

## BERT CAMERON



**H**is quiet voice lilts with the musical accent of his native Jamaica and coupled with a nonboastful manner might cause you to think initially that Bert Cameron is just a relaxed, laid-back Islander who happens to be the top-ranked 400 runner in the world.

While he is easygoing in many ways, the UTEP senior is driven in others. He wants to be the best one-lap sprinter the world has ever seen. He knows he has the ability, but he isn't dwelling on achieving even greater successes than he already has—specifically, two NCAA outdoor titles, the Commonwealth gold medal and the fastest time so far in 1983.

Bert Cameron's very personal goals are aims he talks about with unusual candor. While he enjoys being considered the top 400 sprinter in the world, he doesn't run to maintain that rating. He runs for two simple reasons: to win and because he loves it.

**T&FN:** When you go into any race, what are you trying to do? Just win, or maintain your place as No. 1 or what?

**Cameron:** It depends on the competition. If the field isn't that competitive, I'll try to run a good time. But I don't think about No. 1.

Sometimes, though, I have the fear of losing. A lot of times, guys will just pop up that nobody has ever heard of and you don't know anything about them or how they race. So I don't go into races thinking about No. 1. I just don't like to lose. That's why I like to run a fast time here in the States before I go to Europe. I try to do that every year because then I know what kind of shape I'm in. Then I can be more relaxed and confident for the year. Also, I can just train and I don't have to worry about the other guys and what they are running. They know what I have run, so they know what they have to do.

**T&FN:** You admit to fearing losing, but are there any specific 400 runners you fear at this stage of your career?

**Cameron:** There is one and that is the American Walter McCoy. Any time I am in a race with McCoy, I know I can't go into the race and mess up in any way. McCoy is such a good competitor. He never gives up; it doesn't matter how much of a lead you think you have on him. He never stops coming after you.

But otherwise, I have only a feeling of nervousness going into a race against other people. Like I said, the only thing I really fear all the time is losing. I hate to lose.

**T&FN:** What can you say about your other leading opponents? How about Cliff Wiley?

**Cameron:** You can never let Wiley get away from you. He has so much speed. I feel the way to run Cliff Wiley is to stay with him for the first 200; if you do that, you will have a chance to beat him. But if he gets away from you in the first 200, you are in a lot of trouble.



**T&FN:** *How about this new face, Charles Phillips? You beat him in Dallas in April, 45.26 to 45.49.*

**Cameron:** I also saw him run at Mt. SAC two weeks later and he looked much different. He looks like he has more confidence and he runs more loose on the backstraight. And he has a long stride.

**T&FN:** *How about Sunder Nix?*

**Cameron:** I have raced Nix only once so I don't know much about him. But we all know he has the talent because he was the fastest man in the world last year.

**T&FN:** *How about Tony Darden?*

**Cameron:** Oh, I have run against Tony a lot. I first raced him at the Pan-Am Games in 1979; I was just a senior in high school and I placed 4th in 45.97. I could tell that Tony really wanted that race that day. That taught me that you can achieve something if you really want it and work for it.

**T&FN:** *How about Willie Smith?*

**Cameron:** Smith is like Wiley; he has a lot of speed so you have to be sure to stay close to him.

**T&FN:** *You haven't ever met Darrell Robinson outdoors, but what can you say about him?*

**Cameron:** Robinson looks like a thin guy, but he is very strong. When he wants to run, man, he can run. He is going to be a great one.

Another one like Robinson is the high school boy Clinton Davis. I saw him run indoors and when he puts it all together, he is going to be very good, too.

**T&FN:** *What do you think of Hartmut Weber of West Germany, the European champion?*

**Cameron:** He runs so relaxed. He has a beautiful stride, so smooth it seems effortless. He is a good one. But like I said, there are so many guys who can surprise you—bam!

**T&FN:** *You did that in 1980 as a frosh, winning the NCAA, running 45.23 for a PR and ranking No. 8 in the world.*

**Cameron:** Well, when I came here, I didn't know what I was getting into! I saw all these guys over here and I said to the coach at UTEP, "I don't want to run in no college races."

He laughed and said, "Bert, it doesn't work that way." My first race in college was indoors at East Tennessee; I ran 46.6 and beat Willie Smith, who ran 46.7. From that day, I realized, "Hey, I'm a good quartermiler." It was important for me to run well against him, because in Jamaica we had heard of Tony Darden and Willie Smith and Billy Mullins. Then in my very first college race, I beat Smith. So that showed me I could run with guys like that.

