

T&FN INTERVIEW

Will Claye

by Sieg Lindstrom

Not just a man of the triple jump—the event in which he has most excelled—Will Claye is also not just a versatile horizontal jumper who had two Olympic medals to show for it by age 21 in '12. As he explained in our chat he's also a man of varied off-the-track interests from fashion to philanthropy.

While Claye, who trains with coach Jeremy Fischer at Chula Vista's Olympic Training Center, says his sport is job No. 1, he pursues his other passions with more than cursory determination.

For evidence look no farther than the Will Claye Day he held in Gainesville, Florida, last fall and plans to repeat. In 24 hours Claye visited and helped out a boys & girls club and a juvenile detention center. He did a golf scramble to aid a charity for Downs Syndrome children, cooked breakfast at an American Cancer Society home and spent the late evening hours delivering care packages to and meeting homeless people.

With the '14 USATF TJ and '15 USATF indoor LJ titles the latest feathers in his cap, Claye began this chat on the job 1 topic, his jumping.

Claye: Everything's going great. I'm just preparing myself for the outdoor season, trying to build a good foundation that I can stand

runway, which I feel is making a big difference at practice. I hope that it translates to track meets.

And in the triple jump I'm seeing a lot of improvements based off of one small technique change that I did. I used to come off the board with double arms; now I come off single-arm similar to Jonathan Edwards. So I feel a big difference in that.

T&FN: Had you ever tried that single-arm takeoff technique before?

Claye: The day that I started triple jumping it was double-arm so it was quite the habit to break but we worked on it.

I jumped at the Armory Invitational indoors and if you watch the video it looks really awkward. At that point I didn't have it down yet; I was still trying to learn it but I just was telling myself, "Don't revert, don't revert back."

Sometimes you get put in a stressful situation and you'll revert back to your old ways so I was telling myself to stick with it. After that I kept working on it and now it feels natural.

T&FN: Which event is your favorite?

Claye: I would say the triple jump. I like the triple jump more and I know the triple jump more. For the most part, when I long jump it's me just getting on the runway and using my God-given talent and not really knowing exactly what positions I'm in. It's just jumping.

But the triple jump I know technically; I know how I'm supposed to feel if I'm doing it right, and I know if I'm doing it wrong. I know the triple jump better and I think that's why I like it better right now, but that can change, though.

I feel like this year may be the year where I won't be able to pick one.

T&FN: So two more medals in Rio then?

Claye: Yes, sir, that's the goal, God willing. That's what

Claye In A Nutshell

•**Personal:** William Bundu Claye was born June 13, 1991, in Tucson, Arizona; 5-11/160 (180/72)

•**PRs:** LJ—27-2½/8.29 ('11); TJ—58-3/17.75 ('14) (7, x A)

•**Schools:** Mountain Pointe (Phoenix) HS '08; Oklahoma '10, Florida '12; now represents Nike

•**Coaches:** Larry Todd (HS); Jeremy Fischer (Oklahoma & pro); Dick Booth (Florida)

•**Major Meets:**

LJ—3)NCi, 9)NC, 2)USJ '09; 2)NCi, 3)NC, 2)US, 9)WC '11; 2)USi, 4)WCi, 2)OT, 3)OG '12; 7)US '13; 5)USi '14; 1)USi '15

TJ—2)NCi, 1)NC, 1)USJ '09; 10)NC '10; 1)NCi, 2)NC, 2)US, 3)WC '11; 1)NCi, 1)WCi, 2)OT, 2)OG '12; 2)US, 3)WC '13; 1)US '14

•**World/U.S. Rankings:**

LJ—x/2 '11; 7/1 '12; x/7 '13; x/4 '14;

TJ—x/2 '09; 5/2 '11; 2/2 '12; 4/2 '13; 2/2 '14

upon all the way up until September. We have a long season so you really need to have a good base under you.

T&FN: Have you changed anything for '15? Any technique adjustments or decisions to emphasize one event more than the other?

