

HOUSTON McTEAR

Nine seconds flat to tie the world 100 yard dash record.

A notable achievement anytime. By a high schooler? Sensational. But by a high school junior? That borders on the unbelievable.

In a way, Houston McTear borders on the unbelievable—18 years old (born Feb. 13, 1957), 5-7, 155lb, from Baker High School and a tiny backwoods hamlet called Milligan, Fla., second-oldest of eight children of an impoverished sawmill worker, a world record holder of such surprising ability who hails from what can only be described as the grinding poverty of the rural American South.

And yet you have to believe in Houston McTear—second in the '74 Junior meet as a prep sophomore and second versus the USSR Juniors, equaler of the prep 50 mark indoors this winter, winner at 60 yards over the USSR, twice matcher of the prep 100 best outdoors this year at 9.3 and once a record-setter at 9.2.

Somehow, though, his 9.0 is still surprising. But to see McTear run goes a long way toward convincing you McTear is for real all the way. He runs with a raw strength, overpowering the distance with brute force, churning toward the tape. It may not be stylish but it gets the job done.

Off the track, McTear (it's pronounced like McTeer) is quiet, shy and speaks in a low monotone, often in single words. But give him time and McTear warms up. When he does, he smiles easily, laughs and jokes. Coincidentally, he wears a diamond stud in his left ear and that may best describe Houston McTear—a diamond-in-the-rough whose gleam is becoming more polished every day.

And after talking to McTear for very long, it becomes obvious that he is remarkably level-headed, can handle all that has happened to him—and that he expects even more to happen in the future.

T&FN: The stock question by now must be, "Were you surprised at your world record?" But were you?

McTear: Yeah, I was. I thought it was maybe a 9.2 or 9.3, but sure not 9.0. I was really happy about it, though.

T&FN: What did the phrase "world record holder" mean to you before you ran your 9.0?

McTear: Just meant to me that I could be one too if I wanted.

T&FN: Has the meaning changed any?

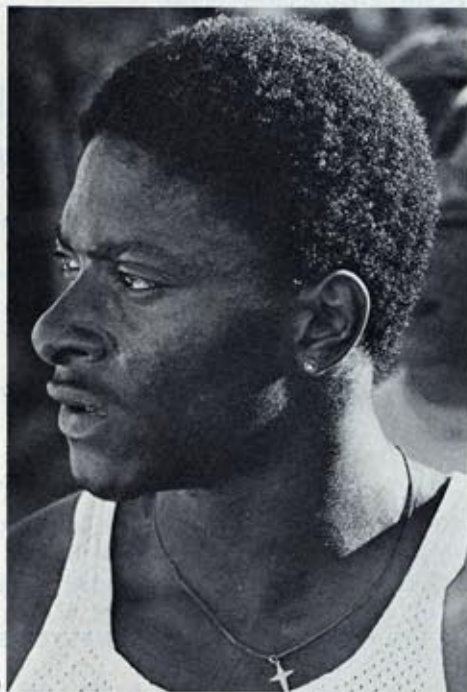
McTear: Naw, it hasn't changed. I'm still me.

T&FN: Would you call yourself modest?

McTear: Not really. I'm just a sprinter who likes to run. I don't think about what's happened. I'm the same Houston McTear I always was. Track can't change me.

T&FN: You said earlier this year you would like to be the first high schooler to run 9.2 and you were. Did you think you could run a world record?

McTear: I thought I could some time, but not this fast. Not as a junior in high school. Now I don't know what could happen.



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T&FN: What do you feel is your potential in the 100?

McTear: 8.8 or 8.9.

T&FN: You ran well indoors this winter, but what has caused you to improve to a world record holder?

McTear: I worked on my start. I worked on it a lot before the state meet. That's why I had a good start in the race. I didn't jump the gun; I just had a good start. The start is the key to running the 100 under 9 seconds.

T&FN: The very next weekend after your record, you ran at the King meet in Jamaica against sprinters the caliber of Steve Williams and Don Quarrie. Were you happy to tie the high school 100-meter record behind Williams?

McTear: That was no satisfaction to me. I would rather win any time.

T&FN: You would rather beat runners like that than run a fast time and lose to them?

McTear: Anytime. Running against the best is when I get better. I been blessed by God with this gift of speed and I always try to do my best with it. The best is the only way.

T&FN: You think this ability of yours is natural?

McTear: Mostly, but I do work hard.

T&FN: Were you fast when you were younger?

McTear: Yeah. Sort of like everybody chasing after me instead of me chasing after everybody else.

T&FN: What do you do in training?

McTear: Just sprints mostly.

T&FN: No laps or intervals?

McTear: No, not much.

T&FN: What do you work on during the indoor season?

McTear: My start mainly. The start is what you need most indoors.

T&FN: How about outdoors?

McTear: Well, me and the other guys will go outside and run a 110 and walk a 110 and work on our relay handoffs.

T&FN: Do you ever run a 100 for time in training?

McTear: Not very often. I don't go full speed, but I've run under 10.

T&FN: What's the longest you have ever run, in practice or a meet?

McTear: 440.

T&FN: Have you ever considered moving up to the long sprint?

McTear: Noooo. Anything over a 220, I don't want nothing to do with.

T&FN: What do you think is your best distance?

McTear: My best is the 100. I think my upper limit is the 220.

T&FN: You've long jumped 24-6½ this year. Have you ever thought about concentrating more on it?

McTear: No, I just want to be a sprinter. I just long jump as a sideline. I just do it in the important meets, but I think I might cut it out. About every time I jump, I hurt my feet when I land.

T&FN: What other events have you done?

McTear: I high jumped some when I was younger. I went six feet even.

T&FN: You're also quite a football player [1380 yards last fall in 96 carries for a 14.4-yard-per-carry average]. And you've supposedly never had any kind of injury. But do you worry about getting hurt in football?

McTear: Yeah, I do. Football's my favorite sport and I would really like to try to play in college. But I'm not sure if I'll play next fall because I don't want to get hurt.

T&FN: Could it be you're thinking about the Montreal Olympics?

McTear: Oh sure. I'm looking forward to them. I want to run in the two AAUs this year, too, and I'd like to try for the Pan-Am team. But I would really like to be at the Olympics. I just want to run against the best.

T&FN: How would you describe the way you run—other than fast?

McTear: Aw, I never really thought about it. I just go out there and run for the tape. I do think about getting a good start always. That's about all. □