



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **The Laureus World Sports Awards 2005 to air on e.tv**

The sixth annual Laureus World Sports Awards, which honours the world's best sportsmen and women, was recently held in Estoril, Portugal. The glittering Awards Ceremony will be broadcast on e.tv on **Wednesday 8 June at 10.15pm**.

The Laureus World Sports Awards has established a unique place in the sporting calendar. It honours the greatest sportsmen and sportswomen from around the globe and across all sporting disciplines. Nominations are made by sports journalists across the world and the nominees are then voted on by the legendary members of the Laureus World Sports Academy.

In the audience at the Awards Ceremony at the Casino Estoril were members of the Laureus World Sports Academy, sports guests and celebrities including His Majesty the King of Spain, Hollywood stars Jackie Chan, Teri Hatcher, Joely Richardson, Marcia Gay Harden, Cuba Gooding Jnr, Woody Harrelson and Morgan Freeman, Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone, England football coach Sven Goran Eriksson, England football captain David Beckham and his wife Victoria Beckham and former Formula One drivers Jean Alesi and Mika Hakkinen.

The Laureus Awards Ceremony was the climax of two days of exciting sports events including the Laureus Golf Challenge, the Laureus Beach Festival at Tamariz Beach and the Laureus Regatta in Cascais Bay. The Laureus Golf Challenge, hosted by Laureus Academy member and golfing legend Gary Player, one of only five men to win golf's Grand Slam, took place at Penha Longa, the Robert Trent Jones II designed course between Sintra and Cascais. The Laureus Beach Festival took place on the spectacular strip of sand between Estoril and Cascais included beach volleyball, football and tennis, while the Laureus Regatta featured yachts crewed by members of various America's Cup teams.

If you're a sports fan tune into The Laureus Sports Awards on e.tv. It's not only a celebration of sporting excellence it also offers an entertainment packed mix of sporting-heroes-meets-musical-chart-toppers-and-showbiz-glamour.

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## **NOMINEES AND WINNERS 2005:**

### WORLD SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR

Lance Armstrong - (USA)

Cycling

Born: 18 September, 1971

Place of Birth: Plano, Texas, USA

Already twice a winner of Laureus Awards, Armstrong has proved one of the greatest cyclists and most determined competitors ever, winning a record sixth successive Tour de France in 2004 at the age 32. He has recently announced that he will be challenging for a seventh Tour de France in 2005.

His achievement is all the more remarkable as in October 1996 he was diagnosed with testicular cancer, which had spread to his brain and lungs. Despite doctors only giving him a 40% chance of recovery, with successful surgery and chemotherapy, Armstrong was pronounced healthy in February of 1997 and returned to racing in 1998.

It was his return to the Tour de France that redefined his career. Leading from start to finish in 1999, Armstrong established a new average speed of 40.2kmh and won the race. He received the Laureus World Comeback of the Year Award in 2000 as a recognition of that achievement. Backed by the US Postal Services team, he won the Tour de France for the next five years and his dominance in this event was further acknowledged by the Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award in 2003. This is the third successive year in which Armstrong has been nominated.

Hicham El Guerrouj - (Morocco)

Athletics

Born: 14 September, 1974

Place of Birth: Berkane, Morocco

A true champion and a national hero to Moroccans and to countless millions more sports enthusiasts around the world, the brilliant El Guerrouj made history in Athens when he became the first man in 80 years to win both the Olympic 1,500 metres and the 5,000 metres, matching the legendary Finn Paavo Nurmi in Paris in 1924.

El Guerrouj, then 29, came to Athens as the greatest middle distance runner in history never to win an Olympic gold medal. He missed out on what seemed like certain 1,500 metres gold in Atlanta in 1996 when he tripped, and then ran a poor tactical race in Sydney in 2000, but in Athens he corrected those mistakes in spectacular fashion. His 1,500 metres victory in Athens was voted IAAF Male Performance of the Year.

In those four memorable days in Athens, he crowned a glorious career in which he has rewritten the world record books at 1,500 metres, the Mile and 2,000 metres.

Roger Federer - (Switzerland)\*WINNER

Tennis

Born: 08 August, 1981

Place of Birth: Basel, Switzerland

The year 2004 saw Roger Federer become the dominant force in world tennis. He completed arguably the most spectacular 12 months by a tennis player in the open era, becoming the first

man since 1988 to win three out of four Grand Slam events in the same calendar year, winning the Australian Open, Wimbledon and the US Open. He also won Wimbledon in 2003, becoming the first Swiss to do so. Now 24, Federer established himself as indisputable World No.1, winning 11 times in 2004, the best performance in almost 20 years, and he is unbeaten in his last 15 finals, a record in the open era.

Federer began the year winning the Australian Open for the first time, defeating Marat Safin in the final. He then defended his Wimbledon crown, using his skills and finesse to overcome Andy Roddick's power game. By winning the Gstaad tournament on clay and the Toronto Masters on hardcourt shortly after the grass of Wimbledon, he completed a rare triple of consecutive tournament victories on three different surfaces. In September, he beat Lleyton Hewitt in straight sets in the most one-sided final in the 120 year history of the US Open and he finished the year taking the Tennis Masters Cup at Houston for the second time in a row.

With a win-loss record of 74-6 and 11 tournament wins, the year 2004 belonged to Federer. What makes it an even more remarkable achievement is that he did it without a coach, relying solely on his fitness trainer Pierre Paganini and physiotherapist Pavel Kovac. Federer was also nominated in 2004 for the Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award, but lost out to Michael Schumacher.

Michael Phelps - (USA)

Swimming

Born: 30 June, 1985

Place of Birth: Towson, Maryland, USA

Phenomenal youngster Michael Phelps took over from Ian Thorpe as the No.1 swimmer after one of the greatest Olympic performances of all time in Athens. Just 19, he won six gold and two bronze medals. If Michael Phelps had been a country, he would have finished higher in the medals table than Brazil, Canada, Netherlands, Holland, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Spain and Sweden.

He narrowly failed to emulate the achievement of Laureus World Sports Academy member Mark Spitz who won seven gold medals in Munich 32 years ago, but few doubt that here is a talent to match the great Spitz. Despite his young age and the media clamour in Athens, Phelps remained modest and focused.

