude', driving him to victory.

The University of Birmingham scholarship scheme, of which Davies has been a member since he started at the University, is a holistic programme focusing not only on the offering of funding towards necessary training, equipment and competitions, but the overall wellbeing of the scholars. It includes strength and conditioning

coaching, access to the new world-class performance gym, and nutritional, physiological and psychological support. In this case, the team clearly recognised an area of development and worked with Davies to improve on the winning margin that allowed him to succeed at this elite international championship. Davies said, about the support he received from the University:

‘I can’t really value enough how much support the team has given me, in the run up to these championships but also in my entire running career since I’ve been at Birmingham. In terms of these Games, as a team we knew that it was obviously going to be very different conditions in Chinese Taipei, and so we identified the temperatures and I was able to train in a heat chamber, where we worked out the optimum amount of time needed to acclimatise to the heat. I think that physically this gave me the advantage - but even more importantly, it meant that mentally I was ready to deal with that heat in Taiwan. It made a huge difference because there was so much focus and thought put into my plan that was tailored to my training.

‘What I really enjoyed about going out to these Championships more than any other is that I felt really prepared. I’ve done other big champs before but never felt like I was ready and in shape at this level - whereas this time I knew I’d done all my preparation right, which meant all I had to do on the day was focus on performing at my best.’

Davies’ silver medal at World University Games-level is an outstanding achievement and one that will put him in good stead for his next race, the Great North City Games in Newcastle on the 9th September. Davies will begin his final year of study at the University this month, and will be training under his new coach, four-time British steeplechase champion Luke Gunn, who has been Head Coach of the University Athletics and Cross-Country team since January 2015.

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Notes to the editor:

- The University of Birmingham supports around 100 performance athletes each year including Olympic gold medallist Lily Owsley MBE and British Indoor 1500m Champion, Sarah McDonald. Sport scholars receive a comprehensive package of support per academic year, consisting of sport science, sports medicine, strength & conditioning, lifestyle and financial expense payments.
- The University of Birmingham Performance Centre was established over ten years ago, and provides one of the best integrated athlete-centred specialist support teams in the UK for developing performance. It offers the latest specialised sports science and medicine support delivered by a team of multidisciplinary experts, and the team of specialists work closely together to create a bespoke, integrated support plan. All the support is underpinned by scientific theory and the latest research with the use of state of the art specialist equipment, including the AlterG® Anti-Gravity Treadmill and Altitude simulator.
- University of Birmingham Sport & Fitness opened in May 2017, it features Birmingham’s first 50m pool, six glass back squash courts, 200+ station gym, five activity studios, an indoor sports arena, 10m climbing wall and more.
- The University of Birmingham is currently ranked in the top ten universities for sport in the UK.
- The University of Birmingham is ranked amongst the world’s top 100 institutions, its work brings people from across the world to Birmingham, including researchers and teachers and more than 5,000 international students from over 150 countries.
- University of Birmingham scholars won 7 medals for GB at the 2016 Rio Olympics and Paralympics: Lily Owsley MBE, Gold (Hockey), Sophie Bray MBE, Gold (Hockey), James Rodwell, Silver (Rugby 7s), Pamela Relph MBE, Gold (Rowing), Lora Fachie MBE, Gold (B 3000m Pursuit) and Bronze (Time Trial), and Alison Patrick, Silver (Triathlon).
- Photo credit (Jonny Davies at Hyeres 2015): Mark Shearman