

2012 Summer Olympic Games Preview - Track & Field

The 2008 Summer Games seemed like a down year for the United States in the realm of Olympic track and field.

Although American led the track and field competition in Beijing with seven gold and 23 overall medals, they had to fight for headlines thanks to Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt's star-making performances at the Bird's Nest. Bolt won both the men's 100- and 200-meter events and was the main factor behind Jamaica's total domination of the Americans in the sprint events. The island nation also claimed gold in the women's 100 and 200, with Shelly-Ann Fraser and Veronica Campbell-Brown winning those events, respectively. In the end, Jamaica became only the second nation in Olympic track and field history to win gold in all four individual sprint events -- the men's and women's 100 and 200 races -- at the same games. The U.S. did it three times, pulling off the feat in 1964, '84 and '88. Bolt also became the first runner in 24 years to win both the men's 100 and 200 races at the same Summer Games. American Carl Lewis achieved the feat on his way to four golds at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. Despite the Jamaicans' success in the sprint events, the U.S. is still the country to beat in these competitions. With well over 700 medals in track and field, the Americans have taken home more hardware than the next five nations combined. Still, Bolt, who holds the world and Olympic records in both the 100 and 200, once again will be one of the favorites in the sprint events. However, he has a new rival in countryman Yohan Blake, who could wind up stealing his teammate's thunder in London. Not counting heats or disqualifications, Bolt had only lost two races in five years heading into the 2012 Jamaican Olympic Trials, but Blake beat him twice over a 48-hour span in Kingston to send shockwaves through the sprinting world. Blake posted the best time in the world this year with a time of 9.75 seconds in the 100 at his country's trials. Blake also bested Bolt with a 19.80 in the 200. The U.S. men will do their best to keep Blake and Bolt from the top of the podium in London, as Justin Gatlin and Tyson Gay will compete for the Americans in the 100 and Wallace Spearmon, Maurice Mitchell and Isaiah Young will try their luck in the 200. The 30-year-old Gatlin won the 100 at the 2012 U.S. Olympic Trials in Eugene, posting a time of 9.80 seconds -- the fastest-ever time in the 100 for a man over 30 years of age. Gay, the U.S. record-holder in the 100, won the 100 and 200 at the 2007 World Championships, but went without a medal in Beijing. Meanwhile, Spearmon will be aiming for redemption in London after having his bronze medal in the 200 taken from him in Beijing. Along with Churandy Martina of the Netherlands, Spearmon was disqualified for stepping out of his lane, leaving fellow Americans Shawn Crawford and Walter Dix as the silver and bronze medal winners, respectively. "That's definitely something that's been on my mind for a while," Spearmon said of his misstep in 2008. "If I didn't make the team this year that would have been on my mind for the rest of my life. I don't take my second chances lightly." LaShawn Merritt will also try to defend his gold medal in the 400 for the U.S. in London. Merritt, who also helped the U.S. take the 1,600-meter relay in Beijing, has been cleared for the London Games after receiving a 21-month ban for taking the penis enlargement product, ExtenZe. Lolo Jones is the most recognizable name for the American women and she hopes to claim her first Olympic medal in London. Jones was the favorite to win the 100 hurdles in Beijing and actually led the final race until stumbling over the second-to-last hurdle. Jones, a two-time gold medalist in the 60 hurdles at the World Indoor Championships, wound up finishing seventh in Beijing. There was a bit of controversy among the women sprinters at this summer's U.S. Olympic Trials. After Jeneba Tarmoh and Allyson Felix finished in a dead heat for third place in the 100-meter final, a runoff was set to determine who would get the last spot. But Tarmoh withdrew from the runoff and conceded the spot to Felix, who is also scheduled to compete in the 200 in London. Tarmoh, meanwhile, will be an alternate for the 100 and may also be a part of the U.S. women's 400-meter relay team. Carmelita Jeter won the 100 at trials and finished second to Felix in the 200. Sanya Richards-Ross, wife of Jacksonville Jaguars defensive back Aaron Ross, won bronze in the 400 in Beijing and will compete at that distance and in the 200 this summer in London. As usual, the Americans are not as stacked with talent in the field events as they are on the track, but Christian Taylor and Brittney Reese offer the U.S. strong chances at winning gold in a pair of jumping events. Taylor won the men's triple jump at the 2011 World Championships, while Reese claimed gold in the women's long jump at both the 2009 and '11 World Championships. In addition to Reese, the U.S. women also have Chelsea Hayes and Janay DeLoach set to compete in the long jump in London. "I just feel like we have a great group of girls going to London," said Reese. "We are ready to sweep." Ashton Eaton also has a solid shot at winning gold for the U.S. in the men's decathlon after breaking the 11-year-old world record at trials. His 9,039 points smashed the previous American record of 8,891 held by Dan O'Brien since 1992. One of the biggest international stories will be the participation of South Africa's Oscar Pistorius, the double amputee who is set to become the first man ever to compete in both the Summer and Paralympic Games. Pistorius, who at 11 months old had both of his legs amputated halfway between his knees and ankles, is scheduled to compete for South Africa in the 400 and also the 1,600-meter relay in London. The track and field events will take place over the last 10 days (Aug. 3-12) at London's Olympic Stadium. Source: foxnews.com