Claye: You know what? My long jump is actually coming along really well. I'm actually learning to long jump the right way. I switched to a hitchkick this year and that's coming along really well. I changed just a few minor things technically in my approach coming down the



“When I step on that runway I feel inspired by Muhammad Ali... I want to be the Cassius Clay of track & field”



ERROL ANDERSON/THE SPORTING IMAGE

I'm training for and I really believe that I can go and win a gold medal in both jumps.

T&FN: *Is there one jump in your career that's felt the closest to perfection?*

Claye: I had maybe three jumps like that. One of them I didn't finish. I was so excited in the middle of it that I did it right that I couldn't even finish it. That was my last jump in the Olympic finals. I just had so much adrenaline going and I was the last jumper. I just went for it and I hit it right and I was like, "Oh, man, this is it!"

Then I just fell out of it; it was the one of the worst feelings ever but that was one of them. Another was at the 2012 World Indoor [where he won gold].

I had a pretty big foul that was a toe foul and it was a bit further than what I had jumped. I won with 17.70 [58-1] and that [foul] was farther than that so only God knows how far it was.

That was one I wish that I could have got back, but one of the best jumps I've had was at Sacramento last year at USAs. It felt amazing. That is one of the best tracks; we should definitely have USAs there again. But I hit a big jump there. I didn't even touch the board when I took off.

Again, I got excited in the air and kind of rushed my landing and ended up in the stands with my family. But that was one too where I could say I did almost everything right.

T&FN: *What does that feel like as you're doing it?*

Claye: It really feels like a stone skipping across the water. You kind of feel like you're just floating on top of the ground, like you don't hit the ground and you're just flying. That's when you know you're doing it right.

I know you've seen a lot of guys out there jumping and it looks painful. If you do it right, it's like moving art. It looks really, really good and it feels good.

T&FN: *You mention that feeling of floating when a jump goes really well. You also have an interest in visual art and, looking at your website, will-clayeinflight.com, I see, among other offerings, that you're selling posters and a t-shirt with an image of you "triple jumping" underwater, floating as it were. It reminds me of the famous photo of Muhammad Ali in a boxing stance at the bottom of a pool and you've even titled it "Cassius Claye Underwater."*

Claye: That picture underwater is definitely paying homage to Muhammad Ali, and I feel like

when I step on that runway I feel inspired by Muhammad Ali. Just from watching him and studying him, how confident he was when he got into that ring because he knew the work that he'd put in and he knew that no one else outworked him, that's something I took away and was inspired by.

I want to be the Cassius Clay of track & field.

T&FN: *Before the Millrose Games this winter*

Doing It For His Country

T&FN: *You've used the phrase "surfing to myself." That makes me want to ask about another interesting t-shirt you have for sale on your site. It's called "Unseen" and depicts you wearing your Olympic medals, the American flag and a ski mask. Is that a commentary on something?*

Claye: Man, I've gotten a lot of flak on that photo. A lot of people saw it the wrong way. I can't be mad at them. I have a ski mask on and most times when somebody has a ski mask on they're doing something bad.

But when I did that photo shoot with a friend of mine the vision was to show the world that what I'm doing is not for Will Claye. I'm not just out here to build my name up and put my face out there and just make it *The Will Claye Show*.

I wanted it to be known that whatever I do is for my country—that's why I had the United States flag on my shoulders—and my family and my God. I had just come back from the Olympics and I had the medals on. It was just me showing the world that this is not for me but it's for all of us together.

As divided as our country is, I feel like it's up to people like us, Olympians and people that have high statuses, to try to bring our communities together; that's up to us.

I really do this for my people and I really want the United States to get better. There's a lot of things that can be better. If we continue to unite just a little bit more then in the years to come when I have kids and they have kids it will be a bit different.

you held a pop-up event at a sneaker boutique near the Armory. The promo for that included an image of you jumping while kitted out fashionably in a fedora. You've designed clothes, in fact. Clearly, fashion is another major interest.

Claye: Yeah. That's bringing the two worlds together. I am a person. I'm not just this track athlete. I do other things. I'm really into fashion, I'm really into art and into music. Obviously, I'm into track & field.

