

Justin Gatlin

by Jon Hendershott

It took Justin Gatlin only 9.85 seconds to achieve the dream of a lifetime: winning the Olympic 100 title. Gatlin put his name on the roster of Games champions along with such illustrious U.S. dashmen as Owens, Morrow, Hayes, Hines, Lewis and Greene, then added a silver in the 4x1 and a bronze in the 200.

Now the Raleigh, North Carolina, resident looks ahead to bolstering his reputation and status in the sport, by both running faster times and winning titles this summer like the U.S. nationals and then the World Championships.

Gatlin, now 23, took a break from training and from his business communications studies at St. Augustine's to talk about how that big win in the past has affected his aims for the future:

T&FN: So, are you used to being introduced as the "Olympic 100 champion" yet?

Gatlin: [laughs]: I'm getting used to it. I think I'm a modest guy, but sometimes I still catch myself in that I can't believe it really happened.

I had been waiting for something like that to happen to me in the sport since I first knew what track was. Now it's happened so fast, at a young age for me,

so the hardest thing for me will be to maintain my success and keep striving for higher goals.

T&FN: In '00, you were a senior in high school and Maurice Greene won the 100 in Sydney. Did you ever think—in your wildest flights of imagination—that you might be the guy to succeed him as the Olympic 100 champion?

Gatlin: Never. I never thought that in four years I would be on the line and racing him, as well as the world's other fastest sprinters. If somebody could have showed me that within four years I would be Olympic champion for beating the fastest people in the world, I would have just been like, "Wow!"

T&FN: And even though you were young, you did make a big impact right away on the national scene, like winning an NCAA sprint double as a frosh in '01. Was that sudden success difficult to get used

to? Or was it like, "Hey, this is what's happening, so let's go with it."?

Gatlin: Track & field is a very delicate sport, in the sense that you can't rush out there too fast and maybe get injured. You've got to go out at a measured pace; let everybody see who you are, meet you and see that you have a story behind your name.

I think I did that. I came out a little fast, but I did get some recognition so people knew who I was. I had some hamstring injuries, but I bounced back and achieved a huge goal for me, which was the Olympic Games.

Honestly, I don't know just where I stand right now. I'm really anxious to see how this year's going to go and how the public is going to perceive me. I don't want to be the Olympic champion and then never do anything important after that. I want to do a lot more for the sport. I still have a lot more to achieve.

T&FN: You ran the two fastest 100s of your life last year in the two biggest races, the Trials [9.92] and the Games [9.85]. Were those 100s last year the best examples yet of Justin Gatlin rising to the occasion?

Gatlin: Yes, they were. But to me, even a race like in Yokohama after the Olympics was the same kind of thing. It was important for me to run well there, to show people I could be consistent because that's what I've been working on all along.

Every championship I've been in, pretty much since my frosh year outdoors, I've won. That's what I do: I live for the moment of excitement and the moment of pressure. I like when the pressure is on, because I know people are watching then. People are waiting, anticipating what's going to happen.

T&FN: That's where you prove yourself, on the field of battle?

Gatlin: It is and right now I'm trying to refocus myself and not be too laid back. Not be like, "Hey, I won the Olympics, the highest plateau in my sport."

But the Worlds are coming up this year and I know a lot of sprinters out there are practicing very hard. They were very upset by the outcome of both sprints in Athens. So I'm just going to refocus myself and have the eye of the tiger again.

T&FN: You mentioned racing in Japan in your only post-Athens race. Then you passed up compet-

ing this indoor season. While it's true there was no big championship meet indoors for Americans, is it possible you missed out by not competing either after the Games or this winter? Not in terms of earning money, but more to strengthen your credentials and reputation.

Gatlin: I don't think so. Track really is a



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delicate sport, so the challenge is not to give people too much, but also not give them too little. Nobody really ran indoors seriously: Asafa [Powell] didn’t run, Maurice ran only a couple of races; Shawn didn’t run any races.

So I think that builds anticipation for outdoors and that’s what we want in the sport.

You want people to be like, “Where are those guys? Guess they’re going to duke it out outdoors.” We don’t want someone to come out having had a hot indoor season; we want everybody to be at the same level, ready to compete and show who’s the best.

T&FN: *You made the team in both sprints and then took 3rd in the 200 after your 100 win. Will the 200 reclaim equal status with the 100 for you this season?*

Gatlin: I can honestly tell you that winning the 100 did throw my focus off a little bit. It did come fast in my career, but also in Athens, I was up until 4:00 in the morning. Not celebrating, but just starting to get my body ready for the next races.

