



Peter Probst

**A**fter losing the 110 hurdles at last summer's Sports Festival, Greg Foster made a vow to himself: he would not lose again. Unlike most people's resolutions, this one has remained unbroken.

Indoors, the top-ranked hurdler of last season has only strengthened his commitment. He went undefeated in 9 finals this winter. His six auto-timed finals at 60y/55m averaged an exceptional 6.938, a time only Foster and Renaldo Nehemiah have ever bettered.

Adding 7 consecutive outdoor wins from last summer following the Sports Festival to his '83 indoor string, Foster hasn't been beaten in his last 16 starts.

That winning streak is the outward manifestation of a new determination that drives the 26-year-old UCLA graduate. Seemingly always just a tick away from being the very best, Foster has taken command of his life and career and is producing his finest hurdling.

We tracked him down in New York City, as he prepared to win his first national indoor title:

**T&FN:** You were quoted earlier this winter, "It's fun for the first time in a long time." Why had hurdling not been fun for you?

Foster: Well, it had gotten to the point where I felt I had to be there, I had to run. I wasn't doing it for myself, for everyone else but Greg Foster. I almost felt like I wanted to quit, but I couldn't because I was afraid of what other people might say.

But now it doesn't matter what other people say. I want to run, and I'm not going to let anyone get in my way and stop me from running.

I'm going to do everything I can to

run as well as I can, but if I'm not ready to run, I won't run. I prepare myself for each individual race, and if I'm not ready for that race then I'm not going to go out there and embarrass myself—and I feel that taking 2nd-place would be embarrassing myself.

**T&FN:** When did it get to be a chore and not fun?

Foster: It seems like it was about three years ago; about the time of my last year in college.

**T&FN:** You spoke of the expectations of others; did your collegiate obligations affect this state of mind?

Foster: I think that started most of it. It's not that I didn't want to help the team out, but there were times I felt I should have been helping myself out more than



anyone else, but the team always came first.

**T&FN:** *Did you get to where you really disliked running, or were all the various obligations just distracting you so much that you couldn't enjoy it?*

**Foster:** I think I was just being distracted. The fun part was being taken away.

**T&FN:** *How much did the presence of Renaldo Nehemiah play in all this?*

**Foster:** Not as much as people might think. I always look forward to meeting the top competitors, because you can't improve unless you race against the best. But there were times when I didn't feel right and yet I felt I had to meet the top guys because I was afraid of what people might say. "Foster's not running because Nehemiah will be there." I felt like I had to race to keep everyone off my back.

**T&FN:** *Is it possible that other people really created this big rivalry between you and Nehemiah and you fell into the trap of believing you had to respond to the expectations of others?*

**Foster:** Yes, you could say that. I was so worried about doing what other people expected me to do, not doing what I felt would be best for me and help me to get where I am now.

I feel I should have been where I am now three or four years ago, but trying to take care of the expectations of others hindered me. That just sort of postponed my development, and it so happens that Nehemiah isn't around now—which does make it a little easier because I can run a little more relaxed now.

**T&FN:** *Did you do anything special to try to break out of that trap of answering to everyone but yourself?*

**Foster:** No, not really. Basically, I just listened to my parents and they just told me to go out and do the best I could and not worry about what everybody else thinks. As long as I was happy with the way I was running, it didn't matter what other people thought.

My coach, Bob Kersee, won't let me run a race now unless he knows I'm ready to win. Just by listening to him and to my parents, I think I've really got things under control as far as the expectations of others.

The only expectations I worry about now are my own. What I expect to do and what I want to do, I make sure I can do it. I don't go out there just guessing about what's going to happen; if I do what I'm supposed to do, I know what's going to happen.

I mean, I had confidence—but just not enough to be No. 1. I had enough to stay at No. 2. So to move up I had to either build my confidence up, or I would stay No. 2.

Winning has built my confidence more than anything else in the world. My parents and my coach taught me that if I do have a

bad race, that's all it is. The last race I lost was at the Sports Festival last summer, I shouldn't have lost that race but I did, yet I didn't let it get me down. I went to Europe and won seven straight races against the very best.

**T&FN:** *You also said this winter, "I'm a much better hurdler than I have ever been." Has that been due more to this mental change than to any physical changes?*

**Foster:** Actually, for me it's been more physical.

It really started last year after the Sports Festival. Something I usually never do is accept a 2nd-place prize. But I got on the awards stand at the Sports Festival and accepted the 2nd-place medal. As I was walking out of the gate, I threw it at my coach. But Bobby knew why I did it; he knew, just as I did, that I shouldn't have lost. He knew I hadn't trained the way I should have trained. Mentally I was ready, but physically I wasn't ready.

