

RIGHT: Hartmann at his new clinic in Iten, Kenya, with Mo Farah (left) and 2010 world cross champion Joseph Ebuaya

BELOW: When not treating athletes, Hartmann is a keen veteran cyclist and is seen here climbing Alpe d'Huez en route to winning his age category in the gruelling Marmotte race in 2009

display in his "Hartmann Collection" included gifts and signed memorabilia from people such as Lance Armstrong. It was more impressive than anything I have seen in England.

So, given this, I eagerly looked forward to the launch of his autobiography earlier this winter. By now, I thought I knew him well, but I still wondered if any of the 'magic' would be explained. The idea that he had disappeared to Lanzarote for a few weeks to bash it out – all in long-hand – merely added to the intrigue.

The first thing that surprises me about his book – *Born to Perform: how sport has shaped my life* – is that so much of it focuses on his early life as a triathlon pioneer. Long before he took up physical therapy, he was a seven-time Irish triathlon champion and Hawaii Ironman competitor during the Eighties and felt a duty to describe in the book the early days of a sport that was, at the time, in its infancy.

Given this, the book will be of huge interest to triathlon fanatics. He explains his races and training in great detail and with huge honesty as he talks about the rivalries and occasional bust ups with bureaucracy. This part of his life ends in tragedy, too, because a serious bike accident in 1991 when his wheels hit an armadillo while doing mile reps on a Florida highway. He would not compete seriously in triathlon again, but he took the same triathlon work ethic and elite athlete mentality into a career in sports injuries prevention with stunning effects.

His first Olympics, therefore, was not as a triathlete as he hoped but as a therapist in 1992. But he immediately found he had a skill for helping injured athletes get back on their feet and he immersed himself in the job. By accident, he had found his true niche in life.

As Sonia O'Sullivan writes in the book's foreword: "It's not just that he is the best physio I know. It's the positivity and belief he brings out in me ... Gerard is the most energising person I know ... and the most pro-active person that an athlete from any sport can have in their corner."

The second half of *Born to Perform* tells the story of his experiences with athletes such as Dame Kelly Holmes and Radcliffe. He says, though, that when asked who the greatest athlete he has ever worked with is, he usually says Moses Kiptanui. "I have never witnessed an athlete run with such rhythm and grace," he writes.

After treating dozens of top Kenyan runners over the years and subsequently opening a clinic in Kenya itself, Hartmann is well placed to explain why they are so good.



He says in the book that it cannot all be down to their physical ability. "I strongly believe that it is willpower and Christian belief on top of drive and an enormous work ethic that gives them the competitive edge," he explains.

Yet one of the most impressive sights, he says, was watching Noureddine Morceli run 8x400m, with every rep under 52 seconds. Moreso, it was the fact Morceli did not jog between efforts but instead stood on the spot "incurring acidosis and lactic acid at the highest level". Hartmann adds: "He suffered like I had never seen any runner suffer."

Hartmann's book is full of inspirational stories and lessons, not all about African athletes either. He tells, of course, the story of Radcliffe and how she went from teenage also-ran in the English National Cross to world record-holder in the marathon. Similarly, he says fellow Irishman Marcus O'Sullivan had very little speed as a child and was not tipped for the top, but went on to win the world indoor 1500m title three times in addition to running 100 sub-four-minute miles.

"Neither Paula nor Marcus had obvious athletic talent in the beginning," writes Hartmann. "Their talent lay in their ability to persevere, to train hard and to endure pain – and, above all, they shared the desire to succeed and the self-belief to achieve whatever it was they set out to do."

The stories of O'Sullivan, Radcliffe and indeed Hartmann himself sum up the real ethos of the book. Triathlon history and elite athlete anecdotes aside, the biggest feature of *Born to Perform* is the advice that anyone can rise from adversity and succeed if they find something in life they are truly passionate about. Hartmann's book also contains valuable and well-written lessons about the beauty and benefits of sport and also about why keeping a balance in your life is so important.

At major events in the past, such as the 2000 Olympics, Hartmann has been part of the British athletics team, but UKA stopped using him during the Dave Collins era in order to focus on building its own GB-based medical support systems. It will be Britain's loss next year, because Hartmann is part of the Irish Olympic team's back-up squad in London 2012 and at the biggest sporting event on the planet he is definitely the kind of man you want on your side.

» *Born to Perform: how sport has shaped my life* is published by Orpen Press and is priced at €16.99

