

NEWS RELEASE

UNIVERSITY
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US Olympian collects honour and takes to the track

US Olympic athlete, Marla Runyan, will add another 'trophy' to her medal collection when she is presented with an Honorary Fellowship of the University of Central Lancashire in Preston on Monday 8th July.

Middle-distance runner Marla, a 1500m finalist in the Sydney Olympics, is almost completely blind and is being awarded the Honorary Fellowship in recognition of her success and commitment to her sport and to other visually impaired young people.

And not wishing to alter her routine whilst in the city, Marla is to use the running track at the University's £12 million Sports Arena to keep up with her training.

The first registered blind athlete in the US to take part in the Olympic Games, Marla is also a Pan-American Gold Medallist and 2001 US Outdoor Champion, as well as being a national class heptathlete. Off the athletics track, she has degrees in the education of deaf and deaf/blind children.

Since the age of nine, Marla has suffered from Stargardt's disease, a type of macular degeneration resulting in the loss of ability to see details, and can now only make out shapes and colours. Alan Roff, Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University, said: "Marla's focused approach to everything that she takes on, and her determination not to let a disability get in the way of her life plans, make her an excellent role model for all students. Everyone will at some time face a serious challenge in their lives and can only be inspired by the way Marla has overcome hers so successfully.

"The University is delighted to recognise her success with the award of an Honorary Fellowship, which is particularly appropriate for our students on the Deaf Studies degree programme."

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Notes to editors: Marla will be presented with her award by the University Chancellor, Sir Richard Evans, at the Degree and Awards Ceremony on Monday 8th July at 2.30pm at Preston Guild Hall. She will be available for photographs and interviews before the ceremony at 2pm. Please contact the Media Office at the University of Central Lancashire for further details.

Photo opportunity: Marla will be training at Preston Sports Arena between 9am and 11am on Tuesday 9th July. Please contact the Media Office for further details.