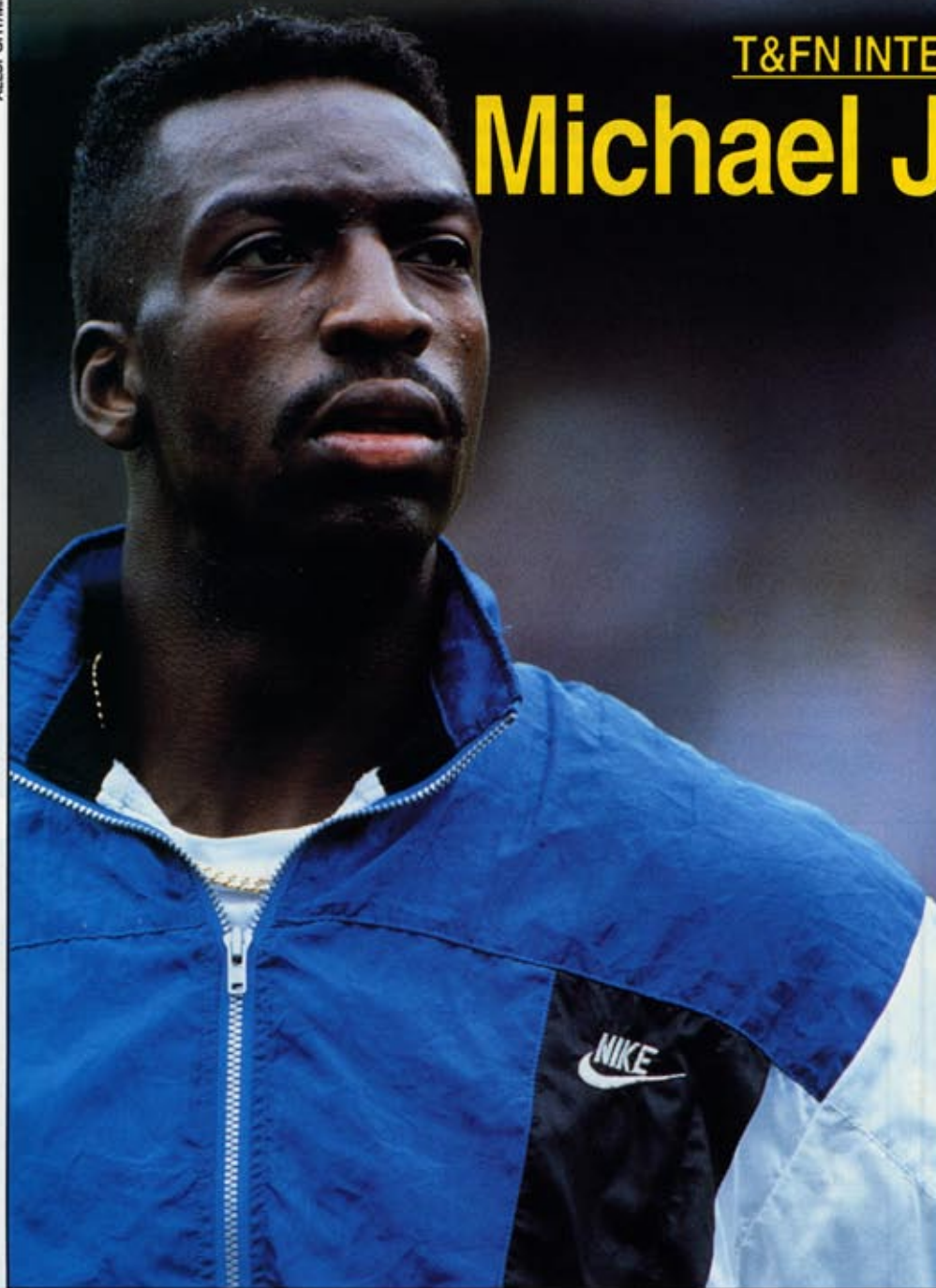


T&FN INTERVIEW

Michael Johnson



by Jeff Hollobaugh

Of all the shocks experienced by the fans who jammed Barcelona's Estadi Olímpic last summer, probably none stunned them more than Michael Johnson's inability to win the gold in the 200.

The 1991 world champion had run a world-leading 19.79 (not to mention 43.98 in the 400) earlier in the campaign. In our own preview, we labeled the 1990 Athlete Of The Year as "the strongest of favorites." Even his competitors had to accept his dominance.

