

# Sanya Richards

Sanya Richards is a composed, serious-but-playful and articulate 19-year-old who speaks in complete sentences, without a single "you know" or "like" in more than half an hour of conversation.

As a runner, she seems to flow rather than to be producing a maximum effort. In fact, she doesn't appear to be running excessively fast until the race is over and you look at your stopwatch.

Richards came to the United States from Jamaica seven years ago with her parents, Newton and Sharon (and her younger sister Shari), and she became a U.S. citizen in May '02. The family lives in Pembroke Pines, Florida, where her father is a real estate investor ("On a small scale," she adds) and her mother is a travel counselor.

We caught up with her during the hectic Texas Relays weekend, where she anchored the Loughorn team that crushed the Collegiate Record in the 4x4 (see p. 22):

**T&FN:** How did you start running track?

**Richards:** I was 7 years old in Jamaica, at a sports day. I won a race for my team and that's

## Richards Thinks Olympian Thoughts

**T&FN:** Have your performances in '03 and so far in '04 set you up for trying to make the U.S. Olympic team?

**Richards:** Definitely. They're great confidence boosters. And they help us plan my future training for the Olympics. I don't do the planning and I don't know exactly what the plans are. My coach and my dad know, but I just want to focus on the next goal, the next race.

**T&FN:** Many would call you one of the favorites in the Olympic women's 400, even this early. Do you even think about such predictions?

**Richards:** I find those predictions as just flattering. I just try to stay grounded and focused. I'm just trying to be ready when I get there, because I know it's going to be tough. It's going to take in the high 48s or the low 49s to medal.

**T&FN:** Who do you see as your prime competition for a medal?

**Richards:** Ana Guevara—she's the world champion. Lorraine Fenton and [Natalya] Nazarova. She just won the World Indoors. And Michelle Collins and Jearl Miles-Clark from the United States. I know it'll be difficult, but I'm going to try to do well for myself and for the U.S.

where it all started.

**T&FN:** Who were your first heroes, or heroines?

**Richards:** Merlene Ottey. I used to see a huge picture of her painted on a wall on my way to school. I remember saying to myself, "I

want to be like her and have my picture on the wall." There were a group of runners wearing the Jamaican national colors [black, green and gold], and she was the only woman.

**T&FN:** In high school you were named T&FN Athlete Of The Year; you won the Gatorade Award, and USATF's Verizon Youth Award. You won U.S. Junior titles at 200 and 400, and medaled in both events at the World Juniors.

With all that behind you, what were your expectations going into your frosh year at a high-powered program like the one at UT?

**Richards:** I was looking forward to it. In spite of the pressure of being on my own and being in a new environment, I was hoping to have a good season and win the nationals and hopefully help the team win the team title.

**T&FN:** You did that and more in 2003: won the NCAA and USATF 400s, set a PR and AJR of 50.58, made it to the semis of the Worlds and then anchored the winning 4x4. What's your assessment of all that?

**Richards:** I feel that every race I win and everything I've done so far has advanced me in the right direction for my real goal—winning at the Olympic Games [see sidebar]. I try not to dwell on those other achievements because they might distract me from that ultimate goal.

**T&FN:** What positive effects have UT coach Bev Kearney brought to your development as an athlete?

**Richards:** She inspires me because of her own situation [recovering from a serious auto accident two years ago]. Besides that, she has put a lot of thought into what I am doing. And her plans always seem—though I don't always understand where we're going—to have my best interests at heart.

**T&FN:** What's the atmosphere like on the Texas team? Close-knit and supportive of each other, certainly, but what special things does the team offer to the athletes?

**Richards:** We all heighten each other's performances. When one performs well, it inspires the others. When Raasin [McIntosh] and Nichole [Denby] do well, it helps me to want to do well, too.

by Jim  
Dunaway

EPIC/ANDERSON



**Richards (getting stick from Natasha Staten) also anchored the quick Longhorn 4x1 here at the Texas Relays**



**T&FN:** *What did you learn from the world-class competitions you experienced last year, at age 18?*

**Richards:** Overseas, I realized that at that level, it's fun—but it's also a job. It's really serious. Watching Maria Mutola and how hard she trains made me realize that to stay competitive for a long time, you really have to stay in tune with your goals.

**T&FN:** *What is your strongest asset as a competitor?*

**Richards:** My competitiveness. When all else fails, I want to win. Bev says even when the house is falling down around me, I'm able to keep a level head and run well. I love to run and I want to cross the finish line first.

