

A LAST, LAST GOODBYE



By Sebastian Coe Retirement is always a flurry of last goodbyes : the last this, the last that : the last run through some old, well known routines. I'm now in the Commonwealth Games village in Auckland, going through those routines as an athlete for the last time.

And this really is, not could be as in the Rolling Stones' song, *The Last Time*. One dictionary definition of "last" is "latest up until now." But after this set of races, this Commonwealth Games on a foreign field, I shall get on quickly and firmly with the other things in my life.

I thought back this week to my other recent goodbyes, back to the Barcelona World Cup final in September, which was my last appearance in a British vest in Europe.

It felt so good to wear that vest again after the Olympic disappointment the summer before.

But the memory will always be flavoured with the strange aftertaste of might have beens; would I have won gold rather than silver but for the incident with Abdi Bile in that last 100 metres ?

Then a few days later came my last farewell to a British crowd in a marvellous night at the Crystal Palace National Stadium.

Going through the pre-race routines from home for the final time : packing, toast and tea in mid-afternoon, 17 hours on the M25... those old familiar things.

I shall never... forget the reception I was given, before and after the race. Fifteen minutes of waving, smiling emotion, a hurried, breathless speech ; then exit to press conference, my eyes and face saying more than my tongue.

I wondered whether I should have left it there and called a halt to the hard, heart-slogging effort.

But the day before Crystal Palace, I had announced I would go for these Commonwealth Games because it was the one major competition I had missed — through injuries — and because I wanted to give the event my support.

I had said that I would make one more throw of the dice. And I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

So here I am Auckland. The preparations are over and I'm ready to go.

To get to this stage I have followed my usual strategy for a big meeting, to be ready for five tough, quick races (at 800 and 1500 metres) within six days against some of the best in the world.

The background work with my coach was done in England between October and December — all the hard conditioning on the roads, the track, in the gym to build up strength and stamina.

FINAL PREPARATION

I completed the work in Melbourne in December and early January, when it was also important for my body and mind to adjust to this hemisphere, time, temperature. Now it's the final sharpening, the speed work, almost all on the track.

So I'm back for the last time in the village routine, living and working in a small community of competitors from throughout the Commonwealth.

The village is crowded — seven or eight share a living unit — and for the first time I am staying out of it at night, as are others in the England team, at least until the race days.

But it's nice to be back among some old faces and some of the new ones.

There's a shorthand between us all based on the cocoon of the concentration we inhabit.

Nothing matters but the event, the competitions: we look, watch, dream, worry, laugh, eat and sleep the sport and the day.

Each day, the main routine is the track with my coach, the watchers and the teammates.

Yesterday I was studied and timed in everything I did by the whole of the Kenyan middle distance track team and their coaches. They believe they can win all the distance events from 400 metres upwards. Well, they'll get a fight. And there are some very good Britons out here.

So what's my aim? Simply to maintain my record of winning a medal at every major championships in which I've competed. As throughout my career. I dream of the best; and my routines are dedicated to doing the best I can.

After all, it's my last go in an English vest, my last goodbye.

S. C.

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AT THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES SEBASTIAN COE RACES FOR THE LAST TIME

Success or failure, the important thing is to participate.

