

T&FN INTERVIEW

Allyson Felix

When she scored her 200-meter win at last year's World Championships, Allyson Felix became the first woman runner ever to capture three consecutive WC titles

The Southern California native also won a 4x4 gold to add to her relay awards from the '07 Worlds and '08 Olympics, and she was part of another baton win in March at the World Indoor. Joining all those honors was a 4x1 victory in Osaka in '07 and, of course, two less-than-satisfying silvers in the last two Olympics half-lappers.

Felix has been so good for so long, it's easy to forget that she was a world-class performer as a high schooler back in '02 and '03: she achieved everything but the Doha relay gold before her 24th birthday.

After her recent demanding seasons, Felix sees 2010 as a recharging year.

We caught up with her on a recent Wednesday, a lighter day in the rigorous training regimen of renowned coach Bobby Kersee:

T&FN: So Bobby's athletes train six days out of seven each week?

Felix: It's about five days right now. Wednesdays are a day of active rest because we still go out on a long run that day. The only day we have totally off is Sunday.

T&FN: So what do you do on your day-and-a-half off?

Felix: On Wednesdays we do a 30-minute run and also get physical treatment, like mas-

sage and chiropractic work. Then for me, I just take care of any other business I have to do, like appointments.

Anything you want to do for yourself, you have to make sure it falls on a Wednesday. So that makes it a busy day.

On Sunday, I go to church and that takes up a good portion of the day. It's also time to see family, so there isn't much happening on the outside.

T&FN: You said at Mt. SAC [see p. 21] that you see this season as a kind of transitional year between the championships cycles. But for an elite athlete of your level, is there ever a year that is really relaxed?

Felix: Not exactly, but just having no big championship is the main thing. That takes a lot of pressure off and you can focus on some other things. But as far as the work, the effort that you put into it, that part never changes.

There's not as much stress this year, so that makes it a little more enjoyable. You can do things that you may not get to do in a championship year so that makes it more enjoyable, yes.

T&FN: Speaking of enjoyment, are you actually learning to like the 400 more, to some degree?

Felix: I think that now that I have a better understanding of how to run it, it is more enjoyable. Before, I didn't really have any idea how to go into the race; I was just running it. But as I've learned more, I know how to run it more efficiently—so it isn't as painful as it used to be.

T&FN: Might you look at the 400 as over-distance work for the 200? Giving you strength that you can fall back on in the 200?

Felix: Oh yes. That's always been an added bonus. Even if I never competed in the 400, Bobby trains us from a 400 base. So it definitely is a key to my training, especially for that last 50 of a 200, which is so important.

T&FN: You have won four gold medals in championship 4x4s, including an Olympics. Have those relay experiences helped you, if not fully embrace the 400, then at least tolerate it more?

Felix: Yes, but running the relay is such a different thing. It's a lot of fun. It's at the end of the meet and you get to come together with your teammates. So I really enjoy running on the 4x4.

Although the relay does help give you more confidence by making you feel more comfortable with that 400 distance.

T&FN: Have you ever considered that the 400 might be your prime event? Or will it always be the 200?

Felix: [laughs] In my mind, I'll always have the 200 as my focus point. But

by Jon Hendershott

“In the 400, I think what I dislike is having to pace myself; I'm all about going fast. I don't want to have to run controlled; I like to sprint.”

Felix In A Nutshell

•**Personal:** Allyson Michelle Felix was born in Los Angeles, California, on November 18, 1985; 5-6/125 (1.68/57)

•**Schools:** Los Angeles Baptist HS (North Hills, California) '03; USC '08 (did not run for team); now represents Nike

•**PRs:** 100—10.93 ('08). 200—21.81 ('07). 300—36.33i AR '07. 400—49.70 ('07)

•**Coaches:** Jonathan Patton (LA Baptist); Pat Connolly ('04); Bobby Kersee ('05-present)

•**Major Meets:**
100—1)WY '01; 4)US '07; 5)OT '08; 5sf)US '09
200—4h)US '01; 2)USJ, 5)WJ '02; 3)US, 3)PAG, 5qf)WC '03; 1)OT, 2)OG '04; 1)US, 1)WC '05; 4sf)US '06; 1)US, 1)WC '07; 1)OT, 2)OG '08; 1)US, 1)WC '09
400—3)USi '10
4x1—1)WC '07
4x4—1)WC '07; 1)OG '08; 1)WC '09; 1)WIC '10

•**World/U.S. Rankings:**
100—9, 4 '05; 6, 4 '06; 6, 4 '07; x, 5 '08; x, 7 '09
200—7, 2 '03; 2, 1 '04; 1, 1 '05; 1, 1 '06; 1, 1 '07; 2, 1 '08; 1, 1 '09
400—3, 2 '07; 5, 2 '08, 4, 2 '09



you never know what might happen. And Bobby might have a whole different plan about the 400. Who knows? But for me, it's always been kind of the second event. Yet I'm also putting more effort into it because I know there is potential there, so I should explore it. [See p. 34 for more on Felix and learning to run the 400.]

T&FN: *You have had notable successes in all three sprints. What aspects of each of them do you like the most?*

Felix: I've always loved the 100 because I love to go fast. It's just an all-out sprint and I love that. Since I came into track, that's always been my favorite thing.

The 200 has always been just the perfect distance for me. There is still that speed, but there also is time for it to be forgiving. If you get a bad start, for example. It just works well for my body type, so I have always enjoyed it.

For the 400, I do like the challenge of it. It's something you definitely have to work at. It's not just having a natural talent for it. You have to spend the time on conditioning and a lot of work at practice goes into it. So I really like the challenge of it.

