

Home soil counts

THE European Team Championship has existed in one form or other for 50 years. From 1965-2008 it consisted of separate men's and women's competitions. Since 2009 it has been in more or less the current format as one combined men's and women's competition with promotion and relegation within the four divisions. Interestingly the official programme for the event refers to it as a new event in its sixth year, with no recognition of its predecessor.

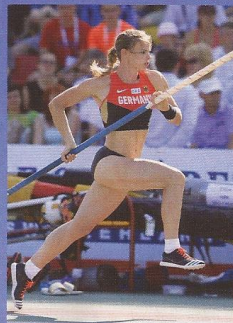
Russia, or the Soviet Union, has utterly dominated the championship, winning the combined event in four of its six years as well as winning the men's event seven times and the women's event 17 times. Great Britain's only successes

RUSSIA BEAT THE 2014 WINNERS GERMANY AS A PROMISING GREAT BRITAIN TEAM FINISH IN A FIGHTING FIFTH PLACE

Reports: Stuart Weir in Cheboksary **Pictures:** Jean Pierre Durand

have come in the men's event which the nation has won six times, most recently in 2008. As far as recent years go, Britain has finished second to fifth in the combined competition.

Does winning the European Team Championship mean that you are the strongest athletics nation in Europe? Well, in a sense it does. It is one criteria, but remember it is one athlete per country as opposed to a medals or finalists count at a major championship. And of course a major championship will have the country's strongest team –



Silke Spiegelberg: pole vault winner

something the European Team Championship cannot claim.

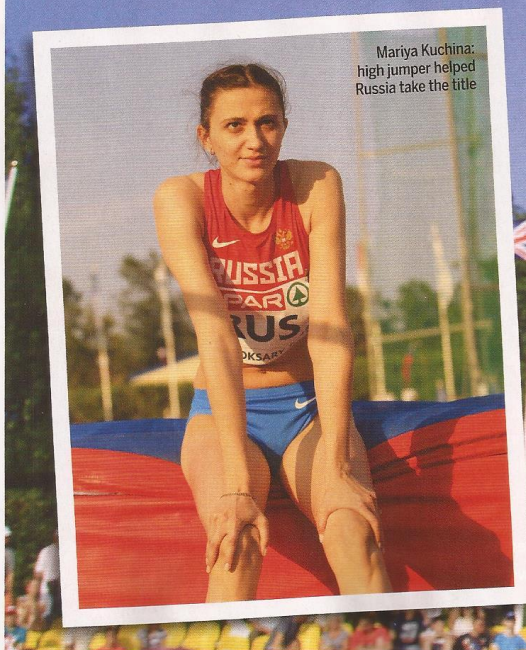
In view of Russia's dominance of the competition, it seems appropriate for the event to take place in Russia for the third time, having previously been in Moscow (1985) and St Petersburg (1998) – the latter being the scene of a memorable GB men's victory. However the

choice of Cheboksary as host city came as a bigger surprise.

Cheboksary, 500 miles south-east of Moscow, is the capital of Chuvashia – something which is of sufficient importance to the locals that several of the event volunteers informed me of it. The locals see themselves as much Chuvash as Russian.

A city of 450,000, Cheboksary has existed since the 15th century. It has a modern, prosperous feel to it. It is on the Volga and water is a big feature of the city with a lake and fountains. According to the tourist information in my welcome pack it is "the motherland of great commanders, cosmonauts, scientists, artists, musicians, dancers and Olympic Champions" – so now you know.

The Spartan Olympic Stadium (capacity 12,000) is neat and compact with a stand along the finishing straight and about ten rows of open seating all the way round. It looks like a good lower league football ground. While the stadium is the home of the local football



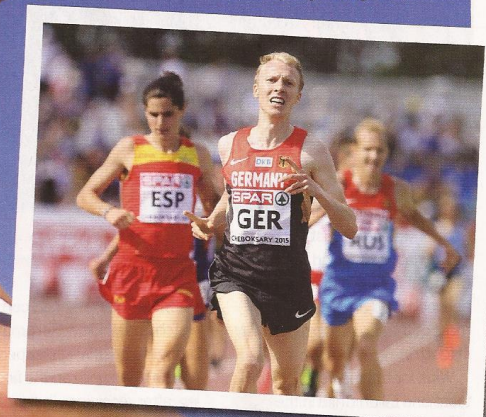
Mariya Kuchina: high jumper helped Russia take the title



Defending champions Germany put up a fight with steeplechase winner Gesa-Felicitas Krause (left) and 3000m winner Richard Ringer (below) but ultimately they had to yield to Russia

Overall scores

1	Russia	368.5
2	Germany	346.5
3	France	317
4	Poland	317
5	Great Britain & NI	291
6	Italy	288
7	Ukraine	281.5
8	Spain	230.5
9	Belarus	217
10	Sweden	187
11	Finland	149.5
12	Norway	121



team, the city loves its athletics and regularly hosts Russian events. A random search of an IAAF website revealed that 36 world-class performances had been registered in the stadium.

