

Kori Carter

by Jon Hendershott

Kori Carter is a hugger. She gives genuinely warm hugs virtually to everyone she meets: opponents, teammates, coaches, parents, fans—even writers. That’s the style of a hurdles star with an outgoing, bubbly personality.

One aspect of the Stanford junior that the track world has been able to get its arms around this year is her hurdling talent: cutting her PR from 57.10 to a Collegiate Record 53.21 while winning the NCAA.

And she cut her 100H best to 12.76 to win the Pac-12 before taking 2nd at the NCAA in 12.79 behind CR-setter Brianna Rollins.

Carter turned pro after the college title meet, but couldn’t shoot for the World Champs team as illness struck after her USATF heat. Which is where we began our discussion:

T&FN: What was the illness that hit you so hard in Des Moines?

Carter: We never knew if it was food poisoning or some kind of stomach virus. I was throwing up, plus diarrhea; the whole thing.

But I don’t think that really was the issue. I hadn’t eaten the whole day, so when I stood up I had a lot of equilibrium problems. I was extremely dizzy; I couldn’t get my balance or even see straight.

If it had been a stomach virus, I maybe could have gotten over it if I had eaten. But we knew I definitely was in no shape to try to run hurdles.

T&FN: Was that hard to accept emotionally? You knew that physically you couldn’t do it, yet at that time you had the fastest time in the world. It was your first meet as a professional, so was it hard to accept?

Carter: Yes and no. I just had to keep things in perspective. I had been really working on keeping my emotions in check. But I’m also the type of person who loves to compete and I felt that this whole year I had become a very dominant hurdler. I really wanted to get out there against the pros and validate myself.

But at the same time, I tried to think of it like maybe it wasn’t in God’s plan—[laughs] maybe I’m supposed to be at my sister’s wedding instead.

So that was hard initially, but I know I will have other opportunities to make World and Olympic teams. So in the moment, yes, it was hard. But in the big picture, it’s not the end of

the world.

T&FN: It solved the potential dilemma of making the team but what to do about that wedding. The wedding is on the day before the Worlds open and the heats start the next Tuesday, so there wouldn’t be enough time to get to Moscow to run. Basically impossible to do.

Carter: Pretty much. And I do believe I will have plenty of other chances to make teams—but my sister is going to get married only once.

T&FN: You then made your international pro debut in London. What were your impressions of that experience and what do you feel you learned from it?

Carter: It was one of my biggest running experiences ever. I thought I would be really nervous, because of the huge crowd and the big-name competitors.

But I was more excited than scared. My coach said, “I could tell you were excited from the way you attacked that first 200.”

I wasn’t really in control. I ran too hard and died at the end. But it was so amazing; just the energy that the crowd brought and the number of people who were there.

You really don’t see that in America except at Oregon. I don’t want to say it was better than Oregon [laughs] because Eugene is always so amazing.

But London was a completely different level of experience. Just things like being in the meet hotel and going to have dinner or breakfast and you’re sitting next to Nick Symmonds. I said, “I watched you guys on TV.”

I talked with Sally Pearson. I went down the next day to the warmup area just to watch her warm up. My roommate was Ajee’ Wilson and the whole energy was amazing.

T&FN: On the other hand, too, all those athletes got to see you, too. “Here’s the young woman who has run 53.21.”

Carter In A Nutshell

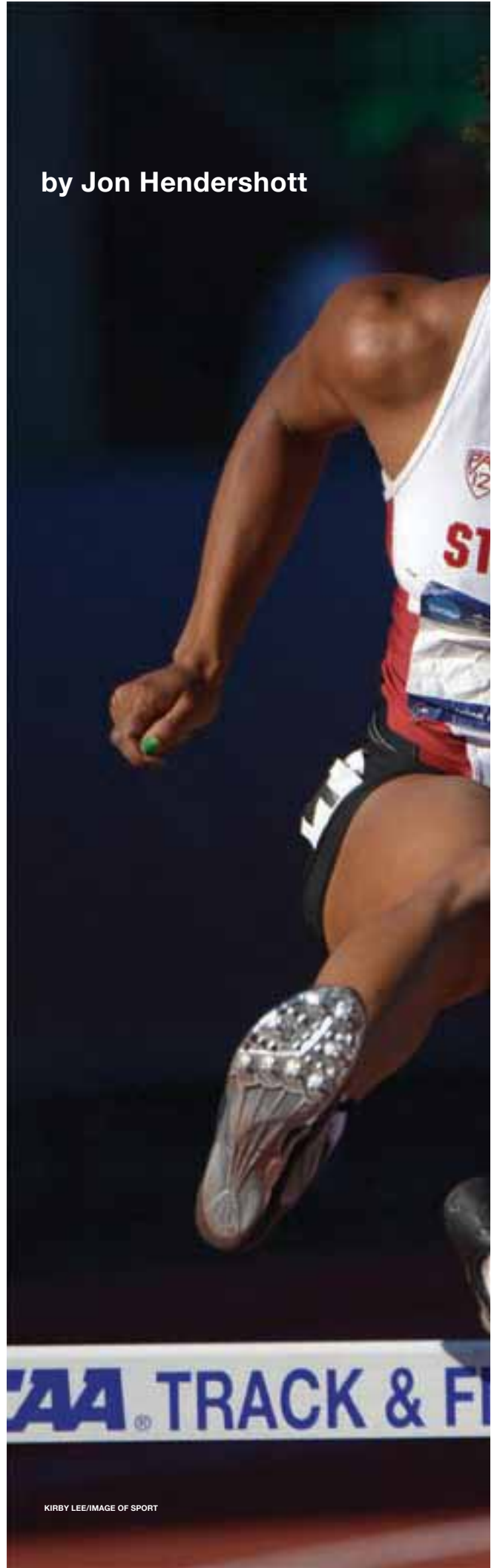
•**Personal:** Kori Danielle Carter was born June 3, 1992, in Pasadena, California; 5-5/125 (1.65/57)