T&FN: *What do you dislike about the events?*

Felix: Well, in the 100, the start. That's always been a real challenge for me. I think I would have a much better chance if the race started at like 40 meters. The start is something I've always struggled to work out and I'm continuing to work at it.

The 200... there's really nothing that I dislike about it. I guess it might be the start, but mainly I just really enjoy that race.

Then in the 400, I think what I dislike is having to pace myself [laughs]. I'm all about going fast. I don't want to have to run controlled; I like to *sprint*. So it's a challenge for me to have to hold back, be patient and use some strategy in it.

T&FN: *Last year in Berlin in your 200 interview, you got laughs when you said directly to Veronica [Campbell-Brown] that you would trade your three Worlds 200 golds for one of her Olympic golds. But was there some truth in your comment?*

Felix: Yes, because everyone holds the Olympics in such a special regard and to me they mean so much that it's difficult when things don't go the way you had planned.

It's always everyone's biggest goal to do their best at the Olympics. But it seems that a lot of my success has been at the World Championships. Things haven't always gone the way I wanted at the Olympics. So it's always a struggle, but I just work to keep moving forward and seeking excellence.

T&FN: *So was Beijing tougher to accept than Athens? You were only 18 in '04 but favored in '08 and a two-time world champion then. So did that make Beijing more difficult to accept?*

Felix: Oh definitely. In Athens, I feel like there wasn't as much going on. Of course, I wanted to win and I was disappointed initially. But once I put things into perspec-

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tive... I mean, a lot of people didn't expect me to even make the team.

But having the expectations in Beijing of "You're supposed to win" made it tough. Having worked for that goal since Athens and then falling short—then having to wait another four years for another shot at it—made it extremely difficult.

But then it also is about the journey and the whole process, so I'm definitely still grateful for those experiences. I tried to take positive things away from it as well.

T&FN: *But there must be a level of great satisfaction in you to have won three Worlds 200s in a row?*

Felix: Oh, I still see it as a great accomplishment; it's always very special to do something that no one has done before. But still, the Olympics are always something different.

I think it's always great for me to have the motivation and the training toward the next Olympics. I can always come back to that, especially on days when I'm not feeling good in training. I can think about my two Olympics and work extra hard.

T&FN: *In fact, what has been the most satisfying performance of your career, so far? Winning three golds in Osaka or what?*

Felix: I still will say that it was Athens. Everything was so new then, in general but also at my first Olympics. And because to me the

Olympics are so special. Osaka was great, but to me there still is nothing like the Olympics. Just having that opportunity and experiencing everything about the Olympics for the first time makes Athens stick out for me as my biggest accomplishment.

T&FN: *Of your Worlds, was Osaka the highlight?*

Felix: Definitely. I think I took for granted how well the relays went there. You never know how hard it actually is to get a team together and get the stick around until you don't have that opportunity.

So in Osaka, everything just clicked and that was great because in Berlin we didn't get the stick around in the 4x1 heat. You just never know when you're going to get the opportunity to even be set up for a win.

T&FN: *Where does winning an Olympic title at 200 sit on your list of goals to still achieve in your career? Is it still at the top?*

Felix: It definitely is. Looking toward Lon-

don is right at the top of my list. It will be my third Olympics—so I hope that the third time really will be the charm.

Also, I know that I want to run through

On Learning To Love The 400

Allyson Felix grows more comfortable each season in the 400. She says that coach Bobby Kersee has taught her about running the various segments of the 1-lapper:

"We focus a lot on conditioning so that I'm able to focus on my first 200. I think that lately he has really wanted me to be able to go out at a good pace. So I want to make sure not to relax too much in the first 200, then really work the third 100 before you use everything that you have for the end.

"For me, it's been all about that first 200. He says he thinks I'm afraid I'm going to die at the end, so I don't go out as hard as I could. So that's what we've been focusing on."

Is she afraid that she *will* die at the end?

"I don't think I'm afraid I'll die, but it is in the back of my head that if I do go out too hard... It's about saving energy, in my mind. But Bobby always says, 'You've trained for it so it's not going to happen.' It's a mindset that I just have to get more comfortable with."

Does that comfort come only from actually racing the 400 in competition?

"Exactly. I feel that in years when I can run multiple 400s, I can learn more. Running them here and there is fine, but it's just better overall to run them on a consistent basis."

2013 and the Worlds in Moscow. Then I'll re-evaluate things and take it year by year. See where I am in my life, if I'm still enjoying it and still want to go after it.

T&FN: *You graduated from USC in elementary education, so when you retire from running will you want to teach?*

Felix: I still would love to work in the classroom. I'm also starting work to establish a foundation to help young girls. I've always had the desire to work with children, so I know that somehow I'll want to be working with kids. The foundation will be working with youth and giving back to them.

T&FN: *Would you ever want to coach? Track in general and sprinters in particular?*

Felix: I really don't feel like being a coach. I don't know why, but I just don't see it. You never know but as of now I don't have a desire to coach. I just can't imagine inflicting that much pain on someone else [laughs]. There must be some crazy pleasure in that for coaches. But that's not really me.

T&FN: *Besides an individual Olympic gold medal, what other prime goals do you have?*

Felix: I would love to just drop all my times. I think it's everyone's goal to have the World Record in their primary event. It may seem a long way away right now, but I always look at it as taking it a little bit at a time. So I'm just always looking to drop times and getting closer to that record.

Also getting PRs in the 100 and 400. My thing is just to get improvement year by year and if I can do that, then I'm making progress. I'll keep running the 100 because I always enjoy running the 4x1. In order to do that, I have to put down some fast 100 times. So it's something I'll always stick with. □

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