

WHO ARE YOUR SPORTING HEROES OF 2018?

14 December 2018

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BACKGROUND

The year is almost over, so it's a good time to pause and reflect on the past 12 months.

In this special edition of the debate, we take a look at the greatest sporting achievements of 2018.

It was a year of remarkable achievements – especially by British sportspeople. The football World Cup saw England reach the semi-finals for the first time since 1990, Lewis Hamilton won yet another Formula 1 title, Chelsea Ladies won a football double without losing a game and the English netball team pulled off a stunning victory at the Commonwealth Games.

Away from the UK, there were incredible sporting stories. Simone Biles came back from a long break to shatter world records in gymnastics. Ester Ledecká became the first woman to win a gold medal in two different sports at the Winter Olympics. And France won the football World Cup in Russia.

Which individual or team was the most heroic in 2018? Have we left anybody out? You decide!



HERO: A DEFINITION

Hero is a word that is used very frequently, but what does it mean and what exactly does a person have to do to be considered heroic?

The dictionary definition is "A person who is admired for brave or noble deeds; a person who, in the opinion of others, has heroic qualities or has performed a heroic act and is regarded as a model or ideal."

But how you define "heroic act" or "heroic qualities" is very much down to you. For example, England didn't win the World Cup, but for many people their achievements were heroic.



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ENGLAND MEN'S FOOTBALL TEAM

They may not have won the World Cup, but they captured the country's hearts on their incredible run to the semi-finals, where they lost to Croatia. England went into the tournament as underdogs, with nobody expecting them to do very well. But under Gareth Southgate's management, the side won their first ever World Cup penalty shootout, and played some positive, exciting football. England captain Harry Kane was also the tournament's top scorer.



MARIT BJØRGEN

At the PyeongChang Winter Olympics earlier this year, Norway's Marit Bjørgen became the most decorated Winter Olympian of all time. She won bronze in the women's team sprint free cross-country skiing event to take her all-time medal total to 14, one above previous record-holder Ole Einar Bjørndalen, who is also Norwegian. Then she went on to win medal number 15. In fact, she won a medal for every event she competed in at PyeongChang! Bjørgen retired this year at the age of 38.



ENGLAND NETBALL TEAM

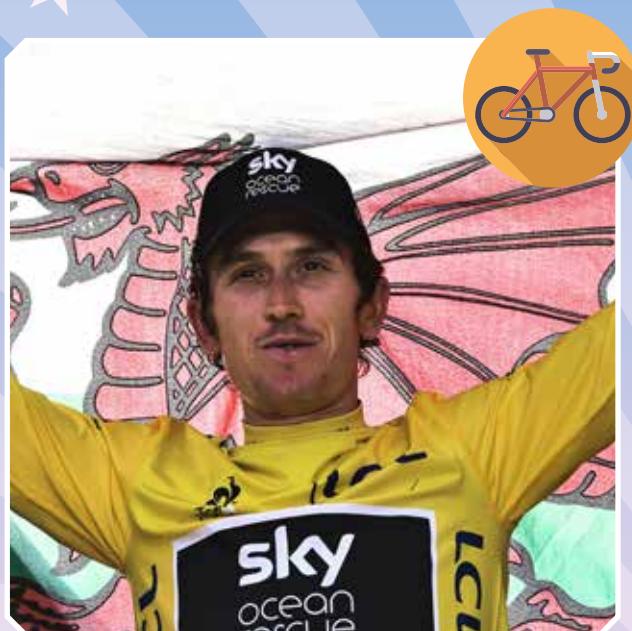
In April, the English netball team beat hosts Australia to win their first ever Commonwealth Games gold medal. It was an incredible final – England won by just one point – but the achievement was so impressive because Australia have won the title three times, and are world number one.



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GERAINT THOMAS

The Team Sky cyclist became the first Welshman ever to win the Tour de France, the biggest competition in the cycling calendar. He had previously won two Olympic and three world team pursuit titles between 2007 and 2012, but winning the Tour de France is his biggest achievement to date. He is only the third Brit ever to win the race.



