

Race against time for Paula Radcliffe

Paula Radcliffe has not given up hope of regaining her marathon title at this summer's World Championships in Berlin.



Best foot forward: Paula Radcliffe might struggle to compete in Berlin this summer after a bunion operation

By Simon Hart

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Radcliffe underwent surgery three weeks ago to remove a bunion from her right foot which is believed to have been the root cause of all her recent injury problems.

Radcliffe, who had the operation in California and is now recovering at home in Monaco, was back on an exercise bike within five days of her surgery and hopes to resume running in the next two to three weeks on an anti-gravity treadmill installed at her high-altitude training base in Font Romeau, France.

A spokeswoman for the world record-holder said: "If things go well, the World Championships are still an option. Obviously Paula has got to wait and see how things recover but that is what she would like to do."

It is the second successive year that Radcliffe, 35, has been left with a race against time to be fit for a major championship after a stress fracture of her right femur wrecked her preparations for the Beijing Olympics, where she finished 23rd.

Doctors now believe the bunion was the cause of all her recent problems, including a fractured toe that she sustained on a training run in the United States last month which forced her to withdraw from this month's London Marathon. A toe tendon injury also ruled her out of the 2008 race.

Her spokeswoman said: "It's now very clear that all the injuries over the last couple of years have been because of this foot problem, including the femur stress fracture last summer. The pressure on the hip was because of the foot and the compensation she was making.

"We've just got to hope that the recovery now goes to plan. But whatever happens, hopefully she will be better for good. The surgeon is really positive about that."

Despite her injury problems, Radcliffe proved that she is still major force over 26.2 miles with her imperious victory in the New York Marathon in November and, if fully fit, would be one of the favourites for gold in Berlin.

That would be good news for the British team, who failed to reach their medal target in Beijing and have been set a new goal of between four and seven medals in Germany.

Radcliffe took the world title in Helsinki in 2005 but missed the 2007 World Championships in Osaka after giving birth to daughter Isla earlier in the year.

Her operation was performed by leading foot surgeon Amol Saxena, whom she consulted about her long-term problems following her victory in New York. Last week she was examined by another foot specialist in Munich and was told her recovery was on schedule.