

T&FN INTERVIEW

Lauryn Williams

An athlete who is anything but self-centered, sprinter Lauryn Williams says she didn't realize she had really special talent until she won the NCAA 100 and then Olympic silver as a Miami junior in '04. Somehow the World Junior and Pan-Am Games golds she won the two previous years did little to inflate her ego.

Williams turned pro after her Athens performance and won gold at the Worlds in Helsinki the next year. But then—after she took silver in the '06 World Indoor 60—she had her first serious bout with illness or injury. She sank to a No. 7 U.S. 100 Ranking.

We caught up with the diminutive speedster at her Miami home in late May as she worked to put the aches and pains behind her so she can pursue a world title defense in Osaka this August.

T&FN: How are you doing?

Williams: I'm doing OK.

T&FN: "OK?" You don't sound too enthusiastic.

Williams Facts

•**Personal:** born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, September 11, 1983; 5-3 $\frac{1}{2}$ /127 (1.61/57)

•**Schools:** Rochester HS, Pennsylvania '01; Miami '04; now represents Nike

•**Coach:** Amy Deem

•**Major Meets:** 100—6)NCAA, 1)USJr, 1)WJr '02; 3)NCAA, 7)USATF, 1)PanAm '03; 1)NCAA, 3)OT, 2)OG; 3)USATF, 1)WC '05; 2)USATF '06. 60—2)USATF Ind, 2)WIC '06

•**World/U.S. Rankings:** 100: '02—x, 9; '03—x, 7; '04—4, 1; '05—3, 1; '06—11, 7. 200: '05—9, 4

able to diagnose exactly what's going on with it.

T&FN: But you're obviously back racing.

Williams: Yes, the season's here and time is of the essence. My training is going well, actually, so we're just trying to get the actual race together.

T&FN: So you're rehabbing the hamstring, getting therapy on it and working out. You say you're not running well, but on the other hand your training is good.

Williams: I mean that I'm doing what I'm

supposed to be doing in training. I'm hitting the times in practice that my coach wants me to hit.

But I'm not putting it together on the track yet. My mechanics are off. My left leg's just not lifting the way it should.

T&FN: Technically speaking, is there anything you can feel during your races that tells you you've got a mechanical problem?

Williams: No. Racing feels the same but when I watch the video afterwards I can see there's a problem.

T&FN: What do you see?

Williams: My left leg and right leg aren't doing the same thing.

T&FN: I was hoping to ask about your return from last year's illness and injury and your thoughts looking ahead to defending your title.

Williams: Sorry, I don't want you to mistake my tone for having lost hope. I plan to defend my title in Osaka. I know that by the time we get to the World Championships this problem's going to be ironed out and I'll be ready.

I am dedicated to becoming a better Lauryn Williams than I was in '05. This bump in the road is just part of the process.

