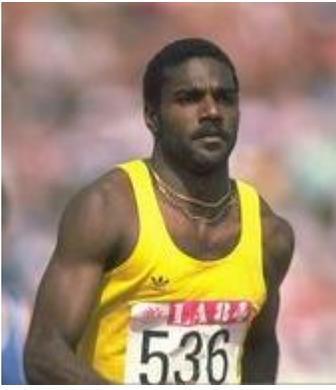


CAMERON - Independence Day Hero



Nothing tests a man's mettle like adversity. Jamaica's Bert Cameron was tested severely at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles and passed with flying black-green-and-gold colours. He went to LA in search of a gold medal that would crown him king of the event some still call 'the quarter'. He left with something just as valuable.

The Spanish Town native won three NCAA 400 metres titles for the University of Texas El Paso to match the feat last achieved by George Rhoden, the 1952 Olympic 400 metres champion. He carried that form to the international circuit and collected gold medals in 1982

Commonwealth Games and the inaugural IAAF World Championship in 1983 for good measure. Those achievements made him a worthy successor to Rhoden and Arthur Wint, the 1948 Olympic champion.

Early in 1984, the St. Jago High School graduate set a still standing Gibson Relays record of 45.50 seconds and his fans saw gold. He easily reached the Olympic semis on August 6, and set off steadily in lane 2. As he straightened into the second 100 metre segment of the race, disaster struck. Pain cut through his left hamstring, forcing him to pop up into the air and to jog down to a walk.

His compatriots at home held their breath.

Miraculously, the pain stopped and Cameron took a baby step, then one at half pace and then he was sprinting again. Cheers rang out from every home in Jamaica. The other seven men in his semi were gone but the respected US journal, TRACK AND FIELD NEWS wrote, 'most quarter milers run the last 100 with a refrigerator on their back; Cameron had a jetpack and a helluva lot of courage.'

Despite losing vital metres to the injury scare, Cameron clocked 45.10 seconds and secured his place in the final.

"Quitting does nobody any good. I just can't give up that easy", said the champion to TRACK AND FIELD NEWS.

Sadly, he couldn't run that race but he had gained the respect of the world on Independence Day with his courage and determination. Robbed of a shot at gold in Los Angeles, Cameron gradually came back to form. He took silver at the 1987 Pan-Am Games and lowered his own national record to 44.50 seconds in the 1988 Olympic semi to reach the final again. In those Games in Seoul, South Korea, Howard 'Birdman' Morris, Devon 'Helsinki' Morris and Winthrop Graham did well to give Cameron the baton in second place. Then 28, he used his experience to hold off a hoard of medal hungry teams to secure the silver medal for Jamaica in the 4x400 metres relay. Davis, Morris, Graham and Cameron clocked a Jamaican record of 3:00.30

Ironically, Rhoden was the anchor man when Jamaica last won an Olympic 4x400 metres relay medal and that was 1952.

It was due reward for an Independence Day hero.

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