

THE "DIRECT PUNCH" MOUNTAIN RUNNING BLOG

HOLI RUN

#MOUNTAINRUNNING

I enjoy living simply,
you don't need
any luxuries
to run in the hills.

**EUROS 2017:
THE STORY OF
THE UNSHAKEN HAND**

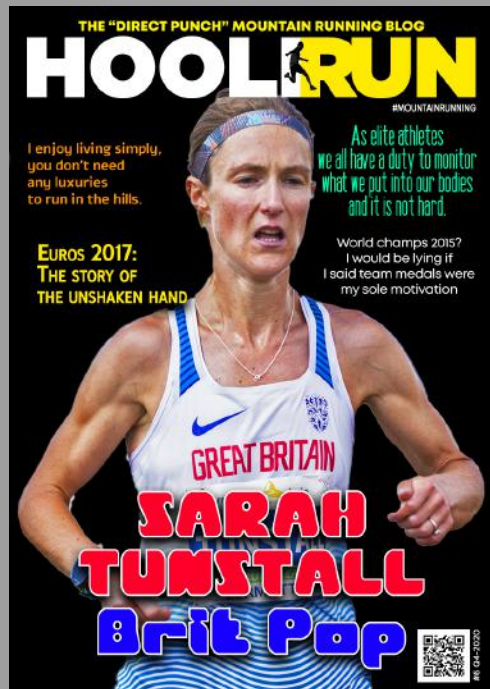
As elite athletes
we all have a duty to monitor
what we put into our bodies
and it is not hard.

World champs 2015?
I would be lying if
I said team medals were
my sole motivation

**SARAH
TUNSTALL**
Brit Pop



#6 Q4-2020



On the cover

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Photography: **Alexis Courthoud**
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www.hooliganrunner14.com

Sarah Tunstall, Smiling Serious.

A sensational athlete with numbers and pure technical construction, but first of all a brilliant mind and a personality as simple as tough.

When I approached her, I probably put her healthy principles in difficulty, not perfectly liking (I guess) the pompous Italian manifestation of emotions, often used as an excuse to get away from the substance.

But in her great humanity and integrity Sarah gave me this gift, also (I hope) in the name of the fact that she understood how much HOOLIRUN does not want to do shows or noise at all costs, but to tell (also) stories of great interpreters of art to produce lactic acid, blood in the mouth and put down frequencies on the track.

Sarah is not an easy cat, that sly smile she shows off on special occasions looks like a protective shield.

I realized this when I tried to meet her at Arco 2016 (Euro-Champs) with very little luck (she practically didn't shit me), I was fascinated and intrigued by those tears seen one year earlier on the finish line in Betws Y Coed when a world medal went up in smoke and when she revealed to me a great agonist and a strong passion, which are the boosting elements of my view of sports.

For over 10 years Sarah has been at the top of the world mountain running, after having enchanted with a medal in the Under23 cross that still makes us ask why she has not entirely expressed a devastating technical and athletic talent. She marked the beginning of a new generation for British women in mountain running, remaining the cornerstone of a team that always starts big events with great pressure and it's in the process of a huge revamping.

Some runners become "a cult" for the fans thanks to their extroversion, their tantrums, things that have little to do with the competition field. Sarah is a cult for all that is within the competition, without giving up a good stout-beer and those smiles, like a true brit-pop of the 70s.

Skola14

BRIT-TUNSTY 2020 SARAH TUNSTALL

Q. HI SARAH, TANKS FOR ACCEPTING MY INVATION FOR THIS INTW . Let's start with the classic one: introduce yourself, who's "this" Sarah Tunstall we read in the top ranks of world mountain running since many years ? Your childhood, your school-story, your sports approaches

SARAH - I started running at school around age 12, at the time my Dad was entering 10km races and Half Marathons so I would enjoy going out with him. However, my main sport during my childhood was hockey and I would only run 2 or 3 times a week for about 15 minutes. I always enjoyed cross-country and often in PE lessons I would be the only girl who would want to run so I had to join the boys class! I never liked track running from an early age but if I was in the fields or on the local fells I loved it. I made some regional cross country teams when I was young and continued to play hockey until around 2001. That was when I started to take running a bit more seriously and I qualified for junior England Fell Running teams.

FEATURED

SARAH TUNSTALL

DOB: 19/04/1986

PLACE: CUMBRIA AND FRENCH ALPS

COUNTRY: GREAT BRITAIN

"I always enjoyed cross-country and often in PE lessons I would be the only girl who would want to run so I had to join the boys class!"

