

# Tim Montgomery

by Jon Hendershott

*Tim Montgomery always has been enthusiastic about sprinting and his career. But since breaking the World Record in the 100 with his 9.78 scorch at the Grand Prix Final in Paris on September 14, the 27-year-old has become positively ecstatic.*

*That's because becoming the fastest man in history finally achieved the monumental goal Montgomery always believed he could attain. He always knew he had the talent, from a wind-aided, short-track 9.96 at age 19 to a 9.92 PR and Worlds bronze at 22. But he also had seasons plagued by injury.*

*The turning point came when Montgomery moved to Raleigh late in '00 to work with coach Trevor Graham. He became ultra-serious about training, especially weightlifting, and improved to 9.84 last year in rising to No. 2 globally behind WR holder Maurice Greene. A mixed record vs. Mo this year set the stage for the late summer, culminating with his run to glory in Paris.*

*Most important of all, Montgomery also met superstar Marion Jones. She provided the inspiration, on the track and off, and suddenly life for Montgomery is a dazzling dream fulfilled:*

**T&FN:** Three days after the WR you said you couldn't believe you had done it. Now, a month later, what are your reactions?

**Montgomery:** I know I can go faster. I finally got the splits from the IAAF and my top speed was as fast as Ben Johnson's. I had a great reaction at the start but I lost a lot in the first 30m, which I can fix. I lifted my hands up instead of sweeping them back, which helps power you forward at the start.

So I had to compensate later in the race for not following through at the start. But I went through 80m in 8.04; Ben did 8.02. When Maurice set the record, he did 8.09.

**T&FN:** What do those numbers tell you that you have to do to run faster?

**Montgomery:** Now that I have done it, it's much easier to go back and replay it. As we know from Edmonton, it's the start that needs work; the finish is there. We know that the way I closed on Maurice, I just need to get a little stronger at the start. Then hold the pressure I put on my body, which will enable my stride length to be longer and not so choppy in the beginning.

**T&FN:** John Smith was quoted that if you hadn't lifted your hands instead of sweeping them back, you might have run 9.74. What did you think of that kind of estimate from someone like the coach of Maurice Greene?

**Montgomery:** Well, I had to smile about it because he has produced a lot of great sprinters. For someone who is your enemy to say that you can go faster, that's incredible. Some people

can't be as realistic as that and it was good to know that John can be that way.

**T&FN:** You said afterward that your feet, knees and joints were sore. You'd never run an effort like that before, but did you ever guess it could dole out such a pounding to your body?

**Montgomery:** We saw that right after Michael Johnson ran his 19.32, he had to go straight to ice bags on his legs. After my 9.84 last year, I had to take off five days and reset my clock. Everything was off in practice.

After the record, my feet were all beat up from the pounding and pushing and the exertion I put on them. When you put so much stress on your body, no matter how you do it, you need time to recover. You can't jump back on the track just a few days later.

**T&FN:** Was the stress from the record basically what kept you out of the World Cup? You were eager three days after Paris to run it.

**Montgomery:** I was very eager, but I just couldn't run. It would have blown everything. I worked to be No. 1 in the world; I worked to break the record. Now, I strive to go out and put a great performance together every time I touch the track. But if I'm not 100%, there's no use me touching the track.

I knew after Paris I wasn't 100%. I was drained from not sleeping—I sat up in bed that night thinking, "Oh gosh, what did I do?" It was something I knew I could do...

