

T&FN INTERVIEW

Brittney Reese

by Jeff
Hollobaugh

The best explanation for Brittney Reese's domination of the long jump? "That is something that I don't like, to lose," she says.

Indoors and out, "Da Beast" has racked up 10 national titles (in addition to 2 NCAA crowns) and 6 World Champs golds. Throw in Olympic gold and silver and you have the makings of a crowded trophy room.

Born in California, raised in Mississippi, Reese might have seemed to be the ultimate long jump machine if not for her tendency to fire up so much for competition that she would overshoot the foul line. Still, she made winning look easy.

Yet after winning the Worlds in '13, Reese—and

stable to where I needed to be to stay focused on the Olympics. Afterwards, I still was able to produce a decent jump in Zürich, but after that, I'm not going to lie, I was tired. I'm kind of glad that we didn't really start back up until November. But out of all the [big meets] this is the one that took the toll on me the most.

T&FN: Did you feel as defending champion, you were under a huge amount of pressure in Rio?

Reese: Oh yeah. I try not to focus on that type of stuff, I just go out there and try to be the best athlete that I can be on that day. I just try not to worry about the competition or the competitors. I don't have any of that. I just go out there and try to do my best.

T&FN: Did this journey of yours into the highest levels of the sport really begin with a bottle of Coca Cola?

Reese: [laughs] Yeah. At the time, I was playing basketball and our season had just ended. The athletic director—who was also the track coach—brought the basketball team out to find the long jumpers.

I was already doing the high jump and I had the 4x1, the 4x4, the 400, things like that. So he wasn't even looking at me to try long jump because I had so many events already to do. He let everybody go one-by-one to see who could jump the furthest and whoever went furthest would get the Coke.

And he would not let me jump because I had my events already. I begged him to let me try. And the first time I jumped about 16-feet. He couldn't believe it. He told me to go back and do it again. I went back and did the same thing.

Not only did I win the long jump, but I won a Coke and I got out of the 400 which I did not like so it was a win-win day for me all the way around.

T&FN: You made the decision to concentrate on track after a couple of years of doing only basketball at Gulf Coast Community College. What motivated that?

Reese: I was only supposed to go to community college for one year and then transfer to Ole Miss. But I didn't want to leave my team behind.

But after conference, a bunch—I

Reese In A Nutshell

Personal: Brittney Davon Reese was born September 9, 1986, in Inglewood, California; 5-8/140 (1.73/64)

•**PRs:** 100—11.59, '13, 11.20w '11; HJ—6-2i (1.88) '08; LJ—23-11¾ (7.31) (=9, x W; =2, =8 A) '16; TJ—43-2¼ (13.16) '08

•**Schools:** Gulfport HS (Mississippi) '04; Mississippi Gulf Coast JC '06 (no track); Mississippi '08; now represents Nike (manager—Mark Pryor)

•**Coaches:** Prince Jones (HS); Joe Walker (college/pro); Jeremy Fischer (pro)

•**Major Meets:** 3)NCi, 2)NC '07; 2)US, 8)WC; 1)NCi, 1)NC, 1)OT, 4)OG '08; 1)USi 1)US, 1)WC '09; 1)USi, 1)WCi, 1)US '10; 2)USi, 1)US, 1)WC '11; 2)USi, 1)WCi, 1)OT, 1)OG '12; nm)US 1)WC '13; 1)US '14; 2)US, nq)WC '15; 1)USi, 1)WCi, 1)OT, 2)OG

•**World/U.S. Rankings:** x/1 '07; 4/1 '08; 1/1 '09; 1/1 '10; 1/1 '11; 1/1 '12; 1/1 '13; 4/2 '14; 7/3 '15; 1/1 '16

soon the world—saw a different side. A torn labrum in her hip followed by surgery nearly ended her career. The work it took—both mental and physical—to climb back to the top forced her to reinvent herself as a jumper.

In addition, becoming a parent last year to her adopted son forced her to reinvent herself as a person.