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BRIT-TUNSTY

2020 SARAH TUNSTALL

"although I can win prize money from the races I still work because I don't want to see running as a job"...

Q. about coaching: I see in you the "personation" of what I call "the brit-model" : you live half year in UK and Half year on the alps, you share trips with other athletes in a sort of "nomad" life, your coach is an athlete himself (I guess . .) . . . how is your sport life organized and how difficult is to handle with normal life ? By the way: do you have a regular job as well ?

SARAH - I have never had a coach, I don't think I have ever had a very conventional approach to training but it works for me. Since 2015 we have based ourselves in the Alps full time (until the current situation). I am a Physiotherapist but over the past 5 years I have very much prioritised running. This can create a slightly nomadic lifestyle but it is one I enjoy and I think fits quite well with Mountain running as you don't need any luxuries to run in the hills. I enjoy living simply, we earn sufficient money for rent and food by working as much as we can during the Winter season so that we can enjoy the Summer racing and training. Although I can win prize money in the Summer I still work a few hours a week because I don't want to rely on money from races or see running as a job. I don't think it is a coincidence that the best British mountain runners have used this approach; Billy Burns, Martin Cox, Angela Mudge, Robbie Simpson have all based themselves for long periods in the Alps, and it is great to see younger athletes like Jacob Adkin and Heidi Davies also doing similar. It is an approach that I would encourage it for any young talented Mountain runner. In Britain we are very limited with high mountains, only a handful lie above 1000m and are spread across the nation so it is not always accessible to run uphill for an hour continuously or find steep enough gradients. Britain can easily produce very good up and down athletes but for uphill only I fully believe you need to spend time training in the higher Alps.

TRAINING
SCHEDULE



2020 SARAH TUNSTALL

BRIT-TUNSTV

Q. Related question: what should a mountain runner do to “survive” today ? What’s the formula and balance between racing the brands “glamour” races/sponsorship desires / racing in the competitive races and eventually grab a medal ?

SARAH - I think this is something that is becoming tougher to balance with sponsorship deals changing and can sometimes require more social media “likes” than race wins. In recent years off-road running and especially ultra-running have become more “glamorous” and to fulfill commitments to brands athletes do need to conform to specific race schedules or a set number of Instagram posts. It may be because I am very stubborn, or because I don’t run with my phone but I don’t agree with changing your race plans for any sponsor. I would rather be self-sufficient and earn my own money so that I can run in the shoes I want to wear and race when I am healthy and motivated. It depends on individual goals but I think there are so many races on the calendar now that if you really want to get medals you have to be disciplined and have a strict race plan. In my view races should be chosen strategically to help lead you in your own personal goals such as arriving to a Championship in peak form. If you race every event on the calendar from April-November I think this can greatly reduce your chances of a medal when it comes to the major events.



2020 SARAH TUNSTALL
BRIT-TUNSTY

BRIT-TUNSTY

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Q. We go on with the medals: flashback 2015, you won the trials on the same tracks of the world champs race, but when the day came I saw the tears while you crossed the line in 4th. Can you relieve that day in Wales for us ?

SARAH - The GB trials are always tough because of the high caliber of athletes that we have so gaining selection is never an easy task. It is probably the race I get most nervous for every year. I definitely ran my Champs race at the trial that year and surprisingly I could not replicate it again four weeks later against the same competitors!! It was disappointing at the time but you always learn valuable lessons from the bad races.

Betws Y Coed
- 2015 WMRC -



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EMMIE

EMMA

SARAH

2015 files

<<I'm not going to pretend that we are the best of friends but we all get along well away from the start line and the emphatic team gold that year was something that we greatly celebrated afterwards.>>

Q: Still on the 2015, a direct punch: was the GBR women team a friends' squad that time or is the legend true regarding a strong competition (and even more) between you, Emmie (Collinge) and Emma (Clayton) ??

SARAH: Ha. I wasn't aware there was a "legend"! If you know me, Emma and Emmie, I am sure they won't mind me saying that we are all hugely competitive. We all have very different approaches but all wanted the same thing in 2015, individual medals, so I can see why it could be interpreted. I'm not going to pretend that we are the best of friends but we all get along well away from the start line and the emphatic team gold that year was something that we greatly celebrated afterwards. It may sound selfish but when you train for a sport by yourself every single day I would be lying if I said team medals were my sole motivation, which I am pretty sure is the same for Emma and Emmie. However, it isn't always like that and in Patagonia this year, the fact that I was 3rd team counter was the only thing that kept me going and I tried to distract myself by calculating who was in front of me, from what countries and holding a position for the team.