**T&FN:** *Which do you prefer, the 200 or the 400?*

**Richards:** The 400. I really feel comfortable when I run the 400. I feel my strategy is good and getting better every time. The 200 is an indicator of how fast I'll run in the 400, especially the first half. But the 400 is my primary event.

**T&FN:** *What do you think about when you're running?*

**Richards:** In the 60 or 100, I don't think about anything. I do most of my thinking in the blocks: going through the phases and running the race in my mind. If you think during the race, the race leaves you behind.

In the 200, I think, "Get out aggressive, get up tall and lift coming home."

I think a lot in the 400. I've been trying to push myself more. I sometimes think I'm a little conservative in the 400, so I tell myself to keep pushing.

**T&FN:** *Do you have specific time goals for this season and overall?*

**Richards:** I always put time goals on my wall. This winter I had "SANYA'S GOALS" in big letters. Under it "Indoor World Junior Record" and the time I had to beat [51.87] and "NCAA Record" and that time [51.05].

Bev always tells me not to focus on time, but to just win every race. And I find that when I do that, I run fast times.

**T&FN:** *Did you ever consider competing for Jamaica?*

**Richards:** Definitely. That was the toughest decision I've had to make so far in my career. My parents and I discussed it and discussed it and we decided I should compete for the United States, and give back to the country that's given me and my parents so many opportunities.

I think this is a great country and I'm happy we moved here.

**T&FN:** *How does sprinting reflect Sanya Richards, the person? Or does it? Is track that big a part of your life, or just one facet of the overall you?*

**Richards:** Track is a huge part of my life. My competitiveness is the same way in school, in playing cards, anything. I

always want to win. Off the track I'm funny and laid back. But on the track, I'm focused—some say "mean."

**T&FN:** *On some personal angles, what's your favorite kind of music?*

**Richards:** I'm not really a music freak, but I love rap and R&B.

**T&FN:** *Favorite book?*

**Richards:** *The Power Of Positive Thinking*, by Norman Vincent Peale.

**T&FN:** *Favorite food?*

**Richards:** I love chicken—any type of chicken.

**T&FN:** *What's your favorite thing to do outside of track?*

**Richards:** Shopping. Going to the mall.

**T&FN:** *Do you like to dance?*

**Richards:** My sister and I love to dance. We would sing and dance at Christmas for the whole family; two aunts and their kids and my grandparents.

**T&FN:** *Does your family follow your races?*

**Richards:** At every meet, some family members are in the stands. Sixteen are coming for the [NCAA] here [in Austin] in June.

**T&FN:** *Given your commitment to track and to the team, do you have much of a social life?*

**Richards:** No. I don't go out a lot. I don't mind. I'd prefer to have a gold medal than to be at the last party of the day. Like my dad says, I'll have plenty of time to party when I'm done running.

**T&FN:** *Do you plan to continue running, as a professional, after graduation? For how long?*

**Richards:** I'll run as long as I enjoy it. It's still fun, still new to me every time I step on the track. When I lose that, that's when I'll give it up.

**T&FN:** *You're young, just 19. How can you handle all the attention you're getting?*

**Richards:** Both my parents are humble and I try to stay like them. They've taught me how to be gracious and not to run for attention, but to run for better and better times.

**T&FN:** *What are your goals as an athlete? As a person?*

**Richards:** As an athlete, to be an Olympic champion. I've always wanted to be an Olympic champion.

As a person, I want to know that when I look in the mirror that I'm happy, that I've made all the right decisions and that I wasn't forced to do anything I didn't want to do. □

### Richards Facts

**•Personal:** Born Sanya Leanne Richards, February 26, 1985, in Kingston, Jamaica; 5-9/138

**•PRs:** Outdoors—100: 11.28 ('03); 200: 22.86 ('03); 400: 50.58 AJR, AmCR ('03); LJ: 19-11 1/4 '01. Indoors—80: 7.21 ('04); 200: 22.49 WJR, -AmCR ('04); 50.82 WJR, CR ('04)

**•Schools:** St. Thomas Aquinas High (Fl. Lauderdale, Florida) '02; now a sophomore at Texas, majoring in business

**•Coaches:** John Guarino (Aquinas); Beverly Kearney (Texas)

**•Major Honors:** 200—1)US Jr, 3)WJR '02; 2)NCI '03; 2)NCI '04. 400—1)US Jr, 2)WJR '02; 2)NCI '03, 1)NC '03, 1)US '03, 4sf)WC '03; 1)NCI '04. 4x4—1)WJR '02; 1)NCI '03, 1)NC '03, 1)WC '03; 1)NCI '04

**•World/U.S. Rankings:** 200—#5 U.S. '02; 400—#5 U.S. '02; #8 W, #1 U.S. '03