That image of invincibility shattered in the semis when Johnson, weakened by a case of food

poisoning contracted several weeks earlier, failed to advance to the final. He recovered well enough to help the U.S. 4 x 4 to a gold medal and a World Record, then he went home.

Now Johnson, the only man ever to top the World Rankings in both the 200 and 400 (and he has done it twice) has returned to racing. A 45.14 indoors speaks well for his recovery. The man himself speaks well for his peace of mind, his thoughts on prize money, and his enjoyment of the sport:

T&FN: Are people still asking you what happened in Barcelona?

Johnson: Not everybody so much asking

me what happened—I think everybody at this point knows what happened. Every time I go someplace, I get questions about, "How long did it take you to overcome the disappointment?"

That's going to happen, because anyone that was such a favorite as I was, that's going to stick out in everyone's mind. I'm used to it now. I was prepared for it before the season even started; I knew I was going to be faced with those questions.

T&FN: What did Barcelona teach you about yourself?

Johnson: As far as myself, I didn't learn anything that I didn't already know. I think a lot of other people learned something: that is, Michael Johnson is human. He can have a bad day or he can get sick, whatever the case may be. I think a lot of people learned that.

People thought I was invincible. I always knew—from the beginning—all those things. I knew that if I'm not on top of my game, I can be beat. At that point, I knew I was not on top of my game. I knew I was vulnerable.

T&FN: What did you learn about the sport last summer?

Johnson: I learned that I need to approach the season not focusing on one meet, because you never know what can happen. I'm going to approach my seasons from now on to be consistent, not putting too much stock into one meet, whether it's the Olympics or World Championships or whatever.

If I'm competing in the World Championships I'm definitely going to try to be in top shape at that time. Of course, that will be the most important meet, but I'm not going to go into training every day, saying, "I'm training for the World Championships." That meet alone is not going to make a season for me.

For my own satisfaction and my own peace of mind, regardless of where I'm ranked at the end of the year, my goal is going to be to have a consistent season from start to finish. Not just one meet.

T&FN: Are you a hungrier athlete this year?

Johnson: I'm not going to approach the season like that. I went through enough now to not be like that. I think that's what people do, and it only sets them up for more disappoint-

ment if they can't do what they want to do.

I'm just going to go into the season as if I had won the 200m gold medal, and that is, "This is a season. I'm going to run. I'm going to do the best I can. Try to be consistent at 200 and 400m. Try to run faster than I have before, and try to be what most people expect Michael Johnson to be, and that's to be a consistent 19.9-20.0/43-44 flat 200/400 runner."

"I'm just going to go into the season as if I had won the 200 gold medal."

I'm not going to go out and try to break World Records at 200 and 400m to take away something that happened last year. That's done and finished. I didn't win the gold medal in the 200, so that's over with. If I had won it, the same thing would apply. I came out hungry in '92 because it was a new season and '91 was over. I was World Champion, but that was over, and I had to put that behind me. The same thing applies this year.

T&FN: *You've achieved an admirable peace of mind. It almost sounds as if there's a religious faith behind it. What is your philosophy?*

Johnson: It has nothing to do with religion. My philosophy is for me to keep my own peace of mind, just for myself, and not set myself up for disappointment. I've seen other people do that, not winning, or not doing what they wanted to do, and coming back the next season and saying, "Well, to make up for that, I'm going to do this, plus more." Then if an injury or something that they can't control comes along like it did for me, then they're double disappointed.

That's no good. For my own satisfaction, I approach each season as it goes. I think that as long as I do that, I'll be a much better athlete, a much better person.

T&FN: *Are you doing anything different in training this year?*

Johnson: No, I'm doing the same thing that I've been doing. The only thing different now—it's not really different, it's just that usually at this point in my training I'm doing a little bit different work. A little more speed or technical work.

But I took two months off this year. I usually take 4-6 weeks. Everything has been moved back, so I'm still doing a lot of base training. I'm not doing any speed work at all, and no technical work. The only thing different at this point is everything has been pushed back by a month or so.

T&FN: *How has your relationship with Clyde Hart evolved over the years?*

Johnson: Clyde Hart and I are still coach and athlete, just as we were in college. It's the same relationship. The only thing different

now is instead of running for Clyde Hart's track team I'm running for myself and he's my coach. As far as the workouts and our relationship as athlete and coach, it's the way it's always been. I think that as long as I am running, it will be that way.