- 2015 MOUNTAIN RUNNING TEAM WOMEN WORLD CHAMPIONS -



Q: 2017, a perfect year: silver medal at Euro-Kamnik and bronze in the magnificent World-Premama: is it your greatest year ever ? What was the reason of such a perfect season ? One flashback of both those races please

SARAH: In terms of how I was running in 2017 I would say it was my greatest year. Looking back there was a culmination of factors, mainly I had a really solid Winter of training in 2016. Due to the snow I did a lot of road and treadmill running including shorter 5km style speedwork. I also started snowshoeing which helped keep up my leg strength and I was working with skiers, teaching injury prevention classes so I inadvertently worked on a lot of my own weaknesses and conditioning. When I introduced my hill training in the Spring of 2017, I just hit a sweet spot and combined with no major injuries, everything just felt great.

In Kamnik I have never felt so good in an uphill only race and felt like I could just keep pushing on and on uphill. I do vividly remember at around 4km into the race, being unsure and a bit scared about passing Andrea!

In Premana, amongst the intense noise, I have lots of little recollections from during the race, most memorably, Sarah Rowell's worried expression when I passed through the first lap in 4th. I telepathically tried to reassure her that I wasn't going to be f***ing 4th again! After the race one of my most poignant memories from any race was seeing my Dad arrive back in the town just in time to watch me on the podium at the flower ceremony.



Q: I was at the finish line in Veljika Planina in 2017 and I saw with my eyes what happened (you and Andrea Mayr refused to shake your hands with gold medal . .), Names are not important now, but from what I have seen you are clearly for a "life-ban" in the doping sanctions, no matter which substance or any other circumstance . Can you tell me more about this kind of view ? (I also had a discussion with Ben in Zinal last year and he pointed that you even refuse to take aspirina when sick during the winter . . .)

SARAH - I don't like getting drawn into conversations about doping but going back I would have acted differently in Slovenia and I would have shaken Maude's hand, not because my views on the situation have changed but I do regret being overly emotional and angry after one of my greatest ever races. Unfortunately I don't think that lifetime bans will ever be introduced to athletics but I am very much in favour of adequate sanctions whatever the substance or circumstances. I think that there is too much of a grey area when it comes to doping. This can mean that innocent athletes are punished when they have made a mistake but it also means that guilty athletes can be reprieved. In my opinion, fines and 4 month sanctions are really disrespectful to the sport and other competitors. As elite athletes we all have a duty to monitor what we put into our bodies and it is not hard. For example, I have been in Spain suffering a chest infection and had to go to the Pharmacy but within 2 minutes you can check whether the medications are approved or not on your phone. To neglect doing so at an elite level of athletics, in my opinion, is stupid and unforgiveable neither of which should provide a valid argument for a lighter punishment. It is definitely a topic that I can be accused of being overly emotional about. I don't dwell on the past but I had a medal upgraded from 4th to bronze in 2009 and I don't believe that there could be an emptier feeling in sport than getting a retrospective World medal in the post. It was shit! I try to be objective about it and know some people will be innocent but I think once an excuse works and a lighter sentence is awarded, this can open the flood gates and be exploited by people who may not be innocent. I would like stricter and more consistent sanctions in the future. For me the bottom line is, if a banned substance is found in your body it may have aided your performance unfairly whether you intentionally took it or not.

VELIKA PLANINA 2017 - THE UNSHAKED HAND

EURO-KAMNIK 2K17



Q: 2019 Mountain Running World Cup looked like to be built up for you, you won two stages but missed to win the cup due to some absences in some key races. Simply: why ? And what's your opinion bout the 2019 winner Sarah McCormack ?

