

Sport

Relative values inspire quest for Olympic gold

Brownlee brothers ready to take on the world, and each other, at London 2012, writes Alyson Rudd

Supporting sibling rivalry holds a peculiar fascination. It is bad enough controlling brothers during a game of Monopoly but how on earth does it pan out when the prize is an Olympic gold medal?

In London today at the Royal Observatory, alongside eight other London 2012 hopefuls including Tom Daley and Mark Lewis-Francis, two sets of siblings will be unveiled as among the first athletes to join the BMW London 2012 Performance Team. As well as Richard and Simon Mantell, the Great Britain hockey brothers, there will be Alistair and Jonathan Brownlee, of whom there are high expectations in the triathlon.

"We're probably more competitive at Monopoly than we are at triathlon," Alistair says.

The reason has less to do with their obvious affection for each other and more with the respect they have for the intensity of each other's training.

"You know how hard the other person has worked so it's competitiveness combined with mutual respect," Alistair, 22, says.

He accepts that spectators enjoy the extra dynamic of watching brothers compete. "It makes for better viewing," he says.

Alistair, the 2009 world champion, also notes that the British usually root

for the underdog. Could this mean that they will find themselves cheering on his younger brother?

"I suppose so," Jonathan, 20, says. "I'll still be really young but so will Alistair. He will only be 24, not a seasoned athlete."

Triathletes peak at about 28 so it might be over-optimistic to expect a gold and silver pairing from these two,

but Jonathan disagrees. "We train hard and started triathlons when we were 10," he says. "Many triathletes start at 18 and they come from a running background. So we have that advantage."

The triathlon is not determined by who can swim, cycle and run the fastest, but the cleverest. There is little point in pushing so hard on the bike that your legs buckle when you try to

sprint. Similarly, it is possible to succeed after a poor start.

"One of the best things about triathlon is how technical and tactical it is and the constant trade-off; should I be easing off on the bike?" Alistair, who shares a house with his brother in Yorkshire, says.

There is so much that can go wrong that it is little wonder that Jonathan has recurring dreams in which he is unable to complete the course. "At my first world junior championships in 2006 I had a crash," he says. "Juniors are up to age 19 and I went in at 16 and at the first corner I crashed. It was an absolute nightmare. It was my first big race for GB. My bike was broken and I had to walk back. It was an awful feeling. It made me love it more. I'm not really sure why. I wanted to come back and prove myself."

That is why, presumably, Jonathan has just as many recurring dreams in which he wins.

"Anyone can get a good result when everything's going right," Alistair says, and he should know having once somehow finished eighth after cycling three kilometres with a puncture.

In the 2010 Hyde Park Triathlon he was ill but did not give up. "I can have the worst day of my career and feel under the weather and still come tenth," he says.

So which brother is the most tactic-

Sibling rivalries

Alistair on Jonathan ...

● If Jonathan finished ahead of him at the London Olympics in London, would he feel pleased for him or devastated for himself? "I'd get both emotions. I'd be pretty disappointed but that would be quickly overtaken by pride. I'm never disappointed for long; I never dwell on races."

● In athletic terms Alistair most admires his brother's swimming. "His technical ability in open water is really good."

● Away from sport, what does he admire most about Jonathan? "His ability to do work. I've always struggled with my motivation with schoolwork and Jonny's good at that."

● And his sibling's greatest weakness? "His cynicism; he's cynical, as you can tell."

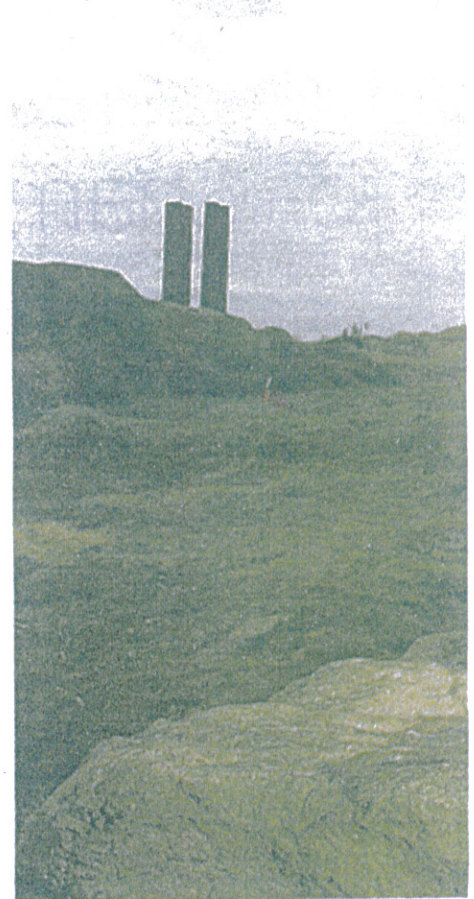
Jonathan on Alistair ...

● Is Jonathan at a disadvantage because there is an expectation that the older brother should do better? "Definitely. He's always beaten me. I use that as taking pressure away from me. I've got to aim for gold, though; there is no point aiming for silver."

● In sporting terms Jonathan most admires his brother's lack of weaknesses. "He's an all-rounder, he's a pure triathlete."

● Outside sport, Jonathan is impressed most by Alistair's braininess. "He's really clever. He was good at sciences and studied medicine and he doesn't work very hard; he's just clever."

● What is his brother's least admirable trait? "He's a bit selfish sometimes and thinks about himself a lot."



