

The 1989 campaign brought affirmation for U.S. Athlete of the Year Sandra Farmer-Patrick.

A native of Jamaica, she had lived most of her life in the U.S., but held dual citizenship as the Olympic year began. She had U.S.-ranked in 1977 and '78 but wore Jamaican green and yellow as a 400H finalist at the '84 Olympics and '87 World Championships.

After her marriage to fellow hurdler David Patrick in '88, the time seemed right to run in Seoul representing the U.S., the country she called home.

At the Trials, the field for her semi was moved out one lane because rainwater had pooled on the curb. Farmer-Patrick became confused on the backstraight and veered for a time from lane 6 into lane 5. She had gained no advantage and hindered no one, but she was disqualified nonetheless.

Her appeals were rejected despite the fact there was an open lane in the final.

Farmer-Patrick had skipped the Jamaican Trials and a desperate plea by telegram for consideration from the Jamaican federation went unanswered. The Jamaican public branded Farmer-Patrick a traitor. Her decision had proved irrevocable.

At least Sandra had David to share her disappointment. He PRed in the Trials but finished 4th, a hair's breadth away from 3rd. Two of track's "good guys," they watched the Olympics on TV.

In '89 they rebounded in fine style. each claimed the TAC title, and they followed up with twin World Cup wins. And Sandra, for her part, stopped the talk of those who second-guessed her switch in nationalities, setting American Records at TAC and the New York Games.

T&FN: What was the highlight of '89 for you?

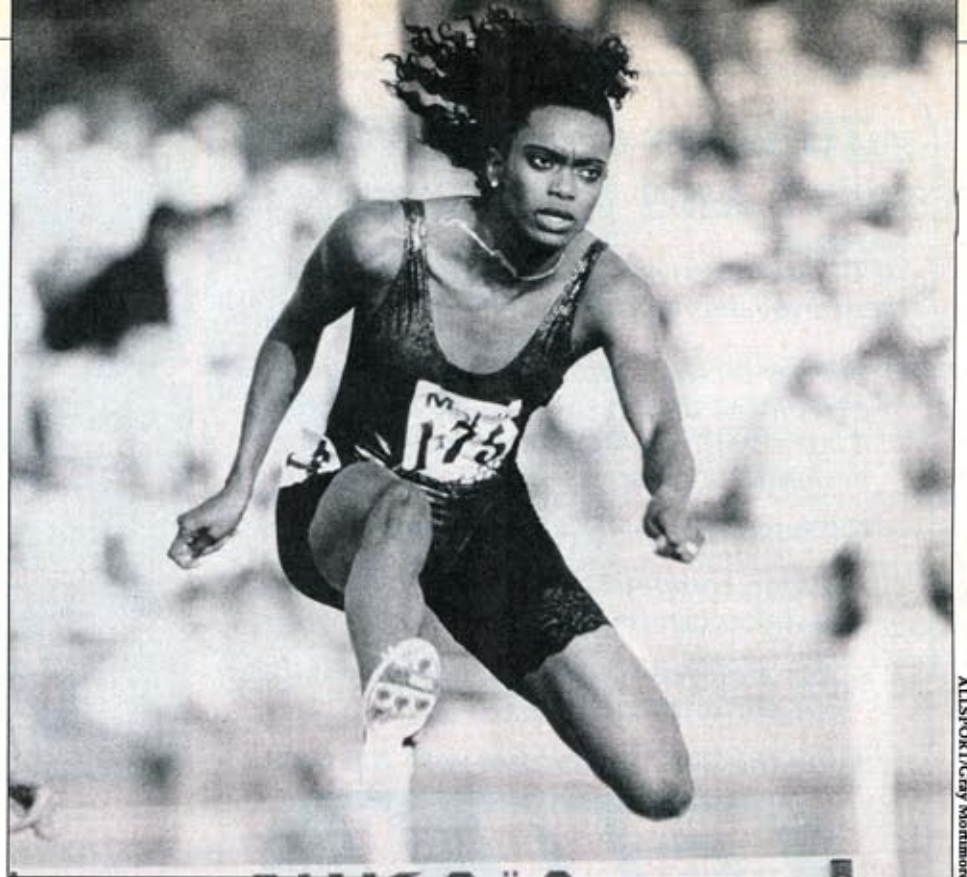
Farmer-Patrick: My first race, the TAC nationals. I didn't have to do anything after that, and I was content just knowing I was able to go out there and break the AR and get a PR on my first attempt.

