Team Cambridge

The CAM guide to the student and alumni athletes hoping to compete at the London 2012 Olympics
Julia Bleasdale hasn’t yet been selected for London 2012, but it’s now a strong possibility. She ran in the 10,000m at Stanford, California in April with a time of 31 minutes 29 – making her number one in the UK and the fifth-fastest British woman ever. “As long as three women don’t manage to run faster than me, I’ll have one of the three spots that are up for grabs in the 10,000m,” she says.

A potted history of sport at Cambridge

From the banning of football to the planned Sports Centre, sport has always played a central role in University life.

To find out more about Cambridge’s Olympic history or 2012’s hopefuls, visit alumni.cam.ac.uk/olympics.
Andrew Baddeley
College: Caius 2000
Subject: Engineering
Competition: 1500 metres

Andy Baddeley is Britain’s top metric miler, an Olympic finalist in Beijing in 2008 and a World Championship finalist in Osaka in 2007. The first British male 1500m runner to make a world final in 10 years, Andy is also a European and Commonwealth finalist.

Phyllis Agbo
College: Trinity 2004
Subject: Natural Sciences
Competition: Heptathlon

Phyllis Agbo has fond memories of training at Cambridge. “In those days the track didn’t have floodlights. So if you wanted to train late in the afternoon, you had to do it in the dark!”

Dr Claire Hallissey
College: Robinson 2001
Subject: Natural Sciences
Competition: Marathon

At the London Marathon, Dr Claire Hallissey set a new personal best of two hours, 27 minutes and 44 seconds – thereby winning selection for London 2012, where she will compete alongside Paula Radcliffe and Mara Yamauchi.

Louis Persent
College: St John’s 2008
Subject: Architecture
Competition: 400 metre relay

A year out of Cambridge, Louis Persent says he is trying not to think too hard about being an Olympic hopeful. “I know that if I work hard and race well I can make the team. There are lots of runners in my position, all needing to make just a small improvement to gain selection. So that is where my focus lies.” And while the 2016 Olympics might make more sense in terms of career development, Persent says “when something like this is happening 50 miles from your house, you don’t want to miss out!”

Emma Perkins
College: Newnham 2004
Subject: History and Philosophy of Science PhD student
Competition: High jump

As one of the UK’s top student athletes, Emma Perkins has already jumped at the Olympic Stadium. She competed in the British University Championships in May – the first competition at the venue – where she finished second. Her target now is to jump the Olympic “B” qualifying standard of 1.92m. Her personal best is 1.89m.

She says: “If I can continue to improve, I can get there. There’s still time, so I’m going to keep working hard.”

A new Sports Centre

Work is well under way on the most significant sports facility development in the University’s 800-year history. On 1 May, construction began on the Cambridge Sports Centre – a world-class facility for recreation, training and competition. When it opens next year, it will bring hundreds of athletes and spectators, across dozens of sports and activities, together under one roof.

“The Sports Centre will make a tremendous difference to the Olympic hopefuls of the future,” says Kyle Coveny, the University’s associate director for sports development. “But importantly, the facilities will be open to the entire University community, giving everyone an opportunity to participate.”

The University has allocated £10m from central funds towards the development of the Sports Centre. www.sport.cam.ac.uk

Louis Persent
College: St John’s 2008
Subject: Architecture
Competition: 400 metre relay

A year out of Cambridge, Louis Persent says he is trying not to think too hard about being an Olympic hopeful. “I know that if I work hard and race well I can make the team. There are lots of runners in my position, all needing to make just a small improvement to gain selection. So that is where my focus lies.” And while the 2016 Olympics might make more sense in terms of career development, Persent says “when something like this is happening 50 miles from your house, you don’t want to miss out!”

Emma Perkins
College: Newnham 2004
Subject: History and Philosophy of Science PhD student
Competition: High jump

As one of the UK’s top student athletes, Emma Perkins has already jumped at the Olympic Stadium. She competed in the British University Championships in May – the first competition at the venue – where she finished second. Her target now is to jump the Olympic “B” qualifying standard of 1.92m. Her personal best is 1.89m.