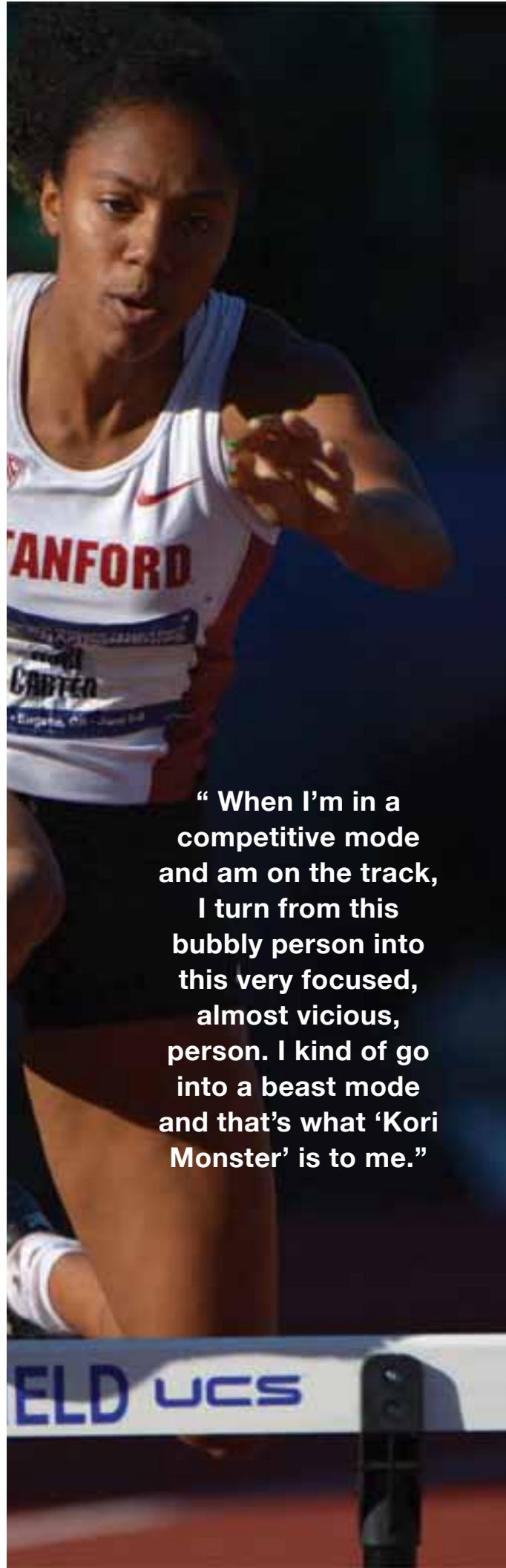
•**PRs:** 100—11.57 (*11); 200—23.87 (*12); 100H—12.76 (*13); 400H—53.21 CR (*13)

•**Schools:** Claremont (California) HS ’10; Stanford 2011–13; now represents Nike

•**Coaches:** Eugene Bramble, Richard Holmes (HS); Edrick Floréal, Jody Stewart (Stanford)

•**Major Meets:** 100H—2)WY ’09; 6)USJ ’10; 6)NC ’11; 6h)NC, 6h)OT ’12; 2)NC ’13. 400H—7h)WJ ’08; 8h)NC ’11; 8h)NC ’12; 1)NC, 3h)US ’13.





