

# MEL LATTANY



Perry McIntyre, Jr.

Lattany finishes his 9.96 low-altitude record, flanked by Georgia's Norman Edwards (l) and Neal Jessie (r).

**P**ride of performance is a feeling that runs deep in Mel Lattany. And the 24-year-old dashman from Small Town, U.S.A. (Brunswick, Georgia) has plenty to be proud about.

Lattany has ranked among the top 5 100m sprinters in the world since 1980 and among the top 9 in the 200 since '81. He rated No. 2 in both sprints that year and No. 3 in the 100 the past two seasons.

But he has never been as fast as this spring when he sped 9.96 on the track of his Georgia alma mater, the fastest 100 ever run at low altitude.

Yet, Lattany's name doesn't seem to get the media recognition that some of his opponents do. That's okay with Mel, though; he would rather let his sprinting do his talking. He wants his achievements, not idle talk, to bring pride to himself and his loved ones.

But Lattany is also motivated by a couple of negatives in his past: making the 1980 Olympic Team but sitting home because of the boycott and losing a shoe in his 100 semi at the '83 TAC and thus missing a chance to run in the World Championships. He fully intends to make amends in the weeks ahead.

With us, however, he is relaxing in his hotel room before the S&W meet in Modesto, chatting about sprinting and his place in it. Close friend Walter McCoy, along with Lattany's younger

brother Charles and several friends, watch a soundless TV and switch between "Roadrunner" cartoons and Japanese kung-fu movies. But the likable, friendly Lattany is in his own world, the world of sprinting:

**T&FN:** Sprinters named Lewis and Smith and King and Brown seem to get more publicity than one named Mel Lattany. Yet you are every bit as much in their class. Why hasn't Mel Lattany gotten more recognition?

**Lattany:** Well, Mel Lattany is a low-key person and always has been. [McCoy laughs and buries his head under a pillow.] Really, I strive for consistency first. Win, lose or draw, I'm not the type of person who throws his arms up in front of the crowd for recognition. My sprinting speaks for itself.

The sprinters like Lewis and King and Brown have been consistently good, too, but more in front of U.S. crowds. I have showed my consistency in front of European crowds. I feel that Europeans enjoy this sport more than Americans and they can motivate the athletes to run at their best.

But this year, I have run more races in the U.S. than since I was in college. I know it's most important to be at my best in June for the Olympic Trials, but I also want to show the American people what Mel Lattany can do.

**T&FN:** Has the approach of the top American sprinters switched from performing at their best domestically to concentrating more on running well in Europe?

**Lattany:** I think it has. Europeans cheer for everything and everyone. They see that there are nine people in a race and, at the top level against the best guys, there really is no loser. Europeans really appreciate the competitive aspect of track. But in the U.S., if you aren't 1st-place, you're a loser—in every way.

But regardless of that, sprinters—and all American athletes—want to perform in front of crowds in the U.S. because the Olympic Games will be here. There have been a lot of fast times already this year and I know there will be a lot more.

The dream of every U.S. sprinter is making the Olympic Team, and we know that basically there isn't anyone else in the

# T & F N I N T E R V I E W

world who can compete with American sprinters. We know that's who the top competition is, so it's time to stop avoiding all the other top-name sprinters and get into those confrontations now because you know you will have to face them in the Trials and Olympics.

Meet them now so that you can go back and analyze your race to find out what you did wrong. Then when you get into the Trials, you shouldn't have any problems and you can run your best race when you need it.

**T&FN:** *You say, and athletes often say, you want to "run my own race." But all of you know each other, you know you are good, so what does "running your own race" mean to you?*

**Lattany:** I consider myself one of the best starters in the world and for me to run a good race, I have to get out with the pack. Be with the pack for at least 40m, and then go into relaxation because after 60m nobody gets any faster. It's just a matter of who holds the technique the best. That was a key to my 9.96 race.

**T&FN:** *You have had successes at both sprint distances, but do you like one better than the other?*

**Lattany:** I like the 200 better, simply because you can get a bad start, run the worst curve of your life and still come up and win the race. My training is more geared to the 200 and I've always felt that I could break the World Record in the 200. With my training leaning toward the 200, I felt I could run a good 100—but I didn't think it would be as fast as 9.96. I'm proud of that time, but when it comes down to heart and soul, I really like the 200 better.

**T&FN:** *This spring, Carl Lewis said, "The reason I win so many big races is that Ron Brown may have a 10 start and Calvin Smith may have a 9 finish, but I'm an 8 everywhere and that's what carries me through." How would you rate your start, middle and finish?*

**Lattany:** I see myself as not having any flaws in my race. I try to run a complete race. I feel that my start is very good and my finish is also good. Carl was just talking about running a consistent race. Calvin has always had problems coming out of the blocks—but he can have those problems and still break the World Record because his finish is so strong. That's why we call him "Fast Feet." Ron Brown is another complete sprinter.

