T&FN INTERVIEW

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 of 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 ACOY 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
"A lot of people who were supposed to be my friends dropped me like a hot potato."

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 my sport and not be distracted by other things or what they say, then I’ll be 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 I did 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 for 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’m 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 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 today?
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 9.64. 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 NUTSHELI

Andre Remal Cason was born January 20, 1969, in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and is a 3-7/85. Graduated from Green Run HS (Virginia Beach) in ’87, and competed for Texas A&M ’88–’90. Currently represents Nike International.

PRE: 100—9.92 (’93) (5.6 W: 3.4 A); 9.79w (’90) (e: 2.2 W: A)
200—20.70 (’89); 21.11 ’90); LJ—24-1/2’7.58” (’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):

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| 1988 | 19  | Tex A&M     | 10.08| 6(NC) ’93, USJR, 7(JO), 1(JW)
| 1989 | 20  | Tex A&M     | 10.04 (6.4 | 3(NC), 3 US, 2 JO, 1(WG)
| 1990 | 21  | Tex A&M     | 10.12 (x: 8) | 2(NC), 5 US|
| 1992 | 23  | Gold Coast | 10.08 (x: 8) | 8 US, 2(JO)
| 1993 | 24  | Gold Coast | 9.92 (2, 1) | 1(JW), 2(JW)