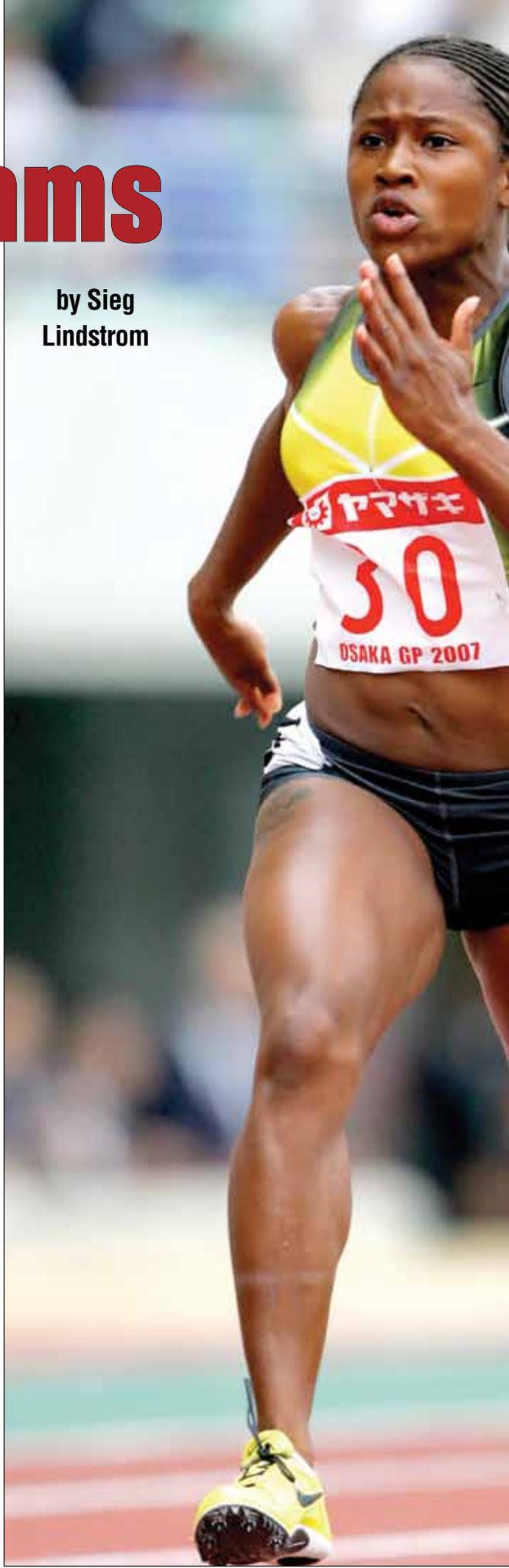
I know I'm still one of the best in the world and I just feel that by the time we get to Osaka I'll be ready to show the world that.

T&FN: You've said this was the first time you have ever been injured, at least to the extent any ache or pain has slowed you down. That itself is amazing. Is there any positive to finally experiencing what it's like to have a serious injury?

Williams: Being injured is truly humbling and a definite learning experience. You take for granted being healthy and pain-free and though you may sympathize with people when they are hurt and hope they get better soon, you have absolutely no idea how an injury truly tests your character and your desire to be a great athlete.

Better now than as an older athlete: 1. Because when you're old your body doesn't respond the same and, 2. This has been a

by Sieg
Lindstrom





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learning experience so I have this wisdom in the event of future problems.

It's just difficult after winning in Helsinki, then getting off to a great start indoors in '06 and knowing how great training had been going heading into outdoors I couldn't help feeling like I was going to run faster than I ever had as soon as I stepped on the track.

I was expecting to run sub-11 the majority of my races last year, and then with the pneumonia and then the hamstring I just couldn't do it.

Then I had to watch as Sherone Simpson had the kind of season I was hoping to have. Full credit to her; she went out and did it, but it was tough not being able to respond.

T&FN: *Has experiencing injury altered your approach to training?*

Williams: Like I've said, it's a 9-to-5 now, between getting therapy and massages and making sure I'm doing everything I possibly can to rehab and strengthen my leg.

T&FN: *Have you changed your training?*

Williams: Only in terms of the little things like making sure I always do the stretching and cooling down after the workout—whereas before I kind of treated it as optional. I make sure I do everything I'm supposed to.

You know, like all 20 of an exercise I hate, instead of maybe doing 17 or so and deciding that's good enough.

T&FN: *You graduated from Miami in 3½ years with a degree in finance. Have you done anything with that?*

Williams: Not too much recently. I had an internship with Citibank in the finance department.

Actually, at the moment I'm studying for my Series 7 [stock and securities broker's] Exam and completing the post-licensing for my real estate license.

The Series 7 book is humongous so I'll probably take it with me to study while I'm running in Europe this summer.

T&FN: *So you're creating several options for when you finally do retire?*

Williams: Yes. What I'm hoping to do is make use of some of the contacts I have and maybe, like with real estate for example, follow somebody around who's doing it—I mean somebody who's really good at selling houses—and learn how they do it.

T&FN: *Has your fame in the Miami*

area as an Olympic medalist opened doors for meeting business people?

Williams: Not really but having gone to the University of Miami I know a lot of Miami football players who are in the NFL now and I've gotten to know some of the business people in their entourages whom I might be able to tap for their expertise.

