



ALLSPORT/Mike Powell

T&FN INTERVIEW

KEVIN YOUNG

by Jon Hendershott

It's easy to understand why Kevin Young is happy these days. The 25-year-old UCLA grad has paced the world since his first 400H race in early May.

Going into the Games, Young hadn't lost over the 1-lap barriers. He made his second Olympic team with a season-pacing 47.89 and followed up his New Orleans victory with three consecutive Grand Prix meet wins.

Perhaps most notable of all, though, in all three of those European races, Young outran '91 world champion Samuel Matete, the Zambian who hadn't been beaten since the late summer of 1990.

It really shouldn't be much of a surprise that the gregarious Young has assumed the mantle of 400H leadership left vacant by the injury-induced retirements of Edwin Moses and Andre Phillips, and the suspension of Danny Harris.

After all, Young has ranked among the world's 10-best long hurdlers since '86. He rated No. 1 in '89. Maybe it's the specter of just missing bronze medals in both Seoul and Tokyo that haunts Young's image, but to see his fast, powerful, dominating hurdling this year, it seems clear Young is intent on writing a whole new chapter

for himself—with the ultimate happy ending coming in Barcelona.

He spoke with us after his big sequence of victories over Matete:

T&FN: At the Trials, you said, "There isn't as much pressure this year without Andre Phillips and Danny Harris around. A lot of pressure has been taken away from all of us." What was the pressure you felt from their presence, as well as Edwin Moses?

Young: Harris was running well. Even if Phillips hadn't run much the past couple of years and there was just the chance of Edwin competing, there always was the possibility of Danny dropping a bomb and running fast, especially in a big trials-type competition.

T&FN: Yet at the Trials and in your three Grand Prix meets after New Orleans, you responded to the pressure, which is a very positive thing.

Young: This year, I haven't felt that pressure at all. The key things that my coach and I wanted to focus on all season were to stay healthy and run well.

I feel I got a good start early in the season because I got into shape and I was

focused on what I wanted to do once I got on the track.

T&FN: You have said this year reminds you of 1986. Why?

Young: I look at this year as parallel to '86, my sophomore season at UCLA when I first came up internationally. That year, I consistently ran 50.2, 50.3 early on. Then at the Pac-10, I dropped to 49.02.

Hopefully, this year will be the same: low-48s, high-47s in the early part of the season. Then, bang! I'll find that rhythm and run a fast low-47s, if not get under 47. So in comparing this year with '86, I seem to be on my way.

But I also feel I've made mistakes in a lot of my races—so coming to the finish line, I can tell myself that I've got something I can work on.

T&FN: Do you feel you made mistakes in the Trials race, even though it's your seasonal best?

Young: I thought I had used 13 strides between hurdles for the whole race. But in seeing tape of the race, I realized I used 12 between the fifth and sixth hurdles.

I planned at the Trials to come off the last hurdle, just relax and finish up. But I came off the last one and I was tense listening for David [Patrick]. Then in the last 10m, I relaxed and the finish line came to me in a heartbeat and the race was over.

I saw the sub-48 time and thought, "Wow!" Based on that and the mistake of

the two hurdles I anticipated, I felt that would be a couple more 10ths off the time I ran, easily.

T&FN: *In terms of being in good shape early in the season, you ran a 400 PR at Mt. SAC of 45.11, then eight days later ran a high hurdles PR of 13.65. Did those bests tell you that you were on the right track in terms of training and preparation?*

Young: Yes. In training with Coach Smith, and when I was at UCLA, we always run quarters. It was just a matter of time before I ran a good open 400. Steve Lewis and Danny Everett always teased me that someday I had to get under 45 seconds.

But they are two completely different races as far as how I run a flat 400 versus the hurdles. With the barriers, it's 19 strides to the first and 13 all the way around. There's a rhythm in the hurdles. But you've got to get out and run that 400. You just open it up and let it go.

T&FN: *You've placed 4th in two big title meets. How have you benefited from being so close to medaling in both the Games and the Worlds?*

Young: I definitely learned patience, especially after '88. I learned how to control my own anxieties and now I don't find pressures in the minute things that can happen out there on the track.

I've learned a lot of perseverance, especially running behind guys I've beaten before. That's been kind of hard to swallow sometimes, especially after last year's Worlds.

T&FN: *A season like yours this year certainly is a confidence-booster.*

Young: I feel I've gained a lot already, being able to run consistent, run fast and run healthy. I've gotten a lot of peace of mind.