So I just try to merge them all into one. That pop-up shop was something I really wanted to do for fans and all the kids that are looking up to me and want to be in an environment with me and enjoy themselves.

In our sport it's not too often these days that kids can see things or have things that they can take with them. I don't know about you, but I had a lot of posters of all my favorite athletes and musicians.

But these days it's not really like that—especially with things being so digital. I kind of

Claye — continued

want to bring that back. I want to be able to do pop-ups and booths and things like that and be able to give out things to the kids, t-shirts and posters and whatever I can do on that day.

I feel like the kids really like it—especially if it looks cool. I think it looks cool and I'm still a kid so we all see it the same way. It's something that I really want to continue doing. It's kind of tough.

Meet promoters, not all of them agree with it, so it gets kind of tough but I really want to make it happen. It's bigger than meet promoters or myself.

It's a lot of people that pay attention and watch what goes on on that track, and it really sucks to see someone for 10 seconds or however long on that track and then they walk into that tunnel and you never see them ever again. That's just here and gone and [a young fan] can't really take anything away. Most of the time, things like that you forget in 48 hours. I don't like that, I want it to change.

T&FN: *Do your fashion, art and music endeavors complement your jumping or do they take some of your energy in another direction?*

Claye: I'll be honest. All of us track athletes, we don't train all day. We train probably 5 hours tops in a day and there are 24 hours in a day. I always make sure I take care of my business on the track first. Always.

And then after that when I leave the track I am always so inspired to just do something—whether it's go and meet with a friend and do music, or go home and draw some designs out for some t-shirts, or go to my printer's office and create something for my clothing line. I love to do that stuff and I always have so when I'm done doing my main job, which is track & field, there's so many more hours in the day that I have to do other things. And I still get like 10 hours of sleep a night so I'm not up all night.

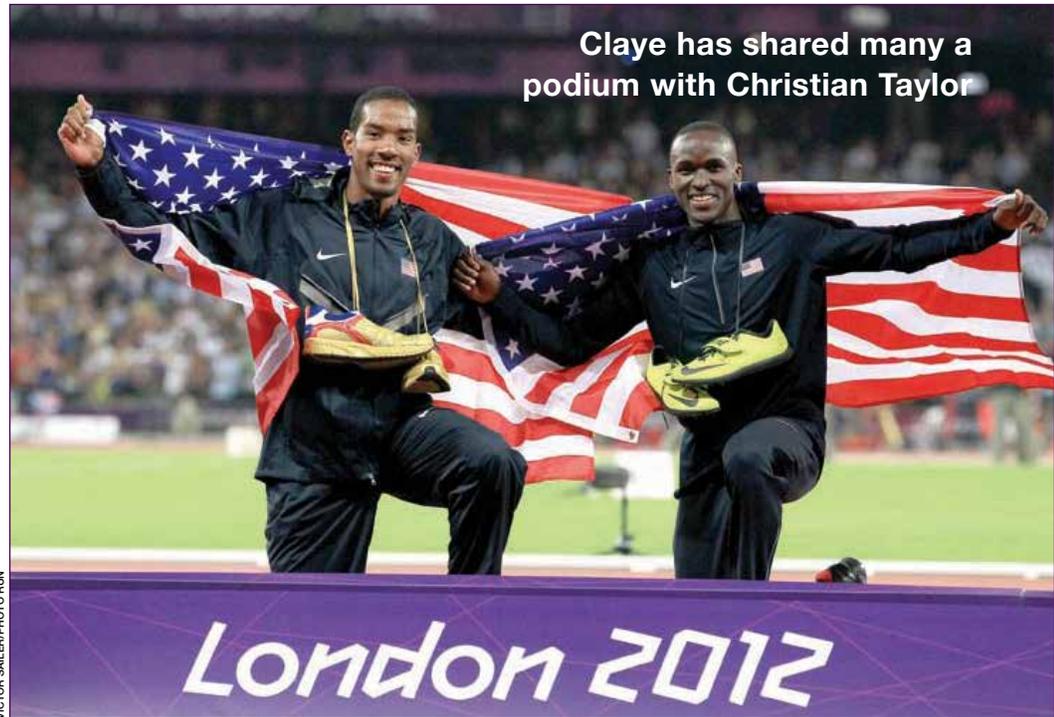
T&FN: *What kind of music do you make?*

Claye: It's a mixture, kind of like funky rock, hip-hop, soulful all mixed in one. I feel like if anyone were to listen to my music it would kind of be like reading my diary. I would say I'm not