She says: “If I can continue to improve, I can get there. There’s still time, so I’m going to keep working hard.”

A new Sports Centre

Work is well under way on the most significant sports facility development in the University’s 800-year history. On 1 May, construction began on the Cambridge Sports Centre – a world-class facility for recreation, training and competition. When it opens next year, it will bring hundreds of athletes and spectators, across dozens of sports and activities, together under one roof.

“The Sports Centre will make a tremendous difference to the Olympic hopefuls of the future,” says Kyle Coveny, the University’s associate director for sports development. “But importantly, the facilities will be open to the entire University community, giving everyone an opportunity to participate.”

The University has allocated £10m from central funds towards the development of the Sports Centre. www.sport.cam.ac.uk

Louis Persent
College: St John’s 2008
Subject: Architecture
Competition: 400 metre relay

A year out of Cambridge, Louis Persent says he is trying not to think too hard about being an Olympic hopeful. “I know that if I work hard and race well I can make the team. There are lots of runners in my position, all needing to make just a small improvement to gain selection. So that is where my focus lies.” And while the 2016 Olympics might make more sense in terms of career development, Persent says “when something like this is happening 50 miles from your house, you don’t want to miss out!”

Emma Perkins
College: Newnham 2004
Subject: History and Philosophy of Science PhD student
Competition: High jump

As one of the UK’s top student athletes, Emma Perkins has already jumped at the Olympic Stadium. She competed in the British University Championships in May – the first competition at the venue – where she finished second. Her target now is to jump the Olympic “B” qualifying standard of 1.92m. Her personal best is 1.89m.

She says: “If I can continue to improve, I can get there. There’s still time, so I’m going to keep working hard.”
“I didn’t really get into cycling until my fourth year at Cambridge. I entered the National Road Race Championships and came fourth, which was unbelievable.

My first proper international race was in Brittany just after I graduated. I could not believe how hard it was at the time. But it was very satisfying when I went back to the same race three years later and won.

I moved to Switzerland to do a PhD in 2005 and worked full-time in research while trying to race with a Belgian team at weekends. I’m very fortunate in that my PhD supervisor is Professor Sarah Springman, and she has been hugely supportive of my cycling career. It’s only thanks to her that I have been able to juggle research and cycling.

Going to the Beijing Olympics was exciting because I didn’t even expect to be selected, and then I won silver in the time-trial event. There’s more pressure going to your second Olympic Games because you’ve got more experience and you obviously want to perform better than last time. It would make me really proud to race for Great Britain on home soil.”

Diver Stacie Powell feels completely at home in space – whether that’s during a triple somersault or while studying the Milky Way at the Institute of Astronomy.

Powell just missed out on the 2004 Olympics, placing third in the trial – only the top two divers were selected. “I was determined not to let this happen again,”
she says, “and all my extra hard work paid off when I won the trial qualifying for Beijing in 2008.”

At her Olympic debut, Powell was placed eighth in the synchronised dive and 10th in the platform dive. Her focus is now on a place in this year’s Olympics, even while juggling her training with a PhD in Astrophysics at Churchill College.

“I am currently training in the gym and the pool twice a day, six days a week,” she says. “The training is so intense; you push yourself as far as you can physically go. I often read papers when I have a spare minute at the pool. The internet helps a lot, so I can do my work from anywhere, even when I am away at competitions.”

Annie Lush

College: Emmanuel 1999
Subject: Geography
Competition: Women’s Elliott 6m

Annie Lush rowed in the winning crew of the 2001 Women’s Boat Race, before turning her passion for sailing into a full-time career. She has sailed with a number of professional teams from small keelboats to super yachts, and has been part of three Women’s Match Racing World Champion crews. She is the powerhouse of the women’s match race team, sailing in the middle of the boat, bringing technical skill and experience.

