

Meet Kemba Nelson



Jamaica has been producing top sprinters for generations and Kemba Nelson could be next. She zoomed into the spotlight at the recent NCAA Indoor Championships with a stunning win in the 60 metres, clocked in 7.05 seconds, the number 2 time for the distance this year. Dazzled by her big breakthrough, Nelson says her confidence has been boosted.

Four (4) days after her victory for the University of Oregon in Fayetteville, Arkansas, the 21 year-old Jamaican was on the crest of a wave. "I'm still trying to come to terms with what I did", said the Montego Bay native who had clicked off times of 7.19 twice before the NCAA meet. An improvement to 7.13 seconds in the first round paved the way for a final where she did everything right. "I knew I had to start because we are all very good starters so it was just trying to get

out, not too far behind and transition well into the final 30", she remembered.

Like her heroine Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Nelson was not a star at Boys and Girls Championships. In fact, as a student at Mount Alvernia High School, her best finish was second place in the class 2 100 metres in 2017. That took her to the University of Technology (UTECH) where she rubbed shoulders with Fraser-Pryce herself. "I like her drive, how hardworking she is because I've trained alongside her for three years, seen everything for myself and she's really very determined and very hardworking", she said admiringly.

Her time at UTECH bore fruit. She made Jamaica's team to the 2018 World Under 20 Championships and then in 2019, she emerged to public notice. First, she raced to third place in the 100 metres at the Carifta Junior Games in Grand Cayman. A solid sprint double at the National Junior Championships confirmed her promise.

Asked where her speed comes from, Nelson explained, "Well, I would say Dad because he played football and then my Mum played netball so I'd say my Dad is fast."

What seems certain is that her outdoor personal best of 11.49 seconds will fall. "I believe I can do far better than I've always did in previous outdoor seasons. So this really builds my confidence."

Andrew Henry, who coached her at Mount Alvernia, was impressed. "The timing was surprising but in terms of her effort, it's not surprising because you know, she is a championship athlete. It doesn't matter where she's at, from the moment she in a final, her aim is always to win and it doesn't matter who's she's up against, she's focused on what her objectives are," Henry said of the 2016 and 2017 Western Championships class 2 sprint double winner.

On the Jamaican all-time 60 metre performance list, she trails Merlene Ottey, Fraser-Pryce, Thompson-Herah and Veronica Campbell-Brown. All four have won global gold medals and now the world is waiting to see if Kemba Nelson is next in line.