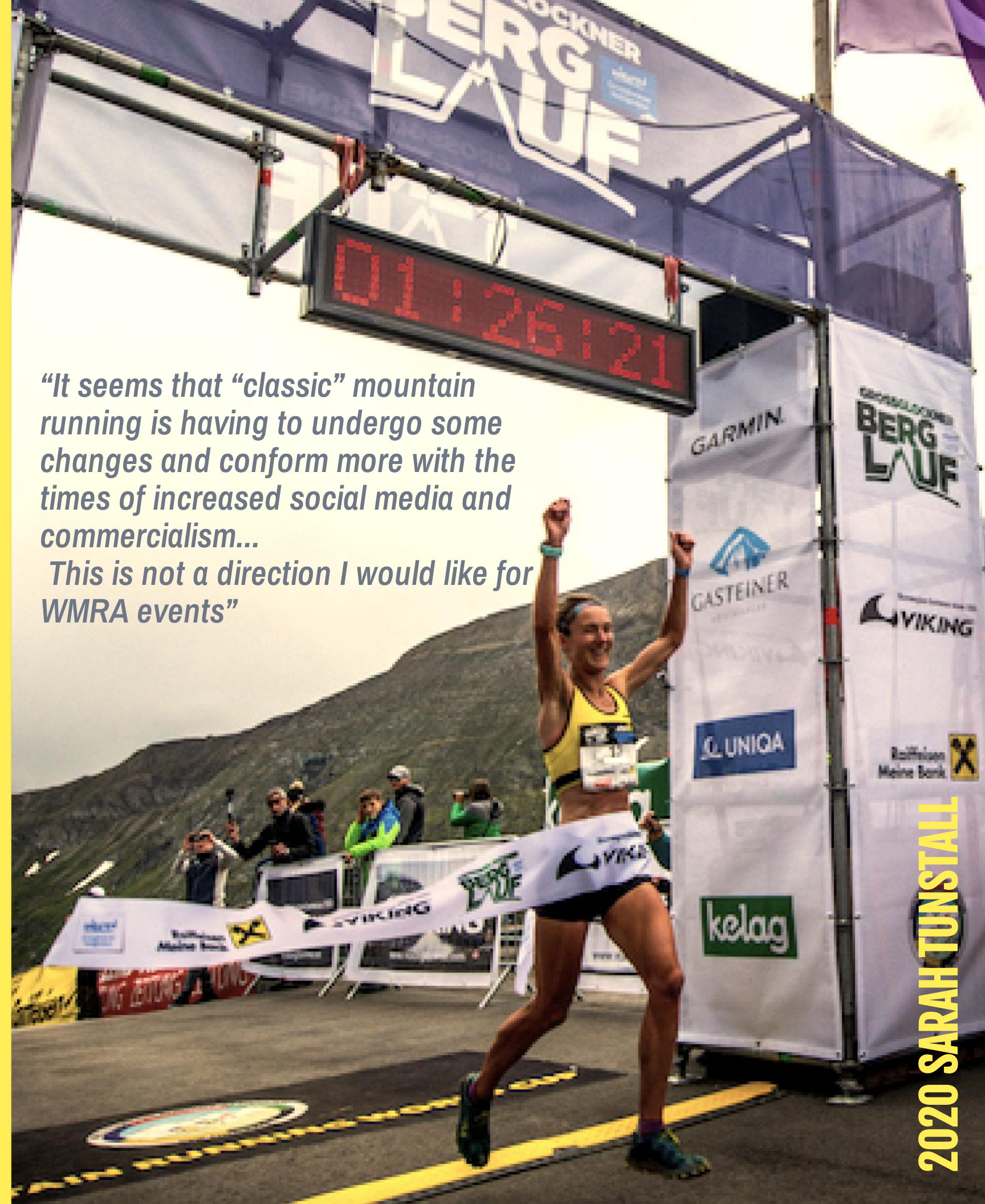
SARAH: I never planned to focus on the World Cup last year, I strongly feel that if I over race it can become a long and exhausting season and you I am very unlikely to run well for the whole summer. My priority last year was always Zermatt. I usually know my main goal at least a year out and, again being stubborn, focus primarily on this. Having run for a lot of years motivation is also an important factor for me and I need to choose races that excite me. Grossglockner had been on my radar for years (since I had to pull out with an injury in 2012) as was Drei Zinnen. I decided not to race Sierre-Zinal due to an injury which I was very pleased I did because it meant I could do Drei Zinnen, possibly one of the most scenic and iconic races I have ever done and one that really did put a smile on my face. I was disappointed not to be at the last edition of Smarna Gora. It is a race I have attended many times and have always enjoyed but I got knocked off my bike in the weeks before and was still running around in a sling so there was unfortunately no way I could race. In terms of Sarah Mc, it has been really exciting to see her progress over the last couple of seasons and it is no fluke. Having spent more time in the Alps racing and training she has worked hard to improve her climbing. We've had many chats about her massive potential for getting a Championship medal and she knows that I believe this is something she has to prioritise in the near.