That day, I told him, "I have just lost my last race." I don't care who is in the race; I won't allow myself to lose it. If Nehemiah had been allowed to come back and compete, I would still have the same attitude.

I am *not* going to lose anymore, because I am not going to run anymore unless I am totally, 100% ready to run.

**T&FN:** *What is Greg Foster like off the track? Is that man as intense as the competitor on the track?*

**Foster** (laughs): Well, I'm a pretty quiet person; if I don't know anyone in a situation, I'm quiet. But I get loud around my friends; Andre Phillips for sure. I stay to myself most of the time. I have a 2-year-old son and I like to spend a lot of time with him. We go to the park almost every day.

I go to the movies if I don't have anything else to do, but mostly I stay around home. But when I am home, it's hard for me to sit around without watching some soap operas on television.

I love to play basketball. I'm not supposed to do it much, but it's hard to give up. I don't play real seriously, just with the guys in the park. But they watch out for me; when I go up for a rebound, they give me room. Usually, I just shoot around, though, and see if I can still dunk the ball.

**T&FN:** *What is the best race you feel you have ever run? Or have you even run it yet?*

**Foster:** To be honest, I think the best race I ever ran was this winter in Cleveland, even though I did hit a hurdle. It isn't a fast track, and when I found out that Nehemiah ran 6.93 there and then I ran 6.92, I was very surprised. I had trained only three days in the past three weeks because of all the rain we had in Southern California and also because I strained something in my leg

trying to stop after the Dallas race.

I trained only one day before the Cleveland meet; I worked on nothing but using the left side of my body, which I hadn't worked on before. When I crossed the finish, I thought I had run only 7-flat, maybe 7.01. It just didn't feel fast, but it was. I was very surprised.

Outdoors, the Pepsi meet in '78, which would have been my sophomore year, I remember because I got out of the blocks last—I mean dead last. I have a picture of the first hurdle and I'm not even in the picture. But I just concentrated and did what I knew I could and I won the race. I beat James Owens and Dedy Cooper and Nehemiah, too.

I guess the '81 World Cup is the biggest race I've ever won in terms of the nations represented. But I wasn't really satisfied with that race because I won by only 0.04. It was late in the season, but I knew I should have run faster.

**T&FN:** *You must like to win big.*

**Foster:** It's funny you should say that because my coach always talks to me about "destroying." He doesn't want me just to win. If second place runs 7-flat, he wants me to run 6-flat. Something that great.

I like that, because I know I have to be out there to run fast. And that keeps me concentrating on what I have to do, because moving at that fast a speed you have to concentrate. If you don't, you can hit a hurdle and you're down in an instant.

It keeps the idea in my mind of running very fast and getting out of the blocks well, which is something I always have to work on. I can get a good start sometimes, but not always, so I have to work on my start all the time.

That's one reason I'm so pleased with the way the indoor season has gone. I've never practiced through indoor season before and it will help my race outdoors. Indoor races are the first part of the event outdoors, the first five hurdles. The good indoor season I've had makes me very anxious for the outdoor season. □

Gregory Foster was born August 4, 1958, in Maywood, Illinois, and is 6-3/188. A 1976 grad of Proviso East HS (Maywood), where he equaled the prep record of 13.2 while coached by Charles Farinella. A 1980 graduate of UCLA (coached by Jim Bush), where he set an AR 13.24 in 1978. Now competes for Wilt's AC, coached by Bob Kersee. He is No. 2 on the all-time world list. NCAA placings: 3rd ('77), 1st ('78), dnf ('79), 1st ('80). Also won 1978 NCAA 200. Winner of TAC and World Cup in 1981. His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	100	200	110H
1975	16/17			13.4yHS
1976	17/18		21.4y	13.2yHS
1977	18/19	10.44		13.54y (7, 4)
1978	19/20	10.33	20.40 (x, 7)	13.22 (2, 2)
1979	20/21	10.28	20.20 (5, 1)	13.28 (4, 2)
1980	21/22	10.35w	20.79 (x, 10)	13.27 (2, 2)
1981	22/23			13.03 (2, 2)
1982	23/24		20.61	13.22 (1, 1)