His first gold came in the 400 metres individual medley in a world record time, which was followed by bronze medals in the 4 x 100 metres freestyle relay and the 200 metres freestyle. He returned to the gold standard in the 4 x 200 metres freestyle relay when he paced the Americans to victory, then won the 200 metres butterfly, the 100 metres butterfly and 200 metres individual medley.

Phelps greatest moment in Athens may have come out of the pool. Though he had qualified for the 4 x 100 metres medley relay final, he gave up his swim to teammate Ian Crocker as it was Crocker's last chance to win a gold. Crocker was nearly speechless with admiration when he learned the news. Phelps was in the stands cheering loudly as the Americans cruised to victory. Despite not swimming, Phelps was awarded his sixth gold for having swum in the heats.

The Athens Olympics completed a remarkable two years for Phelps. In 2003, aged 18, at the World Championships in Barcelona, he won three gold and two silver medals and broke five individual world records in one championship - the first to do this - including two within 50 minutes of each other. For this achievement, Phelps was nominated for the 2004 Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award, but lost out to Michael Schumacher.

Valentino Rossi - (Italy)

Motorcycling

Born: 16 February, 1979

Place of Birth: Urbino, Italy

His fourth consecutive world crown in motorcycling's elite class confirmed Rossi as one of the greatest riders there has ever been. The brilliant Italian motorcycle ace's fourth World MotoGP Championship in 2004 was certainly his best.

At the end of the 2003 season, he had left Honda, with whom he had won his first three World Championships, and switched to Yamaha. His arrival provided a dramatic turnaround in Yamaha's fortunes, and unbelievably they won their first title since 1992.

Rossi was anxious for a new challenge, knowing that if he stayed with Honda he risked critics saying that he was just a good rider on a great bike. Rossi did not get on his new bike until January and few thought he could turn Yamaha's fortunes around so quickly, but in South Africa in April he won his very first race on the Yamaha and altogether won nine Grand Prix during the season. He now has a career record of 100 podium finishes from 139 starts.

Rossi was also nominated for the 2004 Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award, but lost out to Michael Schumacher.

Michael Schumacher - (Germany)

Motor Racing

Born: 03 January, 1969

Place of Birth: Kerpen, Germany

Already twice winner of the Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award, Michael Schumacher won his seventh Formula One World Championship title in 2004 at 35. His brilliant driving skills, allied to the remarkable Ferrari, with its speed, good handling and reliability, proved an irresistible partnership with Schumacher winning 12 of the first 13 races. It was his fifth consecutive World Championship for Ferrari to add to the two he won with Benetton.

In his career, Schumacher has won 83 Grand Prix, an incredible achievement in a sport that once considered Alain Prost's total of 51 unbeatable. His ever-improving statistics are records that are likely to stand for decades to come. Schumacher's incredible work ethic, ruthless determination and superb talent has made him widely regarded as one of the leading Grand Prix drivers of all time.

Schumacher was named 2004 Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award after he won his sixth Formula One World Championship, overtaking Argentina's Juan Manuel Fangio who won five. He was also named 2002 Laureus World Sportsman of the Year to mark his second World Championship win for Ferrari. Remarkably Schumacher has been nominated in every one of the last five years.

#### WORLD SPORTSWOMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

Kelly Holmes - (England)\* WINNER

Athletics

Born: 19 April, 1970

Place of Birth: Pembury, England

At 34 and the oldest woman in the field, Kelly Holmes, after a career dogged by injuries and disappointments, won the 800 metres and 1,500 metres Olympic gold medals in Athens, a feat only ever achieved by two women before. It was one of the greatest achievements in Olympic history and in the 800 metres she beat the once-invincible defending champion Maria Mutola into fourth place.

Holmes is the only athlete ever to reach the 800 metres and 1,500 metres Olympic finals three times. Her 800 metres victory was voted IAAF Female Performance of the Year.

It was an amazing success for Holmes who has suffered an agonising series of near-misses in her career. She was squeezed out of the medals with fourth place in the 800 metres at the 1996

Atlanta Olympics after suffering a stress fracture. Injury also ruined her bid for the 1997 World Championship 1,500 metres, and many wondered if her best chance of a global title had gone as bronze in the 800 metres in the Sydney Olympics was followed by silver in the same event in the 2003 World Championships.

"I could have given up. I had depression, everything. But I felt in my heart one day it might happen. This is my life, what I have dreamed of forever," said Holmes.

Yalena Isinbayeva - (Russia)

Athletics

Born: 03 June, 1982

Place of Birth: Volgograd, Russia

At just 22, she was voted IAAF Athlete of the Year for her remarkable pole vaulting in 2004. Isinbayeva won the Olympic gold medal in Athens with a world record of 4.91m. It was the climax of an 18-month period which had seen her, driven on by competition with her fellow countrywoman Svetlana Feofanova, to break the world record seven times.

Isinbayeva, who during the year accumulated world records at the same rate as former men's champion and Laureus Academy member Sergey Bubka, defied difficult, windy conditions to win the gold medal.

Her dramatic victory came from an inspired gamble. In the bronze position and one jump away from defeat after failing at 4.70 and 4.75 metres, and with Feofanova ahead of her, Isinbayeva put up the bar to 4.80 metres and cleared majestically, earning one of the biggest roars of the night from a sell-out Olympic stadium. She then emphasised her domination by clearing 4.85 metres, then sailed over the record height of 4.91m as tears welled up in her eyes.

Carolina Klüft - (Sweden)

Athletics

Born: 02 February, 1983

Place of Birth: Sandhult, Sweden

Proved she was the No.1 all-round female athlete in the world with a gold medal winning performance in the heptathlon in Athens. Klüft, 21, became the first native-born Swedish woman to win an Olympic title. Her victory in Athens followed her win in the World Championship in Paris in 2003, and completed her full set of Olympic, World, European and Junior World titles. She has taken just three years to go from new kid on the block to mistress of all she surveys.

The Swedish athlete leapt onto the global stage when she won the heptathlon at the World Championships in 2003, and all with a massive smile on her face. At just 21 she has become only the third heptathlete to score more than 7,000 points in an event.

Her speed is her biggest strength, giving her big points in the sprints, long jump and high jump. A bundle of competitive energy, she never lets up for a second, encouraging herself before each jump, sprint and throw and punching the air at the result.