I had to push myself to make the 200 final; I had a lot of good competition. People wanted to come head-hunt on me because I was Olympic champion. So my focus was taken away a little bit. But at the same time, I knew my teammate was going to be more focused. Shawn was upset about his performance in the 100. I knew he would come back and come back strong.

I guess a little part of me felt like I was going to go out and give it the best I possibly could, even if the final was my eighth race in six days. Whoever wanted to beat me was going to have to come get it and come hard.

T&FN: *Going into Athens, you must have felt you had good shots in both sprints, plus the relay. But did you ever consider the possibility that you might win a complete set of medals?*

Gatlin: I think it was perfect. I really wouldn’t trade in my silver and bronze for another silver or even another gold. Because that silver and bronze... if I can go back to the ‘08 Games and win golds in those other events, it will be like completing a set.

When I look at those medals, it’s like, “There’s nothing wrong with them; they’re Olympic medals.” But I want to be the best of the best. I want to win the gold in every race I run. Those are things I look back on and know, “I can do this.” They really are motivators.

T&FN: *What will motivate you in ‘05, on through to ‘08 and even beyond?*

Gatlin: I can tell you right now, from here to ‘08, what all the top sprinters will be thinking: “We’re all in the race for the World Record.” That’s what we all want now.

T&FN: *For ‘05 in both races, do you have specific time goals? Or just win the Worlds, or get yourself better established, or what?*

Gatlin: I’m not going to say I don’t have confidence in myself, but no 100 sprinter in recent years has gone through a whole season undefeated. So that would be a big accomplishment and if that happens this year, I’d be grateful for that.

But I’m not going to go out there thinking, “I’m not going to get beat,” or have my fans think, “Hey, he’s not going to get beat.” Everyone knows I’ll step up at the time I need to, because that’s what I’m here for.

It’s going to be a very exciting year and that’s what I can’t wait for. Be finely tuned and ready. I

Gatlin Assesses Rivals

T&FN: *First, Shawn Crawford.*

Gatlin: Partner—in crime! We’re total opposites. We don’t spend a lot of time together off the track, but when we’re on the track or overseas, he’s my partner in crime. I know I can depend on him.

T&FN: *Asafa Powell?*

Gatlin: Legendary foe, for the rest of my career. That’s how I see him.

T&FN: *Maurice Greene?*

Gatlin: Legacy.

T&FN: *Kim Collins?*

Gatlin: Um... unpredictable warrior.

T&FN: *Francis Obikwelu?*

Gatlin: Upsetter.

T&FN: *John Capel?*

Gatlin: I admire him. I first met John when I was in high school. He had some words of advice that helped me when I went to the high school nationals.

T&FN: *Leonard Scott?*

Gatlin: Teammate.

T&FN: *And Bernard Williams?*

Gatlin [pauses]: I’m drawing a blank. [laughs] Confusing, because you never know just what you’re gonna get out of him.

want to go out there and... every year I’ve been in the sport since high school, I’ve bettered my PR in the 100.

I’ve always had mistakes in my races. To correct them means a faster time. People thought the Olympic 100 was a flawless race but to me, I had a big mistake in the race. I tightened up in the last 20m. I’ve got to stay more relaxed. Then possibly I can go after the World Record. So this year hopefully I can put my best race together and go after the record.

T&FN: *But is this year also about winning titles as well as times?*

Gatlin: Both. Being dominant, that’s what it’s about. I don’t want to be an athlete who has success one year and then the next year nobody knows what happened to him. I want to be dominant; I want my name to be in the record books and on the roster of winners. I want to be able to pull in the crowd. That’s my goal, being dominant.

T&FN: *You said recently that your outlook is that you’re still No. 2; that you strive to be No. 1. So that’s another motivating force, for this season and future years?*

Gatlin: Yes. Never take anything for granted, first because people believe what they see and not what they hear. So I always strive to be better than No. 2. Look at the people I practice with every day. Great athletes like Shawn Crawford, Patrick Jarrett, Dwight Thomas, Marcus Brunson

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Gatlin Interview

and Chandra Sturrup. Athletes who are really good athletes, but also really good people.

So I get something out of it more than just being competitive. We're all competitive, but we

On Training Mate Crawford

Shawn Crawford is profiled on page 12.

T&FN: *Did being in your training group, and especially Shawn Crawford, help you rise to the level of Olympic champion?*

Gatlin: Yeah, it did. Most definitely. I looked Shawn in the face and told him, "Thank you." Without those people, nobody would have seen Justin Gatlin do what he did in 2004. I don't think so.

