

# Andre Cason

by Jon Hendershott

*Andre Cason's motto could be, "That was then; this is now." The 26-year-old Virginia native was the top-ranked American 100m runner in 1993, speeding to Stuttgart silver in a PR 9.92.*

*But that was then. The Cason of "this is now" lives in Atlanta while training with coach Loren Seagrave. Both focus only on the current season, not past successes such as the '88 World Junior 100 crown, a World Indoor 60 title, leading off a WR 4 x 100 at the Worlds in '91 or an indoor AOY season of '92 capped by a 60m WR of 6.41.*

*And they have moved on from the one big minus of Cason's career: a lower calf injury which knocked him out of the '92 Trials and derailed his Olympic hopes.*

*In races themselves, Seagrave wants Cason to "run down a tube," concentrating solely on his own lane. In approaching the new season, coach and athlete employ a similar attitude:*

**T&FN:** *You've been living in Atlanta and training with Loren Seagrave for a little more than a year now. How do you feel about being in the city of the next Olympics?*

**Cason:** The Olympic Games are one of the farthest things from my mind right now. My approach is to deal with each day—which then leads to dealing with each year. There are maybe three major championships between now and the next Olympics. A lot of things can happen in three seasons.

**T&FN:** *So you just concentrate on each season as an entity by itself?*

**Cason:** Yes, we just concentrate on the present. We do look back at some things from the past and evaluate them, to make a better season of the present year. But other than that, we don't try to fix anything that's not broken. But what's broken we try to fix.

**T&FN:** *Though you don't like to look back much, might '93 have been your best season ever?*

**Cason:** [without hesitation] No. There's a lot more to come. I didn't start training really hard and heavy until the middle of April. I was in good physical shape, and had been since January, but not good sprint shape.

I had to run the indoor season just to get over the phobias I had about sprinting. When the indoor season was over, I took a little break. I got married, for one thing.

But my mind was clear; everything was clear and the stage was set for me to run fast. I capitalized on that, but I also worked very hard last year. Yet I didn't have what I would call a "complete" season in terms of training.

**T&FN:** *What were some of those phobias?*

**Cason:** From the '92 outdoor season, when

I went down with the injury at the Trials. At the beginning of the '93 indoor season, I had a lot of fears. I was running then with a small degree of pain in the Achilles area. But now it's all healthy and everything is great.