“ When I’m in a competitive mode and am on the track, I turn from this bubbly person into this very focused, almost vicious, person. I kind of go into a beast mode and that’s what ‘Kori Monster’ is to me.”

Carter: I said to one athlete how amazing all the athletes were and he said, “You need to think of yourself as one of them. You’re not just happy to be here.”

I did feel like I belonged there when I was running, but the whole time I was still kind of starstruck and it was quite amazing. Very surreal.

T&FN: *You have said that you’re a hurdler and don’t favor one hurdles race over the other. But has that outlook changed considering the great success you had this season in the 400s? Or do you still see yourself as a doubler?*

Carter: I think that everyone sees me most as a 400 hurdler and I guess I’m starting to reflect that.

Yet secretly in my heart, I’m still a 100 hurdler. That’s hard because there are girls like Brianna—who made a 12.4 seem mediocre [laughs]. The 100s will always be special for me.

T&FN: *Now that you are a pro, will you stay with Jody Stewart as your coach?*

Carter: Yes. I still have another year of school left. The main difference is that next year I’ll be watching the team’s meets instead of running in them.

T&FN: *You had a hip flexor problem last year that held you back but were fully healthy this season. Besides that, what other factors contributed to the great successes you had this year in both hurdles?*

Carter: I think hurdlers are always going to have little hip flexor injuries. But this year I learned how to manage it a lot better; getting physical therapy that was a lot more effective in relieving that problem.

I also increased my base strength a lot this year—even though 800s weren’t my most favorite workout.

All that helped because in 2012 I felt I would get to the last 100 and just didn’t have anything left. Also this year, I worked really hard in the weight room and especially on my core strength.

Another thing was that last year I would go home after practice and not think about track anymore. But this year, I would get home and instead of rushing around doing errands and things, I would think about recovering from the workout. I became more of a “Track 360” type of athlete.

T&FN: *Was the increased physical strength a big factor in your consistency this year? You didn’t*

lose a 100H final until the NCAA or a 400H final until London.

Carter: I think so. I was a lot healthier in general throughout the season. Early in the year, I was running fast times off of strength and not because of any special speed work. At the NCAA Indoor, I didn’t get out of my heat because I got hit on like hurdles 2 and 3.

My coach said after that, “We’re going to get you so strong that you won’t feel things like that. You’ll be the strongest hurdler out there.”

That was the idea in the 100s, to be strong at the end. For the 400s, it was usually just me and Georganne Moline down the stretch so I really had to have a lot of strength endurance.

T&FN: *You had two great opponents in each hurdles in Rollins and Moline. What effect did their presence have on your performances? Or did you even worry about them?*

Carter: My dad Bruce liked to joke that I won “two” national titles because I was 1st in a completely different race behind Brianna. But she was in a league of her own. I think as far as the NCAA was concerned, Brianna was a goddess and I was a mortal.

But the 400s definitely were more a focus on trying to win. I also saw Georganne a lot more. She and I were pretty evenly matched. It was a coin toss about who was going to win every time.

T&FN: *Your main aim this season was to win the NCAA 400 hurdles, which you did. But how did you feel, first, when you saw the Collegiate Record time of 53.21 and then, since that means you are the fastest collegiate woman ever to run the event?*

Carter: There are some great pictures of me after I crossed the line and saw my time: I was extremely shocked. I’m not one to focus on times, but I thought maybe it was under 54; a 53.8 or 53.9. I’m very much more about winning than times, because if you can beat Georganne Moline, you’re going to run fast. The times will come.

But it was just a *complete* shock. I wasn’t thinking about running that fast. So it was just crazy, but then to have the record on top of that was so amazing and humbling.

Just to think of all the great hurdlers who have come through the NCAA was just jaw-dropping to me. It was hard to think of myself with Sheena Tosta and Lashinda Demus and Tiffany Williams. It was just so remarkable and humbling.

T&FN: *In our feature in the NCAA issue on you and Brianna, you said the “Kori Monster took over and she can be kind of crazy.” Who is the “Kori Monster” and where does she come from?*

Carter: She is my alter-ego. She’s been around probably since high school. When I’m in a competitive mode and am on the track, I turn from this bubbly person into this very focused, almost vicious, person. I kind of go into a beast mode and that’s what “Kori Monster” is to me.

That’s who she is and when I came around the second turn in the NCAA 400s, it was, “You have to win this race” and she just took over.

T&FN: *So then the monster goes back into her lair the instant you finish the race?*

Carter: Yes, right after I cross the finish line, I’m back to hugging everyone. She starts

Carter — continued

coming out while I'm warming up but as soon as I hear "On your marks," I'm all business. I do flip the switch.