Maria Sharapova - (Russia)

Tennis

Born: 19 April, 1987

Place of Birth: Nyagan, Siberia, Russia

Maria Sharapova's first Grand Slam victory at Wimbledon will live in the memory for years to come thanks to the Russian's astounding performance in the final. Centre Court was treated to

the sight of the all-conquering Serena Williams being overpowered and out-thought by a 17-year-old in her first Grand Slam final. It was simply breathtaking to witness. Playing with a maturity beyond her years throughout the tournament, Sharapova also beat former No.1 Lindsay Davenport to become the second youngest champion in the open era at 17 years, 2 months, just five months older than Martina Hingis in 1997. "It has always been my dream to come here and win but it was never in my mind that I would do it this year. When I came off court and saw my name on that board with all the champions, that was when I realised what I had done," said Sharapova. She also won the prestigious end-of-season \$1 million WTA Championship, plus victories during the year in Birmingham, Seoul and Tokyo. In 2004 Sharapova was nominated for the Laureus World Newcomer of the Year Award, but she lost out to teenage golfer Michelle Wie.

Annika Sorenstam - (Sweden)

Golf

Born: 09 October, 1970

Place of Birth: Stockholm, Sweden

It was another fantastic 12 months for the 2004 Laureus World Sportswoman of the Year. She won her seventh major, the McDonalds LPGA Championship, plus seven more tournaments on the US LPGA Tour and the HP Open in her native Sweden. One of her most remarkable achievements was in the Samsung World Championship where she was three shots behind South Korea's Grace Park with six holes to play, holed a 50 foot chip for an eagle at the 15th and went on to win.

She has more tournament wins than any other golfer over the past three seasons and victory only seems to build in her a thirst for more. Sorenstam captured her first LPGA Tour victory at the 1995 US Women's Open and she has not stopped winning since. The Swede collected more LPGA titles than any golfer in the 1990s (18) and in 2002 joined Mickey Wright as the only players in LPGA history to win 11 times in a season.

The winner of 52 LPGA tournaments and seven major titles to date, Sorenstam is the holder of numerous LPGA records, including the lowest round in LPGA history (59). By winning the LPGA Championship and Women's British Open in 2003, she became the sixth woman to complete the career grand slam.

This is the fourth consecutive year in which she has been nominated for the Laureus World Sportswoman of the Year Award.

Leontien Zijlaard-Van Moorsel - (Netherlands)

Cycling

Born: 22 March, 1970

Place of Birth: Boekel, Netherlands

Became the most successful woman in Olympic cycling history in Athens. Aged 34, she won the time trial gold medal to add to her three golds and a silver from Sydney. She also won a bronze in the track individual pursuit. Her medals total made her the Netherlands' most successful female Olympian, overtaking the great Fanny Blankers-Koen.

Leontien van Moorsel was a World Champion cyclist both on the road and on the track before she competed in her first Olympics in 1992 where she finished 8th in the individual pursuit and 23rd in the road race. Van Moorsel won the 1993 World Championship road race, but then missed the next three seasons, including the Atlanta Olympics, while she dealt with anorexia and bulimia. She married her coach Michael Zijlaard, conquered her eating disorders and returned to international competition. At the 2000 Sydney Games, she broke the world record in the semi-finals of the pursuit and then won the final with ease and added a silver medal in the points race.

With help from Dutch teammates Chantal Beltman and Mirjam Melchers, she also won the gold medal in the road race and four days later, she won the road time trial by 37 seconds. By the time of the 2004 Olympics, Zijlaard-van Moorsel was 34 years old. She wanted to retire on a high note, but it looked like her efforts would be thwarted when she crashed in the road race, coming away with bruises to her neck, hip and shoulder. There was speculation that she would have to withdraw from the time trial three days later. Instead, she not only appeared at the starting line, she won the race by 24.09 seconds, earning her fourth career gold medal. Zijlaard-van Moorsel closed her Olympic career by adding a bronze medal in the pursuit.

## WORLD TEAM OF THE YEAR

Argentina Men's Olympic Basketball Team - (Argentina)

Basketball

Place of Birth: , Argentina

Argentina showed in the Athens Olympic Games that they have become one of basketball's superpowers. In the semi-finals they knocked out the United States' so-called 'dream team', winners of the last three gold medals. And then in the final, they beat Italy 84-69 to win the gold medal, with Luis Scola scoring 25 points. Argentina's best finish in the Olympics before Athens had been fourth in 1952.

Argentina had arguably the best all around player in the competition in Manu Ginobili, who plays for San Antonio Spurs in the NBA, a player who can run, dunk, shoot and defend. Ginobili said the basketball title was even sweeter for Argentina because the country had also won an Olympic gold medal in soccer in Athens. "The most special thing you can do is win for your country. We win in soccer in the morning and then in basketball. Argentina is on top of the world because it is on top of the two biggest sports in the world today."

Argentina have slowly been edging towards their new status. In 2002, they won the silver medal in the World Championship, their first medal at the tournament since 1950.

Boston Red Sox - (USA)

Baseball

Place of Birth: , USA

The Red Sox baseball team's victory in the World Series for the first time in 86 years was probably the most emotional sporting achievement of 2004, and ended one of sport's most enduring 'curses'.

From the day in 1920 when Boston Red Sox sold Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees, they had never won the World Series. Four times the Red Sox have reached the World Series and four times they have lost.

This time church bells rang in small New England towns and horns honked on the crowded streets of Boston as the Red Sox won the World Series in style, beating the St Louis Cardinals 4-0 in the best of seven matches.

On their way to the World Series, the Red Sox also engineered the greatest comeback in baseball history when they won four straight games against the New York Yankees in the American League Championship Series. It was a baseball epic. Having lost the first three games of the play-off, the Red Sox had to win all the remaining four, and they created history by doing just that. It was one of the greatest team performances ever witnessed in American sport.

European Ryder Cup Team - (Europe)

Golf

Place of Birth: , Europe

Europe clinched the Ryder Cup 18½-9½ at Oakland Hills, Detroit, against an American team which included Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson and Davis Love III. It was the biggest ever margin in the event's 77-year history, surpassing the 16½-11½ defeat in 1985 at The Belfry. Europe's 18½ points were the most scored by any team since the event was changed in 1979 to include players from Europe as well as the British Isles. It means Europe have now won four of the last five of the biennial matches.