**T&FN:** *The fears centered on what, the injury*

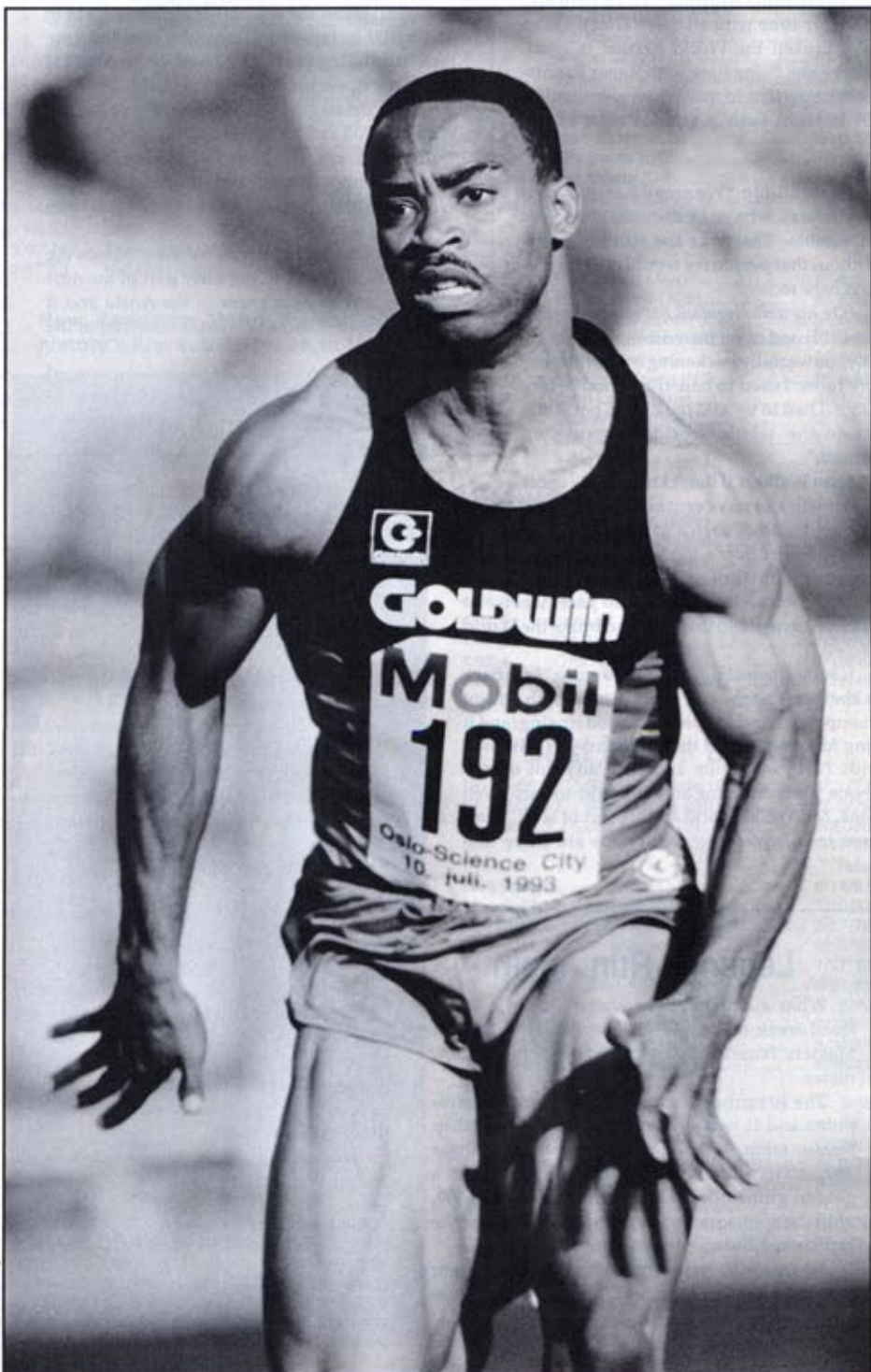
*recurring?*

**Cason:** The fear of going down to injury again. As Loren would describe it, my pain receptors were giving me a great deal of feedback.

Plus, I wasn't getting the full cycle of motion, the full extension on each stride. I was actually afraid to do it. The last stride I took like that caused me to be hauled off the track in New Orleans on a stretcher.

**T&FN:** *There's no way '93 could be seen, by you and anyone around you, as vindication for '92, could it?*

**Cason:** Well, we weren't trying to make up for '92, but we did see '93 as a degree of



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consolation for '92. You can't change the past, but if I had to go back, I wouldn't change it.

I learned a lot of things between the '92 and '93 seasons. Those things have helped me off the track as well as on it, as far as moving on and becoming a better person.

**T&FN:** *What do you feel you learned?*

**Cason:** A lot of people who were supposed to be my friends. . . when they saw I was hurt and they weren't going to get any benefit from being in my corner, they dropped me like a hot potato.

It was disappointing, because it was all over a dollar. I believed the relationship was a lot stronger than that, but it wasn't. But I view it as all a part of growing up. I know how to take those people from now on.

**T&FN:** *Those can be tough lessons to learn.*

**Cason:** They can—but I really don't regret it. Now I'm much wiser, I'm with a better coach and I can see people for who they actually are. I'm at peace with myself and that's been a blessing.

**T&FN:** *You had a very successful 1991 too, but can you contrast that season with '93? Or are they just two separate things?*

**Cason:** I think it has a lot to do with coaching; the mindset of different coaches. But in comparing the two seasons, it's like night and day—especially in terms of my mindset. In '91, I had a few doubts, because everyone was running fast.

In '93, I didn't care if you were running 8-flat—you have to bring it to the track on a particular day. That's how I'm looking at the sport until it's time for me step back.

[Chuckles] There were comments last year by some sprinters saying Andre Cason had come on the scene very quickly. I've been on the scene since '89—and in a way since '88 when I won the World Juniors. So I think you can discount the idea of me being a flash-in-the-pan sprinter.

**T&FN:** *How, then, do you view being ranked No. 2 in the world but especially as the top American for '93?*

**Cason:** I really don't look at it twice. The people around me, including my wife, made me realize that I'm just Andre. I try not to read articles published about me. I'd rather just keep working hard, keep putting good races together.

**T&FN:** *What is Andre Cason's biggest asset as a sprinter?*

**Cason:** First, I will say my faith in God. And second, just being at peace with myself.

When you're at peace with yourself, you can see a lot of things for what they are. You can evaluate a lot of things from just everyday experience. Like, "If I can get through this problem, I know I can do that on the track." That's how I approached the '93 season and that's how I'm approaching '94.

**T&FN:** *What do you feel you have to improve most—as a person, an athlete, a sprinter, whatever—to keep improving on the track?*

**Cason:** I used to be very temperamental. The least little thing anybody said about me, I would blow up. That has calmed down now, but it hasn't calmed down enough.

