



Arsenal's Olympics



Geraint Thomas

THE STARS OF THE SHOW FOR BRITAIN AT THE LAST OLYMPICS WERE UNDOUBTEDLY THE CYCLING TEAM

The team won an incredible seven gold medals in the velodrome, and one more on the road. Among the gold medalists was Welshman Geraint Thomas – then 22 – who was part of the four-man pursuit team which set a new world record when beating Denmark in the Final.

Since the 2008 Games Arsenal fan Geraint has been made an MBE, was crowned National Road Race Champion, and donned the white jersey for best young rider at each of the past two Tour de France as part of Team Sky. Now though it's all about preparing for the London Olympics, and living up to the huge expectation upon the British cyclists.

Geraint, as you may have read when the matchday programme caught up with him last season, has been a Gunners fan since growing up in Cardiff, surrounded by Man United supporters.

With British cycling enjoying something of a golden age at the moment, we spoke to Geraint about his plans in the build-up to the 2012 Games.

Have you been able to watch much of Arsenal so far this season Geraint?

I've been watching most of the games on TV because it's difficult to get to the stadium. I was supposed to go to the Fulham game, but we had a team meeting that day so that couldn't happen in the end. I've been away in Spain lately training, but I'm spending more and more time in England in the build up to the Olympics, so it makes it easier to stay in touch with it. It's been great to see Robin van Persie in such amazing form. I think it's only a matter of time before we're back above Spurs.

Did you find it hard to keep the faith at the start of the season?

I was confident, but obviously losing such big players was always going to affect the team for a while. It's similar in cycling too, when Brad Wiggins crashed out of the Tour de France – it was a massive loss for the team, and it affects the morale too. But since then the other guys like Theo Walcott have really stepped up. Also I watched the Carling Cup game against Man City, and it's clear that there are some really good young players

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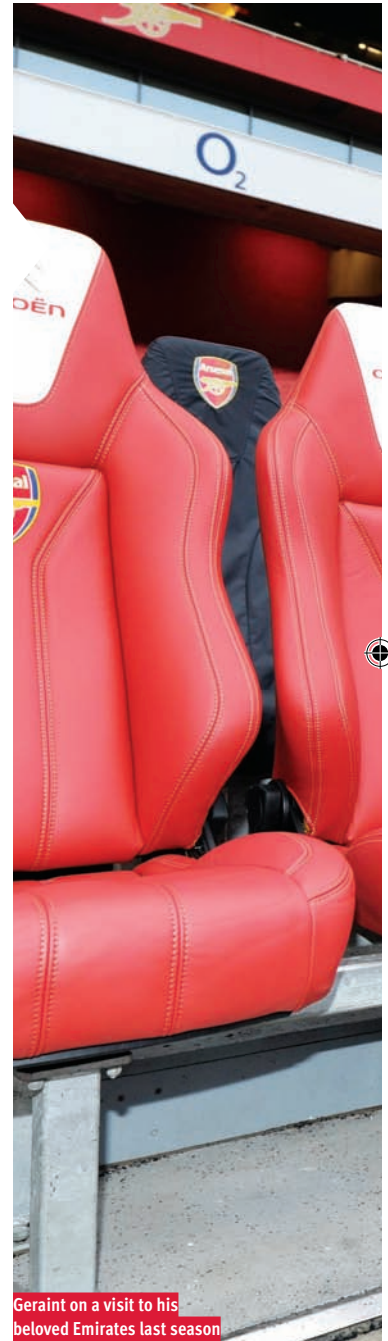
here, and once Jack Wilshere comes back we should have a strong squad for the run in.

One of your countrymen, Aaron Ramsey, has also been a vital part of the team this season...

Yeah, that's always good to see as a Welshman. He grew up in Caerphilly, not far from Cardiff where I grew up. Gareth Bale actually went to my school, but of course I prefer watching Ramsey! Sam Warburton, the Welsh rugby captain, also went to my school, so they are clearly doing something right in PE lessons there!

How's your training been going lately?

I finished my road season at the end of September, did the world championships which Mark Cavendish won, and now it's good



Geraint on a visit to his beloved Emirates last season



Arsenal v Wolverhampton Wanderers





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Arsenal v Wolverhampton Wanderers





to be back on the track. I'm enjoying being back with the rest of the boys, there's a good team spirit and the Olympics is starting to feel really close now. It's getting real. I'm still doing quite a bit on the road too. I'll be doing the Tour Down Under next month, then we have a few tests on the track before a week-long stage road race in Sardinia, and another in France. The main focus is the track now though, and the road races are in there to get the workload up and build the fitness.

Will you be competing in the Tour de France next year?

No, it has to be one or the other – the Tour or the Olympics, and obviously the Olympics is a once in a lifetime thing, with it being in London. So I've decided to miss the Tour unfortunately, it just finishes a bit too close to the Olympics. The track is so specific, and so fast – you pedal almost twice as fast on the track as you do on the road – so it's quite a bit different. I've decided to give that everything, and I'll have plenty of chances to ride the Tour in future.