Europe were brilliantly led by captain Bernhard Langer, and they were inspired by Scotland's Colin Montgomerie who sank the winning putt. Montgomerie, a seven-time Cup veteran, has struggled since winning the last of his seven European titles in 1999, and has suffered the breakdown of his marriage in the last few years.

He needed to be one of the captain's 'picks' to make the team, but the standard of his play was excellent as he stretched his singles record to seven out of seven with victory over David Toms. "We are one of the closest-knit teams in international sport," enthused Montgomerie afterwards. The European Ryder Cup team was also nominated in 2003, but lost out to the Brazil Football Team following their World Cup victory.

FC Porto - (Portugal)  
Football  
Place of Birth: , Portugal

FC Porto won the Champions League in 2004, beating Monaco 3-0 with goals from Carlos Alberto, Deco and Alenitchev, and defeating Real Madrid and Manchester United on their way to the final.

The Champions League triumph completed a period of enormous success for the club under manager Jose Mourinho which included UEFA Cup victory in 2003 and the Portuguese championship for the seventh time in ten years. During the domestic season, FC Porto won 25 times and lost only twice, both matches away from home.

Six FC Porto players were selected for the Portugal squad which reached the final of the 2004 European Championship - Deco, Nuno Valente, Paulo Ferreira, Maniche, Costinha and Ricardo Carvalho.

During the summer FC Porto coach Jose Mourinho left to take over London club Chelsea.

Ferrari Formula One Team - (Italy)  
Motor Racing  
Place of Birth: , Italy

Ferrari maintained their dominance of Formula One in 2004, relentlessly easing to a sixth successive World Constructors Championship, with 15 Grand Prix wins out of 18 races - World Champion Michael Schumacher winning 13 times and Rubens Barrichello winning twice. Schumacher won his seventh Formula One World Championship title during the year and his driving skills allied to the speed, good handling and reliability of the Ferrari proved to be a partnership that was irresistible.

This is the fourth consecutive year the Ferrari Formula One team have been nominated for the Laureus World Team of the Year Award and Managing Director Jean Todt has been in control throughout, along with technical director Ross Brawn, engine director Paolo Martinelli, chief designer Rory Byrne and head of engine design Gilles Simon, who all signed contracts during 2004 to stay at Ferrari until the end of the 2006 season.

"I still have a great passion for my work and my motivation is the same as ever," said Todt. "I could not dream of being with a greater team. Staying here for a few more years is something to be proud of."

Greece Men's Football Team - (Greece)\*WINNER  
Football  
Place of Birth: , Greece

Greece arrived in Portugal for the 2004 European Championship as 150-1 outsiders who had never won a match at a major tournament. Four weeks later the Greece national team, and in particular Otto Rehhagel and Angelos Charisteas had become legendary figures in Greek football history.

Greece were surprise winners of a surprise European Championship which saw top teams France, Italy and Germany eliminated early. Angelos Charisteas scored the winning goal in the 1-0 Euro 2004 final victory against hosts Portugal, while German Otto Rehhagel, aged 65, proved a tactical genius as Greek coach.

The Greeks played with strong defence, confidence in each other and with shrewd strategy. Rehhagel is the first foreign coach and the oldest coach in football history to lead a team to victory in the European Championship. As an exercise in working with the resources at your disposal and getting the best out of them, Rehhagel provided a mastermind.

Greece's new gods on the field were Traianos Dellas and Charisteas, two men barely able to get a game for Roma and Werder Bremen, and yet the talismen for the values of brilliant coaching, organisation and honesty.

#### WORLD NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR

Amir Khan - (England)  
Boxing  
Born: 08 December, 1986  
Place of Birth: Bolton, England

At 17, Amir Khan made an enormous impact in the lightweight division of the Olympic Games in Athens, beating European champion Dimitar Stilianov on the way to a silver medal. He was attempting to become the youngest boxer since Floyd Patterson in 1952 to win a gold medal, but lost in the final to the very experienced Cuban Mario Kindelan. He was also the youngest British boxer to compete in the Olympics since 1976.

Khan was a 13-year-old schoolboy when Britain's Audley Harrison won gold in the Sydney Olympics in 2000 which enthused him to try to emulate that achievement. By June 2004, Khan was already European and World Junior champion after a series of victories in Lithuania and Korea. In the World Championships, he was named best boxer of the tournament after winning the lightweight division.

The 17-year-old won the first round in the Olympic final against Kindelan, but the experienced Cuban established his dominance in round two, picking off the teenager with counter attacks. Although Khan closed out in typical aggressive style, he could not stop the Cuban winning a third straight title.

Svetlana Kuznetsova - (Russia)  
Tennis  
Born: 27 June, 1985  
Place of Birth: St. Petersburg, Russia

Started the year as World No.35, but won Eastbourne in the build-up to Wimbledon and then the US Open, her first Grand Slam tournament, aged just 19. She was 9th seed at Flushing Meadows, beating former World No.1 Lindsay Davenport, who was on a 22-match unbeaten

streak at the time, in the semi-finals, and Elena Dementieva in the first ever all-Russian Grand Slam final. She finished the year ranked No.5 and her 60 singles wins were third only to Lindsay Davenport and Amelie Mauresmo's 63.

In the US Open final, Kuznetsova recovered from losing her first service game with two breaks of her own to take the first set. She twice fought back from a break down in the second set for a 6-3 7-5 win.

Another of the amazing group of Russian women who are coming to dominate world tennis, she said: "When I got to 30 in the world I thought, 'I want more than this, I have to do better'. Then I got to 10, but I always want to do better

Laure Manaudou - (France)

Swimming

Born: 09 October, 1986

Place of Birth: Villerbanne, France

At 17, Manaudou won the women's 400 metres freestyle at the Athens Olympics, setting a European record and becoming the First Frenchwoman to win an Olympic swimming title. It was also the first gold medal in swimming for France since 1952. She also won a silver in the 800 metres freestyle and a bronze in the 100 metres backstroke.

Going into the Olympics Manaudou was not ranked among the top 25 in the world in her event, yet she led from start to finish in the fourth fastest time in history.

"I have been preparing myself for three years for this day. My objective in Athens was victory, nothing else. I am very happy," she said. She also received a message from French President Jacques Chirac telling her "France is proud of you."