He's helped me to learn the fundamentals of doing the 200 and 400. Now I know those things, and I can make my own workouts, but I think that his experience for over 30 years is invaluable. I know I'll come upon situations where I don't know what to do at this point, and he'll always help me out.

T&FN: *How do you feel about the way your indoor season has been going?*

Johnson: I feel really good about it. I set out to not try to do anything spectacular during the indoor season. I just wanted to run the 400 and try to get my strength back, prepare for the outdoor season, and just break up the monotony of training.

The focus this year is going to be on the outdoor season, so I wasn't planning to go to World Indoors or try to break any World Records. That was really my focus on the outset, to just run some 400s, have some fun and get my strength together.

I was about a month or five weeks behind when I started the indoor season so I wasn't expecting anything spectacular. I'm still pretty good in competition, but in my workouts, I'm not where I would normally be at this time of the season. Right now I'm probably in 80-85% shape. Once I get into 100% shape in the outdoor season I'll be able to run well.

T&FN: *Is there anyone you look forward to racing this year?*

Johnson: The only person that I can see running this year that I've never run against before is Quincy Watts, and he's the only person that I haven't beaten. That will be interesting. In terms of Butch Reynolds and I, that will be interesting too. Butch and I have raced; I have beaten Butch. In his return to the sport, he's a much hungrier athlete than he was before. I think that he definitely has reason to be.

Of course, in the 200, Mike Marsh and I have raced; I've beaten him, but that will be an interesting matchup also.

T&FN: *You're asked this a million times a year, but for the record, what events at the USATF Champs?*

Johnson: I'm going to approach this season just as I have the last couple of years, planning to run the 200 and 400 both [prior to the meet]. When I have to make a decision, I'll make that decision at that time depending on how I'm running in each of them. I'll make a decision from there.

T&FN: *Will you run in Stuttgart if there is no direct prize money paid to athletes?*

Johnson: I'm going to have to wait and see how that situation

unfolds. I don't know what the IAAF is going to do; I don't know what the other athletes are going to do. My opinion is that when the IAAF is making the amount of money that they're making from the World Championships—and they're making those amounts of money due to the fact that athletes are there performing—that we should definitely be entitled to some of that money.

Also, the bigger issue is that we should be entitled to some say-so in the sport. We should have some voice.

But back to the prize money, I think that we should hand out some of that money, and I would definitely be willing to join with the other athletes and do whatever we have to do to get that accomplished. I can't do it by myself, so it would all depend on who else is willing to sacrifice.

T&FN: *Are there obstacles to getting the athletes mobilized on an issue like this?*

Johnson: It's not that the athletes aren't political enough or aren't involved enough. You're talking about a sport where the athletes are scattered throughout the world. I mean it's hard to get together and there's no union.

In talking to athletes on the circuit, I definitely would say that most athletes are involved and would like a change. It isn't as easy to do in this sport as in other sports because it's a world-wide sport, and athletes are so far away from one another.

T&FN: *You've earned a good measure of fame in the sport. Do you enjoy it?*

Johnson: It has its good points and it has its bad points. I'd say that the good outweigh the bad. It's nice to go to a meet and have people seeking your autograph and taking pictures with you. People want to see you come and compete. It's nice to be appreciated.

However, like with the Olympic Games last year, people start to expect so much when they put you in a certain status. They don't

JOHNSON'S PROGRESSION

Michael Duane Johnson was born September 13, 1967, in Dallas, and is 6-1/170. Graduated from Skyline High School in Dallas in '86, and competed for Baylor '87-'90. Currently represents Nike International. In 1992, he became the only man to ever break both 20 in the 200 and 44 in the 400.

PRs (with places on World & U.S. all-time lists): 100—10.23 ('91); 200—19.79 ('92) (5, =5 W; 4, =4 A; low-altitude: 4, =4 W, A); 300—31.95 ('91) (9, 10 W; 5, 5 A); 400—43.98 ('92) (7, x W, A; 1-a: 5, =10 W, A). Indoors: 200—20.55 ('91) (=7, =9 W; AR); 400—45.14 ('93) (3, 4 W; 2, 2 A).