1906
Brothers Laurie and Reggie Doherty (both Trinity Hall) claim their eighth Wimbledon doubles championship.

1921
The first ladies Varsity swimming event is held. Distances are half those of the men’s events and the competition includes style swimming and diving.

1924
George Mallory (Magdalene) perishes whilst attempting to climb Mount Everest. Controversy has raged ever since as to whether he reached the summit or not.
People assume that I must have had Olympic dreams since I was a teenager, but it was only when I was trialling for GB, and got selected for the senior squad, that I realised I could go for it. It was the year before Athens, so I knew that if I made the boat, I’d be in with a good shot for the Games. 

That was in my first year at Cambridge. I was rowing with seasoned athletes, some of whom had been to the Olympics, and my learning curve was very steep. I think that as a sportsman, the best way to learn is with other athletes, rather than just from coaches. And there are only two places in the world that offer an environment like that to rowers: Oxford and Cambridge. 

Being a rower and studying at the same time is one of the most difficult things you could ever do. You’re combining so many different things. Now my life is tailored just to rowing, there’s more training; but I have free time in the afternoon to relax and recover for the next day. 

Everyone’s talking about the Olympics, but at the end of the day, you just have to see it as another race. Hopefully I’ll be able to get focused on the Games and aim for a gold medal. That’s what we’re here to do.”
Annie Vernon

College: Downing 2001
Subject: History
Competition: Women’s eight

Annie Vernon began her rowing career at Castle Dore Rowing Club, inspired by her father who had also rowed. She won a silver medal at Beijing in 2008 in the women’s quadruple sculls. On winning, she says: “When you win, first it’s a relief not to have messed it up, then the happiness and joy sink in.”

Jake Cornelius

College: Emmanuel 2006
Subject: Engineering
Competition: Men’s eight

“My first taste of rowing came at a local festival in February 1999. Cornell’s rowers brought some ergometers along. I tried one and thought: ‘This is really good.’ When you’re 15 and good at something, you feel good about yourself, and that experience really stuck with me. It’s the reason why I enjoy assisting with similar events in the community now. I spent four years at Stanford and then went to Cambridge largely to row, as well as being keen on the engineering programme. Rowing has a much higher profile in Cambridge than in the US, which I found very exciting, and the calibre of athletes was excellent, allowing me to train with Olympic gold medallists such as Kieran West.

With rowing, it’s very much the case that you get out what you put in. Part of becoming a better rower therefore involves finding out how to put more into it. Not in terms of the time you spend on the rowing machine, but the sheer level of mental focus you can achieve. It’s something you build, layer by layer, so I feel as if I’ve always been preparing for the Olympics, from 15 to Cambridge.

I’m really looking forward to getting a performance that validates the work we’ve put in. If you win at the end of the journey, it means every loss had a meaning. There’s the feeling of crossing the finish line when the race is over and it doesn’t hurt any more; then it sets in that experience really stuck with me. It’s the reason why I enjoy assisting with similar events in the community now. I spent four years at Stanford and then went to Cambridge largely to row, as well as being keen on the engineering programme. Rowing has a much higher profile in Cambridge than in the US, which I found very exciting, and the calibre of athletes was excellent, allowing me to train with Olympic gold medallists such as Kieran West.

With rowing, it’s very much the case that you get out what you put in. Part of becoming a better rower therefore involves finding out how to put more into it. Not in terms of the time you spend on the rowing machine, but the sheer level of mental focus you can achieve. It’s something you build, layer by layer, so I feel as if I’ve always been preparing for the Olympics, from 15 to Cambridge.

I’m really looking forward to getting a performance that validates the work we’ve put in. If you win at the end of the journey, it means every loss had a meaning. There’s the feeling of crossing the finish line when the race is over and it doesn’t hurt any more; then it sets in over weeks, and indeed years for the major wins, and becomes a bigger part of who you are.”

Silas Stafford

College: Caius 2008
Subject: Geography
Competition: Men’s pair

Silas Stafford says that he realised he wanted to take rowing further while at Cambridge. Now hoping to row for the US he says: “Winning a medal will mean we’ve been successful, and winning gold would be very successful. But come fourth and you may as well be 10th.”

