“What’s not getting through is that everything is not steroids… a lot of these substances are just ineffective.”

Shy with his analyses.

As it turned out, we spoke with Boldon just days before news broke of doping positives for Tyson Gay and Asafa Powell. Since Ato, like many fans, most eagerly looked forward to a Bolt-Gay 100 clash in Moscow, after we round-filed the 100 and 200 formcharts, we spoke again with Boldon just before press time for some followup.

Some of that conversation appears right up front here in place of that blown up by Gay’s bombshell.

T&FN: Well, here we are, talking again because Tyson Gay says he “trusted” somebody else as the gatekeeper to substances going into his system. As new allegations trickle out, Gay’s offense appears to involve something more serious than a stimulant, in a supplement—although the rumored substance is allowed in Major League Baseball—and he should, as he has said, “take [his] punishment like a man.”

Nonetheless, you’ve taken the stance in recent days that WADA should reconsider its ban on stimulants of the type Asafa Powell and Sherone Simpson apparently ingested.

Boldon: Yeah, and that is certainly very controversial but I’m trying to tell it like it is; everybody else is trying to tell it the way it should be.

What’s making me frustrated is that former athletes who I know used to be supplementing because I know who they bought their supplements from are saying, “Nobody should be taking anything; we should all just be…” C’mon, Really? There are a lot of sanctimonious former athletes now. I’ve just decided I’m done [talking about it] because I at the end of the day I’m not going to be left out here as the only one [addressing reality]. “Ato’s throwing in the towel!”

Hello, guys. Everybody’s already doing supplements. They have been for decades.

T&FN: I would hate to see an “anything goes” sport. I don’t like to watch humanly impossible competition courtesy of steroids and other major PEDs. Honestly, though, I think track needs to think more carefully about public perception and minor offenses.

People want to ban Asafa Powell for life; they’re talking about his stimulant positive as if he were Lance Armstrong.

By contrast, how many baseball fans realize or, most importantly, care that if Asafa Powell were a Major Leaguer his punishment for a first offense would be… nothing. Second offense? 10-15 games, I believe. Not even a month.

Our sport’s athletes end up looking like Hannibal Lector for offenses that amount to a “so what?” in other sports.

Boldon: What’s not getting through is that everything is not steroids. What’s also not getting through at all is that a lot of these substances are just ineffective.

You know how periodically there are things on the list and they go through and take this one off the banned list or that one off the banned list? I think now is a time for reassessment of that list.

The people whom I talk to that don’t know anything about sports but understand chemistry look at some substances on the list and say, “Dude, are you serious? They’re busting people for that?!” That stuff is bullshit.”

T&FN: Sadly, Gay’s fall rips a huge hole in the Moscow men’s 100. Earlier you had posited he had a reasonable chance of challenging Bolt.

Do you think Justin Gatlin, after his hamstring injury, can get back to where he was in Rome when he beat Bolt?

Boldon: He might but Bolt isn’t going to be the Bolt of Rome. Gatlin might well get back there but he beat Bolt in 9.94. It’s not like he beat Bolt running 9.78. He beat a really bad Bolt. Then to get through the U.S. Champs and run 9.89 Gatlin did well to just qualify. I just don’t think that this year Gatlin is going to be able to deal with Bolt if Bolt is healthy and he
The 2 Versions Of Usain Bolt

“This is the first year I’ve been in Europe this much since I’ve been a broadcaster and being on the circuit has given me a chance to kind of shadow Bolt and get a sense of just what the demands on his time are.

“I think I understand last year even though last year I sort of figured it out by guess. I figured last year that everybody was writing him off too soon. He’s such a good championships performer and he always figures it out.

“Being over here and being able to see it now, I realize why he’s able to figure it out when the championships come around. What happens is when Bolt is going through his so-called regular season, his training is, I think, somewhat erratic because he has to make these appearances and he has these commitments to sponsors and various people who have demands on his time. It’s a given that he’s got to do this and, yeah, he’ll travel and, yeah, he’ll train and, yeah, he’ll travel.

“The reason why a different Bolt shows up to a championships is because leading up to a championships, on a calendar they block time out and for the first time all season Bolt gets to have continuity in his training. I think that’s why Bolt can look so different between championships versus a Diamond League race.”

About The 100 Hurdles…

Ato Boldon says he’s about as excited for the women’s short hurdle race as any other in Moscow. Why?

“I spoke to Sally Pearson in Europe and she was very honest in an interview we did for Inside Athletics. She said, ‘Look, I’m glad I already have my World and Olympic titles because I don’t know if I’m going to be ready, given my injuries this year, to deal with Brianna Rollins.’

“I was looking to see what Rollins’ team was going to do post-U.S. Nationals and I said to everybody, ‘If she goes to Europe and tries to run every single race it’s going to ruin her for Worlds, but if she goes home, recuperates, trains a little bit, takes some time off, I don’t see how that World Record survives.

