

REBECCA NADEN / PA

# She may say that she doesn't care, but the new golden girl will be forever tarnished

**Rick Broadbent** Beijing

Christine Ohuruogu completed her journey from sporting exile to the top of the Olympic podium when she won the 400 metres in the Bird's Nest stadium yesterday.

However, the wild celebrations at her family home in Stratford, East London, a short jog from the site of the new Olympic stadium, were tempered by questions about her suitability to be the poster girl for the 2012 Games.

Ohuruogu, 24, is now the most successful track athlete in Britain, with the Commonwealth, world and Olympic titles, but she will be haunted for ever by the three missed drugs tests that resulted in her being banned from the sport for a year. "I don't really care what people say or think," she said yesterday. "I'm happy."

Her time of 49.62 seconds was enough for her to beat the favourite, Sanya Richards of the USA, and become the first British woman to win the event and only the fourth to claim a gold medal on the track.

The taint of suspicion continues to divide opinion, however. Under new International Olympic Committee rules she would have been barred from competing in Beijing because those who have served a doping ban must miss the Games after the ban expires. The rule is not applied retrospectively.

Speaking after she won the world title in Japan last August, Lord Coe said: "She could be one of our ambassadors, but we have never discussed anyone being the face of 2012."

Last night he was part of the presentation party that handed the medals and bouquets to Ohuruogu, Shericka Williams and Richards. "He was really happy, it's been a great British Olympics," she said.

Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, sent his congratulations, and Gordon Brown has said he will send a personal letter to all of Great Britain's Olympic medal winners.

Ohuruogu missed three random drug tests between October 2005 and July 2006. Athletes have to say where they will be for an hour every day for five days a week; a UK Sport tester can then turn up at the allotted place unannounced.

After the third missed test, Ohuruogu received a one-year ban from the International Association of Athletics Federations, athletics' governing body, and had her British Sport Lottery funding stopped. She took her case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, but it upheld the ban while stating that there had been "no suggestion that she is guilty of taking drugs" and that "this case can be viewed in all the circumstances as a busy young athlete being forgetful".

Ohuruogu was also banned for life from the Olympics because of a British Olympic Association bylaw barring anyone with a doping conviction from representing Britain. Ohuruogu completed her one-year exile only three weeks before the World Championships in Japan last year, where she made a remarkable comeback by winning the 400 metres. She then overturned her BOA ban on appeal. The independent Sports Dispute Resolutions Panel agreed that there had been significant mitigating circumstances.

Her reason for missing the second test was that she was at home finishing an article for a charity newspaper when she should have been at Northwick Park, North London. Ohuruogu said she spoke to the tester,

who told her she was allowed to wait for only an hour, when it would have taken the athlete 90 minutes to make the trip.

The final straw came when she was not at the Mile End stadium when a tester turned up. "We went to train at Mile End but there was a school sports day so we made a last-minute change and went to Crystal Palace," she said.

It remains to be seen whether London 2012 and commercial sponsors

now embrace her. However, Olympic greats such as Jonathan Edwards and Steve Cram applauded her triumph. "I have never seen an athlete prepare for races so perfectly," Edwards said. Cram added: "Christine is almost a reluctant hero, but she is made for the big occasion."

Ohuruogu is also a resilient figure. One of eight children born to Nigerian parents, she took a part-time job at Newham Council in East London

during her exile and ran up debts of £20,000. When asked whether the controversy had changed her, she said last week: "I think it just defined who I was. I'm the same person, I'm just a bit more robust than I would have been."

Britain's previous female track champions have all been honoured. Ann Packer is an MBE, Sally Gunnell an OBE and Kelly Holmes is a Dame. Time will tell whether Ohuruogu's past prevents her joining them.



Ohuruogu leaving her appeal hearing

## Fame and fortune

### Victoria Pendleton

Young, fresh-faced and already has a reasonably high-profile, I expect her to attract attention from fast-moving consumer goods brands. High street brands will be interested. She has already worked with adidas, but expect to see a lot more of her



### Ben Ainsley

(above) Already an accomplished gold medallist, and more success means more interest

### Chris Hoy

He comes across well on television so I would expect him to carve out a media career. He should not go for the short-term buck but concentrate on quality brands. A knighthood would come in handy

### Rebecca Adlington (left)

Now she is front-page news brands will be clamouring to get a

slice of the action, but she is only 19, so the really big opportunities will come in 2012 when the Games are on home soil

### Rebecca Romero

With Olympic medals in two

different sports — rowing and cycling — she is a unique selling proposition. She will attract high street brands and her ability to win in different disciplines will interest financial institutions

### Christine Ohuruogu

That she missed three drug tests is not going to hurt her. She is a winner, and sponsors and brands will be very interested

### Louis Smith

The first Briton to win an individual medal in gymnastics. This will make him stand out and gives him a great appeal to sponsors

Dominic Curran, director, Synergy Sponsorship



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