But we all run different types of races, so you can't really rank our styles. Regardless of how we run, we have proven we are the very top sprinters in the world and perform consistently well. I just see them like I see myself: we all have gone

about our training to become the best in the world. It's just a matter of who is ready mentally and physically 100% on a given day; that's the guy who will win the race.

**T&FN:** *Because the level of competition in the sprints is so intense, and because you have to do everything virtually perfectly in a race that is over so quickly, how does a sprinter maintain any degree of competitive consistency?*

**Lattany:** You try to iron out all the flaws in practice. I watch films of all the major sprinters to get an idea of the type of races they run. Plus, I'm always hungry because I've been ranked behind someone for the past few years. Wanting to make it to the very top has kept me hungry.

Being No. 1 in the world is all the motivation I need. Some guys may want to be in commercials, or be the richest sprinter in the world, or whatever. When people start looking at the money aspect of running, they lose their fire. If the motivation doesn't come from deep inside, if a guy doesn't really love to run—if they're in it just to get into advertising or promotion, the money side—they're going to lose out in the long run. They're going to fall and fall hard.

I strive to be the best in the world. But if I'm only the No. 2-ranked sprinter in the world for the next 20 years, I'll take it because that shows consistency.

**T&FN:** *You have said there are no friends among sprinters for 10 seconds. But how does any sprinter channel his aggressiveness so he is loose, relaxed and fast, instead of tense, tight and slow?*

**Lattany:** That comes with the experience you gain from being around a long time. We know what each sprinter can do on a given day, that any one of us can win a particular race. You just try to always make your energy positive. You always are nervous before a race, but you try to direct that nervous energy into the race. Instead of exploding out of the blocks and winning for 60m and then losing it in the last 40, you run a complete race.

I feel that is going to be one of the major keys in the Olympic Trials. Not who has run the single fastest time in the world this year, but who can produce fast races most consistently, one after another. This season, I'm trying to race every weekend so I can have consistent performances in my background and then I can run with consistency in the Trials.

**T&FN:** *There are stories that you have had nightmares about running in the Olympics.*

**Lattany:** Well, one night I dreamed I was supposed to run the Olympic semis and

I thought I was in the second race. But my name came up on the scoreboard for the first race. I ran down to the officials on the track and showed them a schedule, but they said, "No, you're in this race." I'm in my street clothes, so I run back to the dressing room, but I can't find my shoes or my socks or my uniform. I woke up with my eyes wide open, staring. My wife just said, "You better relax and sleep; you're driving me crazy."

There were other times she would wake me up because I would start sprinting in my sleep. Those things just showed me how geared up I am for the Trials and the Games. All the races I run this year are important, but I also realize that my thoughts are most centered on two meets, the Trials and Olympics.

**T&FN:** *Are you always so intense about your running, or is it because of the building anticipation for the Olympics?*

**Lattany:** I'm always pretty intense when I run. I try to keep a cool head on the outside, but deep inside I'm about to explode. After a race, I think, "What a relief! It's over." I've always been that intense; I'm crazy about running. I love to run. I have a God-given talent and I try to use it to its utmost. I try to run 100% every time, whether it's 10.3 or 9.96. I always like to walk off the track knowing I gave 100% in every race.

**T&FN:** *With Los Angeles getting closer all the time, does the memory of making the 1980 Olympic team but not competing provide extra motivation?*

**Lattany:** It's something that is always there, knowing I made it but didn't get the chance to compete. So that gives me more drive to make the team this year. And I know we will compete this time, so I know I will be representing my country.

That is important to me, because I love my country. It's the best country in the world and there can be no greater pleasure as an athlete than to represent my country in the Olympic Games. □

Melvin Bernard Lattany was born August 10, 1959, in Brunswick, Georgia, and is 5-9/155. Graduated from Glynn Academy (Brunswick) in 1977 and from the University of Georgia in 1981. Major meet performances: 100—'80 3)OT 8)NCAA; '81 3)TAC 3)NCAA; '82 9)TAC; 200—'79 5)W Cup; '80 5)NCAA; '81 1)W Cup; 6)NCAA. Has a 400 PR of 46.9. His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	Affiliation	Year	100	200
1977	17	Georgia HS	Sr	9.9y	21.7y
1978	18	Georgia	Fr	10.09(A)	20.77
1979	20	"	So	10.16 (x, 8)	20.28 (x, 8)
1980	21	"	Jr	10.14 (5, 3)	20.60
1981	22	"	Sr	10.04 (2, 2)	20.21 (2, 1)
1982	23	Ath Attic		10.14 (3, 3)	20.45 (9, 6)
1983	24	"		10.03 (3, 3)	20.22 (7, 5)
1984	25	Bud Light		9.96	20.73