In November she set a 1,500 metres freestyle short-course world record of 15 mins 42.39 secs and has received countless awards as French Sports Personality of the Year.

Dani Pedrosa - (Spain)

Motorcycling

Born: 29 September, 1985

Place of Birth: Sabadell, Spain

In 2004 became the youngest ever 250cc World Champion, at 19 years and 18 days, taking the record from Marco Melandri by over a year. Earlier in the season Pedrosa's victory in the opening race in South Africa made him the youngest ever winner of a 250cc Grand Prix. In a spectacular year, he won five times and only failed to finish on the podium in three races. He is also the first rider since 1960 to win the 125cc title and then the 250cc title in consecutive years.

Pedrosa's passion for motorcycles began, like many of the top current riders, as a small child riding pocket-bikes. By the age of 12 he had won the Spanish National Championship, but a lack of funds almost curtailed his promising career before it had begun. However, a search for fresh racing talent in Spain headed by former Grand Prix star Alberto Puig gave the young man the opportunity to prove himself on a bigger stage.

After responding to a national advertisement, Pedrosa competed in the Movistar Activa Cup in 1999 and was one of the riders selected by Puig from hundreds of hopefuls to contest the 125cc Spanish Championship in 2000. Four pole positions from twelve rounds and fourth position overall was enough to convince Puig to select him as part of a three-man team alongside Toni Elias and Joan Olive to contest the 125cc World Championship in 2001. Now he seems certain to be one of the big motorcycling riders of the future.

Liu Xiang - (China) \*WINNER

Athletics

Born: 13 July, 1983

Place of Birth: Shanghai, China

Liu Xing, age 21, became the first Chinese man to win a track athletics gold medal in Olympic history when he won the 110 metres hurdles in Athens, a victory which caused huge excitement in China. He has instantly become one of the most famous sporting faces in China and is now one of the host nation's emblems for the Beijing 2008 Olympics. Never having broken 13.0 secs before, he clocked a stunning 12.91 secs to equal the world record set by Britain's Colin Jackson in 1993.

Born in Shanghai, his family wanted him to study computer engineering, but Liu wanted to be an athlete. "I told my mother that I would compete in the Olympics one day," he said. The turning point came in 1998 when coach Sun Haiping spotted Liu and persuaded him to concentrate on the 110 metres hurdles.

After only three years, Liu launched his career in style in the IAAF Grand Prix in Lausanne in 2001 by breaking the world Youth and Asian record with a time of 13.12 secs. In the next two years he won titles at the Asian championships, the World University Games and the Asian Games.

The first warning that Liu Xing was going to be a very special athlete came in 2003 when he won a bronze medal in the World Indoor Championships in Birmingham and a bronze in the outdoor World Championships in Paris. Learning all the time, in 2004 Liu was stronger and more confident and he won the silver medal in the World Indoor Championships in Budapest in March, before his Athens triumph in the summer.

Huina Xing - (China)

Athletics

Born: 25 February, 1984

Place of Birth: Weifang, China

Huina Xing came from nowhere to win the gold medal in the women's 10,000 metres in Athens in one of the biggest surprises of the 2004 Olympic Games. Xing, aged 20, making her first Olympic appearance, clocked a winning time of 30 mins 24.36 secs, with a 62 secs last lap. Finishing seventh in the 10,000 metres in the 2003 World Championship in Paris and ninth in the 5,000 metres seven days earlier in Athens, Xing did not appear to be a serious contender, but she took more than seven seconds off her personal best, clocking 30 mins 24.36 secs to become the Olympic champion. She said: "It's a surprise of all the surprises. I never expected that it could happen. The failure in the 5,000 metres was a blow to me, but it also worked my way as I had no pressure any more."

In 1999 Xing attracted the attention of coach Wang Dexian in 1999. Her 10,000 metres debut was in 2001 and she made an immediate breakthrough the following year, aged 18, with her third place finish at the Asian Games. The following year she set a World Junior record of 30:31.55 at the World Championships. In the build-up to Athens this year, she competed sparingly, although she did score a double win at the Chinese National Championships in May, winning the 1500 metres and the 5,000 metres.

#### WORLD COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

John Daly - (USA)

Golf

Born: 28 April, 1966

Place of Birth: Carmichael, California, USA

After nearly a decade of personal torment in which he battled alcohol, weight problems and had three divorces, John Daly, 38, won again on the US PGA Tour in 2004. His sudden death victory in the Buick Invitational in February won him \$864,000 - more than any single-season total during his career.

Daly took professional golf by storm when he came out of nowhere to win the 1991 PGA Championship at Crooked Stick in Indiana. He was named that year's PGA Rookie of the Year. A big hitter, Daly quickly became a favourite with crowds for his long drives and no-frills philosophy of "grip it and rip it." Almost as quickly he became a controversial figure thanks to his on-course fits of temper and off-course bouts of drinking and gambling. He overcame erratic play to win the 1995 Open Championship at St Andrews, then suffered through six years of poor play and personal turmoil before winning the BMW International Open in Munich in September 2001.

England Men's Cricket Team - (England)

Cricket

Born: 11 March, 2005

Place of Birth: , England

After years of struggling and false dawns, England, under captain Michael Vaughan, completed 2004 with a 7wkts win over South Africa - their record eighth successive victory. That record came at the end of a spell which saw them win 11 out of 12 Test matches, the first time for 75 years they have done this.

England recorded four Test series wins in succession, beating the West Indies (twice), New Zealand and South Africa. They also reached the finals of the ICC Champions Trophy, beating Australia en route to the final, which they lost to West Indies.

All four of England's leading bowlers, Harmison, Giles, Flintoff and Hoggard have appeared in the World Ranking top twenty at various moments throughout the year, and over the year the batsmen have all contributed runs.

Tadahiro Nomura - (Japan)

Judo

Born: 12 October, 1974

Place of Birth: Nara, Japan

After winning the 60kgm Olympic gold medals in 1996 and 2000, Tadahiro Nomura retired, but he missed competition so much he decided to return to the sport. He lost in the quarter-finals in the World Championships in 2003, but persisted in his comeback and at the age of 29 won gold in Athens to become the first judoka to win three Olympic gold medals. Nomura was also the first Japanese athlete to win three consecutive Olympic gold medals in an individual event.