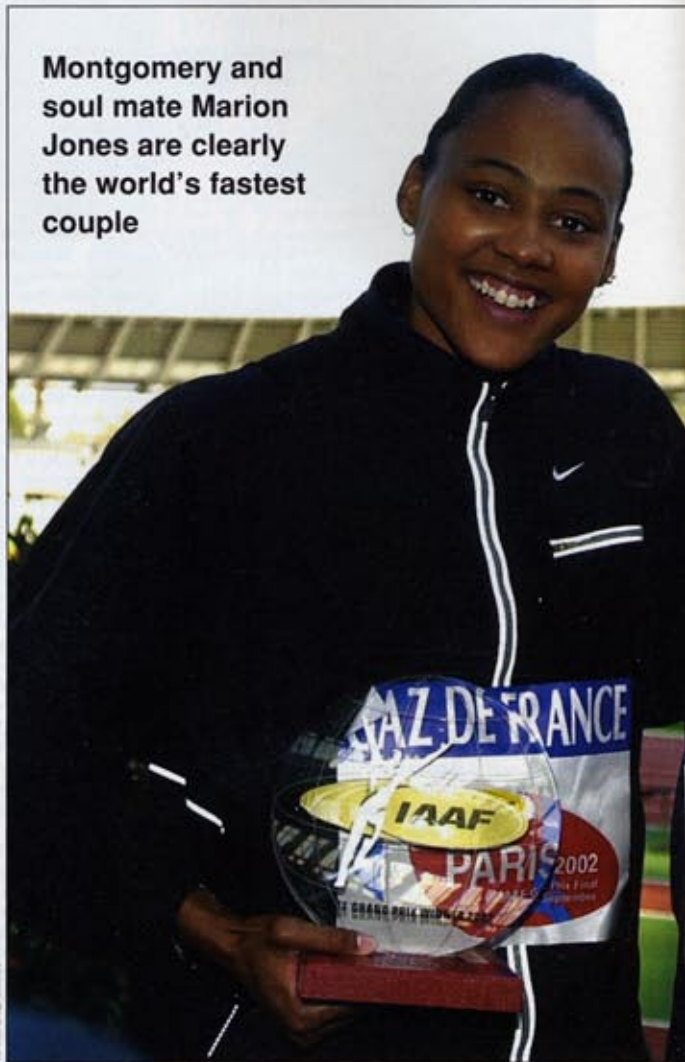
People said, "He should shut up and not talk so much." But this is *my* dream. If you don't want to listen to me, you don't have to. But I knew what I was going to do. The Bible says, "Let your life so shine." You believe in it, speak on it. I believe in 9.75, so I spoke on it. I'll always speak on it until I get it.

**T&FN:** What has been the influence of Trevor Graham on your improvement?

**Montgomery:** Me and Trevor have built a relationship where he knows when to rest me, he knows when I'm ready and he knows when I'm not ready. We always said it would take three years and I started working with Trevor after the 2000 season.

It's like building a house: you've got to find the land, and I found the land in Raleigh. You've got to build the foundation, and that was the 2001 season. Then you start working on the house itself—and gold medals are going to be the furniture for my house.

Montgomery and soul mate Marion Jones are clearly the world's fastest couple



I have some relay golds but I want individual golds in everything I know I can run. I know I can run the 200... and we know I can run the 100. So let's challenge ourselves.

**T&FN:** Was there any element of surprise for you to get the record at the end of a long, demanding season?

**Montgomery:** Very surprising. That day, I just went out there to beat Dwain Chambers. But that's another great thing I'm learning: how to put my mind and body together to work for me. Before, I went out thinking about

Maurice; I was just thinking too much about him without channeling my energy to me and putting it on the line.

It was the first race where I laid it all out. Everything. In other races, I'd think later, "I shoulda started running at that point." The record felt like practice; I was just charging, charging. I just wanted to put as much distance as possible between me and them.

We really didn't know what to expect that day. Then at the start, we couldn't understand the [French] starter and I thought, "I'm just going to focus, focus." I couldn't believe it, but I hit the start—and I knew I hit it. The start of my life. I lifted my hands up and just took off. I was just like the old times as a kid, when you take off your shoes and run from mailbox to



mailbox. I didn't care about form or anything; just get me to the finish line!

I crossed the finish and I was shootin' the guns at the media like, "Who's No. 1 now?" I heard the crowd roar like crazy, then Trevor ran up and grabbed me and said, "You did it." I thought he meant winning the race and being No. 1 because that's what we worked on. But he said, "You broke the World Record," and I was like, "Huh?!"

I can't even explain it; I was just out of it. I just couldn't believe it; I could *not* believe 9.78.

The moment was here. I had told Charley [Wells, his agent] before I wanted commercials and things and he said, "You got to get that record." I told him, "I'll get it, I'll get it," but I just couldn't believe it had come in Paris.

All my life I've raced people; raced my daddy, my mom, raced someone. It's to the point now that it was all worth it: every hurdle I had to jump, every injury I went through, every day I said I didn't want to go train. But I don't want anything else except what I have now—the world's fastest human.

**T&FN:** When was the moment you realized within yourself, "I can become that guy"?

**Montgomery:** It was when I started working with Trevor. Coming here, it was learning nutrition, sleeping right, eating right, living right, lifting weights. Just making it my life. I ran six times under 10 in one season and 9.92 before I got here. Then as soon as Trevor started teaching me, we started looking at film—something I'd never done before—I thought, "Oh, there's nobody in the world who can beat me."

