

## T&FN INTERVIEW

# TONY DEES

by Jon Hendershott

*Tony Dees went to Barcelona as the favorite in the Olympic 110 hurdles. He emerged with the silver medal after running what he felt was "probably my worst race all year."*

*Even though he slipped to No. 3 in the World Rankings after rating No. 2 the previous two seasons, Dees did claim his first U.S. No. 1 (again, after a pair of runner-up finishes).*

*The Mississippi grad, now living and training in Tampa, brings not only sprinter's speed, but also brute physical power, to his demanding discipline.*

*A late-bloomer who didn't earn any kind of ranking spot until he was 27, the 29-year-old Dees also brings an analytical view to the event. That's engendered by his coach, hurdles guru Wilbur Ross.*

*His view is firmly aimed toward one goal: Roger Kingdom's World Record of 12.92. Dees believes it's just a matter of time before he becomes the fastest high hurdler ever.*

**T&FN:** *After the Olympic final, you said, "Nobody asks who placed 2nd, only who won the gold." Was the silver actually a disappointment to you?*

**Dees:** I don't want to use such a strong word as "disappointment," but I did expect to win the gold. I would put it that I'm content with the silver but not completely happy about it.

It definitely wasn't a disappointment; it was a great accomplishment for me. But it was just one of those things that happens—someone had to win and someone had to get 2nd.

**T&FN:** *Looking back on your overall Olympic experience, what are your feelings?*

**Dees:** One thing I do regret is not going all out in the semifinal. Mark McKoy won in the same time he ran in the final [13.12], but I had total control of the race through hurdle 6.

But I relaxed it in. I just wanted to get the feel of the race, but I should have gone ahead and won it. I would have asserted myself over Mark and put a lot more pressure on him. That might have caused him to crash in the final and do all the things I ended up doing.

**T&FN:** *You were World Ranked No. 3 for '92, but were rated the No. 1 American. Is that any consolation at all?*

**Dees:** Not really, because I expected to be the No. 1 American anyway. So I can look at it that I got one of the things I was aiming for.

But looking back, silver medalist was a great feat for me. Not many athletes win a medal in their first Olympics and Barcelona was my first. I did what Greg Foster did his first time [2nd in LA in '84]. It worked out for the best.

**T&FN:** *Is what happened in '92 the motivation for the future, like for the World Championships this year?*

**Dees:** Most definitely. That's the major thing on my agenda this year: to win as many races as I possibly can, including Stuttgart. Last year, I thought too much about time. This year, I'm running to win.

My coach, Wilbur Ross, and I have devised a whole new technique for me to get over the last four hurdles with the speed I carry. I'll no longer slow down—so there'll be no excuses.

And mentally, I'll use the Olym-

pics as a learning experience, so I can take a whole different approach to the Worlds.

**T&FN:** *Exactly what?*

**Dees:** I'm going to go in with the "gung ho-ness" that I need. I'll go in there aiming to run a World Record. Regardless if I do it or not, I'll fare better going in with that attitude than I did at the Olympics.

**T&FN:** *What, in fact, was your mental outlook going into the Games?*

**Dees:** I was a little more humble at the Olympics. I wasn't as mean as I should have been. I will be a lot more focused on myself in the future.

I'll not pay heed to the performances of any other hurdlers. Regardless of what they run, my attitude will be that I'm going to run faster. I went into the Olympics a little soft. I was always a little wary in how I per-

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## "What I have to learn now is how not to forget."

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formed.

**T&FN:** *So, you feel you didn't run the race you wanted in Barcelona?*

**Dees:** No, I didn't. I've looked at the film and it's almost disgusting to me to watch myself. Not once did I execute properly, as I had practiced. It was two different Tony Dees.

So my main focus this season will be to transfer everything from the practice track to the race itself. In practice, I'm flawless. What I have to learn now is how not to forget. I have to duplicate in competition what I learn in practice.

**T&FN:** *Is it fair to say that what Tony Dees learned in '92 about himself as a competitor is that need to transfer knowledge from practice to competition?*

**Dees:** Yes. Mainly, I have to stay more focused and "preach what I practice," so to speak. If I practice one thing all day but forget it in a race, that's a problem.

I look at tapes of practice and I know that if I run like that anytime, there is no way I can be beaten. In practice, I utilize my full speed. I run wide open.