Nomura was one of the hero's of Japan's judo team which brought home eight gold and two silver medals from Athens - the best result ever for a Japanese Olympic judo team.

Nomura demonstrated overwhelming superiority at Atlanta in 1996, Sydney in 2000, and again Athens. He won the majority of his bouts with ippon - a single move which is awarded a full 10 points. "I wanted to show everything I've ever learned about judo, because I figured this might be my last Olympic Games," said Nomura.

Paula Radcliffe - (England)

Athletics

Born: 17 December, 1973

Place of Birth: Northwich, England

The British long distance runner made a triumphant comeback to competitive running with victory in the New York Marathon in November 2004, just 11 weeks after she dramatically dropped out of the Olympic Marathon and then the 10,000 metres in mid-race in Athens. In total contrast in New York, Radcliffe, then 30, kept going to the end and produced a final sprint to beat Kenya's Susan Chepkemei in the closest finish in the race's history.

In Athens she had pulled up exhausted and distraught after 22 miles of the Olympic Marathon, then days later also dropped out of the 10,000 metres with eight laps to go after a late decision to compete. It meant Radcliffe, one of the world's dominant long distance runners, has now not won a medal in three Olympics.

Many thought that Radcliffe had made a mistake to run in New York so soon after Athens, but the cooler conditions helped and her old fighting spirit returned. After the race she said: "It won't wipe out what happened in Athens. Nothing will ever make up for that. But I'm moving on with my life, and this win is a good way to start."

This is the third consecutive year that Radcliffe has been nominated. In 2003 and 2004 she was nominated for the Laureus World Sportswoman of the Year Award.

Shane Warne - (Australia)

Cricket

Born: 13 September, 1969

Place of Birth: Ferntree Gully, Victoria, Australia

Banned for one year during the 2003 Cricket World Cup for taking an illegal diuretic, Warne returned immediately to the Australian team in 2004 at the end of his suspension and made a dramatic impact, breaking the world record for the highest number of Test wickets taken with 566 in 120 Test matches. Regarded as the best leg spinner ever, since his return he has taken 75 wickets in 13 matches.

During his career Warne has revolutionised cricket thinking with his mastery of what many cricket authorities regarded as the dying art of spin bowling, combining the ability to turn the ball huge distances, even on unhelpful pitches, with unerring accuracy and a wide variation of deliveries. Warne claimed that he took only one of what he called a 'fluid tablet' - the prescription drug Moduretic - on his mother's suggestion, in an attempt to improve his appearance. Warne claimed ignorance of the banned nature of the tablet. Although it was an illegal drug, Warne was banned for only one year as it was felt the drug could not have improved his performance.

#### WORLD SPORTSPERSON OF THE YEAR WITH A DISABILITY

Alessandro Zanardi - (Italy) \*WINNER

Motor Racing

Born: 23 October, 1966

Place of Birth: Bologna, Italy

The courage of Italy's Alessandro Zanardi in returning to motor racing after losing both legs in a horrific crash has won him nomination for the Laureus World Comeback of the Year Award for two years running. Last year he was beaten for the Award by Austrian skier Hermann Maier. Zanardi, who had driven in Formula One with the Williams team, had switched to CART racing and his accident in the European Memorial CART race in Lausitz in Germany was one of the worst ever seen. His car spun coming out of the pits and it was hit by another coming down the straight at 200mph.

Zanardi, 38, returned to motor racing in October 2003, finishing seventh in the European Touring Car Championship race at Monza. In 2004 he completed a full season in the championship, racing at speeds of up to 240kmh and has already signed to race again in 2005. He drives a specially adapted BMW in which the throttle is mounted on the upper part of the steering wheel,

the brake pedal has been shaped to prevent the driver's artificial limb from losing the grip and the clutch is actuated through a button on the gear lever.

Dr. Claudio Costa, who has overseen his rehabilitation since the accident, says: "Alessandro Zanardi is letting all the people in his condition know what they can do. His example sends a message to humanity."

Cheri Blauwet - (USA)

Athletics

Born: 15 May, 1980

Place of Birth: Larchwood, Iowa, USA

Paraplegic as the result of a farm accident at the age of 18 months, Blauwet began wheelchair racing after being recruited by her local high school track coach. After high school, she attended the University of Arizona where she received a degree in molecular biology and was a member of the university's Wheelchair Track and Road Racing Team.

In 2004 having won the Los Angeles Marathon in March and the Boston Marathon in April, she went to the Athens Paralympics where she won the 800 metres gold medal and bronze medals in the 5,000 metres and the Marathon.

Founder of the International Institute for Disability Advocacy which provides scholarships to the University of Arizona to students with a disability from developing nations, she received the Paul Herne Leadership Award 2004, given by the American Association of People with Disabilities, which recognises individuals who display exceptional potential in areas of disability rights and equality. A spokeswoman for US Paralympics, she speaks on behalf of the US Olympic Committee and sponsors. She was the keynote speaker at the Human Rights symposium, held at the Paralympic Games in Athens, last September. She was also the moderator for the Development Conference at the IPC General Assembly in Cairo in November 2004. She also volunteers her time and expertise as a coach to the San Jose junior wheelchair track team.

Jonas Jacobsson - (Sweden)

Shooting

Born: 22 June, 1965

Place of Birth: Krokek, Sweden

Sweden's legendary shooter Jonas Jacobsson continued his remarkable success in the Paralympic Games winning four gold medals in Athens to take his career total to 13 Paralympic golds since he first attended the Games in 1980. He also established two new world and Paralympic records and equalled two more.

Jacobsson, 39, was competing in his seventh Paralympic Games after staying competitive at international level for over two decades. Among his impressive medal collections are 22 Paralympic medals: 13 gold, one silver and eight bronze. With 14 world and Paralympic records to his credit, Jacobsson is one of the most successful Paralympians ever. He also won 11 World Championship gold medals from 1979 to 2003.

In the Swedish Cup in Sävsjö in January 2005, a fully integrated competition with able-bodied shooters from ten nations, Jonas won one of the competition days, where he beat American Olympic gold medallist Matt Emmons.

Born with a disability in lower limbs which means he has to use a wheelchair, Jacobsson started shooting at the age of seven, encouraged by his parents and two brothers who are also shooters. Participating in various championships around the world has given him many positive experiences. "To be good at something strengthens self-confidence, but it is important to have a humble attitude at the same time," says Jonas.