I spoke to Schowonda Williams the other day on the phone. She said, "Gosh Sandy, you beat us by a lot in that race. I looked at the film and we were way back there."

I said, "Schowonda, I had a lot built up inside of me. That's the only reason that race was like that. It was probably my biggest margin." It was the first race after the Olympic Games.

T&FN: It must not have been easy giving up the certainty of making the Jamaican team.

Farmer-Patrick: When I made that



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U.S. ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Sandra Farmer-Patrick

decision I told everybody, "There's going to be ifs, ifs, ifs." What if she falls? What if she... and all the ifs came through at the Trials.

T&FN: Why did you decide to do it?

Farmer-Patrick: When you're a competitor, you like challenges. I love challenges, and that's why I think I went for that challenge. I wanted to run so bad for the U.S. I've grown up here. This is my life.

I'd talk to people and say, "I went to the Olympic Games in 1984," and they'd say, "Really?! How'd you do?" When I'd say I ran for Jamaica, it was like, "Oh." It was like a turnoff. It was like I was living here but I was living as a second-class citizen. So to make everything the way I wanted to feel, I felt it was the right decision.

I felt, "Look, I've been to the Olympic Games. I'm over the fun stage. If I can't go to the Olympics and represent my country and get a medal, I don't need to go anyway."

T&FN: After your DQ, Jamaica didn't want you back either. How did you feel?

Farmer-Patrick: I cried a lot inside. No one—I don't think David even—saw me cry a tear on the outside to this day. You have to put my scripture in; it's Psalms 30, verse 5. People can interpret it the way they want to: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." I felt this too will pass away.

T&FN: You've been coached by Loren Seagrave, and David by Stan Huntsman. Do you train together?

Farmer-Patrick: It's funny to see us. We go in the car together. We get our little bags out of the back, we walk down on the track, and then we go separate directions.

T&FN: On race days?

Farmer-Patrick: I usually try to stay away from him. I can stay up and play cards to 3:00, 4:00 in the morning, and it won't affect me one way or another. With him, he has to stay focused. He has to eat at a certain time. I say, "David, let's go shopping."

He says, "No, I have to rest my legs..."

When I go to bed at night I think about what I'm going to do and when I

warm up I visualize what I'm going to do. But during that time I don't put the pressure on myself. I can be with my competitors that day and it still wouldn't bother me.

T&FN: *You were tired and felt some pressure, though, after David won his World Cup race and yours was still to come, no?*

Farmer-Patrick: When I went out the rain got me real heavy, and I didn't feel too good anyway. I thought, "Oh God, I've got to win this race now. Everything is against me. I haven't been training, I'm tired, it's raining, and now the pressure is on me." I had to conquer it. And I did.

T&FN: *In 53.84, no less.*

Farmer-Patrick: Race-pattern-wise, Loren said that was the worst race of my life, because I came home the last three or four hurdles in 17 steps. I never do that.

T&FN: *What did Loren think of your time?*

Farmer-Patrick: He said that had it halfway been sunny—it didn't have to be hot—and the rain wasn't there, he said he knew I would have run sub-53 [Marina Stepanova's WR is 52.94].

T&FN: *Do you think it strange that you ran so fast when you felt really tired?*

Farmer-Patrick: Oh God. People have been asking, "Should we set up a race for you and someone?" Records, whether they be World Records, or American Records, or personal bests, they come when everything is clicking right. The weather, the time, the track, everything has to be right. You can't plan a World Record.

T&FN: *Did you try to plan the AR at the New York Games?*

Farmer-Patrick: I came back from Europe from my last race—in fact I ran an extra race in London that I hadn't planned—and I had like five days rest, if that much. I was like, "There is no way I can go to this meet; I'm tired, Jackie Joyner-Kersey's going to run; she's going to beat me; this is a disaster."

David kept saying, "Just go; Jackie Joyner-Kersey is Jackie Joyner-Kersey. If she beats you, that's somebody great beating you."

T&FN: *I guess David won that argument.*

Farmer-Patrick: I'll tell you, when I got on that line everything else was

erased out of my mind. I saw Jackie and my adrenaline just went to I don't know where; I got energies from I don't know where. My body was shaking; it was like, "Let's start the race *now!*"

The gun went off and I actually couldn't feel Jackie, because they had her behind me, which was good. So I ran my race. But in the curve I thought, "This is where I'm strongest. She's getting ready to get me. I've got to go for it now." And that's when I went for it. When I crossed the line and I saw that time I just said, "That's hand-timed, that's wrong."