Ryan Monaghan

College: St Edmunds 2007
Subject: Economics
Competition: Men’s pair

Ryan Monaghan says winning the pair at the 2010 World Rowing Championship Trials is his most memorable sporting achievement to date – but that one day he hopes to win an Olympic gold medal. He is now a senior on the US team.

Deaglan McEachern

College: Hughes Hall 2008
Subject: History
Competition: Men’s pair

Known as the CUBC President who captained the Blue Boat to victory in 2010, Deaglan McEachern says: “Winning breeds winning,” he says. “When you lose, you only know how to lose.”

1985
The first Light Blue female cox, Henrietta Shaw (St John’s), takes part in the Boat Race.

The Ospreys Club is founded.

1998
The inaugural Varsity cross-channel relay race takes place – the only university swimming race across the Channel. Both teams reach France within two minutes of each other and, in line with competition rules, the race is declared a draw.

2004 Athens
2 gold, 2 bronze

2008 Beijing
1 gold, 4 silver, 1 bronze

2011
Lucy Gossage (Newnham) wins the Ironman 70.3 Ireland and the TriGrandPrix in Spain.

2012
It is announced that the Women’s Boat Race will take place on the Tideway (on the Thames in London) from 2015; planning permission is granted for the West Cambridge University Sports Centre.
Rod Chisholm
College: Downing 1992
Subject: Natural Sciences
Competition: Men’s lightweight
double sculls
Having already competed at Beijing in
the men’s lightweight four, and won
gold at the 2011 World Rowing
Championships in the lightweight men’s
eight, Rod Chisholm has secured a place
on the Australian team and is sure to be
gunning for a medal at London 2012.

Peter McClelland
Canada
College: Pembroke 2009
Subject: Management
Competition: Men’s Four
Peter McClelland was in the Canadian
national team system before he came to
Cambridge, but the Cambridge rowing
culture still bowled him over. “CUBC is
an incredible team,” he says. “In my Blue
Boat (2010), all of us had rowed for our
countries at some level and most aimed
to row for our home teams in 2012.”

Anna Watkins
College: Newnham 2001
Subject: Natural Sciences
Competition: Women’s double sculls
“I first rowed in Michaelmas term 2001
as a novice at NCBC [Newnham College
Boat Club]. The weather was bad all
term, so we had more crew formal halls
than outings. It was the perfect
introduction because the other rowers
came to be my closest friends.
Rowing at Cambridge was a magical
time. Bumps is an inspired race format
and I miss it. I have no idea how we
coped with such a short, narrow, twisty
and overcrowded river. I remember ‘ergs’
in the boat bay at 6am and beautiful
summer evening paddles at 9pm,
complete with angry swans. I made a
very definite decision to become serious
about rowing at Cambridge. I had a
good physiology for the sport, thanks to
the persistence of the two NCBC
coaches, but I ignored this for a while,
because I didn’t want a change of
lifestyle and I was aware there would be
an impact on my studies. But I couldn’t
ignore the opportunity and in 2002 threw
myself completely at the task of climbing
the mountain from chubby novice to
international competitor.

At the moment we are on a camp
in Italy, doing three sessions each day
plus physiotherapy, video reviewing and
planning and technical meetings. The
biggest challenge is constant tiredness.
If I’m not exhausted all the time, I’m not
training hard enough – which has a
crippling effect on the rest of my life. I am
looking forward to being in the middle of
the race and to those six minutes where
I have the power to make it happen.”

Supporting Team Cambridge
Who will you be cheering for? Tell us at cam.ac.uk/olympics
and be entered into a prize draw to win an exclusive
Cambridge sports mug from cult designer Anna Railton
(Pembroke 2007).

www.cam.ac.uk/olympics

To find out more about
Cambridge at the Olympics or to
tell us about your sporting experiences
visit our website, follow CARO
on Facebook or join the debate on
Twitter – @caro1209 #camolympics.