

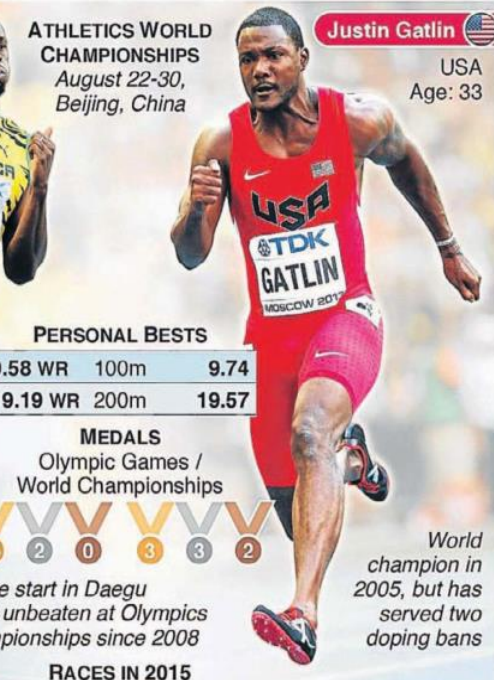
Bolt and Gatlin set for showdown in Beijing

Usain Bolt, the world's fastest man, and in-form sprinter Justin Gatlin are set to contest an explosive duel at the World Championships, with Bolt's track domination and world record under threat



Usain Bolt
 Jamaica
 Age: 28

ATHLETICS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS
 August 22-30,
 Beijing, China



Justin Gatlin
 USA
 Age: 33

PERSONAL BESTS

9.58 WR	100m	9.74
19.19 WR	200m	19.57

MEDALS
 Olympic Games /
 World Championships

14	2	0	3	3	2
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Apart from false start in Daegu in 2011, Bolt is unbeaten at Olympics or World Championships since 2008

World champion in 2005, but has served two doping bans

RACES IN 2015

<p>April: Wins exhibition in Rio de Janeiro in disappointing 10.12</p>	<p>May: Personal best of 9.74 in Doha – world best in 2015</p>
<p>July: After struggles with form and fitness, wins 100m final at London Anniversary Games in 9.87, in only third race of season</p>	<p>June: Beats Bolt's Diamond League record in Rome</p> <p>July: Victory in Monaco is fourth win under 9.80 this season</p>

Source: IAAF Pictures: Getty Images © GRAPHIC NEWS

Doping cloud sours clash

Tests row set to mar Bolt-Gatlin showdown

USAIN Bolt's showdown with Justin Gatlin was always going to be the most highly anticipated clash of the World Athletics Championships in Beijing later this month.

But with track and field rocked by doping allegations it now looks like being a battle for the very soul of the sport.

The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) hit back at charges it failed to act on hundreds of suspicious tests after data from thousands of blood samples was leaked to the media.

Calling the allegations sensationalist and confusing, the IAAF defended its drugs testing procedures and said it was cooperating with the independent World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) in an investigation.

What cannot be disputed, however, is that Gatlin is a proven drugs cheat with two positive tests for banned substances that would have resulted in a life ban had he not cooperated with the authorities.

Bolt, on the other hand, is the most bankable track and field athlete of the modern era. His clean doping record is as much a part of his huge popularity as his undoubted charisma and dominance of men's sprinting for much of the last seven years.

The prospect, therefore, of Gatlin emerging as champion of the blue riband sprint on the

evening of August 23 in Beijing could deal another blow to the credibility of the sport.

"You are talking about the most loved, best known, most iconic track and field athlete out there, Usain Bolt," Bob Dorfman, a sports marketing expert at Baker Street Advertising in San Francisco, said.

"So if he is beaten by somebody who has had drug issues in the past, it wouldn't help the sport." Unfortunately for the IAAF, that is a scenario which looks very probable.

While world record holder



Bolt has struggled to hit his straps this season, the 33-year-old Gatlin is in the form of his life and unbeaten over 100 and 200m since 2013.

"The average person, when they look at his age and see the fact he has been suspended in the past, I think a lot of people are just going to look at it and say, 'well he found a way around the testing'," George Belch, a sports marketing professor at San Diego State University, said.

"Given his age, people are going to have a difficult time accepting the fact that he could be running faster than ever." Even if Gatlin fails to beat

Bolt, his compatriot Tyson Gay or Jamaican Asafa Powell might. Both have served doping bans in the last two years.

Bolt has always prided himself on being a "big meeting" runner, however, and could yet rediscover the form that sent him rocketing into the sporting stratosphere on two sultry evenings at the same Bird's Nest stadium in 2008.

Since he won both the 100m and 200m in world record times at the Beijing Olympics, only a false start in the 100 at the 2011 world championships in Daegu prevented Bolt from sweeping the sprint titles at all four major global meetings.

The 28-year-old Jamaican is by far the best-known of the 2,000 athletes expected to compete at the championships from August 22 to 30.

That number is unlikely to drop much despite the IAAF initiating disciplinary action against 28 athletes on Tuesday after retesting samples from the 2005 and 2007 world championships with new technology.

Most of those responsible for the 32 adverse results have retired or are already serving bans, the IAAF said.

The cloud of doping will hang over the last days of Senegalese Lamine Diack's 16-year reign as IAAF president, which ends on Wednesday.

Former Olympians Sebastian Coe and Sergey Bubka will contest the election to succeed him. – Reuters

