

# IVORY CROCKETT

T&FN Interview by Jon Hendershott

**I**t took Ivory Crockett only nine seconds to make history. In those few fleeting ticks of a watch, he ran 100 yards faster than any man legally has run in history.

To Crockett, the stocky (5-8/147) little Southern Illinois graduate, it marked an arrival in the world's sprinting elite—despite the fact he won two consecutive AAU 100 titles and has beaten some of the world's finest dashmen in the last five years. Crockett had arrived, he knew it and so did everyone else, regardless that some skeptics questioned his achievement.

The 25-year-old IBM sales representative is a quiet man, who accepts praise for his success without false modesty. He is outspoken, though, when he talks about his career, a career which has had many notable achievements but one which, Crockett feels, has rarely been accepted or appreciated by track followers.

**T&FN:** How important to you was the title of "world's fastest human" before you ran 9.0?

**Crockett:** I wasn't looking for that. It was a point that I have accomplished a lot while I've been running but never got any recognition for it. That was more important to me; to win this year, to let people know I do exist.

**T&FN:** Is it the title that's really important or the people you beat?

**Crockett:** I've been beating top people since I was a freshman in college, so beating them isn't that important to me. I've accomplished more than most sprinters today but I haven't gotten as much publicity as everyone else. It seems like I always have to do something sensational before people think I'm any good.

It's been frustrating that pretty much throughout my career when I do something it is always classed as a big upset. But I'm not so outspoken as some athletes. I don't believe in making predictions or promises. I get more satisfaction in my own mind in what I've accomplished than in going around telling everybody about it. What makes me mad is when people say some I've done is an upset or I can't do something.

**T&FN:** Have you felt new increased expectations now that you are the world record holder?

**Crockett:** Well, I handle it this way: every time I run, I ask God to be with me, help me do what I want to do and let me come out of a race physically well. As far as added pressures, I don't feel there are any. I'm going to do my best, regardless of what people say, whether I win or lose.

I think any athlete has to have the right attitude. You have to be close to the man upstairs. I'm a long way from a saint



Chip Gane

but you have to work hard and never sell anyone no wolf tickets. Don't give people because they'll buy 'em. I've never said anything against another sprinter. If anyone just works hard, sooner or later his reward comes.

**T&FN:** Might your small size be a hindrance? Steve Williams and Reggie Jones are 6-3.

**Crockett:** Some people wish they were taller or lighter or faster, but I don't wish these things. I thank God for what he gave me. I never ask God to make me taller. He gave me the world record at 5-8 and no 6-3 sprinter has run that fast so why should I ask to be taller?

**T&FN:** How did you approach the Knoxville race?

**Crockett:** I don't get much publicity anyway and that meet was no different. All the buildup was for Reggie Jones so there wasn't anything on me. I just went there to win and run to the best of my ability. It wasn't any different from anywhere else, even now. I take every race one at a time.

**T&FN:** But might you have had even the slightest thought about a world record for yourself?

**Crockett:** I really wasn't as surprised as everyone else was. Like my start has never been good, but I've been working hard on it. So after I ran 9.2 in the heats into a 5mph wind with the closest guy to me at 9.9, and when my coach said I had really gotten out well, I thought that might be the day. And it was.

**T&FN:** How did you feel in the race?

**Crockett:** Just super good. In '69 when I beat John Carlos in the AAU, I thought that was a feeling I would never

top. But this felt even better than that. I can't explain how good it felt.

**T&FN:** Why did you throw up your arms at the end?

**Crockett:** The victory felt so good my emotions carried me away. Also I was showing I was a good sprinter. I shouldn't have done it and run on through. No telling what time I might have had. If it had been faster than 9.0, I don't think they would have given it to me. But I ran 9.0 and looked back three yards from the tape and didn't use all my leg speed, so I don't think people can say I can't run faster.

I wasn't concerned about the time so much as in winning. They humiliated me down there; everything was for Reggie Jones. Reggie is a great athlete, a great sprinter and a great person and I know he didn't do it. But everything was for him. I got insults from the stands.

What really gets me, though, is that people have questioned my record. I can see that if I had run 9.0 in Carbondale, Ill., where everyone wanted me to win. But in Knoxville everything was set up for Reggie, so that makes me doubly glad I did it. I don't have to prove anything anymore. All I have to do is run.

**T&FN:** What did you feel when you saw the time?

**Crockett:** I wanted to cry, I wanted to laugh. They all came at the same time and I didn't know which I wanted to do first. It was simply overwhelming, but a great feeling.

**T&FN:** How did you begin sprinting?

**Crockett:** Well when I was about 13, I was going off the deep end, getting in all sorts of trouble. Then I met Dr. Charles Roper of Brentwood, Mo., who got me interested in track. If it hadn't been for him, I probably would be an addict or in jail or dead right now. All my mischief was an attempt at getting attention, but then my energies and drives were diverted into track.

**T&FN:** Do you feel you have an ultimate you can run? Does man?

**Crockett:** I'm scared to think what man can do with his body. We use only a quarter of our brain and our brain controls our body. Once we fully utilize both, and get them together, there's no telling what we can do or how fast we can run.

I only want to run the very best I can whenever I run. I have come to hope that both me and my opponent do our best because we both are out there to win. I just want the best man to win.

Tony Waldrop really has his head together about this; he has said, "I want to win and the guy next to me wants to win, but there can be only one winner." To that I would add, I'll do my best and hope that is good enough to win. □