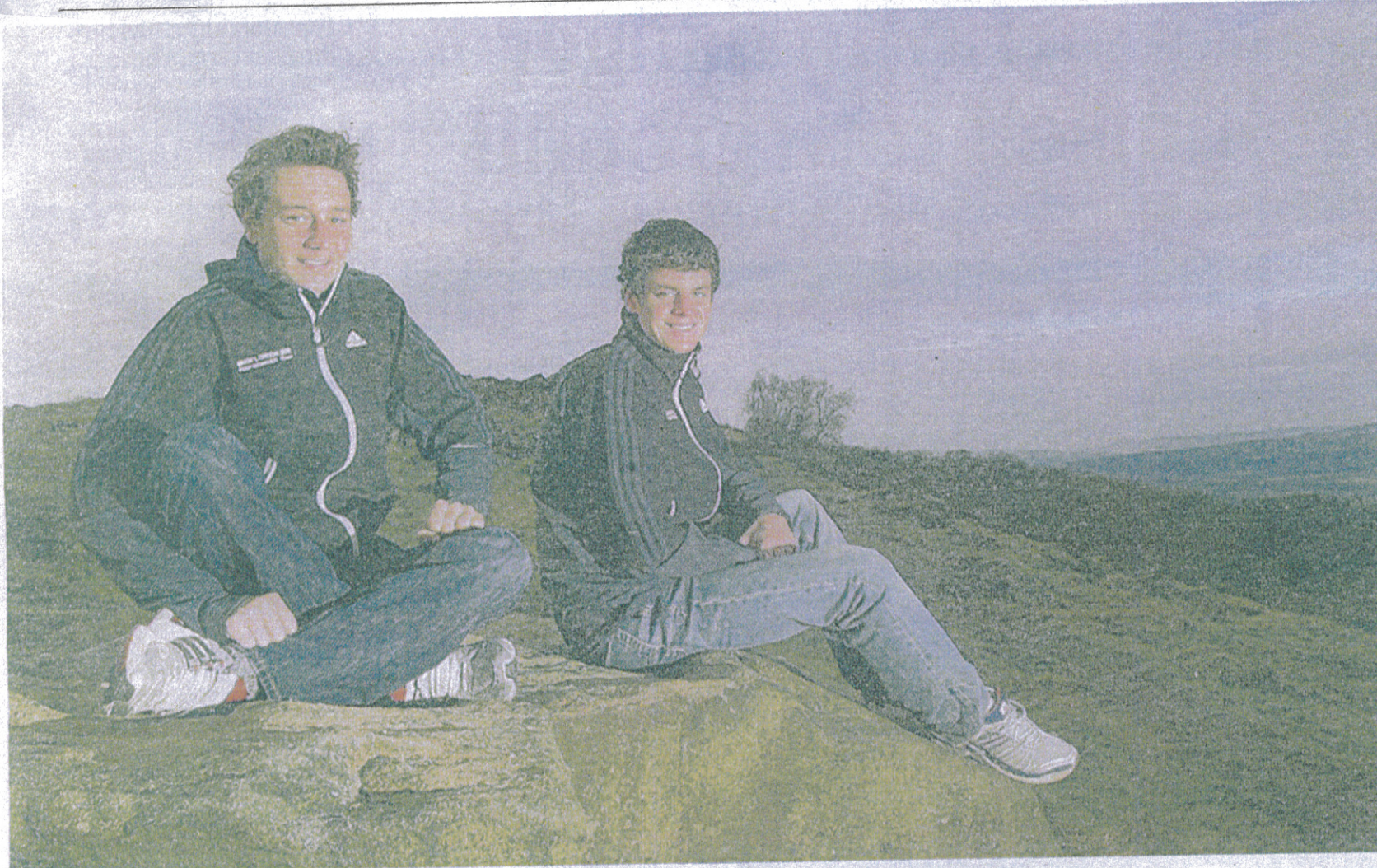
ally astute? "I probably just am," Alistair says.

"Oh, come on," an indignant Jonathan says.

"We race quite similarly and Jonny tries to copy my tactics," Alistair says, in the manner of big brothers everywhere.

But there is truth to this. Jonathan

Sport



Alistair, left, and Jonathan Brownlee take a break in Bramhope, near Leeds, and, above, in competition

was caught up in the triathlon bug because he wanted to be doing what his brother was doing. "Alistair seemed to enjoy it," he says. "I just copied him, being the younger brother, and I started swimming aged 8."

If anything, Jonathan seems to enjoy their endurance-sport lifestyle more and it is telling that in discussing the

switchover from each discipline he says: "I don't have to think about anything. I started triathlon when I was 12. It is natural."

His brother, however, responds firmly: "You definitely do notice. When you've been swimming and you stand up for running you feel absolutely awful, and when you start running you

definitely feel better if you haven't had a cycle beforehand."

There is another sibling, Edward is 15 and Alistair is certain he will not be joining the Brownlee band of triathlete brothers.

"Ed was sick of triathlon by the time he was 10," he says. "Possibly he thought it looks tough and he'd rather

sit on the sofa. He's a different build and enjoys food. Ed likes doing not a lot and when you're a triathlete, you have to be active. By the time I was 15 I was probably running six times a week, cycling to school and swimming five times a week."

Alistair has a Sports Science and Physiology degree and is studying for a

master's in Finance, and Jonathan is taking a History degree at the University of Leeds. On top of that, they spend 30 hours a week in triathlon training.

"It becomes your way of life," Alistair says. "You do your sessions and go home. When I go to see my parents, my mum wants to know if I've tidied the car, is my bedroom tidy, have I done my washing. I might have just won the European Championship and my mum's like, 'Have you got any washing, make sure you do it, don't leave it in your bag.' I say, 'Mum, I've got training for six hours tomorrow.'"

"You do so much training," Jonathan says. "You've got to be quite crazy."

● Alistair and Jonathan Brownlee will today help to launch the BMW London 2012 Performance Team, an initiative designed to provide Team GB and ParalympicsGB with support as they prepare for the Games. To follow the team, visit bmw.co.uk/london2012