T&FN: What was behind your decision to turn pro after the NCAA? Did you feel you had accomplished all you wanted as a collegian?

Carter: The whole process was so funny in that it happened so fast. My dad talked with me the night after the race and said something about we needed to talk with a shoe company. I said, "What?!"

He talked about an agent and I said, "Are we going pro?" and he said, "Yeah, it's about time." I didn't tell my mom before. I told her my plan was to finish school, then try to make the Olympics in '16, then after that I'd go to grad school.

I think one thing was that the opportunity was there. Also I felt I could walk away and not have regrets about my collegiate experience. I don't know how I could top this year, maybe other than doubling next year.

But to win and also set the record was a huge accomplishment for me. I had gotten what I set out to do in college, become the best 400 hurdler. After that, the professional opportunity came up, which meant the chance to run against the greatest hurdlers right now.

I'm a person who always likes competition, so that opportunity was one I couldn't pass by.

Then London just showed me that I made the right choice. I felt so at home and excited to be there. I feel I made the right choice and

Carter Has A Squirrely Side

We saved until the end the most important question of our whole talk with Kori Carter—she loves squirrels. Why is that? Of course, she started her answer with a laugh.

"They are my favorite living creatures—my other favorites are dragons and dinosaurs but they're extinct—because they're just full of energy. And they can be extremely smart; squirrels have been taught to go through obstacle courses. What they will do for food is amazing.

"And I think there's a lot of me in them! [laughs] They're just cool creatures and very hilarious. They're small little bundles of energy, which is like me. Just crazy little creatures.

"I'd love to have one as a pet but in California you aren't allowed to keep them as pets. I have looked into it—I even checked about getting a flying squirrel but there aren't any in California. But I'm working on it. Like you can get licensed to rehabilitate an injured animal, so maybe I'll get into that."

And are there other sides of Carter that would surprise people to learn about—or do squirrels about cover it?

"I feel like I'm such an, um, spastic person. Meaning I have so many widely-varied interests. So it would be hard for me to pin down one thing.

"Multi-faceted,' yes, that's me. Probably 'weird interests,' too."

we'll see how that turns out. But I'm completely content with my choice.

T&FN: It's like, "Let's move on."

Carter: The thing is, Stanford is such an amazing place and means the world to me. I have had so many amazing relationships. So that was hard to leave.

I'm also a control freak, so when I sit and watch a 4x4, I think, "Just give me the baton and I'll make sure we win."

So I'll have trouble just watching meets next year and not going out and do my part. It's going to be hard to not go into the Cal meet or the Pac-12.

T&FN: How do you think '14 will be different for you in terms of both training and competing, precisely because you won't have your team obligations?

Carter: We will adjust my season toward the U.S. nationals. I'll have to sit down with my coach and figure out what we want to do. Also figure out my goals for next year.

We do know there is no pressure to make a Worlds team next year, so I can think about just having fun and gaining experience. I'm sure my training will be pretty much the same.

As far as time goals next year, I haven't really figured that out yet. I'm still kind of coming down from this season and not

really thinking much about next year yet. But I know I want to really test myself next year and see what I can do.

T&FN: Not only did you show everyone else your ability this year, but did you also show yourself through your own performances?

Carter: Yes, it was positive when I could tell myself, "I can go out there and run 54 no matter what. I want to do that, I can and it isn't that hard." Times like that weren't intimidating; they were more expected and weren't daunting.

T&FN: How did you get into track in general and the hurdles specifically?

Carter: I grew up playing pretty much every sport I could try. My sisters played a lot of sports too, but when I came along, I think my mom saw me as her piano-playing ballerina type of girl. But my dad thought I'd be a jock, too, and I ended up being more of a tomboy than the other two combined [laughs].

So I played every sport and after sixth grade, I was really tired of playing softball because it was way too slow. I decided to do track and did all the events I could. I saw myself as a multi-eventer; as the next Jackie Joyner-Kersey.



"There are some great pictures of me after I crossed the line and saw my time: I was extremely shocked"

KIRBY LEE/IMAGE OF SPORT

I did pentathlons but I just hated the 800. It was the most horrible thing.

I had fallen in love with hurdling. I practiced other events less and less and just wanted to go out and hurdle all the time. And I've been running them ever since.

It's such a beautiful event; I just love everything about it. In most other sports, I was really fast and never had to really work at them. I didn't work on my dribbling skills in soccer like my sister did. I would just "out-athleticize" everyone.

T&FN: What do you study at Stanford?

Carter: I'm studying human biology and I have a summer internship with a human design company. The work has to do with prosthetics and orthotics.

It's an area I might like to go into professionally. I don't know if I would want to deal with the general population or people like athletes. But I think the whole area of human technology and helping people move better is really cool. □