

“Those who inspire me...”

Guest editor Oliver Townend reveals his sporting heroes, and why he admires them



Ayrton Senna (centre) had a passion and intelligence that drove his will to succeed

AYRTON SENNA

THE Brazilian racing driver, who won the Formula 1 championship three times and who was killed in the San Marino Grand Prix in 1994, was extremely passionate about what he did and completely ruthless in his pursuit of it.

He was unbelievably intelligent and knew how to get what he wanted, which didn't go down too well with the hierarchy. But his sporty visibility meant so much to him. There seems to have been a conflict between the man you read about — who was sometimes portrayed as a bad person by his competitors, although the majority of them loved and respected him — and the reality.

I think deep down he was a good person; after his death it came out that he had quietly donated millions to help poor children in his home country.

LESTER PIGGOTT

THE most famous Flat jockey of all time and nine-time winner of the Derby, he had a ferocious will to win. He's another with an intriguing personality — very unpopular with all sorts of people at different times and for different reasons, but someone who will live

forever because of who he was.

I admire his longevity — he rode his last winner aged 59. The extremes he went to in order to keep his weight down are incredible. Everyone loves a comeback and his, in 1990 after five years in retirement — which included a year's imprisonment for tax fraud — aged 55 was extraordinary. He's still as famous now as he was then, which takes some doing.

VINCENT O'BRIEN

THE greatest racehorse trainer of the 20th century (pictured, right), who conquered the National Hunt world before turning to the Flat and winning everything there was to be won, is probably my greatest hero. He did everything to the highest possible standard. The yard he developed, Ballydoyle, remains an iconic place, and it takes a very special person to create something like that.

He was known as a gambler when he started out and the authorities didn't really respect or like him to begin with, but his achievements and ability to train anything meant he became worshipped. He worked his way up from nothing to true greatness.



My greatest hero: Vincent O'Brien



'Oozes talent': Ronnie O'Sullivan's natural ability stands out



Lester Piggott's dedication and will to win make him a household name to this day



'Just a winner': AP McCoy's focus, talent and maturity have kept him at the top of his game for two decades

JOSÉ MOURINHO

THE Portuguese-born football manager, who is in his second term at Chelsea, is outpoken, charismatic and very passionate about what he does. He is an absolute, through-and-through winner and his team adore him. He is always straight to the point, and some of his quotes are fantastic — he tells his players that he'd never put the pressure on by saying they must win, but that they must not lose.

He's another very intelligent man who knows how to get the best out of people.

AP MCCOY

THE 19-time champion jump jockey's record speaks for itself. He's a phenomenon who has never lost his passion for winning, which makes me respect him more than most. He's just a winner.

But I admire the way he has matured in the spotlight; in his early days he was seen as being tough on horses and made mistakes with his mouth — as others have — and not being very approachable. Now he is a hugely popular ambassador for his sport and liked by everyone, yet his passion for winning is totally undimmed and his record will stand for a very long time. He's the only one of these "sporting heroes" who I've met and talked to.

He recently announced that he is retiring at the end of the season. I bet that was an incredibly hard decision to make. Like everyone else, I wonder what he will do next. Whatever it is, there's no doubt that he will do it with utter dedication and focus.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

THE Serbian tennis player, who has won the Australian Open for the fifth time, is obviously an outstanding athlete.



Chelsea FC manager José Mourinho knows how to get the best out of the people around him

RONNIE O'SULLIVAN

I'M not a snooker fan, but if Ronnie O'Sullivan is playing, I want to watch him. He is ambidextrous and can play with either hand, and is someone who just oozes talent in whatever he chooses to do. I find him an interesting and complex character, a perfectionist who can be highly self-critical. He intrigues people. He has been world champion five times to date, and just has an extraordinary natural talent.



The Djoker: Novak's humour and personality complement his athleticism and professionalism

But it's his fantastic character and personality that lifts him above other super-talented sportsmen. He comes across as humorous and very intelligent thinker in his interviews, and anyone who can hold on to their personality and at the same time conduct themselves professionally — and win at the very top level, time and time again — is very special.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

THE politician, who died 50 years ago, was another truly remarkable person whose path was never straight forward and whose popularity rocketed up and down during his lifetime. But he always rose again.

His refusal to surrender to Nazi Germany inspired the country. I admire his straight talking and his way with words — quotes such as: "History will be kind to me because I intend to write it" and "I am easily satisfied with the very best" — are brilliant.

He was a horseman, who said: "There is something about the outside of a horse that

is good for the inside of a man" and: "No hour of life is wasted that is spent in the saddle". He was a true leader. I have always spent the cocktail parties in the palace during Blenheim Horse Trials reading Churchill's letters instead of socialising. f&H

➤ As told to Catherine Austen

Winston Churchill: the master of navigating ups and downs, and rebounding from adversity