Now the sole focus of her athletic life is on the one remaining thing she wants from the sport: the World Record of 24-8 (7.52). To reach that, she has to produce the perfect jump.


T&FN: We missed seeing you indoors. How is training going this year?

Reese: Training is going great. I can't complain. I'm healthy. I feel like I'm ahead of where I was last year. I think I am more focused on getting stronger.

T&FN: Why no indoor this year?

Reese: I wanted to rest up from the Olympics. That left me emotionally and physically drained.

It was so stressful going into Rio, knowing that after '13 I had surgery. I had been trying so hard to get myself back and emotionally



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KIRBY LEMMON/AGE OF SPORT

MIKE SCOTT

think it was three or four—of my teammates had got caught smoking weed. And it left us with six people left on the team to go to Regionals. Actually, 5½ because one of the girls had a sprained ankle.

I was crying, I was so upset. And I talked to my mom, and she basically said, “Now if you want to make it yourself, go to track & field. If you want to continue to rely on other people, stick with basketball.”

I said, “I’m going to track. I’m tired of being let down” because I’d been let down so many times in basketball. You know, teammates not doing what they’re supposed to do, not taking responsibility for their actions and things like that. So, I said, “I’m just going to mind myself and go back and run track.”

T&FN: *Do you miss playing hoops?*

Reese: You know, I do, but I get the opportunity to play against my coach Jeremy [Fischer] every now and then. We play H-O-R-S-E.

After the Olympics before we started back training, we would go out to the court and play one-on-one and some H-O-R-S-E or whatever. I still get the opportunity to play just a little bit.

T&FN: *Who’s better?*

Reese: Me. Jeremy will say different. But it’s me.

T&FN: *Your 2013 injury, the torn labrum, how close did that come to stopping your career?*

Reese: It was really close. The year after that I really wasn’t expecting a lot but I was kind of expecting something. It wasn’t a World Champs year so I should not have had to put too much stress on myself because I was coming back from injury anyway.

But the following year it kind of hit home because I didn’t make the final in the long jump. I wanted to cry, I wanted to quit. And that might’ve been my last year of training.

So I was talking with Jeremy and he encouraged me to work with a life coach. I thought, “This might be it if I don’t get myself together this year. This could be it for me.”

I started talking with her and getting to know her and she got

to know me. Instantly things started to change around and we started to realize that I didn’t want to retire, I didn’t want to quit.

We just talked back and forth and that following year, that’s when I won World Indoors. I’m really grateful for her to be in my life and helping me out some.

T&FN: *What’s it like working with Jeremy?*

Reese: We’re like brother and sister. We

On Turning Pro Early

Brittney Reese still had a year of eligibility remaining at Mississippi when she decided to turn pro leading up to the ‘08 Olympics. At the time she said, “It was a tough decision because I am a team player and I like to be on a team. Now I have to ride solo but it was just the right time for me to go.”

Nearly a decade has passed in which she has seen many other young track athletes forego some or all of their NCAA eligibility in favor of paydays. Some have flourished, others not.

While she has no regrets, she has advice to others who are contemplating the decision: “Be smart. Coming from college to the professionals is a whole different thing. You don’t have that team setting, you don’t have your teammates cheering you on.

“It’s really all about you being an individual and taking care of business and doing the things you’re supposed to do as professional athlete. Carrying yourself like a professional athlete.

“You now are a brand. You’re representing yourself.”

joke around a lot, we play a lot, but when it comes down to practice and we’re on the runway, we’re both of the same mindset. It is a teacher-student type thing.

We have a great relationship—he helps me out with my kid. He’s just like a big brother to me. And we absolutely click. If I have a problem doing something we both know exactly what it is. We both can fix it. He has taught me how to be a coach to myself. If I go out and jump and he is not there I know automatically what I did wrong.

And he has also helped me with coaching other athletes because that’s what I want to do and he’s kind of been a mentor in showing me different drills and things that I can do to help my athletes also.

