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# Slovenski šolski muzej

Slovenian School Museum

Marjan Bizjan  
Istanbul

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Naj slovenski atleti •  
Slovenia's Top Athletes

Josipina Turnograjska  
Etiopija • Ethiopia

vrh uspehov naše atletike, kjer ostaja kljub kasnejšim uspehom drugih atletinj vse do danes.

Leta 1999 je Slovenija dočkala tudi prvo odličje na svetovnem prvenstvu – v španski Sevilli ga je s tretjim mestom v skoku v daljino osvojil Celjan **Gregor Cankar**. Tako kot zakonca Bilač je Cankar treniral pod vodstvom Srdjana Djordjevića in najdlje pristal pri sijajnih 840 centimetrih. Njegova kariera bi bila lahko še veliko uspešnejša, a žal je imel sloki Celjan velike težave s prestopi, zaradi katerih je pogosto ostal brez uvrstitve.

V začetku novega tisočletja je začela blesteti tudi Velenjčanka **Jolanda Čeplak**. Leta 2002 je ob zmagi na evropskem prvenstvu postavila še vedno veljaven svetovni dvoranski rekord v teku na 800 metrov (1:55.82). Isto leto je bila nepremagljiva tudi na evropskem prvenstvu na prostem, kasneje pa je zmagala še na številnih velikih mitingih. Vrhunec njene kariere so bile olimpijske igre v Atenah leta 2004, kjer je v epskem finišu osvojila bron. Kasneje je atletinja, ki se je zaradi prijaznejših davkov začasno preselila v Monte Carlo, v formi nihala in imela težave z dopiškimi obtožbami. Te je sicer zanikala, a nedolžnosti ni uspela dokazati.

Leta 2006 je Škofjeločan **Matic Osovnikar** na evropskem prvenstvu v Göteborgu za Slovenijo osvojil še en bron, in sicer v teku na 100 metrov. Naslednje leto se je kot prvi belopolti šprinter po dveh desetletjih uvrstil v finale velikega tekmovanja v tej disciplini – na svetovnem prvenstvu v Osaki je osvojil sedmo mesto. Tu je postavil tudi svoj osebni rekord – 10.13. Lani jeseni se je 31-letni atlet, po izobrazbi zobozdravnik, ki ga je dotlej treniral Albert Šoba, preselil v London. Po dveh slabših sezonah se je odločil, da bo skušal nekdanjo formo doseči s trenersko pomočjo Linforda Christieja, Britanca, ki je med drugim leta 1992 osvojil v šprintu olimpijski naslov.

Svetovno prvenstvo v Osaki je prineslo tudi prvo od medalj metalca kladiva **Primoža Kozmusa**. Atlet, ki je bil razglašen za najboljšega slovenskega športnika kar trikrat (2007/08/09), je prišel v Osako s precejšnjimi izkušnjami z velikih tekmovanj. Leta 2003 je bil na svetovnem prvenstvu peti, leto kasneje pa še šesti na olimpijskih igrah v Atenah. Zatem se je poldrugo leto otepal s težavami, povezanimi s hrbtom, in jih uspešno saniral. V Osaki je osvojil srebro kot napoved naslova olimpijskega zmagovalca in naslednje leto ga je dobil v Ptičjem gnezdu v Pekingju. Leta 2009 je v Berlinu osvojil še naslov svetovnega prvaka. Tem vzponom je sledilo nepričakovano slovo od atletike. A lani jeseni je Kozmus, ki se je medtem poročil, dobil otroka in v domači Brestanici odprl hostel, odločitev preklical. Dotedanjega dolgoletnega trenerja Vlada Keva je zamenjal z Marjanom Ogorevcem, ki je dotlej s Kozmusom sodeloval kot bioterapevt. Njune oči so uprte v leto 2012, ko v Londonu načrtuje obrambo naslova olimpijskega prvaka.

Slovenija ima še vrsto odličnih atletskih dosežkov. Denimo bron **Marije Šestak** v troskoku na svetovnem dvoranskem prvenstvu v Valencii leta 2008, naslov evropske prvakinje v krosu, ki ga je leta 2002 osvojila **Helena Javornik**, pa letošnji naslov svetovnega prvaka v gorskem maratonu **Mitje Kosovelja** ... Na obzorju pa so tudi vedno novi mladi atleti, ki se zgledujejo po uspehih tistih, ki smo jih tu kratko predstavili.



## Slovenia's Top Athletes

Text: **Marjan Žiberna** Photography: **Stanko Gruden/STA**

THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN ATHLETICS WILL BE HELD FROM 27 August to 4 September in the South Korean city of Daegu. Of course there is some truth in the old Slovenian saying that "every beggar praises his beggar's bag", or everyone blows their own trumpet (and in this regard, as a former athlete I am in on this too), but it is true that alongside football, athletics is the most global sport. The number of countries represented by athletes in the biggest competitions, including the world championships, cannot be matched by any other sport; the fact is, the majority of athletic disciplines can be pursued even in countries where some people still go hungry. So the competition in athletics is exceptional. It is encouraging that the part played by almost pocket-sized Slovenia is significantly greater than you would imagine, given its population size. At this point in time we are not going to start speculating on how Slovenia's athletes will perform in Korea, but we can take a little look at some of their major past achievements. We do have quite a few names in the queen of sports that have contributed some important pieces to the world mosaic.