“Assuming she doesn’t run into crazy headwinds in Moscow and it’s not 50 degrees, so far I think she has done the right things. She has stayed home.

“When Sally Pearson is running 12.7 just 30 days before the World Championships, it’s very possible she doesn’t medal. The U.S. hurdlers are not over-raced. Queen Harrison stayed home, Nia Ali has stayed home. Dawn Harper is doing her usual—that is running herself into championship form, as is the norm with Bobby Kersee athletes.

“The U.S. could sweep that event very, very easily.”
“Blessing Okagbare. I think that’s the athlete I am most intrigued by. I think she’ll leave Moscow with 3 medals.”

Rollins I had making the Olympic team in 3rd, English Gardner I had making the Olympic team last year, and Kimberlyn Duncan.

I was one year off on all three of them; I am anticipating that I was one year off on Blessing as well.

Her [list positions] at 100, 200 and long jump have gone a little bit unnoticed. The reality is that that combination has not been done in a very, very long time.

T&FN: Carmelita Jeter is back after tearing her quad in Shanghai in May. Do you think the defending world champion can contend?

Boldon: I don’t know. It’s hard to bet on an over-30 sprinter having to deal with the likes of Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Okagbare, and every now and then someone else. Look at Murielle Ahouré, who just ran 10.91——sort of eye-raising.

I think Jeter is a threat for the podium; I just don’t think she’s a threat for the top of the podium.

T&FN: Do you think English Gardner’s ankle injury will be a challenge for the new U.S. champion?

Boldon: I’ve talked to her on a regular basis. The ankle is a non-issue as long as she’s not going around a turn. What’s more of an issue is cleaning up her form a little bit and getting back to some training because she’s had a very long collegiate season.

I certainly know that in that situation you have to go back and do work that you feel like you’ve gone over already in terms of getting your sharpness back and getting your strength back leading up to a championships.

So it’s not going to be easy work for her but she understands and certainly John Smith understands how to do it. She’s already gone to John [as her new pro coach].

That’s going to be a nice training group: Jeter, Gardner and Blessing Okagbare. I think those three will benefit from training next to each other.

T&FN: Assuming they all get along. That has to be a challenge in training groups loaded with stars.

Boldon: Well, they may not get along but just think of the things that they bring to the table. You have Blessing who has maybe the best finish in the business, I think.

You have Jeter who is as powerful a sprinter as there is, and you have English, who is sort of this wavy character on the track who is the new upset. I’d love to watch those three practice.

T&FN: I wouldn’t expect Gardner to be intimidated. She just exudes “I’m getting to that finish line first.”

Boldon: English is not afraid of anything and I think that’s why I like her. Think of it: most sprinters run from the 400. English, she likes running the 4x4. That’s rare.

T&FN: Finally, the women’s 200. After getting her Olympic gold Allyson Felix started slowly this year. Do you think she’ll round into form or could she be upset?

Boldon: Going into London I felt that Allyson was the safest bet in any sprint event. I was one of the few who knew Veronica Campbell-Brown wasn’t getting a medal in the 200. I also thought she wasn’t getting a medal in the 100 either and she got a bronze [laughs].

But, no, Allyson is not the lock that she was last year. I think Kimberlyn Duncan has a shot against Allyson. Blessing Okagbare has a shot against Allyson, and Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce could win the whole thing.

I spoke to Shelly-Ann earlier this year and that silver in London has changed her whole outlook. She used to hate the 200; now she’s sort of embracing it. She told me that she actually thought she could be better at 200m than she is at 100.

That coming from a past world champion and two-time Olympic champion at 100 sort of piqued my interest.

T&FN: Do the Gay and Powell doping positives and Yohan Blake’s injury absence leave the U.S. and Jamaica men’s 4x1 teams evenly matched or is it just a matter for Jamaica of putting Bolt on anchor and “no problem, mon”?

Boldon: Without Blake and Asafa I think the Jamaican team comes a little bit closer back down to earth but the U.S team with no Gay and with a Gatlin who I don’t think is going to be back to where he was last year—I think Jamaica’s still pretty comfortably ahead.

And like you said, if Bolt anchors forget about it.

Nesta Carter just ran 9.87. A relay team with Nesta Carter and Usain Bolt and any other two Jamaicans isn’t beatable at Worlds unless they make a fatal mistake.

T&FN: You favored the U.S. women’s 4x1 even before Simpson’s removal from the picture. Nothing has changed, has it?

Boldon: No, and Jeter looks like she’s back so that’s kind of bad news for everybody else.

I imagine the U.S. will run Gardner, Allyson, Jeter—and I’m not sure who else will get the call this year. It might be Octavious Freeman.

That U.S. team is too strong.