T&FN: *I understand you stay in touch with Jackie Joyner-Kersey, who still holds the American Record in your event. What advice has she had for you that you’ve really taken to heart?*

Reese: She told me that there is nobody like me. And that I can do some things if I put my mind to it. I always look to her for advice if I have any concerns with my jumps.

But she always has told me that I can break the record if I fix some things. We’ve been working hard trying to fix those things and talking with her and Jeremy on certain aspects of my job to try to improve them.

T&FN: *When did your adopted son Alex become a regular part of your life?*

Reese: I would say around ‘13. He was liv-

Reese — continued

ing with my mom at the time. He came to me actually last year. With him, I had to focus more on my goals in training and being a parent.

T&FN: *Is it a challenge to be a world-class athlete, a coach, and a single parent?*

Reese: Not too much, but it's a little stressful, more than I thought it would be. He's an active kid. He's in baseball, karate, swimming.

But it's been a fun journey with him. I was homeschooling him last year, so he was at every practice then.

He loves to be around the other athletes and my training partners and Jeremy. Sometimes I catch him out there trying to pole vault or shot put.

I'm just grateful that I have coaches and people around me that love him just as much as I love him. He asks tons of questions. They're willing to answer all his questions so that he can learn to love track & field just as much as we do.

T&FN: *When did they start calling you "Da Beast"?*

Reese: I got it at Ole Miss. I think it was the first meet of the season and I won the long jump and the high jump and the triple jump and one of my teammates was like "B-Reese the Beast!" and it just stuck from there.

T&FN: *Where are you more beastly, training or competition?*

Reese: Oh, competition for sure. I try to beast all my training but I think it comes out more when I'm at track meets and try to jump far.

T&FN: *Throughout your career, you've probably had more fouls in big meets than you'd like. Is that*

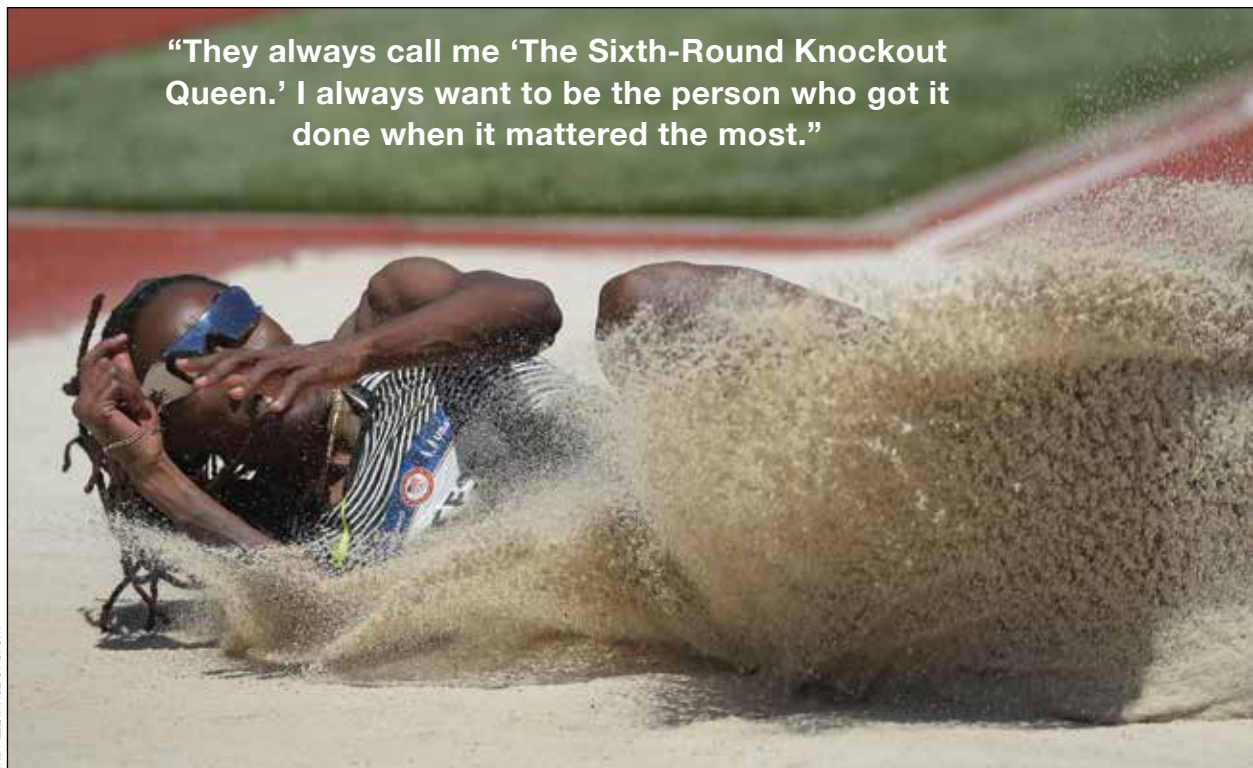
something you address in training?

