

I wonder if Britons deserve Olympic champions after the way that some of us have treated Paula Radcliffe. We build our sporting stars into gods and then when they prove to be mortals, they are accused of letting themselves and their country down. That is a grossly unfair criticism from people who are willing to share the glory of an Olympic victory, but shoulder none of the sacrifices that go into it.

Radcliffe may prepare for a race with machine-like efficiency, but she is human. I don't know about the rest of you, but I have good days and bad days. We can't expect her to be any different.

Sport is unpredictable. That is what makes it so exciting. We are ready to accept that 17-year-old Amir Khan, Briton's only boxing contender can knock out the European champion, but we cannot accept that there is no such thing as a gold medal in the bag. The worst of it is that Radcliffe may have started to believe the hype herself. She couldn't cope when she slipped into fourth place. Unlike the other British marathon-runners, Radcliffe wasn't just burdened by the crushing heat, but also by the weight of expectations resting on her shoulders. At time of writing, Radcliffe hadn't explained what went wrong. But perhaps it was an overwhelming combination. Perhaps it was a bad day.

Whatever the reason, we need to be more measured in our expectations of our athletes. I have enjoyed this Olympics more than any other, but I am getting sick of hearing British commentators talk up our prospects and then have to fumble to justify disappointment a few minutes later.

There is no real reason for disappointment: just to compete in the Olympics is an achievement, but we seem to have lost sight of what it takes just to qualify for a place. Perhaps it is because we are such a nation of couch potatoes that too many people don't know what it is to run a mile let alone 26.2 miles in the hottest day in Athens this summer. One of the best commentaries I have heard this Olympics tried to bring home. I didn't catch his name but the radio commentator said that competitors in the men's high hurdles are clearing hurdles more than a metre high, the high jumpers are tackling bars the height of a house ceiling and the pole vault competitors were crossing barriers the height of a house. The TV somehow shrinks the achievement, but putting it like that really brings it home.

Therefore some of Radcliffe's most painful criticism will come from those in the know like the marathon-runner who said she should have crawled home out of respect for the other British marathon-runner not selected to compete.

But our athletes are selected on their ability to win - and Radcliffe had the 10k later this week to consider. She can still get a gold and she needs to focus on that. To do that we need to accept that she is human, fallible, and that this is not the end, and most importantly so does she.