I travelled on a British Airways flight to Moscow which linked with a partner flight to Kazan

followed by three-and-a-half hours by road to reach my hotel, 15½ hours after I left Oxford! I am the only British media person to travel to Russia for the event, as even the BBC covered the meeting from Salford. Despite the apparent lack of British interest in the event, we were told at the official press conference that the event would be seen live in almost every country in Europe with a total of 110 live channel TV hours of coverage.

The programme started with the two 100m races. With Asha Philip winning the women's race and Richard Kilty coming second to Christophe Lemaitre, suddenly the British team was in the lead! Sadly it was not to last, though, as the nation dropped to fifth on the points table and then hovered between third and fourth for most of the day – ending the day in fourth.

Wins for the men's 4x100m team and Eilidh Child in the 400m hurdles were expected. Jarryd Dunn's victory in the 400m was a real bonus, as were the performances of Lennie Waite in the steeplechase, Oli Aitchison in the 1500m and Nick Miller in the hammer.

Philip's withdrawal due to muscle tightness from the women's sprint relay team just an hour before the event was a blow. Laura Maddox, a



Christophe Lemaitre (centre) takes full points in the 100m from Richard Kilty (right) and Sven Knipphals

400m hurdler who had come to watch and who had fortunately brought her spikes, stepped up for the team and ran the final leg, after receiving what Louise Bloor called "a crash course in 4x100m running in half an hour" from Philip. The inevitable poor changeover left GB in last place, in an event where there were high hopes of maximum points.

The conditions were quite challenging with distance runners struggling with the heat and sprinters running into the wind, of which Philip said: "It felt like you were hitting a brick wall".

Pole vaulter Sally Peake, had to abort one jump as the wind was blowing her off course.

The loudest cheer of the day was when Russia's Valentin Smirnov won the 1500m and the most captivating event was the pole vault with Angelica Bengtsson setting a Swedish record of 4.60m and to the delight of the locals Anzhelika Sidorova thinking she had won it with a PB of 4.70m only for Germany's Silke Spiegelburg to set a competition record of 4.75

Day two was a battle for the British team with Danny Talbot in the 200m being the only winner. There were creditable performances by debutante, Rhianwedd Price with third in the 1500m, while Isobel Pooley in the high jump and Sophie Hitchon in the hammer both achieved season's bests and World Championship qualification marks.

With just the men's 4x400m to come, Britain had slipped to sixth place behind Italy but with the British quartet taking second place, they moved to fifth in the final classification.

As had happened the previous day, the most dramatic event of the day was the pole vault with three men over 5.80m.

"The whole weekend has been amazing, the crowd is amazing and the whole atmosphere brilliant. The city has really taken to the event and done itself proud"

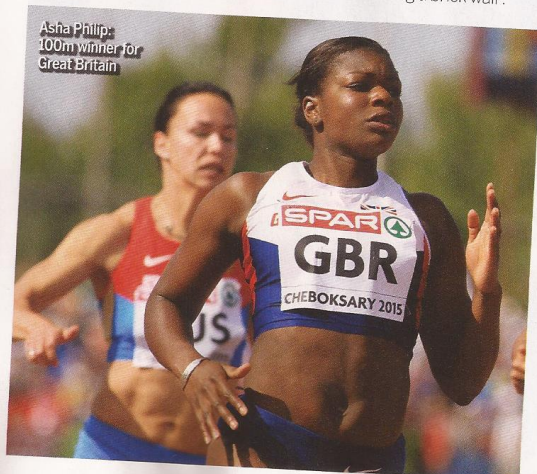
Laura Deadman

Renault Lavillenie of France and Raphael Holzdeppe of Germany each cleared 5.85m with the Frenchman winning only on countback.

The most popular victory was Russian high jumper Mariya Kuchina clearing 1.99m to beat world leader, Ruth Beitia of Spain with the home crowd going wild as she cleared the winning height. In the shot, Christina Schwanitz set a championship record winning the women's event with 19.82m.

The attitude of the locals to the event and the enthusiasm of the spectators was well summed up by Lauren Deadman: "The whole weekend has been amazing, the crowd is amazing and the whole atmosphere brilliant.

"The city has really taken to the event and done itself proud."



Asha Philip: 100m winner for Great Britain