**T&FN:** *You're a big guy, 6-4/208, and you can run a 10.15 hundred. The hurdles are 42 inches high and 10 yards apart, but are they really too close together for you?*

**Dees:** They are. If the hurdles were, say, 11 yards apart, there's not a hurdler alive who would outrun me. Then I could utilize my full speed. Actually, just another two

### Dees's Progression

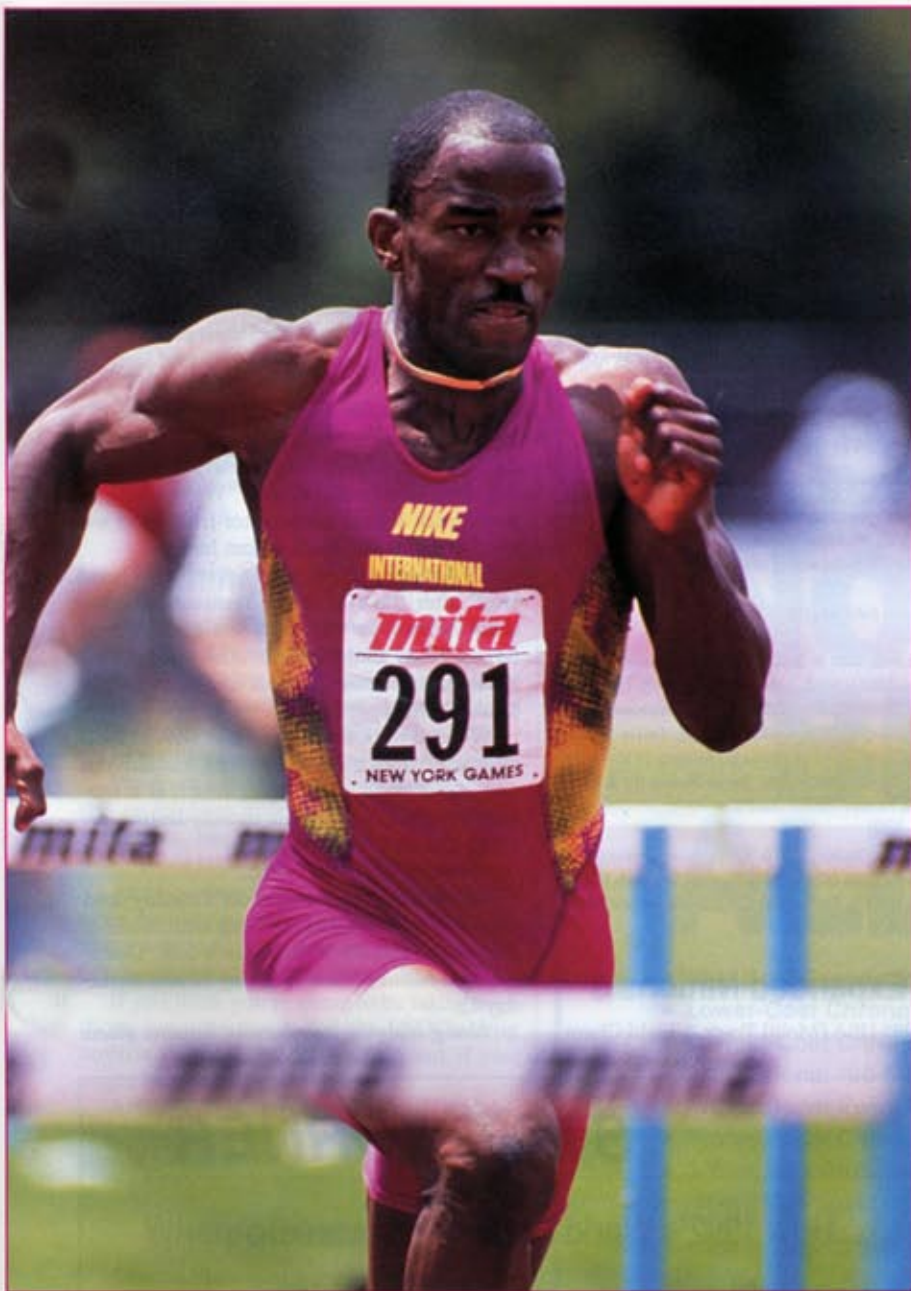
Michael Anthony Dees was born August 6, 1963, in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and is 6-4/208. Graduated from Pascagoula HS in '81 and competed for Mississippi '82-'84. Currently represents Nike International.

Major meets in events other than 110H: 100: '89—8)TAC, 4)OF. 200: '83—8)NCAA; '84—6h)NCAA; '86—8)OF; '88—7s)OT.

PRs: 100—10.15 ('91); 200—20.54 ('84); 100H—13.05 ('91) (5, 12 W, 4, 11 A).