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Q: 2020 original World Cup calendar was a sort of a revolution, may be we will never see it but let's pretend the calendar has been confirmed, what's your point of view about it ?

SARAH - It was certainly a different format to what we are used to. It seems that "classic" mountain running is having to undergo some changes and conform more with the times of increased social media and commercialism. Living in Chamonix maybe makes me skeptical of big races that are highly advertised and often, over-hyped and business-like. This is not a direction I would like for WMRA events but I am open minded to experiencing new races that I am sure will be beautiful and inspiring. If I could have my way every World Cup series would include races such as; Schlickeralmlauf, the old Matterhornlauf, Muttersberglauf, Grand Ballon, Drei Zinnen and Gross Glockner, however, that would just lead to "one-trick" ponies winning the WC every year and the different style races could arguably find a more complete Mountain runner over the course of a season. Looking at the calendar I had only really planned to do the later races; Siere-Zinal, Innsbruck and Chiavenna. I had taken most of last Winter off running to try and get on top of some long-standing heel problems so I always anticipated a later run of form this year.



"It seems that "classic" mountain running is having to undergo some changes and conform more with the times of increased social media and commercialism...

This is not a direction I would like for WMRA events"



Q: Sarah Tunstall is a (very) poor descender : Legend or Truth?

SARAH - Ha. True! I never used to be, but lots of injuries do knock your confidence and I don't have the same reckless descents in my head that I used to. I obviously run downhill all the time but in the Alps I do enjoy the luxury of jumping on a cable car at least once a week to save my legs. In the UK, on smaller hills and in the absence of cable cars you naturally have to descend more and get more practice, often on smoother trails than what Chamonix offers. In the weeks prior to an up and down Champs I need to do specific sessions to build my descending confidence. It doesn't take long and in 2017 I only managed two of these key sessions before Premana and didn't do too badly! I only managed one before Patagonia, which was tentative to say the least due to my injured shoulder and therefore did not bode well when it came to race day.



DANGER



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Q: My two cents about the The GBR women national team: easy to say you re the “striker” and a guarantee for the team, but around I cannot see real consistency. Emmie Collinge is a potential “crack” but runs rarely. In Zermatt the team had a poor overall result while in Patagonia you were Bronze Team with the big surprise (for me) of Philippa Williams. Some young talented as Heidi Davies are trying to gain an international status but from outside my feeling is that your team has not yet a group-identity. What’s your point of view ?

SARAH - For many years the GB mountain team has been really strong, often with more than one medal hope so it means that even if some of the faces on the team change we still have the ability to finish high on the podium. Victoria Wilkinson is one key member who has been on the team for a long time and is now turning more to longer distances. Emmie and Emma have both suffered injury stricken spells but to be honest on paper the team in Zermatt was still very strong. Hatti pushed me all the way at our trial and has a huge international running CV including previously holding the National Steeplechase record, international XC vests and has finished in the top 10 at the World uphill Champs. Emma Gould is a European bronze medalist and Rebecca Hilland has been on medal winning teams both in Kamnik and Premana. . . . (continues)

BRIT-TUNSTY

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STATEMENT

FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

... Therefore it was a real surprise and a disappointment for all of us that we did not win a medal in Zermatt. I think altitude may have been a factor and it was a course where you really had to commit in the first mile. This comes back to your "Brit model" where more uphill-only races in Europe can provide experience and therefore confidence to start at 6 minute mile pace but still reach the 2700m finish line. That is definitely something I never used to be able to do and it is great to see the likes of Heidi and Jacob spending time in the Alps refining these abilities for the next generation of British mountain runners.

Sarah Tunstall

LAST SPRINT

What's for Sarah Tunstall . . .

D. The best race in the world ?

Sarah: It was the old Matterhornlauf

D. The race victory you never forget ?

Sarah: Tour des Alpages

D. The toughest defeat of your career ?

Sarah: Zermatt Euros

D. Best running shoes ever ?

Sarah: Puma Trailfox

D. Favorite Pizza?

Sarah: 4stagioni

D. Favorite sport, except Running?

Sarah: Climbing

D. Favorite drink ?

Sarah: Stout



>> **SARAH TUNSTALL**

