

# Dwight Phillips

by Jon Hendershott

**D**ouble world champion Dwight Phillips has made steady progress while flying to the No. 1 long jump slot in the world.

From a No. 1 U.S. Ranking in '00 as a young Arizona State grad to reaching the top of the global ladder in '03, the Georgia native has helped lead a U.S. mini-renaissance along with Savanté Stringfellow, Miguel Pate and Walter Davis.

His career has reflected his belief in the importance of consistency—in physical training, mental preparation and competitive results. But no campaign ever has gone better than last season's.

After winning '03's Triple Crown—World Champs indoors and out plus the Grand Prix Final—taking his first U.S. crown and ranking No. 1, Phillips now aims his total focus on the biggest goal, an Olympic victory in Athens. He also knows that meeting the world's top jumpers in the biggest meets always brings out his best:

**T&FN:** In six of your nine long jump wins in '03 you produced the winning jump in the final round, and at the outdoor Worlds it was in the fifth round. Is that how you like a competition to unfold?

**Phillips:** I just use the competition to motivate me. The guys out there provide good competition, they really motivate me and in rounds 4-5-6 is when I normally produce my best jumps. It just takes me a little while to get started, to get revved up.

**T&FN:** Did a performance like the World Indoors, where you come from behind to win the gold,

convince you that you could become the world's best jumper?

**Phillips:** It really started toward the end of the 2002 season, where every competition I was in I won. I was just using my speed wrong. I'm a speed and power jumper. I found the right equation in jumping, so I knew that come the '03 indoor season, I was could put together a good string of jumps.

**T&FN:** Was part of that equation the transfer of your pure sprint speed [10.16] to the runway? In Paris you mentioned how hard that is to do.

**Phillips:** I applied it in a different manner than I did in the past. It was just how I distributed my energy throughout the runway. That was one of the biggest things I changed. My coach, Greg Kraft, pointed it out to me and I immediately put it to work and it worked every time.

**T&FN:** How did you benefit from competing in the '00 Olympics at the age of 22? You have said that you saw what it took for an athlete to reach the very top, but just what did you see?

**Phillips:** I learned I had to be mature and patient. A lot of times, athletes—and especially myself—can get caught up in emotions. I didn't do the things I needed to do to jump well or earn a medal. I didn't execute anything because I was so emotional.

I learned to stay within my own boundaries and just focus on myself, as opposed to focusing on others. That's the biggest thing: just being very patient. Gaining that knowledge just comes from experience. If I hadn't experienced the Sydney Olympics, maybe it would have taken me a little longer to learn that.

**T&FN:** Pure competition always has been a huge motivator for you, but can you say what emotions competition fires up in you?

**Phillips:** I guess the thing that really fires me up is that you have maybe 20 guys out there. They're all pouring their hearts out and going for the top, going for the win. It's just a matter of who has the most desire, the most heart and who wants it the most.

That's what really fires me up: seeing other guys's emotions and just having fun doing what they love. That drives me to be the guy who stands on the top of the podium.

**T&FN:** Some events can be cutthroat like the 100, which you run sometimes. Other events like the pole vault have a real sense of camaraderie among the athletes. What's the atmosphere like among the long jumpers?

**Phillips:** I think it's every man for himself! [laughs] It isn't the same feeling the vaulters have; they're a whole different breed. When we're out there, it's very competitive with lots of trash talking. I don't think anybody is trying to help out the next guy.

In meets, I really just keep to myself; I don't say anything to anybody. I really just focus on myself. I can only govern myself, nobody else.

**T&FN:** In Paris, you said you want to be the jumper who returns the U.S. totally to its place of prominence in the long jump. That must mean winning the Olympics, but what else?

**Phillips:** You just have to be consistent. The event requires a lot of consistency, plus winning championships. And obviously for anyone who competes, you always want to break the World Record. That's definitely one of my goals.

I don't know when or where, but I feel that if I continue to train hard and become a better technician that I will be the guy to do it.

**T&FN:** What is the hardest aspect of training for you? Applying your speed to the jump?

**Phillips:** The transferring of speed to the runway definitely is one of the hardest. Especially when I first do approaches on the runway. I run so fast that I can't take off. So it requires a lot of preparation and doing different drills so that I can be ready to jump when it counts.

I really focus very hard on the mental aspect of competing, just like I focus on the physical aspect. What's really going to set the gold medalist apart from the others is mental. How he can hold together in his mind and have his

## "Lewis The Greatest Ever"

Dwight Phillips' spontaneous reactions to the names of other long jump luminaries:

**Savanté Stringfellow:** "Exciting."

**Miguel Pate:** [long pause] "I really don't have anything to say about him."

**Iván Pedroso:** "One of the top 10 greatest jumpers ever."

**Walter Davis:** "Has a lot of heart."

**Yago Lamela:** "Very competitive."

**James Beckford:** "A different type of competitor. He can surprise you at any time."

**Carl Lewis:** "Greatest long jumper ever."

**Mike Powell:** "The World Record holder."

**Larry Myricks:** "Consistent."

**Bob Beamon:** "The most incredible jump I've ever seen in my life—even more than Powell's. Beamon could have jumped farther than he did if he had just let his body progress through the sand and not land on his feet. But to leapfrog out of the pit like he did was pretty cool, too."

