

FREEMAN COULD NOT WALK AWAY



When her career as a world class 100 metres hurdler was over, Michelle Freeman could not walk away from the sport she loved. That motivation has led her through more than a decade as a fulltime coach. Freeman says it is her way of giving back.

"Coaching is not something that I actually wanted to do, to be honest", she revealed candidly in an interview in February. "It's just so many people have given to me in my lifetime and my passion for the sport, I love the sport. I didn't think it's something that I can walk away from and I want to give back and my giving back is to become a coach and there is so many young male and female athletes I want to help because there's so many people out there that if it wasn't for their help, I would never be in the situation that I'm in today to be able to give back", she said gratefully.

The St. Catherine native last laced up her spikes to race in 2007, but, by then, she was already a volunteer coach at her training base, the University of Texas. Her work there included duty as an assistant coach and covered sprints, hurdles, jumps, strength and conditioning.

She assumed duties as assistant coach at San Diego State University in 2013, galvanizing the school's sprinters. American Ashley Henderson accelerated from 11.86 to 11.21 and 10.96w in 2016 and 11.05 in 2017 with coach Freeman's guidance and placed second in the 100 metres at the 2016 NCAA Championships. Jamaican triple jumper Shanieka Thomas, now Ricketts, won indoor and outdoor NCAA titles in 2014.

Freeman's loyalty to her country has led her to attract Jamaicans to San Diego where she served until 2017 and to the University of Virginia where she has been since. Jordan Scott and now Owayne Owens have made Virginia a triple jump hotspot and 400 metres hurdler Andrenette Knight has won an Atlantic Coast Conference crown with Freeman's guidance.

Another Jamaican, 2019 Central Championships class 1 100 metres champion Kayla Bonnick joined the Cavaliers for the current campaign. "I want to give back to my people. I want to give back as much as I can to my people", Freeman explained.

"Absolutely, absolutely", she exclaimed. Speaking more broadly about all the student-athletes under her care, she said, "if I can help one person to believe that the sky's the limit, I'll do anything to help one of my athletes."

For Freeman, a three-time Olympian who won the 1994 Commonwealth 100 metre hurdles gold and the 1997 World Indoor 60 metre hurdles title for Jamaica, a big part of her job is to help athletes to see their own potential. "Even when they think, they didn't have the thought of like I can do it and if I can help them to believe that they can, that's what I want to do", she concluded.