

# BEST OF BRITISH

## AS THE NATION'S BEST ALL-AROUND MALE GYMNAST PREPARES TO DEFEND HIS 2013 TITLE AT THIS WEEKEND'S BRITISH CHAMPIONSHIPS, MAX WHITLOCK REVEALS WHY LONDON 2012 WAS KEY TO HIS SUCCESS

**The year after an Olympics most athletes have a bit of a lull, but you went on to win a hatful of medals at the European and World Championships. Did London 2012 help to push you on to another level?**

"Oh yeah, definitely. The Olympics motivated me even more to get back in the gym, because I saw all these other world-class gymnasts that I was competing against and I thought: 'I want to be right up there with them.' Seeing what they could do gave me an idea of where I was at and where I wanted to be. And that's what I think pushed me to go for the new routines in 2013. Now I want to come out in 2014 with more new routines."

**You won individual bronze on the pommel in London, as well as being part of the bronze medal-winning GB team. The knowledge that you performed so well under such pressure must give you great self-belief.**

"Exactly, and the memory of that sometimes does calm me down. I try to take the pressure off myself as much as I can in every competition, and to think back to the Olympics and to that crowd and the support we had there really helps. It was unbelievable - I don't think any competition will compare to that, so it does relax me."

**This year brings a European Championships, World Championships and Commonwealth Games. How high does the latter rank for you on that list?**

"It's right up there. The Commonwealths is massive because it's a multi-sport event similar to the Olympics. And the more experience I can get at that type of event, the better. I'm looking forward to seeing the difference between the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi to Glasgow."

**You were 17 years old when you competed in Delhi [Whitlock won silver in the team event and on the pommel, as well as bronze on the horizontal bar]. What was that like as an experience?**

"It was my first senior competition, actually, and it came in the same year as my junior Europeans [where he won gold in the pommel and floor events] - so it was a massive step in terms of experience. I loved Delhi, too. Before we went, there was this big fuss over what it was going to be like [in terms of the standard of the venues] and it was amazing - there was nothing to complain about. The village, the gym - everything was absolutely amazing. So I'm really looking forward to seeing what Glasgow is like. It's nice that it's closer to home, so hopefully my family can come out and support me."

**How important is the British Championships to ensuring you're in the England team in Glasgow?**

"I try not to really think about that. It is a trial, but I try not to think: 'I have to do this to get to this.' I just try to get out there and do what I do in training, and hopefully have a clean competition. That's all I really



## AFTER 2012, MY MAIN FOCUS WENT STRAIGHT ON TO RIO - THAT'S MY MAIN AIM

think about. I don't think about what I can get into after - just about what I can do on that day."

**You're going there as the defending champion for the all-around title. Who are you expecting to be your main rivals?**

"It's hard to pinpoint one person. There's Dan Purvis, Kristian Thomas and Sam Oldham, who are all amazing all-rounders [and who were all part of that 2012 bronze-winning team]. The GB squad has such good depth at the moment, even going into the juniors, so it'll be a tight competition. But the better competitors we have, the more it helps the team and the more it pushes individuals, so it's good."

**With your success and the semi-retirement of Louis Smith [although he is attempting a comeback for the Commonwealth Games], you are now the leading name in British gymnastics. Has that had any impact on you going into competitions?**

"I love it, to be honest. I've worked really hard and I don't see it as more pressure. I don't really feel like

I'm a leading name - I just feel like I'm one of the team. At the same time, we all have to go out and do our individual jobs. So I just try to do mine as well as I can, and that's it really. I do enjoy performing, though. That's what gymnasts train towards and the better the crowd and support, the more I thrive on it."

**Is it correct to say you are already working on routines for the Rio Olympics in 2016?**

"Yeah. After 2012, my main focus went straight on to Rio - that's my main aim. In the gym I'm constantly thinking about what I can prepare now so that, hopefully, it's ready and cleaned up and as effective as it can be by 2016. That's why I'm trying to get all my new skills into the competitions coming up. Although it will be hard now, hopefully it will help me out in future." ●

**Sarah Shephard@sarahsportmag**

*The 2014 British Championships take place from March 28-0 at Liverpool's Echo Arena. Tickets are available at [echoarena.com](http://echoarena.com)*