Lee Pearson - (England)  
Equestrian  
Born: 04 February, 1974  
Place of Birth: Stoke-on-Trent, England

Won three gold medals in the three equestrian dressage competitions in Athens in which he competed, Pearson was also a triple gold medallist at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games. His gold medals came in the Individual Championship Test, Individual Dressage Test to Music and Team Competition on Blue Circle Boy. When he returned to Leek, hundreds of people turned out to salute him and he was presented with his hometown's coat of arms.

He said: "I expected perhaps to win one medal. To get three is absolutely fabulous." He showed his consideration for his fellow competitors by asking for the flowers which he received at the gold medal presentation ceremony in Athens to be formally presented to a French rider whose horse had tragically died during the competition.

Pearson was born suffering from Arthrogryphosis, a condition that makes the muscles in the arms and legs grow as scar tissue, leaving babies severely disabled. After 15 major operations, he now walks with the help of crutches and leg splints. Pearson competes in dressage classes for riders with the most severe disabilities

Pearson, who has ridden in novice classes for the able-bodied, was also nominated for the 2001 Laureus Sportsman of the Year with a Disability Award, but lost out to Australian paraplegic yachtsman Vinny Lauwers.

Chantal Petitclerc - (Canada) \*WINNER  
Athletics  
Born: 15 December, 1969  
Place of Birth: Quebec City, Canada

At 13, she lost the use of both legs in an accident. She began swimming, then switched to wheelchair athletics. She was the outstanding athletics performer in the 2004 Athens Paralympics with five wheelchair gold medals - winning every race in which she competed - and breaking four world records, six Paralympic records and four Canadian records. She was chosen to carry the Canadian flag at the closing ceremony and in December 2004 received Canada's Meritorious Service Medal.

She also won three golds and a bronze at the 2002 World Championships and a gold at the 2002 Commonwealth Games, achievements for which she was nominated for the 2003 Laureus World Sportsman of the Year with a Disability Award.

For the last ten years, Chantal has been the official spokesperson for the "Defi Sportif" - a multi-disability sporting event that encourages children with a disability to get active. Her work with the Defi involves not only promotions, but also meeting and inspiring the children and building relationships with the event's corporate partners.

Out of her concern for the development of wheelchair racing in her home province of Québec, Chantal has developed a new 10km road racing series to be launched next month. The purpose of the series is to encourage young children with a disability to move and enjoy sport. Chantal will be co-ordinating, developing and raising funds for this new event.

Clodoaldo Silva - (Brazil)  
Swimming  
Born: 01 February, 1979  
Place of Birth: Natal, Brazil

Known as 'Tubarão' (The Shark) of the swimming pool, Clodoaldo Silva, 25, who has suffered from cerebral palsy since childbirth, which affects the movement of his legs and motor coordination, won six gold medals and one silver in the Athens Paralympics. He won gold in 4 x 50 metres medley (Paralympic record), 50 metres freestyle S4 (World and Paralympic record), 150 metres individual medley, 50 metres butterfly S4 (Paralympic Record), 200 metres freestyle S4 (Paralympic record), 100 metres freestyle S4 (Paralympic record), and silver in the 4 x 50metres freestyle. He also holds the world record for the 100 metres freestyle. Silva says: "I believe that these results show that we are capable of achieving anything if we have the objective and the determination to carry it through."

An advocate for people with cerebral palsy, he is involved in several community projects and focuses his actions on helping children and teenagers less economically favoured. In December 2004 he took the first shot in a charity wheelchair basketball game. The price of each ticket for the game consisted of one kilo of non-perishable food which was then distributed in a poor suburb region of his hometown Natal.

Henry Wanyoike - (Kenya)  
Athletics  
Born: 13 May, 1978  
Place of Birth: Kikuyu, Kenya

Won two gold medals at 5,000 metres and 10,000 metres in the Athens Paralympic Games, breaking the world records in both events. In 2004 he also won the Hong Kong Marathon, was first in the visually impaired category in the Boston Marathon and was fourth overall in the Mumbai Marathon.

Even before he was a teenager, Henry was being groomed to join an elite corps of Kenyan athletes in the country that has probably produced more world-class middle-distance runners over the last 20 years than any other. Then in 1995, aged 21, he had a stroke which resulted in him becoming blind. Four years later a doctor in the hospital which he attended suggested he could still run with a guide and a tether. Once he became familiar with using a guide, he quickly established himself as a world-class non-sighted runner, earning a place in the national squad for the 5,000 metres at the Sydney Paralympics in 2000. He not only won the gold medal, but set a Paralympic record.

Wanyoike is now an advocate for persons with a disability in Africa and is Vice-President of the Kenyan Visually Impaired Sports Association. He serves as an Ambassador for the Light the World programme and is a founding member and co-ordinator for the Goodwill Project, which feeds and educates more than 60 children who are orphaned in Kenya.

#### WORLD ALTERNATIVE SPORTSPERSON OF THE YEAR

Darren Berrecloth - (Canada)  
Mountain Bike Freerider  
Born: 20 August, 1982  
Place of Birth: Victoria, Canada

Ever since taking third as an unknown at the Red Bull Rampage cliff-jumping contest, 'Bear Claw' has almost single-handedly radicalised freeride mountain biking by bringing BMX stunts like spins, hand grabs, and no-hands seat grabs to an already extreme sport. With signature moves like the Superman Seat Grab Indian Air (flying through the air, feet off the pedals, bike out in front, one hand on the bars), he won both the 2003 Joyride Slopestyle Expression Session, in Whistler, and the 2004 Monster Park Slopestyle Invitational, in Marquette, Michigan.

A film star too, his segments have redefined what's possible with two knobby tyres and eight inches of travel. He pulled a 360 off a 25-foot cliff in New World Disorder IV: Ride the Lightning,

and clears a 50-foot jump over a canyon in France in Disorderly Conduct. In 2004 he won the Best Air and Best Performance categories at the BIKE Magazine Video Awards and Reader Poll. He was named one of the '25 Coolest People Now' by Outside Magazine in December. He is so talented he pulls double-duty for Specialized Bicycles, appearing on both its Freeride and BMX Teams.

