

## MICHELLE FREEMAN - FROM SUB-13 TO WORLD RECORD



Michelle Freeman was already on her way to becoming Jamaica's first great female sprint hurdler when she settled into the blocks for the heats of the 55 metres event at the 1992 South Eastern Conference (SEC) Indoor Championships on February 22. 7.34 seconds later, and Freeman had joined the ranks of world record holders.

"I didn't even know I ran that fast, to be honest. I was just running", she reflected on February 20. The record, which stood for 5 years, came as a reward for a year to tribulation, success and more tribulation. An injury at the 1991 SEC Indoors had thrown her off and it took a talk from her

University of Florida coach Bev Kearney to put her back on the right track.

The heart-to-heart talk followed a disappointing showing at the 1991 NCAA Outdoor Championship. "Bev called me in her room and we had a talk and she was like, 'are you ready to do this?' I didn't have a choice but to say I was ready to do it", recalled Freeman who now serves as a sprint and hurdling coach at the University of Virginia. Training with new motivation, she clicked to 12.98 seconds - the first sub-13, 100 metre hurdles time ever by a Jamaican - in New York, won the Jamaican Championship and placed 5<sup>th</sup> in the Pan-Am Games final.

With things falling into place, the former St. Jago High School standout went to the 1991 World Championships in Tokyo as the nation's first ever 100 metre hurdles competitor ... and just missed the final. Those experiences fuelled her intent to do better. "I just made up my mind and great things were going to happen for me, no matter what", she recounted.

When the 1992 SEC Indoors rolled around, the then 22 year-old Jamaican zoomed. "The world record didn't sink in until like 12 o'clock, 1 o'clock that night when I got home and couldn't sleep and I called my coach and I was telling her and she said, what are you doing up? I said, Bev, I can't sleep and she was like, 'Michelle, whatever you did in the semi-finals, in the finals, it doesn't matter' ", she summarized.

She took Kearney's advice and zoomed the final too, in 7.36 seconds.

The record and the win confirmed her world class potential. "Confidence already started soaring as I said from 1991, so that put the icing on the cake", she agreed. Though she would meet tribulation and injury throughout her career, Freeman nevertheless became Jamaica's first World Championship finalist in 1993, our first Commonwealth Champion in 1994 and with the late Dionne Rose in 1996, she featured in the first Olympic 100 metre hurdles final with Jamaican representation.

The 3-time Olympian was at her best in 1997, with the 60 metre hurdles gold medal at the World Indoor Championships ahead of compatriot Gillian Russell, and bronze at the outdoor World Championships in Athens.

To add to her triumph over adversity, Freeman lowered her Jamaican record to 12.52 seconds in the Athens semi-final.