Williams Helped By Her Friends

When Lauryn Williams won in Helsinki it was apparent that there was a lot of great team spirit, especially among the younger U.S. team members. Were any of those athletes a help to her during her injury period?

“Oh, yeah. Bershawn Jackson, Sanya Richards, Wallace Spearmon. That's kind of my hang-with crew. They've been really supportive.

“Sanya and I kind of consider ourselves ambassadors for the sport and realize our voice being heard is contingent on our success on the track. Sanya had such a great season last year, a really great season.

“I kind of felt bad that I wasn't holding up my end of the bargain while watching her accomplish things similar to what I want to accomplish, but she's been very encouraging.”

I've found that it's really important for me to stay busy. I've been hoping to do some more with my sign-language tutoring but I haven't been able to work that in lately. Just trying to get healthy is taking up a lot of time right now.

T&FN: *Do you think that if you had taken 4*

Williams Lends A Helping Hand

Lauryn Williams has been very involved as an ambassador for the sport with USATF, promoting track & field in schools and so on. Does she think those activities away from the track contributed to her getting hurt or have made it harder to get back?

“Oh, no. Whatever people think about how hard we work—or how hard we don't work as world-class athletes... Don't get me wrong—what we do is hard work but we're at the track for like 3½ hours a day. Most people work 8 hours a day.

“When you think about it that way, we're very fortunate and I feel it is the least I could do to spend time doing things that benefit others. Plus I get bored easily. I need something to keep me busy. Why not things that help others?”

years to graduate from Miami instead of 3½ you might have accomplished more athletically in college—not that winning an NCAA 100 title as a junior is chopped liver.

Williams: Not at all. That happened because I kept making U.S. teams. My freshman year I made the World Juniors team and since I was going to be around all summer training, I figured I might as well take classes. Then the next summer I made the Pan-Am Games team, so why not take classes?

Besides, summer school's a lot easier.

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Williams (from p. 15)

You're taking two classes instead of four.

T&FN: How did you get started in track?

Williams: I was 9 years old and my mom just didn't want me hanging around the house doing nothing.

I was always pretty fast. My mom will tell the story of my being able to outrun our German Shepard. If you ask my dad, he'll tell you I got my start when he took me to the science center in Pittsburgh and I started racing this hologram they had of Flojo. I kept trying and eventually I beat the hologram. My dad says he knew then that I had a gift.

T&FN: How is your dad, by the way? I recall

"Being tall doesn't have anything to do with it, as far as I'm concerned. I think anybody can run fast."

that he was ill when he watched you run in Athens.

Williams: He's doing good. His leukemia is in remission and he's on a list for a kidney transplant. So he's doing pretty well.

T&FN: Have you ever felt that your height [5-3/4] puts you at a disadvantage as a sprinter?

Williams: I've never thought of it that way. Besides, a lot of top women sprinters are short. Lisa Barber's about my height. Veronica Campbell, who got the bronze medal in Athens, isn't tall. Being tall doesn't have anything to do with it, as far as I'm concerned. I think anybody can run fast.

T&FN: A lot of athletes, especially when they turn pro early, head off to one of the high-profile sprint enclaves. You've stayed with Amy Deem.

Williams: When it's not broken, don't fix it right? She knows me inside and out as an athlete. Our communication is excellent. We disagree almost never.

Also I'm privileged to work out on the same track, in the same weightroom and with access to the same training staff I had when I was in college. I'm very thankful for that.

T&FN: Anything else we should know about your plans for this season?

Williams: Well, I'm looking forward to getting back to Sub-11. Do you know about that?

T&FN: That's your scholarship fund?

Williams: Yes. I'm going to donate \$1000 for every sub-11 race I run. That didn't happen last year, but I'm looking forward to reviving it this season.

Also... Well, I'd rather not get into details, but I want to donate more to charity. Maybe it jinxed me last year so I'd better not say more.

T&FN: If charitable intentions jinxed you, then there's no justice in this world. I don't think it could have been that.

Williams: Yeah, I guess you're probably right. □