I think once I'm able to totally focus on me, and not be distracted by others and what they say, then I'll be a better person from it. That should then make me a better sprinter, because I'll be in my own world.

**T&FN:** *Perhaps did '92 play a role in that softening of temperament?*

**Cason:** Maybe, but I still wouldn't trade it for anything. It happened for a reason and I believe all things happen for a reason. You may not think it's a good reason at the time. But if it weren't in God's plan, we wouldn't be here. I really do believe it's made me a better person. That has come with maturity.

**T&FN:** *Has adversity, like '92, also helped that maturity?*

**Cason:** I think adversity was an asset. I also feel maturity came after experiencing the top of my game, like in 1991. But then I had to sit at home with my leg in a cast watching someone else run the Olympic final I should have been in. Talk about going from a peak to a valley in less than a year. I had the chance to experience both sides.

Yet it was an eye-opening experience and it was letting me know that, "Here today, gone tomorrow." It taught me to be prepared to run the best race I possibly can every time I compete, because no one is promised tomorrow. You really are only as good as your last race—even if it's hard to get up for races in April and early May.

But I realize I have to go out and perform in those races in order to be where I want to be from the end of May through September. We actually consider a lot of early meets as high speed training—even some meets on the summer circuit. I'm just thankful I don't have to run every other day, like I did back in '89. I paid those dues.

**T&FN:** *Perhaps the athletes who think you came out of nowhere are the younger up-and-comers who don't know your history?*

**Cason:** Actually, I feel I've gotten a better response from the younger generation of sprinters than from the older. I appreciate that because what

I find very cool about the sport is younger sprinters asking me about things.

I like having information for them and taking the time to answer their questions. There was only one veteran sprinter who sat down and actually talked with me: Calvin Smith. Every other sprinter wouldn't give me the time of day. I didn't like that.

**T&FN:** *One aspect of sprinting, you've never worried about is your small stature. But is there anything special you try to do to even things up with the taller sprinters?*

**Cason:** I've said before, I am the strongest sprinter in track by far. I compensate for height with strength. Another advantage I have is I'm able to accelerate at any given point of a race: the start, at 60m, at 80m. Some people don't have that gift.

I consider those two things as assets. I don't believe in adversity. I may have a small frame, but I don't have a small mind or a small heart.

**T&FN:** *After Stuttgart's 100, you said you had never run a race better. Do you still feel that way?*

**Cason:** Yes—excluding the start, which I also meant after the race. I had the poorest start of my career in the final. From 0 to 10m, it was total trash. But from 15 to 100m, I know I ran faster than any other sprinter ever.

Loren went back and watched the race frame by frame; he calculated that from start to finish, I ran 9.84. But the clock doesn't start when Andre starts; it starts when the gun goes off. We feel if I'd had just a normal reaction, I would have run a real 9.85—but coulda/woulda/shoulda.

I can say that has been the best race I've run—so far. But I know I'll execute at the start much better than 0.183 [reaction time, slowest of the eight finalists by 0.017]. I know I will run much faster than 9.92 in the years to come. □

### ANDRE CASON IN A NUTSHELL

Andre Romal Cason was born January 20, 1969, in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and is 5-7/165. Graduated from Green Run HS (Virginia Beach) in '87, and competed for Texas A&M '88-'90. Currently represents Nike International.

**PRs:** 100—9.92 ('93) (5, =6 W; 3, =4 A), 9.79w ('93) (a-c: 2, 2 W, A); 200—20.70 ('89), 20.11w ('90); LJ—24-10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>/7.58i ('87). Indoors: 50—5.62 ('92) (=3, =3 W; =2, =2 A); 55—6.04 ('90) (4, =4 W, A); 60—6.41 ('92) WR.

**Progression (World & U.S. Rankings in parentheses):**

Year	Age	Affiliation	100	Majors
1985	16	Va HS	10.83	—
1986	17	Va HS	10.38	8)US Jr
1987	18	Va HS	10.49	5)US Jr
1988	19	Tex A&M	10.08	6h)NC, 1)USJr, 7s)OT, 1)WJ
1989	20	Tex A&M	10.04 (6, 4)	3)NC, 3)US, 2)OF, 1)WUG
1990	21	Tex A&M	10.12 (x, 8)	2)NC, 5)USA
1991	22	Fla Clippers	9.99 (5, 4)	4)USA, 2)PAG
1992	23	Goldwin TC	10.08 (x, 8)	dnf—h)OT
1993	24	Goldwin TC	9.92 (2, 1)	1)USA, 2)WC