# ↳ SLOVENIA'S TOP ATHLETES }

If we take a look back at the time before Slovenia struck out on its own, at least three names stand out – **Stanko Lorgar** and **Nataša Urbančič** from Celje and **Draga Stamejčič** from Ljubljana. In 1958, at the European Championships in Stockholm, Lorgar earned a bronze medal in the 110-metre hurdles, which was the first medal for a Slovenian at any of the major competitions, Urbančič, who recently passed away, also won a silver, in javelin at the European Championships in Rome in 1974, after ranking sixth and fifth in the Olympics in Mexico City and Munich, respectively. The time between that saw magnificent performances by the all-rounder Stamejčič. After securing fifth place in the pentathlon at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, she set a world record in the 80-metre hurdles. This is one of two world records set by Slovenians. By Slovenian women, to be precise – the other record was set by the athlete Jolanda Čeplak.

Slovenian athletes had been very successful within the former Yugoslavia, especially those from the Kladivar club in Celje (one of its members, **Rok Kopitar**, came in fifth in the 400 metres hurdles at the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow), but they truly blossomed in the previous two decades. In 1990 the Postojna native **Borut Bilač** won bronze at the European Championships, which were held in the Croatian city of Split, in the long jump. In fact, the biggest successes in the first half of the '90s were in the Bilač family. In 1992 Borut married the outstanding German high-jumper Britta Vörös, who (as **Britta Bilač**) won the crown of the European champion in 1994 in Helsinki, and a year later at the world indoor championships she also won silver. Her personal record, which can still cause problems for the best, stands at exactly 200 centimetres.

Meanwhile **Brigita Bukovec** had already been blazing her own trail in the 100 metres hurdles. The Ljubljana athlete, a protégé of trainer Jurij Kastelic, crowned her series of major wins and medals by securing silver at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. This was the first Olympic medal for Slovenian athletics, and ranked Brigita as the supreme Slovenian athlete, a position she still holds today despite some later successes from other women athletes.

In 1999, Slovenia finally won its first world championship medal – in the Spanish city of Seville - **Gregor Cankar** from Celje came third in the long jump. Like Borut and Britta Bilač, Cankar trained under Srdjan Djordjević, and his efforts landed him with a magnificent personal best jump of 840 centimetres. His career could have been even more outstanding, but sadly the slender Celje native had a lot of problems with overstepping, which disqualified out many of his jumps.

The start of the new millennium also saw the rise to prominence of the Velenje athlete **Jolanda Čeplak**. In 2002, with a victory at the European Championships, she set what still stands as a world indoor record for the 800 metres (1:55.82). In the same year, she was unbeatable at the outdoor European Championships, and she also secured wins later at numerous major events. The pinnacle of her career came in the 2004 Olympics in Athens, where she won bronze in an epic finish. Later on, after moving for a time to Monte Carlo, where the tax burden was gentler on her, the athlete suffered inconsistent form and had problems with accusations of using performance-enhancing drugs. She denied the claims, but was unable to prove her innocence.



In 2006, the Škofja Loka athlete **Matic Osovnikar** earned a bronze medal for Slovenia in the 100-metre race at the European Championships in Gothenberg. The following year he qualified for the final of a major competition in this event, coming in seventh at the World Championships in Osaka. Here he set his own personal record of 10.13. Last autumn, the 31-year-old athlete, a dentist by profession, who had previously trained under Albert Šoba, moved to London. After two indifferent seasons, he decided to try to regain his earlier form with some training help from Linford Christie, the British sprinter who won the Olympic title in 1992.

The World Championships in Osaka also brought the first medal in the haul of hammer-thrower **Primož Kozmus**. This athlete, who has been named best Slovenian sports person three times now (2007, 2008 and 2009), came to Osaka with considerable experience from major competitions. In 2003, he came in fifth in the world championships, and a year later he secured sixth place at the Athens Olympics. Then, for a year and a half, he struggled with back-related trouble, which he managed to overcome. In Osaka he won silver, a declaration of intent to secure the Olympic title, and the following year he indeed won the title at the Bird's Nest in Beijing. In 2009 he also won the world championship in Berlin. This rise was followed by his unexpected departure from athletics. But last autumn Kozmus, who meanwhile got married, became a father and opened a hostel in his native Brestanica, reversed that decision. He replaced his long-time trainer Vlado Kevo with Marjan Ogorevc, who had previously worked with Kozmus as his biotherapist. His eyes are focused on 2012, when he plans to defend his Olympic title at the London Games.

Slovenia has recorded a range of other outstanding athletic achievements. For instance, the bronze of **Marija Šestak** in the triple jump at the world indoor championships in Valencia in 2008, the title of European cross-country champion secured in 2002 by **Helena Javornik**, and this year's title of world mountain marathon champion won by **Mitja Kosovelj**. There is also a steady influx of young new athletes on the horizon, looking to emulate the successes of those mentioned briefly here. ↪

