Wisden’s five cricketers of the century, but hey, non, forget what some crusty old book says. Let’s pump up da Marley and talk about da mon, forget what some crusty old book says. Joe Frazier was a clever ducker and diver with a howitzer left hook. An Olympic gold medallist and heavyweight champ in a very strong era, his three epics with Ali immortalise him. Herb Elliott’s middle-distance career had barely begun before it was over, but the Aussie had achieved everything he wanted. In 1958, he broke the mile’s four-minute barrier 10 times, then slaughtered the field at the ’60 Olympics, winning the 1500m in world record time. Unbeaten at both the mile and 1500m, and holding both world records, he gave it away. Wayne Gretzky, you could say this Canadian is the Pele of ice hockey, except that some people, including us, reckon Maradona was better than Pele, and no serious pundit would ever dare argue that Gretzky had an equal. Four Stanley Cups with the Edmonton Oilers and nine NHL MVPs are merely the key points of a resume as glittering as the ice he played on. Michael Johnson was the king of middle-distance events, and from the mid-1990s on, the popular Moroccan dominated the 200m and the mile. Zico was the man every woman wanted to wed and every kid wanted to be. A tough, tough man, the dour personality of “Smokin’ Joe” contrasted poorly with rival Muhammad Ali’s crackerjack antics. But in the ring, Frazier was scarcely second best to anyone. Paraded as a plodding brawler, he was really a clever ducker and diver with a howitzer left hook. An Olympic gold medallist and heavyweight champ in a very strong era, his three epics with Ali immortalise him. Juan Manuel Fangio in motor sport, the name Fangio’s code for genius. The little Argentine won five F1 world crowns in the 1950s at a rate of one race win in two, during an era where the danger was extreme and skill was far more important than cars and engines. He could master a circuit within a couple of laps, drive any vehicle to its edge and was peerless during his short career. Jackie Joyner-Kersee was an American heptathlete and long jumper who dominated the Seoul 1988 and Barcelona ’92 Olympics. Miles ahead of her rivals, remarkably, she still holds the world record by a considerable margin, and is second all-time in long jump. Zico remains the archetypal Brazilian footballer. A samba package of flair and skill, the “White Pele” was a first-class dribbler and blinding finisher, scoring 52 goals in 72 internationals. But it’s his long-range scoring, especially his free-kicks, for which he’s best remembered, perplexing keepers by bending the ball in mid-air. Wayne Gretzky, The “Master Blaster” is one of Wisden’s five cricketers of the century, but hey, non, forget what some crusty old book says. Let’s pump up da Marley and talk about da mon, forget what some crusty old book says. Joe Frazier was a clever ducker and diver with a howitzer left hook. An Olympic gold medallist and heavyweight champ in a very strong era, his three epics with Ali immortalise him.