Then in the first year, I just flopped! [laughs] I had all this information but I couldn't transfer it to me. I was fighting my old style with my new style but you've got to be as smooth as possible to run fast in the 100. My body was going through the changes from the weightroom, carrying new weight.

I thought, "Oh man, I want to quit. It's embarrassing to be out there." But Trevor sat me down and said, "Let's look at everything you've ever done. Let's really study this." So we just went from square one, from the basics, the ABCs and 1-2-3s and here we are.

**T&FN:** Is there such an animal as a "perfect" 100, or is that the elusive goal you want to chase?

**Montgomery:** That's the goal I want to chase. When Michael Johnson ran 19.32, he said he felt a twinge in his hamstring at the start which caused him to go off balance. It takes something out of the ordinary to make you dig harder. You may think you had a bad start, so you really, really run and you end up beating the World

Record. It's give and take.

**T&FN:** Is any record mostly circumstantial? Things just come together at a time that no one can predict?

**Montgomery:** A coach can't make a formula for setting a World Record. Like, the "perfect" sprinter? You "should" be this big, or this way or that. Who's to say that? People find it so hard to believe when someone does something. They think you had to be helped or enhanced. It's always been that way. You're not going to win. So it boils down to just you

knowing what you've done. What's inside your heart.

**T&FN:** Is that attitude now a big difference within you? Did you have to do some of the trash talking you did this year toward Maurice in order to psych yourself up?

**Montgomery:** Yes, but now I don't have to talk. I couldn't figure out why Maurice would talk. If the world knows you're fast, you don't have to get on TV and say it more. For me, I was trying to make myself believe it. I knew he ran 9.79 but told myself, "I'm going to beat you. So I got to make some noise, because if I don't, I'm not going to get your attention."

But now I don't have to give any press conference about Maurice or nothing. It's going to be a great rivalry next year, like it's always been. We both want to go faster and to do that we need each other in the race.

**T&FN:** For you, the big factor in improving is your start?

**Montgomery:** I want to be as powerful as Maurice at 60 and be Tim Montgomery at the finish. That would be the "perfect" sprinter; no telling what we could run. But I've got to work with what I've got and it all boils down to improving what we know I need to improve. That's the first 30. I'll be doing starts this winter in the snow.

**T&FN:** You've been the top gunslinger for only a month, but might there be more motivation to stay at the top than there was to get there? Or are they two different kinds of motivation?

**Montgomery:** What I think now is that I still haven't got it: 9.75. That's my goal and I haven't got it yet. But I've got Marion on my team and she's *not* going to let me lay down. She's going to remind me every day what has to be done. So that's a huge plus. Now it's, "Let's shoot for the stars." I'll be an even bigger person to break the record again.

**T&FN:** Much was made of you and Marion's personal relationship when it was first revealed in Paris. But what has been her influence on you as an athlete and as a person? Has her presence helped you become the world's fastest man?

**Montgomery:** I must say it has. If it's raining outside or there's snow on the ground, and I see her out training—a person who has done everything except set a record—if she can be out there, I *know* I better get out there. If she's got everything, and I'm trying to get what she's got, I've got to be out there. If she can take it, I can take it.

Since we teamed up, it will be a great thing to see how much we both improve. I can't explain how much two people in the same sport, the same event, can share with each other. We help each other out so much, it's going to help us both improve tremendously.

**T&FN:** And your personal connection must be a great motivator, too.

**Montgomery:** If you have someone that you love; that you're with every day; who understands how you feel; just got done doing the same workout as you; laid it out like you laid it out... that person knows what you went through. It's a joy and a blessing to have that person around you.

**T&FN:** Another matter of circumstance? You

## Montgomery Interview

could have chosen not to move to Raleigh.

**Montgomery:** We talk about it all the time. It's like it was meant to happen. We talk a lot how it just fell into place. Every time I've done something great, she's played a part in it—I ran in her shoes in the 9.84 in Oslo; I used her block settings in Paris.

**T&FN:** You share your lives, but what do you like to do off the track?

**Montgomery:** We have our own lives, but it's strange because we like the same stuff. We know she's a tomboy [laughs], so we go four-wheelin'. We go out in the woods; go fishing together. We like the same movies; Mafia movies. I got to break down then and go to some of the women's movies with her.