Gunn-Rita Dahle - (Norway)  
Mountain Bike Racer  
Born: 10 February, 1973  
Place of Birth: Stavanger, Norway

Mountain Bike Action magazine calls her 'untouchable'. The Norwegian speedster dominated in 2004 and has won 11 consecutive World Cup Cross-Country runs. She led the entire way at the Athens Olympics, even though a mechanical problem delayed her for a full minute. Her dominating performance - she beat her closest competitor by 59 seconds - won her not just the gold medal, but also three prestigious Norwegian awards: The Endurance, Performer, and Sportsperson of the Year Award. She easily won the European Championships as well. In naming her 2004 Rider of the Year, Mountain Bike magazine said: "Road or mountain, no rider showed the kind of dominance this year that Dahle did. She has not lost a world-level competition in more than two years. Her overall World Cup lead was more than 500 points to the next-placed rider."

Dallas Friday - (USA)  
Wakeboarding  
Born: 06 September, 1986  
Place of Birth: Orlando, Florida, USA

A former gymnast, Friday uses aggressive tricks and aeriels to rack up style points in wakeboarding competitions. She has been one of the most dominant athletes in any sport over the past two years, winning 13 of 15 professional women's titles in 2003 and 2004. Her major victories over that span include two Indmar Performance Awards as the top female wakeboarder on the Pro Wakeboard Tour, the National and World Championships, two Malibu Open Championships, two US Masters Championships and the Vans Triple Crown of Wakeboarding Championship.

The most decorated woman wakeboarder in X Games history, she took her third gold in 2004. In October she won a slice of the biggest wakeboarding purse in history at the Gravity Games H2O in Perth, Australia. For her achievements, sports network ESPN awarded Friday the 2004 ESPY for Best Female Action Sports Athlete. Friday is the first wakeboarder, male or female, to even been nominated for an ESPY.

Mike Horn - (South Africa)  
Explorer  
Born: 16 July, 1966  
Place of Birth: Johannesburg, South Africa

In October 2004, Horn became the first man to circumnavigate the Arctic Circle without motorised transport, completing a more than two-year solo odyssey he named 'Arktos', which means bear in Greek. Horn set out in August 2002 from Norway on a 12,000mile journey through Greenland, Canada, Alaska, the Bering

Strait and Russia's Siberia. Often dragging a Kevlar sledge carrying 200 kilos of equipment and food, he faced all kinds of natural hazards including polar bears. He used a kite to pass over huge ice blocks, an efficient but dangerous way to travel at speeds of almost 100kmh.

Horn said: "I just kept moving every day - skiing, climbing, walking, sailing, kayaking, cycling and crawling - whatever man can do with two arms and two legs." Frostbite had forced Horn to abandon a first attempt in April 2002 after he took off his gloves to replace his boots in temperatures of minus 45 Fahrenheit.

Mike Horn was the 2002 Laureus World Alternative Sportsman of the Year for his journey around the Equator.

Ellen MacArthur - (England)\*WINNER

Yachtswoman / Solo Sailor

Born: 08 July, 1976

Place of Birth: Derbyshire, England

Only 28 and 5ft 3ins tall, Ellen MacArthur set the record for a round-the-world solo sail. She was, since 2001, already the fastest woman and youngest person ever to make a solo circumnavigation. Then she set off from Falmouth in autumn, and proceeded to beat the existing record of Francis Joyon of France by one day. In the end, MacArthur completed the 27,000-mile journey in 71 days, 14 hours, 18 minutes and 33 seconds. On her arduous journey, MacArthur battled hurricanes, dodged icebergs and whales and endured endless nights en route through some of the world's most notorious weather spots - past the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa and round Cape Horn in South America. She never slept for more than 15-30 minutes at a stretch, just four hours a day.

The feat earned her commendations from the Queen, who will confer on her the title 'Dame', the female equivalent of a knighthood; from the Royal Navy, which made her an honorary Lt. Commander; and from Time Magazine, which named her a 'Hero of 2004'. Almost forgotten is the fact that MacArthur last year missed out on a new West-East Transatlantic record by only 75 minutes.

Shane McConkey - (USA)

Freeskier, BASE Jumper

Born: 30 December, 1969

Place of Birth: Vancouver, USA

An extreme skiing champion and founder of the International Free-Skier Association, McConkey is immensely talented and versatile, once skiing a 45-degree, 2,000ft British Columbia slope on water skis. He spent much of 2004 jumping off cliffs, defying gravity and making 200-metre turns on steep Alaskan mountain faces. During the year he also honed his new skill - ski-BASE-jumping, using a parachute to stitch together otherwise unthinkable sequences. For instance he would throw a back flip off a high ramp, land, ski, ditch his poles, then throw a front flip off a cliff, ripping his parachute cord and sailing back down to earth.

His stunning feats in the new film Yearbook included skiing down the sheer summit of the Eiger, Switzerland's frightening and imposing 13,025-foot peak, throwing not just a front flip, but two of them, before opening his parachute. The jaw-dropping sequence won the two biggest awards at Powder Magazine's prestigious Video Awards, the Readers' Poll and the Full-Throttle Award - his second straight Full-Throttle.

OTHER WINNERS:

\*Boston Red Sox won the inaugural Laureus Spirit of Sport Award, a new honour which celebrates a remarkable feat during the sporting year, for their history-defying success in winning baseball's World Series for the first time in 86 years.

The Laureus Spirit of Sport Award is bestowed by Laureus on those individual athletes or teams who, through their remarkable success, their refusal to accept defeat or their unquestionable contribution to the enjoyment of the game, encapsulate the true spirit of sport.

\*The Laureus Sport for Good Award was presented to Northern Ireland's Gerry Storey who has spent a lifetime training boxers of all denominations at the Holy Family Gymnasium in Belfast. The Laureus Sport For Good Award recognises the amazing achievements of men and women who have used sport to transform their communities.

For centuries, the people of Ireland have been divided by religion, politics and - until recently in the North - by barbed wire, bombs and bullets. In the middle of it all, on the streets of Belfast one boxing gym stood as a lone sanctuary from the violence.

The head coach, a survivor of four separate bombing attempts, carried on teaching children on both sides of the paramilitary divide.... and he did it in the same gym, at the same time.

Laureus celebrate his remarkable achievement, for he was able to do what centuries of political and religious groups could not - UNITE people.....ironically enough, by fighting.