

Let the GAMES BEGIN

With the countdown to the Olympic Games finally upon us, *David Young* casts a speculative eye over the main events, the names to watch and the likely medallists



THIS PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT:
The Olympic Rings are installed at Tower Bridge, London; the Olympic Stadium nearing completion, May 2012.



Or how about the Soviets pipping the much-vaunted US basketball team by a single point in 1972 – scoring in the final seconds of the match? Then there was the pizza-quaffing human speedboat, Michael Phelps, who won a record eight gold medals in the Athens games of 2004. At only 19 years of age. And almost effortlessly.

But there are also moments that tug at the heart strings. British runner Derek Redmond tore his hamstring in the semi-final of the 400m in 1992, falling to his knees on the track. When the stretcher-bearers arrived, he waved them off, refusing to quit. And he limped all the way to the finish line. By the time his father went to help him, the entire stadium was in tears.

But what lies ahead in the year's Olympic Games? Thankfully, we'll know very shortly. Let the countdown begin...

THE MAIN EVENTS

What's a true Olympic sport? Well, that's a debate that'll run till the end of time. Should beach volleyball really be included? Or is it just there for entertainment purposes? And is synchronized swimming really a sport? The purists can point to certain events having always been around – athletics, swimming, fencing and gymnastics – but now that you have boats, horses, guns, spokes and racquets included, there's probably no going back.

Arguably, all disciplines on show will have some relation to the Games' motto of *'citius, altius, fortius'* (that's 'faster, higher, stronger' for those who dozed off during Latin classes). So, with that in mind, here's a guide to those who'll be standing out in their fields.

The Olympics – the ultimate games – spark into quadrennial life once more at the tail end of July. And the world's best at just about any athletic endeavor you can conceive will be there, raising the bar and widening the gap between mortals and heroes.

We love the promise of Corinthian spirit and the chance of glimpsing insights into the human condition. All the more, perhaps, we love to marvel at the spectacles and the extraordinary feats that will be performed. Of course, we expect every last one of the athletes to pour all they can muster in strength, stamina and guile into making the podium.

Memories of this fabled contest, however grainy, are etched into our minds for life. Like Mexico in 1968, when 200m gold medal winner, Tommie Smith, along with bronze medalist John Carlos, raised their black-gloved fists during the US national anthem – to promote black civil rights. In the same games, Bob Beamon set a long jump record of 29 feet, which would stand for almost 23 years.