Playing video games against each other; football and basketball. I like fast cars; she likes fast cars. It's just incredible that we like so many of the same things.

**T&FN:** You each have the other's name tattooed on a wrist. Is that another sign of your mutual commitment?

**Montgomery:** They are. And regardless of the relationship, we are friends, forever. It's showing us that this is real and it's forever. This no game. For it to happen so soon is the connection we have. It was a "love at first sight" thing. It happened so quick, but we feel like we've been together forever. I must say it's

an unbelievable feeling. When your life moves forward with someone, you know you're with the right person.

**T&FN:** What are some of your other tattoos?

**Montgomery:** I've got one that says, "Still I Rise" and shows a man busting out of the chains that held him. That's how I felt in my career; I was always there, running good times, but I never got credit for it. Even this year, people talked about Dwain Chambers. I wondered why, since his PR was 9.94.

People can talk about you or not give you your due respect, but they can't do things for you. You've got to do everything for yourself. With all the changes in my life and negative stuff, I'm now free. The World Record set me free.

I put everything toward the record—my license plate is "Track 9.75." I've had it for a year. It is an important time to me, but I've also put my faith into it because it's what I really believe in. Now the record's here and I look at everything around me and say, "Gosh, I couldn't have written this story."

**T&FN:** Is 9.75 what you still have left to prove to yourself, or is it just a step along the way?

**Montgomery:** Marion and I have talked about this a lot and we think the ultimate goal would be to break the World Record and win the Olympic gold medal in the same race. Donovan Bailey did it in Atlanta; incredible.

## — MONTGOMERY IN A NUTSHELL —

Tim Montgomery was born January 28, 1975 and is 5-10/160. Graduated from South Carolina's Gaffney High in '93, attended Blinn JC and Norfolk State.

**PRs:** 100—9.78 ('02); 200—20.52 ('99), 20.44w ('97).

**Major Meets:** 1)JUCO, 4)USATF ('94); 6h)USATF ('95); 7)OT ('96); 2)USATF, 3)World Ch ('97); 3)USATF ('98); 3)USATF, 6)World Ch ('99); 6)OT ('00); 1)USATF, 2)World Ch ('01); 2)USATF ('02). Has two World Champs relay golds ('99 & '01), Olympic relay silver ('96 prelims) and gold ('00).

**Progression** (with World and U.S. Rankings):

Year	Age	Affiliation	100	Rank
'92	17	SC HS Jr	10.45w	
'93	18	SC HS Sr	10.61	
'94	19	Blinn JC Fr	10.11, 9.97w	(x, 6)
'95	20	unattached	10.27, 9.95w	
'96	21	Norfolk St So	10.08	
'97	22	Asics	9.92	(4, 2)
'98	23	Asics	10.00, 9.99w	(x, 5)
'99	24	Asics	10.01, 10.00w	(9, 3)
'00	25	Asics	10.01, 9.96w	(9, 4)
'01	26	ZMA	9.84	(2, 2)
'02	27	Nike	9.78 WR	(17, 17)

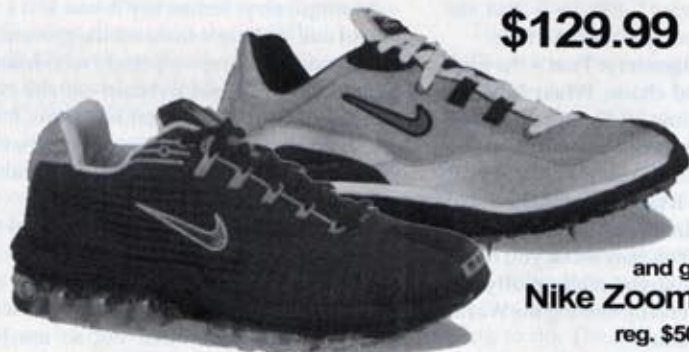
But to break that 79 barrier, break the barrier of what Ben Johnson ran. . . I never understood it was so big until I realized that Maurice still was in Ben's shadow because he only ran 9.79. But 9.78 never had been put on the clock.

Now, I've got to lower it because I want to keep the record for the rest of my life. [laughs] I look through all the sprinters and I don't see one who can take it to where I want to take it. Like the 19.32, I just don't see anyone doing it.

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