Reese: We work on it. But I feel like the fouls come from me getting excited and overstriding or not putting my feet down quick enough. That's because when I get on the runway I'm so anxious and so excited. Last year I did a really good job of it until the Olympics. I didn't foul so much last year as I had in the

T&FN: *After having been in so many World Championships and having won so many golds, is London this summer still a big thing for you?*

Reese: I will say, yes, it is. My goal and my focus now is on trying to break records. I feel like I've done everything else in the sport. That's something that I'm looking forward to in the next couple of years whenever it decides to

"They always call me 'The Sixth-Round Knockout Queen.' I always want to be the person who got it done when it mattered the most."



KIRBY LEE/IMAGE OF SPORT

past. It's something I'm definitely working on, that and my landing. I want to get those two down pat to where I'm getting the max effort out of each jump.

T&FN: *Is it tough to deal with that in practice when you don't have the same adrenaline flowing that you would have in a meet?*

Reese: Yes. It's really tough. There are certain drills that we do at practice that can help limit that. I think I'll be all right this year. It's more about me just trusting the process. Trusting myself and getting my foot down quick. I think everything will be OK.

happen. I'm not going to rush it. I'm just going to do what I do and whenever it happens, it just happens.

T&FN: *You've now competed in 3 Olympics and 8 World Champs, indoors and out. Which of your performances are you most proud of?*

Reese: I would say my first Olympic medal at the London Olympics in '12.

I was so proud of myself that day because I worked so hard. I did not want to end up 5th again [as in '08] and I didn't want to get left off the podium. I was really, really happy and overjoyed.

T&FN: *You're only 30. JJK was still jumping world-class at age 35. How much longer will you stay in the game?*

Reese: I'm probably going to give myself till '20 and that's probably when I will be done.

T&FN: *How do you want to be remembered when it's all over?*

Reese: They always call me "The Sixth-Round Knockout Queen." I always want to be the person who got it done when it mattered the most. □

A Future As A Coach?

Brittney Reese isn't the first top-shelf athlete who wants to go into coaching herself. What sets her apart from most is that she's already started. An assistant at San Diego's Mesa College, she works alongside head coach Renee Ross.

Rather than being pigeonholed as a jumps coach, she explains, each year she gets to learn a new event area. "I've coached high jump and long jump, now I'm coaching sprints. I'm making the rounds.

"My training is to be a coach someday and I want to learn to coach all the events..." she pauses and adds, "except throws... I don't know anything

about throws.

"For me to get this opportunity to coach at my age while still being in training, it's real cool— for me to be out there learning with my athletes. I have a good squad. We are gearing up for conference."

This season, Reese is working with the men's side mostly, but says that isn't much of a change. "They're a little more hardheaded than women. But they listen well. They're motivated. They're willing to win. But I've got to stop them every now and then from talking so much. I feel like they talk more than women," she laughs.

"But it's not that big of a difference. They trust me and I believe in them and I try to find different ways to connect with them."