**Ralph Boston:** "Oh man, one of the all-time greatest jumpers ever. Yeah, he's kind of the godfather of American long jumping."



## Phillips won long jumping's Triple Crown in 2003

mind make him do physically what he needs to do to win.

**T&FN:** Earlier this year you called yourself a "track junkie." You read about the sport's history.

You watch films of former greats—Lewis, Powell, Myricks—both from historic and technical standpoints. How would you like your own chapter to read?

**Phillips:** Wow, that's a huge question! [laughs] I would like to be Olympic champion, World Record holder and the first guy to jump 30-feet. Many time World and U.S. champion.

**T&FN:** When Dwight Phillips writes his own chapter, what positive factors of his will contribute to what he writes?

**Phillips:** I'm the person who will write my own destiny. It's up to me to put in the work and really focus on accomplishing the goals I've set for myself. I think it's going to be self-fulfilling for me to just put in the work and train. It's all about training and working and learning the pros and cons of jumping.

Also I'm surrounded by just a great supporting cast in coaches Greg Kraft and [Arizona State sprint coach] Darryl Anderson. Great climate in Arizona, great weather. So it all just gives me the opportunity to focus on writing my own chapter and accomplishing those goals of winning titles and setting records. I'm in just a really great environment.

**T&FN:** What do you have to keep improving as a jumper to be able to write the best chapter possible?

**Phillips:** First, you have to stay injury-free. That's definitely one of the most important parts of competing. Even in '03, from after the Prefontaine meet in May through my last meet, I competed on a torn abdominal muscle. It

was quite painful in every competition, but I had the will and desire to go out and win.

So injuries can be really nagging and can hold you down. It's still not 100%; the doctors

say it can take from six to nine months to completely heal. It's about 85% now. I can still train, but I still feel pain at times.

**T&FN:** You have said that when you are out on the circuit you like to go around the cities you're in to check out the people and the sights. Is there a favorite city you have visited?

**Phillips:** Back in '01 when I competed in Rome, I got the chance to go to the Colosseum. That was just amazing to me. There was just a lot of history behind it. I felt honored just to be able to be in that place at that particular time. I was just happy to be a human on earth.

**T&FN:** Did you feel similar happiness on the top step of the victory stand at either Worlds?

**Phillips:** Yes, and especially indoors. That victory helped cement the type of competitor I am. I will always remember that victory since it was my first major championship. Just the work I put in to get there made me very happy with the results.

**T&FN:** You have said that your family is a great motivator for you.

**Phillips:** I have two older brothers and one younger. What they provide is, I think, just tough love. They give me no breaks at all. I wish I could

catch a break even today. They're tough on me, but I need that. It keeps me grounded. But I'm just happy to have them be a part of my success.

Actually, after I won the Worlds they were very happy. But now, it's like, "You haven't done anything, man. You gotta prove you can win the big championship." That means the Olympics.

**T&FN:** Out of high school, you first went to Kentucky looking more at the triple jump?

**Phillips:** Yes, I first went to Kentucky but I actually was more of a 400 runner. The 200 also and I would triple jump sometimes. In high school, I thought the 400 was my best event—I thought I could be a world champion in the 400, instead of the long jump.

No, Tyree Washington won't have to look out for me—but the 100 sprinters better watch out. I want to run more 100s next season.

**T&FN:** Do you have a favorite thing to do away from track?

**Phillips:** Just relaxing at home and also trying to be a chef. I try to cook everything that's in the book. I'm a cooker. I try to cook a little of everything; southern fried foods. And I think I'm the best barbecuer ever. I can grill with the best of 'em.

My favorite food? I love all kinds of food. One cultural type of food I'm really into is Greek food. Yeah, I know where I can get some of that next summer. ☐

### Phillips Facts

• **Personal:** born October 1, 1977, in Decatur, Georgia; 5-11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>'/181. Trains at Arizona State.

• **PRs:** 100—10.16 ('02); 200—20.68 ('02); long jump—27-8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>'/8.44 ('03); triple jump—53-10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>'/16.41 ('99).

• **Coach:** Greg Kraft (Arizona State).

• **Schools:** Tucker High (Tucker, Georgia) '96; attended Kentucky through '98; graduated from Arizona State in '00 (degree in communications).

• **Club:** Nike.

• **Major Honors:** 4)NC, 6)USA, 7)Pan-Am '99; 2)NC, 2)OT, 8)OG '00; 3)USA, 8)WC '01; 3)USA '02; 2)USA I, 1)WIC, 1)USA, 1)WC '03.

• **World U.S. Rankings:** '99 (x, 7), '00 (x, 1), '01 (x, 4), '02 (3, 3), '03 (1, 1).