**T&FN:** *Virtually from the time you first became a world class 400 runner, you have had leg injury problems—left hamstring in '80, right hamstring in '81, a cramp indoors this past winter. But you were relatively healthy in '82 and had your*

*best year yet. Do you know what caused the injuries?*

**Cameron:** The doctors have finally decided it is some type of tendinitis in my hamstrings. I have always had it; there always was this pain that would never go away. I would finish a hard race and the next day I would be so sore.

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## "I Want To Be Even Better Than Lee Evans"

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The doctors have told me to rest more, plus do a lot of exercises. So I won't run hard races as often as in the past. For some guys, the more meets they run, the better they get. But for me, the less meets I run, the better it seems to be for me.

All the injuries have kept me from running the 200 more. The 20.74 I ran in the WAC meet was my best ever. But for a long time I didn't run the 200 because I was afraid of being hurt. Two weeks before the Moscow Olympics, I ran a 200 in Oslo and from then on I felt that pain in my legs. That's why I didn't run well in Moscow.

**T&FN:** *You are the only No. 1-ranked athlete from Jamaica, a country with a great track tradition. Considering that Jamaica has produced 400 runners like Herb McKenley, George Rhoden, Arthur Wint, George Kerr, Mel and Mal Spence and now you are No. 1, has this brought undue pressure or expectations from your countrymen?*

**Cameron:** Yes, it has brought some pressures and exactly because Jamaica has such a tradition of great quartermilers. It started with me after I won the NCAA in 1980. Then I got hurt and couldn't run well in Moscow. But in '81 I won the NCAA. Then I went to the World Cup and was beaten by Cliff Wiley and the Italian, Zuliani. People at home were disappointed, I know, because they were expecting me to win since I had been running well.

I have gotten the feeling that people back home expect me to win all the time, but I don't let it bother me because that's like fans are everywhere: as long as you win all the time, you are a good guy. But they criticize you if you lose. So I don't worry about it because I know most people don't know what competing in international track & field is all about.

**T&FN:** *As a youth, were you aware of all the great Jamaicans in the 400?*

**Cameron:** This is what I heard a lot. My senior year of high school in 1979, there was me and the guy from Texas, Ian Stapleton. We were the best high school quartermilers in Jamaica and people always

talked about us at the same time they talked about McKenley and Rhoden. People said we would follow in their footsteps.

I have to say that I am trying to maintain the standards those great guys first set. A lot of times when I run I think of McKenley and I compare what I am doing to what he did: those guys won in the years before the Olympics and so have I. And then they won the Olympics. That's what I really want too. I want to stay in shape to win the Olympics. That's what I really want because then I can go home and I will be really appreciated by all the people.

That feeling really gives me motivation and pushes me for next year, because I really love Jamaica. I love to be with the people. I have been just walking down the street and people call out to me and I love that. If I can win the Olympics that feeling will be even better.

**T&FN:** *How would you like to be remembered in the history of the 400?*

**Cameron:** When I'm finished, man, I want to be remembered as the best quartermiler, ever. That's what I want. I can remember hearing about Lee Evans. I never saw him run, but I heard so many times how competitive he was, how tough he could run, how strong he was, how good he was. I want to be even better than Evans; I want to be the best quartermiler ever. Running has made me who I am and it has taken me places I would never have seen otherwise. So I want to always do my very best.

**T&FN:** *Do you have any idea where Bert Cameron might be if he never had started running?*

**Cameron:** Oh, I would still be at home in Jamaica. Probably in the police force or something like that. I would be just a guy who hangs out with his friends and has a good time.

But my own abilities in running have opened up so much to me. There are so many things I would never have seen or learned about if it hadn't been for my running. Because of that, I know that when I stop running I will go back to Jamaica to help the kids there who may have the same kind of talent. I wouldn't want them to waste their talent, and the opportunity to see and do so many things in the world. I want to be able to share my experiences with the kids. □

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Bertland Cameron was born November 16, 1959, in Spanish Town, Jamaica, and is 6-1/175. He was the NCAA Indoor and Outdoor 400 champion in 1980 and 1981; in '82 he was 3rd indoors, 2nd outdoors. His progression, including World Ranking and World List positions, and placings in major meets:

Year	Age	Affil	Class	400	WR	WL	Meets
1978	18	Jamaica		47.20			
1979	19	"		45.97			
1980	20	UTEP	Fr	45.23	8	8	4)Pan Am
1981	21	"	So	44.58	2	1	3)WCup
1982	22	"	Jr	44.69	1	=2	1)Com G
1983	23	"	Sr	44.89(A)			