Progression (with World & U.S. Rankings):

Year	Age	100	110H	Majors (hurdles)
'81	18	—	13.9 hs	—
'82	19	—	13.98	—
'83	20	10.31w	13.68	4)NCAA Ind
'84	21	—	13.65	2h)NC, 7)TAC, 6q)OT
'85	22	—	13.86	6h)TAC
'86	23	—	13.65	7s)TAC
'87	24	—	13.86	—
'88	25	—	13.54	4)TAC Ind, 6s)OT
'89	26	10.16	13.61	5s)TAC
'90	27	10.27	13.24 (2, 2)	1)TAC Ind, 2)TAC
'91	28	10.15	13.05 (2, 2)	6)TAC Ind, 6)TAC
'92	29	10.32	13.08 (3, 1)	1)TAC I, 2)OT, 2)OG



ALLSPORT/Tim DeFrisco

feet is all I would need.

**T&FN:** *At your size and speed, what is the toughest aspect of hurdling for you?*

**Dees** [laughs]: Just clearing hurdles 8, 9 and 10. Controlling technically what to do at those hurdles. For me, hurdles 1-2-3 are 10 yards apart. Then, 4-5-6 are  $9\frac{3}{4}$  yards; 7-8-9-10 are  $9\frac{1}{2}$  yards. The 10th hurdle might even be only 9 yards.

That's with the speed I generate and carry through the race. So it makes it very difficult to compensate and adjust for those last hurdles once I get to them.

**T&FN:** *With your size and because indoor races are so short, do you use them more as training?*

**Dees:** Pretty much. But I am looking at this indoor season like I did in '90. I was untouchable for the first six hurdles outdoors that year. That came from

running indoors.

This year I'm going to do the same thing, to increase my speed over the first part of the race. If I can get that edge on the other hurdlers, then I can get out where I can relax and concentrate more. I'd be ahead of the field at that point.

My objective is to use this indoor season as a developmental stage for the first part of the race outdoors. It's the same idea of transferring knowledge.

I'm always thinking of ways to try to get a little extra, because with my speed, there's no way I shouldn't run a World Record.

**T&FN:** *Are the hurdles just like any other event, in that you have to stay relaxed in order to speed up? Don't force it?*

**Dees:** Absolutely. You have to finesse the hurdles. If you try to force it,

you just fight yourself and crash all over the place.

**T&FN:** *Wilbur has said if you run a clean race, not hitting any hurdles, you can run 12.88. Would that be your "perfect" race? Or do you want to put a time on it?*

**Dees:** It's hard for me to put a time on it. It could be that 12.88 would be too slow. From practices, we've projected times between 12.79 and 12.84. One big key is clearing the last few hurdles better than I have been.

**T&FN:** *Is there one aspect you like most about the actual running of the hurdles?*

**Dees:** The idea of conquering the event. I want to run faster than anybody in history. Something tells me I'll do it someday. That's the whole object: I want to use the ability that God has gifted me with to the fullest. Running faster than anyone else will be the deepest filling of that potential.

**T&FN:** *From the mental standpoint, how does hurdling reflect the personality of Tony Dees?*

**Dees:** The hurdles express my aggressiveness and determination to get what I want. You also see that in the grimace on my face when I run. In everyday life, I'm determined to get something if I want it. When that is done, only then will I rest.

**T&FN:** *What's the most important thing running the hurdles has taught you about life itself? Partly that determination to go after your goals?*

**Dees:** That's part of it. Hurdling puts that fighting edge in your mind; it prods the fighting part of you. The "don't sell yourself short" type of attitude.

Hurdling is very demanding, so I feel if I can accomplish even half the goals I have set for myself, then I'll make it quite successfully in the business world.

**T&FN:** *For something completely different: you race cars, don't you?*

**Dees:** Yes, drag racing. My brother got me into it, but I've been doing it since I was 15. It's been about 13 years. My car is in the class called "super gas."

It runs around 9.5-9.7 seconds for a straight quarter-mile. That's about 145mph. The racing season starts around March, so if I have a break from track after indoors until early May, I'll race the car then.

**T&FN:** *You're not concerned about the possible danger in the sport?*

**Dees:** Not really. You take it for what it's worth. If you run cautiously on the track, you're more likely to get hurt than if you just go out and run.

**T&FN:** *Well, how dangerous is car racing?*

**Dees:** It isn't as risky as you might think. When you say, "Racing cars," most people think of two cars blasting down some city street. One has a blowout, it flips and somebody is killed.

But about half of any dragster is roll cage. Cars are inspected before any race and if there's the tiniest, slightest thing out of order, you can't race that day.

There is some danger, sure, but if you wear all the safety equipment, you're fine. I don't race during track season—but I am thinking of converting my car to a street car just because it's so pretty to drive around. □