T&FN: *Which had to have been helped by going to Europe after the Trials and beating Samuel Matete in three consecutive Grand Prix meets?*

Young: My attitude was, I had just come from running 47.89 at the Trials. His best of the year was 48.67; I had run close to my PR already. I knew what he's capable of doing, but if he hadn't done close to it yet, he still needed to get in shape and find his race rhythm. Then he could run a sub-48.5.

I decided to get in the race and just mimic what I had done in the past: run a comfortable 13-stride pattern and then just finish the race. He hadn't lost since 1990 and I was expecting him to run in his usual fashion. But evidently, he wasn't prepared to do that.

T&FN: *So what did you think about soundly beating the world champion?*

Young: I figured if I could run a good, fast race when the weather was

"I have no doubt that I'm going to run under 47 seconds. It's just a matter of time before I do."

cold like in Stockholm, I'd be okay. Then a couple days later in Villeneuve d'Ascq, it was windy down the backstretch.

Some hurdlers tend to run a slow first 200 if it's windy like that. I told myself to just run my usual race—a 13-stride pattern doesn't change with the weather.

After Stockholm, Sam and I watched a tape of that race together. I noticed that coming off the fifth hurdle and going into the sixth, he made his transition from 13 strides to 15, but I continued my 13-stride pattern and you could see a big gap open up. I must have picked up 8m on him. I told myself, "When we're both in shape and I pick up an extra 8m on him, I should be able to hold him off until the finish."

T&FN: *At the Trials, it appeared that on the second turn, after hurdle five and up to the eighth, you just buried everyone.*

Young: That's where almost all the guys make the transition from 13 strides to either 14 or 15. I finally realized at the Trials, "That's where the consistency in stride pattern pays off." If I can gain several meters there, I should be able to hold off anyone.

T&FN: *In terms of experience, was Seoul your "learning Olympics," where you learned about just missing a medal, or being in the call room 45 minutes before you ran and all those details?*

Young: Yes, and '92 is the year that maturity sets in. That's been a very big factor this year in general: I'm a maturing hurdler. A lot of things have gone across my mind this year—the main one being I looked back at how Moses ran.

He ran a consistent 13-stride pattern. With consistency, speed will come. I'm running 13 strides now—even though each race seems different because there are points in each that I can improve on.

But it's just a matter of time before I

click and find that niche in one race and run a good one. I have no doubt that I'm going to run under 47 seconds. It's just a matter of time before I do it. I feel that as long as I don't rush it, it will just come.

T&FN: *What's Kevin the hurdler like?*

Young: I'm very serious when I'm competing, just like every competitor out there. There are a lot of contrasts in the hurdles—people will say to me, "Wow; you run so fluid; it's like poetry in motion; so smooth."

But they also notice the demands of the race itself: running 400m, over barriers. In any given second, you can hit a hurdle, fall and your race will end.

For me, my anatomy is a natural: you look at my height [with a 37-inch inseam] and the hurdles and they seem to go hand in hand. I'm gangly, yet I flow when I run. You also have to be technically strong to run the hurdles.

Something else I've learned is that you have to go out there, run the race and respect it. If you're serious, you respect your event and also you respect your competitors. You have to; you never can count anyone out.

I think that in the next couple of years we'll notice a lot more guys making the big breakthrough at one given time.

In '86, I got an early introduction to international competition and racing against guys like Moses, Harris and Phillips. A lot of today's younger guys haven't been able to run in really great races against hurdlers of that caliber—so I guess it's up to me to make sure they do!

YOUNG'S PROGRESSION

Kevin Curtis Young was born September 16, 1966, in Los Angeles, and is 6-4/170. He graduated from Jordan High School (Los Angeles) in 1984 and from UCLA in June '89. Currently competes for the Foot Locker TC. His 400H best of 47.72 ranks him No. 7 on the all-time world list, and No. 4 among Americans.

PRs: 400—45.11 ('92); 800—1:51.42 ('88); 110H—13.65 ('92); 400H—47.72 ('88); HJ—6-3 ('84); LJ—25-4 $\frac{1}{2}$ ('86); TJ—48-11 ('85).

Progression (World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Yr	Age	Affil	400H	Majors
'84	17	Ca HS	37.54hs	—
'85	18	UCLA	51.09	—
'86	19	*	48.77 (10, 5)	2)NC, 3)TAC, 3)OF
'87	20	*	48.15 (5, 3)	1)NC, 4)TAC, 2)PAG
'88	21	*	47.72 (3, 3)	1)NC, 3)OT, 4)OG
'89	22	SMTC	47.86 (1, 1)	—
'90	23	*	48.45 (6, 3)	2)TAC
'91	24	*	47.83 (5, 2)	2)TAC, 1)OF, 4)WC
'92	25	FLTC	47.89	1)OT