

Thunderer: Bolt and Brexit teach us that the world is imperfect

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Along with millions of others I hoped that Usain Bolt would be victorious in his final 100 metres race. It was not to be. Bolt was not invincible after all. Isn't that a relief? Even the superheroes among us are not perfect.

There is beauty in that imperfection, recognition that life cannot be shaped according to our wishes all the time. It seems important to accept that. How gracious Bolt was in defeat, treating winning and losing just the same. That seems more important even than victory.

What about Justin Gatlin? Twice banned for drugs cheating and having "done his time", as Bolt himself generously conceded, he came back to win. To do so aged 35 must take grit and courage. Is that also worthy of our acknowledgment?

Gatlin was booed by a London crowd lauded for its sporting knowledge and fairness. Is there also beauty in redemption? Victory and defeat. One pyrrhic, the other triumphant, with just a wafer between the two. There is deep irony in this, a paradox with which we must wrestle.

The world does not conform to human expectations. Hope springs eternal but things go wrong. We have a deep need to attribute failures to the fault of others, to blame and shame — even when, if roles were reversed, we would plead mitigation, expecting to be forgiven. Do we treat others as we would hope to be treated ourselves? Are there lessons for Brexit?

The referendum result was unexpected for many. Victory for some, defeat for others — and it is still seen that way.

The margins there were small too. Will triumph turn out to be pyrrhic? Is there yet redemption in defeat? Has cheating been rewarded and humility vanquished? What comebacks might occur? Is there another race to be run with unanticipated outcomes?

The blame game should stop. We are where we are in an imperfect world. The referendum is done. However, a good dose of humility would be welcome as we ponder the uncertain future. Graciousness and generosity would go down well, especially against continued divisiveness. Willingness to review prior decisions could mark real leadership and relieve the burden of trying to meet unrealistic expectations.

The world of athletics is at a turning point. A new honesty and openness is essential. British politics seems also to be at a turning point. To make meaningful progress, we really do need a more enlightened approach.