When they gave me officially the time they did, I thought, "This is unbelievable. I'm tired. I didn't plan on running that fast."

But Loren always says, "Sandra, the more races you run, the better you'll get." □

Sandra Marie Farmer-Patrick was born August 18, 1962, in Kingston, Jamaica, and is 5-8/138. Graduated from St. Angela Hall HS (Brooklyn) in 1980. Attended Arizona in '80-'81 and Cal State Los Angeles until '85. Represents the Flo-Jo International Track Club.

PRs: 200—23.32 ('89); 400—51.65 ('89); 800—2:10.94 ('84); 100H—13.58/13.0w ('89); 400H—53.37 ('89).

Progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Yr	Age	400H	Major Meets
'77	14/15	58.90 (x, 5)	1)TAC Jr
'78	15/16	59.94+ (x, 7)	—
'79	16/17	58.31	1)TAC Jr
'80	17/18	58.62	—
'81	18/19	57.54	dq-sf)TAC
'82	19/20	57.54+	4)TAC, 9)CG
'83	20/21	56.43	6)NC, 4sf)TAC, 5h)WC
'84	21/22	56.05	2)NC, 5)TAC, 8)OG
'85	22/23	55.75	4)NC, 5)TAC
'86	23/24	55.89	2)TAC
'87	24/25	54.38 (4, x)	2)TAC, 2)PAG, 4)WC
'88	25/26	54.49 (5, 1)	dq-sf)OT
'89	26/27	53.37 (1, 1)	1)TAC, 1)WCp

Farmer-Patrick's Early Hurdles

That Sandra Farmer-Patrick runs track at all is perhaps more amazing than her undefeated '89 season.

Growing up in her grandmother's brick house in Jamaica with several other young children, she explains, "I never thought about track. I was just a survivor; like most little young Jamaicans, just running around trying to survive."

At about age 10, though—she can't remember exactly which year—great-aunt Vita Farmer adopted her and brought her to Brooklyn.

"To leave Jamaica and go to the United States," she recalls thinking, "Oh my God!"

Adjusting took some time. "When I first went to class I had this deep accent," she remembers. "The kids would tease me, 'Oh, she just came off the banana boat. Little coconut!' And when you're a little kid, you're like, 'Why do these kids treat me like this?' " Tall and gawky, she was also ribbed for standing out in that way.

Outside of school her life was church. Church, church, and more church.

"I went to church six times a week, and on Sundays three times a day," she reveals. "Vita is very-very-religious Pentecostal. It was just me and her in the house and all I did was go to church, Bible study, things like that."

She jumped at the chance to join the Flashettes Track Club. But not out of any great drive to be an athlete. "I just wanted to get out of the house and mingle with other kids," she says. "I had my little tennis shoes on and my little skirt, because in my religion you couldn't wear pants."

Coach Don Johnson provided her with a sweatsuit, to Vita's initial dismay. "After that he gradually broke in those little briefs to her," says Farmer-Patrick, recalling that Sunday meets presented an even larger stumbling block.

"No, she cannot miss church," she recalls Vita telling Johnson. "If you're sick, you go to church and you get healed in church, so there's no excuse for not going to church."

As Sandra persisted in track, even running an AJR 58.90 while only 14, Vita gradually "loosened up." After all, scholarship money Sandra won at the Colgate Games paid her high school tuition at Christian (albeit Catholic) St. Angela Hall.

On Farmer-Patrick's first trip home from Arizona during her first collegiate year, she wore lipstick before a planned visit to the house of her uncle, a minister. Vita "wiped that stuff off my lips and all over my face," says Farmer-Patrick. "She was so upset."

The cat was out of the bag, though. Track and fashion had Sandra for good.

By 1983 she was worldly enough to talk with fellow athletes Jennifer Inniss and Gervaise McCraw about men. When hurdler David Patrick's name came up, Sandra remembers announcing, "May the best woman win. I'm going for it."

A mutual friend laid the groundwork for a meeting at that year's Jenner. David sent her roses before TAC, and in January of 1988 they married.

Track brought David. On that score Vita hasn't uttered a word of complaint. /SL/