very much a vocal person outside but when I get on the track or when I get in a recording studio or I have my pen and pad, those are the places where I feel comfortable being 100% free. Other than that, I'm just kind of like surfing to

was given this talent for that; I feel I was given this talent to be able to help other people. That's how I feel at the end of the day.

So I'm constantly looking for ways to help. I personally feel like the younger generation



Claye has shared many a podium with Christian Taylor

VICTOR SAILLER/PHOTO RUN

myself. So when I get in those places I let free; same thing when I'm on the runway.

If you were to watch my jumps, it's not an act. When I'm out there I don't feel like I force anything; it just happens. That's just me being free. That's like my happy place.

T&FN: *Does that include the training track?*

Claye: Yes. When I'm at practice it's just like when I'm at the meets. If you were to ask my coach, "How's Will at practice?" he'd say, "He's the same way as at the meets, yelling and starting claps." I just feel comfortable there.

T&FN: *You are quite involved with community service. What motivates that?*

Claye: Just to help as many people as possible. I don't feel like me being this great track athlete is just so I can sit back and bask in all this and be like, "Yeah, I'm good." I don't feel I

is where it starts. If anyone wants to make an impact on the future, I would say to help a kid.

T&FN: *You put your money where your mouth is with Will Claye Day. In competition, though, do rivalries with others fuel you?*

Claye: When I'm out there I'm not really worried about anyone else. I know the work that I've put in and I know what I'm out there to do. I'm out there to win and it doesn't really matter who I'm competing against at that point. I go out there and jump the best I can and it's all on me.

There's nothing I can do to stop anyone else from doing what they're doing. So my focus is really just taking what I've been working on at practice and implementing it into competition at a meet. I'm never really looking to see who's to my left and who's to my right. Never.

T&FN: *I had the privilege of seeing Jonathan Edwards' big jumps when he set the World Record at the '95 World Championships. Amazing. Do you feel those kinds of distances are within reach?*

Claye: Yes, I do, for sure. A lot of people always say you shouldn't put out numbers and things like that but I am confident in my God-given talents and my work ethic that I can jump further than that. So it's just a matter of time.

I don't know the exact date that it will happen but I believe that it will happen. It could be at Drake Relays, it could be at the Olympics, it could be at the 2024 Olympics, but I really feel that I can do it. □

Video Study Important

T&FN: *You say rivalries don't motivate you much but do you watch your rivals jump to try to learn from their technique?*

Claye: Not at a meet. At home, yes. I watch those guys' videos almost every day.

T&FN: *Whose jumps do you watch?*

Claye: I watch Teddy Tamgho a lot. He's special, man. That guy is a good jumper and he does a lot of things right. We've even talked on social media about certain things that he saw that I was doing wrong. He's given me some pointers.

Since I was in college I've been in touch with Teddy and he's always been helpful about

motivating me and giving me some advice here and there. Never too much because I don't think he wants to give me the secrets to jumping 18 meters [c59-feet], but he gives me little bits and pieces here and there. I appreciate that.

I definitely study Teddy a lot and obviously I study Jonathan Edwards. I study Willie Banks, I study Mike Conley.

T&FN: *You trained with Christian Taylor in college. Are you different kinds of jumpers?*

Claye: Oh, yeah. We're much different. Christian's more of a power jumper; I'm more of a speed jumper. If you were to watch film you would see the differences. He's a lot taller than me as well so it's a bit different how he technically does things.