

**Olympic Games****Athletics-Veronica Campbell-Brown**

# Jamaica's Campbell-Brown: world's fastest woman?

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Paul Gains [CBC Sports](#)



Veronica

*Campbell Brown of Jamaica in the women's 200m during the Jamaica International Invitational meeting at the National Stadium, May 3, 2008 in Kingston, Jamaica. (Michael Steele/Getty Images)*

## Story content

- [Strong foundation](#)
- [No animosity](#)
- [Drug assisted-records](#)

Jamaican-born sprinters have been a dominant force on the world scene but a Jamaican has never won the Olympic 100m under the national flag. Veronica Campbell-Brown aims to change that.

The 26-year-old won the 2007 IAAF World Championships 100m and was crowned the 2004 Olympic 200m champion. But while Usain Bolt, her country's latest world record holder, is still mulling over a 100-200m double her mind clearly is made up.

"Definitely, right now I am planning on doing the double -- the 100, 200 and the relay," she says. "It is very hard for me to choose between the 100 and 200. I love both so I have no choice but to double."

The 2008 season has so far gone according to plan. Campbell-Brown won the 100m and 200m in a meet in Orlando, Florida, where she and her husband, 2006 Commonwealth 200m champion Omar Brown, reside. She also won the Adidas Classic 100m in Carson, California, and then on June 1 she set a world-leading time of 10.91 seconds in the 100m at New York's Reebok Grand Prix.

That's awfully fast to be running so early in the season. After all, there are two months to hold that form. But she points out that she ran under 11 seconds five times last season, including her world-leading time of 10.89 in late June. So, no, she is not worried about peaking too early.

### **Strong foundation**

"I have a really strong foundation," she explains. "The fall work I did was really good. And the way my coach coaches us we didn't get into our speed work that early. So I think my base is good enough. Over the years I have always been able to maintain my fitness level and run fast throughout the summer. And in September I will still be running fast."

Her coach is Lance Brauman. He recruited her to Barton County Community College after she won the 1999 IAAF World Youth Championships as a high school student at Vere Technical in Trelawny, Jamaica.

From there she followed him to the University of Arkansas which is the same path as double world champion Tyson Gay.

Brauman served a year and one day in Texarkana Federal Correctional Institution in Texas after being convicted for embezzlement and mail fraud. The charges stemmed from having used state money to pay student-athletes for work that was not completed.

Brauman was in prison during the 2007 world championships. But he had sent his athletes: Campbell-Brown, Gay and Wallace Spearmon (2007 world championship 200m bronze medalist) workouts in advance. After his sentence was served he moved to Orlando.

Gay is now coached by former Olympic 4 x 100m gold medalist Jon Drummond while Spearmon's father, Wallace Spearmon Sr., coaches his son. So, Campbell-Brown has Brauman's undivided attention.

The recent success of Usain Bolt has also served as inspiration.

"All of us are running for the same country so obviously we are going to make sure that everybody is on the right track," she admits. "When one person runs fast it motivates all of us to try and run good as well."

### **No animosity**

Many Jamaican sprinters have left the country to pursue athletic scholarships in the United States and there they have stayed. Bolt and Powell have remained in Kingston to the delight of the Jamaican people. Campbell-Brown says she has never felt any animosity from Jamaicans because of her decision.

"The federation does support us," she says. "The fans love track and field and I get a lot of support from Jamaican and Caribbean people. So living in the U.S. I don't feel like an outsider at all.

"After the Olympics I went home and there was a parade where a lot of athletes, including myself, toured the whole country for a day. We met a lot of people, took a lot of photos and just had fun. It was very good, the entire country was excited."

Campbell-Brown's fastest time in the 100m is 10.85 seconds, recorded at the 2005 Zurich Weltklasse

meet. She wants to reduce it this season. But she laughs when asked if she sees herself ever attacking Florence Griffith-Joyner's world 100m record of 10.49 which was set 20 years ago.

"You never know what can happen," she says. "I have never run 10.6 or anything like that. If I was running 10.6 then I could say, 'OK, I have a chance.' My personal record is 10.85 and the world record is 10.49. The main thing I think about is getting a PR [personal record] and winning my races. I think the world record is beyond my reach right now."

#### **Drug-assisted records**

Many of the women's world records, it has been opined, were set with performance-enhancing substances. The release of East German Secret Police documents confirmed that that country was heavily involved in doping on a systematic basis. Campbell-Brown believes the IAAF missed an opportunity to put things right when they discussed keeping a new set of world records in the new millennium.

"I think that would be a good idea," she agrees, "because if the world record was in reach of the women it would add more excitement to the sport. Like the men's 100m. The world record could be broken in many meets so it is more exciting."

To her competitors Campbell-Brown can be cold. She is the picture of concentration when she lines up to race. But off the track she is friendly and unmistakably humble. Guests at her home are treated to Jamaican cuisine such as curried chicken, rice and peas that she loves to cook from scratch.

"When I am on the track competing a lot of people may think I am mean because I hardly smile," she admits. "I think by smiling it might take away from my focus. I am so much in my zone thinking about what I need to do in the race to execute a proper race to win. Outside of track I am very relaxed. I am humble because I do believe that all I have achieved is a blessing from God. So there is no way to be boastful about it."

Campbell-Brown has no plans to race again until the Jamaican Olympic trials June 27-29. A few European competitions will follow prior to the Beijing Olympics. Clearly she is running as well as ever and the Olympic 100m gold medal would be a wonderful conclusion to a career. How much longer she will continue is up in the air.

"I have no idea," she declares. "I guess it will depend on how fast I am running. If I am 30 and running 10.8 or 10.7, I will keep going. But if I am not running as fast, why keep going? It is based on how fast I am running and how dominant I am still. That's how I will decide on whether I retire or keep going."

[Back to top](#)