

A Name Made For Headlines

Who can resist a sprinter with the utterly perfect nickname? Meet Usain "Lightning" Bolt

by Sieg Lindstrom

"Lightning" Bolt, they call him. He is Usain Bolt, the Jamaican sprint prodigy who doesn't even turn 17 until August 21, two days before the World Championships begin in Paris.

The 6-foot-5 star has grown 2 inches since he stormed 20.61 in the 200 at last year's World Junior Championships in his nation's capital of Kingston to become, at 15, the youngest-ever winner in that meet. His improvement on the track has been just as rapid.

This April Bolt got down to 20.43, and then 20.25. On the same day as his 20.25 he ran 45.35.

In June he won the Senior Jamaican 200 title with a 20.28.

In July he won the World Youth title in 20.40 and then a week later added the Pan-Am Junior crown in 20.13—the fastest time ever for a 16-year-old, faster than any 17-year-old has ever run and equal to the World Junior Record set by 18-year-old American Roy Martin in '85.

"If you don't think this guy can run under 20 seconds, you're nuts," says T&FN High School Editor Mike Kennedy, who has seen Bolt in action at both the World Juniors and Worth Youths.

"Don't be surprised if he does it sooner rather than later," Kennedy adds, "and I don't think a sub-45 in the 400 is beyond him either. But the thing is he probably doesn't yet know what he's doing there, and you might get a 46.5 as easily as a 44.5."

Bolt Does It Right

Read what Usain Bolt's family and friends in his town of Coxeath have told the *Daily Gleaner* about their boy sprint star and it helps to be Jamaican, or perhaps a reggae fan. But the message comes through the dialect even to a foreigner.

"Everywhere yuh teck it, wi a thunder bolt," said his aunt, Lillian Bolt-Smith.

"Wi a bolt man, lightning bolt, thunder bolt, nothing fi stop wi," says dad Wellesley Bolt.

For an expert's perspective, ask Arkansas sprint assistant Lance Brauman, who served as a U.S. team coach at the

World Youth Championships and saw Bolt run. "He's obviously the most talented 16-year-old I've ever seen," Brauman says.

But could a 16-year-old who grew 2 inches in the past year to 6-5 get too tall for the long sprints? Brauman thinks not: "He's very powerful on the ground for a guy that size. Usually you see that kind of power in a guy that's 5-10 to 6-feet. But he gets his knees up well. He handles himself extremely well: good foot placement. He does a lot of things right that are hard to coach.

"He's either been taught from a very young age how to do things or he just naturally does some things right."

Asked to compare Bolt with the scores of youthful phenoms he has observed over more than 30 years, Kennedy—who followed firsthand the career of '90s mega-phenom Obea Moore—does not hesitate for a second: "I've never seen anybody better at that age."

A Bolt from the blue Usain is not. He is the son of Wellesley and Jennifer Bolt from tiny, rural Coxeath, Trelawny, in western Jamaica—an area where coffee, sugar cane and yams are grown. There are two local tourist attractions: the Windsor Great Cave and Miss Lilly's Bar and Shop, run by Usain's aunt Lillian Bolt-Smith.

Usain "is a very humble child," his mother—who has nicknamed him Vijay—told the *Kingston Daily Gleaner* last year. "Sometimes it is almost unbelievable."

Bolt even had trouble adjusting to his own blitz run to elite world



Bolt ate up the rest of the field at the World Youth Championships, winning the 200 by a huge 0.64 margin.

level. At the Central American & Caribbean Junior meet just over a year ago, he ran 20.60, but repeatedly referred by mistake to his new "21.60" PR, as his tongue lagged a second behind his legs.

Winning the World Juniors in Jamaica flashed Bolt to instant national-hero status, and forced him and his family into a series of somewhat weighty decisions.

At a parade to hail Bolt's return to Trelawny last summer, a local political candidate provided the SUV in which the sprinter rode and publicly offered to pay for his school expenses and a family vacation.

The politician's was, no doubt, just the first of many offers that will affect Bolt's decision whether to turn professional or preserve his eligibility for a U.S. scholarship.

After the Pan-Am Juniors, Bolt's comments showed he is leaning toward taking the money to run after the World Champs. "I'll see what happens there with the big guys," he said. "I think they will push me a little harder to run faster. I'm just looking to my 200m because that's what I'm going to go pro with." □