Shawn pushed me—no, he pulled me. He was out there dominating. In my head, I couldn't comprehend why somebody I trained with every day was out there running much faster than me. I think it was because I was being too nonchalant about the situation.

Like I felt really embarrassed at first after the Prefontaine meet [where he finished 8th while Crawford won in 9.88]. I've had bad luck at Prefontaine the last couple of years [laughs].

But it's like, Shawn did what he had to do at Pre and I didn't, so it was a real wakeup call for me. At the end of the year, I told Trevor, "That race was more of a blessing than it was a burden." Sometimes you've got to stand some embarrassment in order to get your game back together.

talk and joke together at the same time we're getting the job done together. We help each other out. It's more than just Shawn and me; it's

Former Gatlin Mate Scott Back From Football

Pro football's loss was definitely sprinting's gain. After Leonard Scott was let go on the final cut by the Pittsburgh Steelers in '03, the Tennessee grad resurrected the sprinting talents that had taken him to the '99 NCAA Indoor 60 title and outdoor bests of 10.05 and 20.34.

Despite not having a fall base heading into the Olympic season, Scott sped a 10.01 PR in the OT semis, took 8th in the final and later ran 10.03, 10.04 and 10.07 in Europe. He earned his first World Ranking at No. 9.

This winter, the 25-year-old Scott wasn't even training for indoors, yet won 60s at Millrose and Birmingham before rocketing a U.S.-pacing 6.46 in Liévin (see p. 30).

"Even though I didn't train for indoors, I wanted to use it to get the first part of my race down," explains Scott, now happily living in Los Angeles and training with the sprint-strong HSI squad. Once I get outdoors, I feel the opening phase of my 100 will be somewhat taken care of." He adds, "I was pleased with my times indoors, but what I did was purely off God-given ability. I have

a group now. We help each other, critique each other. One of us can be the best in the world. We know that can happen.

T&FN: *You're the 100 winner and Shawn is the 200 champ, but you train with each other every day. So are you aiming for each other's top spot?*

Gatlin: [laughs] I wouldn't be mad if I won a gold in the 200, no. But I like the feeling I have when I win the 100. It's a different feeling. I've won a lot of 200s in my career, but the 100 is just a different feeling. I have to say, people treat you differently when you win the 100.

People look at it with a different perspective. A lot of people don't understand the 200 or how it works, but they understand how a 100 works: the fastest man getting to the line first.

T&FN: *A lot happened to you after Athens: you were on the Wheaties box; you appeared on David Letterman; you went to the Emmys on a date with Allyson Felix; you were grand marshal of a Christmas parade in Raleigh.*

But what has been the best thing to happen to you so far because you won that title of "Olympic 100 champion"?

been amazed where John Smith has taken me."

Says HSI's renowned sprint coach, "We have been very pleased with Leonard. It's always nice to see a young man strive to improve. Because he was more a football player, he is young in track terms. But he has an untapped well of talent."

Smith predicts, "With the strength base he's got for the first time, his 200 can be off the chart."

A 10.34 sprinter as a prep (Zachary, Louisiana), Scott emphasized football first at Tennessee. "The biggest problem in college was going back and forth between the sports," he recalls. "I couldn't fully concentrate on either one."

After Scott was cut ("I was crushed"), his father called HSI's Emanuel Hudson about getting him back into track. The club accepted him, he and his wife moved to LA and now "I truly believe that sprinting is my calling. It's where I should be."

Scott paused in his European racing last summer to attend the Games and watch friend/

Gatlin: I knew the perks would come and people would recognize who I was.

But the best thing to happen since the Olympics is that I can talk to people and they'll listen. I can talk with kids. I went to a small town called Lumberton, a couple of hours outside Raleigh. Hardly even on the map, it's so small. I talked to a group of young girls and they really listened to what I said.

That's what happens now, even though I'm still at a young age. But I've accomplished something big in my life and people listen to what I have to say. I really appreciate that. I think I touch people's hearts when I talk with them now. That's the thing I like the most. □

MARK SHEARMAN



A 6.49 in Birmingham gave Scott the first of two big Euro Circuit wins

former Vol teammate Justin Gatlin win the biggest dash. He admits, "I was so happy for him, but it also made me very hungry. I was used to being out there with him. I'll be there at the next Olympics."

Scott is eager for this outdoor season. "I mainly want to run under 10 in the 100 and win the World Championships," he says.

Scott's enthusiasm for the future is clear as he adds, "I feel like the sky is the limit." //Jon Hendershott/