Major Meets: 200—dnf(NCAA ('88); 5h)NCAA, 6h)USA ('89); 1)NCAA, 1)USA ('90); 1)USA, 1)WC ('91); 1)OT, 6s)OG. 400—7h)OT ('88).

Progression (World & U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	100	200	400	Relay
'86	18	—	21.30	—	—
'87	19	—	20.41	46.29	44.7
'88	20	10.19w	20.07 (x, 7)	45.23	43.5
'89	21	10.29	20.47	46.49	43.8
'90	22	10.23w	19.85 (1, 1)	44.21 (1, 1)	43.5
'91	23	10.23	19.88 (1, 1)	44.17 (1, 1)	44.6
'92	24	—	19.79 (3, 2)	43.98 (5, 4)	44.0

NOW WITH 35% MORE NOTHING.



Air Max.



1337 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10028 (212) 369-6010
 1170 THIRD AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021 (212) 249-2133
 416 THIRD AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10016 (212) 213-4560
 360 AMSTERDAM AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10024 (212) 787-7665
 355 NEW YORK AVENUE, HUNTINGTON, NY 11743 (516) 549-3006

TT123 now available

The latest issue of Track Technique (#123, Spring 1993) is ready. It's another important issue, and the first prepared under the editorship of Kevin McGill. Articles include "Weight Training for the 400m Hurdler," by UCLA conditioning coach Bob Alejo, on Kevin Young's conditioning buildup to the 1992 Olympics; "A Truth-In-Labeling Law for the Discus," by Al Bashian and Jack Tarbox; "Pool Training—It Works!" by Brent McFarlane; "Evaluation and Control of Basic and Specific Muscle Behavior," Part 1 of a landmark piece by Dr. Carmelo Bosco of Italy. Order your copy now. TT 123 is \$4.00 postpaid. A one-year subscription (4 issues a year) is \$15.00. Order from **Track & Field News, 2570 El Camino Real, Suite 606, Mountain View, CA 94040 USA.** Ask for back issue contents sheet (#84-123).

TRACK TECHNIQUE

FOR THE COACH WHO DOESN'T
KNOW IT ALL

The official technical
publication of the
U.S.A. Track & Field



Johnson Interview — cont:

hold you to the same level as they would another athlete, who can possibly have a bad day or become injured or ill. Once you do so much they come to expect that, that's the bad thing.

T&FN: *Are you, in effect, competing against what you've accomplished in past years?*

Johnson: Over the last couple years I did some things that haven't been done. I was ranked very high for those things. Last year, I did even better in some aspects, but because I didn't do what I had been doing the past couple years, I wasn't ranked as highly. I think that was due in part to what I had already established myself as.

Had last year been completely separate from any other year, had I just busted on the scene and did the things that I did, then I think I would have been touted as a great athlete. But because of the things I had done in the two years before, I kind of got lost in the shuffle.

T&FN: *Competing at your level, you have to be more than skilled as an athlete. You have to be savvy at business. But have you managed to keep the business of track from dominating your life?*

Johnson: It's not going to dominate my life; I won't let that happen. But it's definitely very important and I have to stay on top of my business. I'm not going to let it dominate my life but I'm also not going to let it slide off to the side. I won't become a person who has to run to pay my bills.

T&FN: *Do you still enjoy the sport? What in track is the most fun for you?*

Johnson: The most fun? Track is a challenge. It's always constantly a challenge to run faster than you've run before. It's always a challenge to try to beat the other guy.

It's a challenge to be No. 1. I mean, nobody wants to see the same guy winning time after time after time: what was happening with me for the past three years. So anytime someone came up to me and could run kind of fast and run close to me in some races, then people would start touting this person as the person who would beat Michael Johnson.

It's a lot of fun to listen to people say that and then to beat the odds. I mean, nobody wants to lose. It's always a challenge to be out there competing with seven other guys, and all eight of you don't want to lose.

T&FN: *Do you miss the relay experience that was so much a part of your days at Baylor?*

Johnson: I miss it a lot. I still work with the guys at Baylor, coaching them and working with the relays. That's a lot of fun. It takes care of some of my missing it, but running relays with a team, I miss that a lot. I still get to do it at least once or twice a year.

T&FN: *How long will you stay in the sport?*

Johnson: I'll definitely run through '96 and probably '97 and after that I'll make some decisions as to what I want to do next. I think I'll continue to run in the sport as long as it's fun for me. □