Why reaching the start line is worth gold to Qatari sprinter

Level 1 • Elementary

1 Warmer

How many Olympic sports events can you write down in two minutes?

2 Find the information

Quickly skim-read the article to find the answers to these questions.
1. Where is Noor al-Malki from?
2. Where will she be in the summer of 2012?
3. Why will she be there?

3 Key words

Write the key words from the article next to the meanings below. The paragraph numbers have been given to help you. Then find the words in the article to read them in context.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>barrier</th>
<th>heat</th>
<th>heroines</th>
<th>participation</th>
<th>prime</th>
<th>represent</th>
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<th>coach</th>
<th>encourage</th>
<th>motivation</th>
<th>presence</th>
<th>sprinting</th>
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Level 1 • Elementary

London 2012: why reaching the start line is worth gold to Qatari sprinter

Andy Bull
01 June, 2012

1 Even for a 17-year-old, Noor al-Malki is small: just over 5ft (1.52m) tall and a little under 45kg. This summer, Noor will become the first female athlete ever to represent Qatar in the Olympics.

2 Her active participation should last about 13 seconds, which is how long it takes her to run the 100m. For the Olympics, that is slow. Qatar had to get a special allowance from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) just to get her a place on the starting blocks.

3 Noor is likely to finish last in her heat. But she will break a barrier that has stood far longer than 24 years. Noor doesn't have heroines: there are no Qatari female role models in sport.

4 Qatar is trying to show the IOC that it is now willing and able to increase women’s sport in Qatar and across the Middle East.

5 Qatar wanted to host the 2020 Olympic Games but the intense summer heat meant the Games would have to be in October and not August. They plan to try again for the 2024 Games, when Noor will be 29 and in her athletic prime.

6 Qatar is also sending a swimmer, Nada Arkaji, 17, and a rifle shooter, Bahia al-Hamad, 19. The three young women are close friends. Their presence will help London 2012 become the first Olympics where the split between male and female athletes is 50-50.

7 Only 42% of Olympians in Beijing in 2008 were women. Only three of the 204 countries which took part did not send women for religious and cultural reasons: Qatar, Brunei and Saudi Arabia. This year, Brunei’s Olympic committee is sending a female 400m hurdler, Maziah Mahusin, as part of its 2012 team. That just leaves Saudi Arabia, which is not sending any female athletes.

8 Noor’s family was sporty: her brothers played football and her sisters played handball. She started sprinting in school competitions in 2008 and was spotted by the national coach.

9 She is one of 50 athletes who train at Qatar’s centre for women’s sport. “The centre tells girls like me that we have done a good job and we deserve to have special treatment,” she said. “It gives us hope and motivation.” Noor says many people are surprised when they find out what she does. “Traditionally, sport is not for women in an area like this. It is not common to see a female champion.”

10 Noor is not going to London for a medal. “I could not believe it when they told me I was going to the Olympics,” she said. “It was a shock but it was also a source of immense happiness and pride. It is the dream of every athlete in Qatar and I will be taking that with me. I am nervous but I try to focus on the fact that I am going for a specific reason, which is to represent Qatari women and to encourage more women to get into sport.”

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Note: Since, this article was written, Saudi Arabia has announced that it will allow women to compete in London 2012. In a statement issued on 24th June, the Saudi embassy in London said that women could compete as long as they qualify.
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4 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the information in the article? Underline the parts of the article where you can find the information. Correct any statements that are false.

1. Qatar is sending three young sports women to the Olympic Games in London.
2. They will represent their country at running, swimming and cycling.
3. Brunei is the only country in the Middle East which does not send women athletes to the Olympics.
4. The 2020 Olympic Games will be in Qatar.
5. Noor is the only sporty person in her family.
6. Noor trains in Qatar at a sports centre for women.
7. Traditionally, sport in Qatar is not for women.
8. Noor thinks she will win a gold medal for her country.

5 Discussion

Discuss the questions below in small groups.

• Do you think the International Olympic Committee was right to give Noor al-Malki a special allowance to compete in the Olympic Games?
• Will you be watching this year’s Olympics? Which are your favourite events to watch?

6 Alternative Olympic events

Not everyone is good at sports. Use your imagination to think of new events for an ‘Alternative Olympic Games’.

Complete this sentence to start:
I would like to represent my country at …

7 Web tasks

The best website for information about this year’s Olympic Games is www.london2012.com.
Go to the website and look for interesting information to tell other students.
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KEY

1   Warmer

You can find the full list of sports for the London 2012 Games at www.london2012.com/sports.

2   Find the information

1. Qatar
2. London, UK
3. to take part in the summer Olympics

3   Key words

1. represent
2. participation
3. heat
4. barrier
5. heroines
6. prime
7. presence
8. sprinting
9. coach
10. treatment
11. motivation
12. encourage

4   Comprehension check

1. T (paras 1 and 6)
2. F (paras 1 and 6) – running, swimming and rifle shooting
3. F (para 7) – At the time the article was written, Saudi Arabia was the only country not sending female athletes to London 2012.
4. F (para 5) Qatar’s wanted to host the 2020 Olympics but it’s too hot in August; it plans to bid for the 2024 Olympics.
5. F (para 8) – Her brothers played football and her sisters played handball.
6. T (para 9)
7. T (para 9)
8. F (para 10) – Noor doesn’t think she will win a medal; she is going to represent Qatari women and to encourage more women to get into sport.

5   Discussion

students’ own answers

6   Alternative Olympic events

This is a chance for the students to use their imaginations and to talk about things they are good at, which may not necessarily be sporty. Ideas could include: cooking, knitting, house painting, dog-walking, hairdressing, etc. Write the ideas on the board and then see who in the class would be willing to enter these new events.

8   Web task

students’ own answers

Teacher’s note: You can find lots of educational resources and ideas for using the topic of the Olympics in class at London 2012’s Get Set website: http://getset.london2012.com/en/resources.