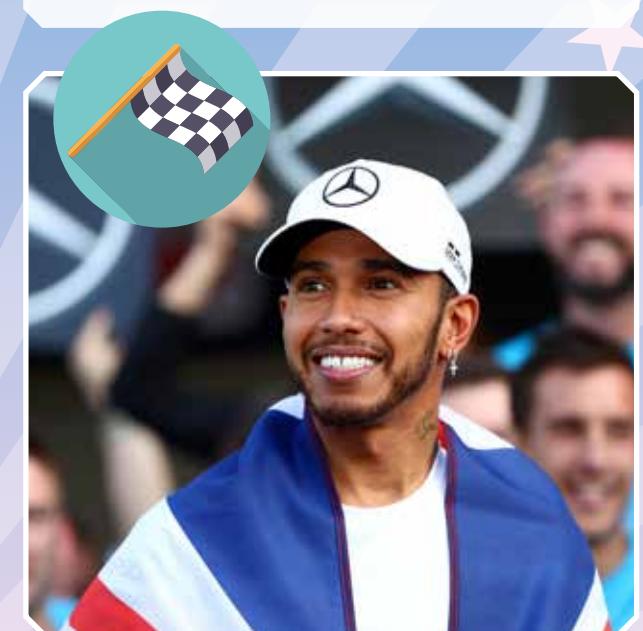
FRANCESCO MOLINARI

Europe went into this year's Ryder Cup as the underdogs, but pulled off a sensational win against the USA. It was a team effort, but one man contributed more than most: Italy's Francesco Molinari became the first European in the history of the tournament to win all five of his matches. He went into the Ryder Cup off the back of a very successful season, having won the PGA Championship at Wentworth and The Open at Carnoustie.



LEWIS HAMILTON

The British motor racing driver won the Formula 1 Drivers' World Championship for a fifth time this year, sealing his place as the most successful British F1 driver ever. He joins Argentinian driving legend Juan Manuel Fangio on five titles – only Michael Schumacher has won more (seven). Even more impressive is that Hamilton was defending the title he won in 2017, so he now has back-to-back crowns.



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MANCHESTER CITY

The Premier League champions broke so many records in winning the 2017-18 title, it's hard to keep count! Pep Guardiola's side smashed a total of 11 records, including: biggest title-winning margin (19 points clear of Manchester United in second), most points (the first team in English top-flight history to reach 100), most goals (106), most wins (32) and best goal difference (+79).



ESTER LEDECKA

Earlier this year, the Czech athlete became the first woman to win a gold medal in two different sports at a single Winter Olympics. She scooped a surprise gold in the women's super-G (skiing) before winning the snowboarding parallel giant slalom title. Ledecka only started on the international skiing circuit in 2016. She said: "I was dreaming about this moment since I was a little child. A lot of people were telling me that it is not possible to do both sports and to be on a high level in both sports and today I proved it is possible."



SIMONE BILES

In November, gymnast Biles, who is still just 21, became the first woman to win four all-around titles at the World Championships in Doha. It was all the more impressive an achievement as she hadn't competed internationally since the 2016 Olympics in Rio. This year she also became the female with the most World Championship medals – 20, including 14 golds. Her haul of 20 matches Russian Svetlana Khorkina's record.



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MARK WILLIAMS

Welshman Williams won his third World Snooker Championship in May after defeating John Higgins in an epic final. It was his first triumph at the tournament since 2003. Aged 43, Williams became the second oldest winner of the World Championship. Three months later, he won the World Open in China.



TIGER WOODS

The American golfer, considered one of the greatest of all time, made a comeback in 2018 after long-term injuries and four major back operations. He won his first tournament in five years with victory at the Tour Championship in September. Less than a year before, he was ranked 1,119th in the world and said he might never return to the sport he loves. But the comeback was sealed this year, with Woods' 80th PGA Tour title – a first since 2013.



FRANCE FOOTBALL TEAM

France won its second World Cup this year in Russia, beating Croatia 4-2 in an entertaining final. The French team, which included stars such as Antoine Griezmann, Kylian Mbappe and Paul Pogba, was managed by Didier Deschamps, who captained France to their first World Cup trophy in 1998. He became only the third man to win the competition as a player and coach. In Mbappe, France had the standout young player of the tournament. And his goal in the final meant France became the first team to score four times in a World Cup final since Brazil beat Italy 4-1 in 1970.



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LAURA MUIR

The Scot finishes 2018 as the number one ranked female 1500m runner in the world. She had an amazing season, winning her first major outdoor title when she picked up gold at the European Championships in August. In addition, she became Diamond League champion in September, and won silver at the World Indoor Championships. She might have won Commonwealth Games medals, too, but missed out on the competition in order to complete her university studies.



CHELSEA LADIES

It was a remarkable 2018 for the Chelsea Ladies football team. They won the Women's Super League title without losing a single game (winning 13 and drawing five), and they lifted the FA Cup, too. It was the second time Chelsea Ladies had won the double, after first achieving it in 2015.



...OR SOMEBODY COMPLETELY DIFFERENT?

These are just suggestions of people you may consider heroic in very different ways. Do you have your own idea of who might be heroes of the year – whether they are famous or not?