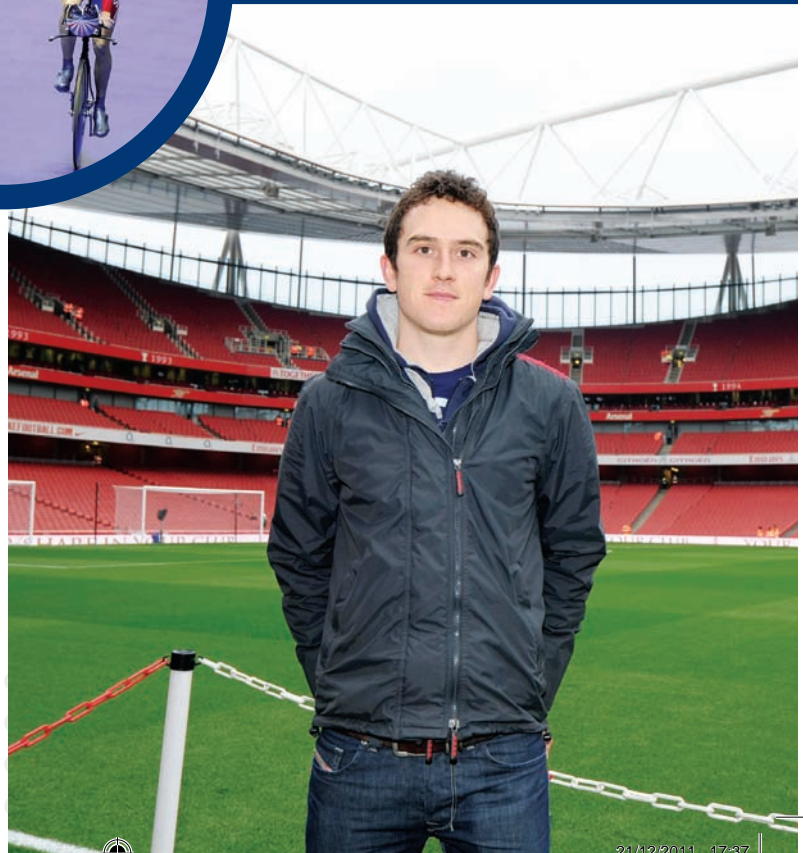
Celebrating a pursuit win

There will be a lot of expectation on the British Cycling Team at the Olympics, what's the spirit like in the team?

We're all really excited about it. The Aussies, the Kiwis and the Russians have all stepped up and put the pressure on. So there will be no complacency, and if anything they have overtaken us as favourites. But people like myself and Ed Clancy, we won in Beijing so we know what it takes, and that can be an advantage. But there's always pressure, it's a big year ahead and everyone in the squad is really on their toes.



Climbing the famous Col de Galibier on this year's Tour de France



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Olympic countdown...
DAYS TO GO



London



With Mark Cavendish nominated for Sports Personality of the Year too, it's a good time to be a cyclist isn't it?

Without a doubt. The Beijing Games was so unbelievably good for us that it just blew up from there. Then Team Sky came along on the road and it has given British fans a team of their own to follow. Obviously the results of people like Chris Hoy, Cav, Brad Wiggins –

Over the **Christmas** period I'll spend a few days back home in **Cardiff**, but I'll still be training. Then from the **Tour Down Under** next month it will be **racing** all the way **through**

that's really helped to publicise the sport and it's grown massively. Cav has a great chance of winning Sports Personality, and Chris Hoy won it in 2008, so it's definitely a golden age for British cycling.

What events will you be competing in at the Olympics? Will you be defending gold in the team pursuit?

Yes, that will probably be the only one I will do, as they took out the individual pursuit which I also wanted to do. So I'm just going to concentrate on the one event, and try to get that gold medal which is all I want.

What's the new velodrome like in London?

Capacity is about 6,000 which is a lot for a velodrome. I haven't actually seen it myself yet, but I've heard from people who have ridden there that it's a great venue – a nice structure and a good track. It will be a great atmosphere, because it's so enclosed.

What's your training schedule until next August?

It's pretty full on – we have just come back from nine hard days in Mallorca. Over the Christmas period I'll spend a few days back home in Cardiff, but I'll still be training. Then from the Tour Down Under next month it will be racing all the way through really. The World Championships will be in Melbourne in April, then the Giro D'Italia, which is a three-week stage race, then it will be the final couple of months preparation for the Games. It will fly by, just as the last couple of years have done for me.

Finally Geraint, what was your reaction when Welsh sport lost one of its biggest names – Gary Speed – last month?

Well I'd never met him, but as a kid in Wales I obviously watched him when he played for the national team. We only had one or two good players, so he was always one of the ones to watch. It was such tragic news, and it was so out of the blue. What's been really nice though has been hearing everyone say such great things about him – he was obviously a really nice man.■



Geraint at the Track World Cup earlier this year

In 2007 Geraint became the first Welshman to compete in the Tour de France since 1967

The track cycling at the London Olympics will take place at the 6,000 capacity London Velopark in Leyton, which will host its first ever event in February



Geraint wore the coveted **White Jersey** between stages one and seven of this year's Tour de France and won the combativity award on **Stage 12**

He won the **points** competition at this year's Tour of Britain

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