

New Generation: Sprinter Ackeem Blake Is Learning



Newcomer Ackeem Blake topped the 200 metres at last Saturday's JAAA Qualification Series meet at the National Stadium with a personal best of 20.97 seconds on April 24. For his coaches at the Titans Track Club, it was a sign that their young charge was learning what it takes to be fast.

Blake, the 2019 National Junior 100 champion, got an affirmation from Olympic gold medalist Michael Frater, who coaches the Titans alongside 2002 World U20 400 metre hurdles finalist Greg Little. "It has been a learning experience for him for the most part because when he got there, we realized that Ackeem hasn't been doing track for a very long time so he has to learn basically everything and that's good with somebody when you get them like that because they're not grown up into any bad habits", Frater said on April 26.

"He's just about what you call as raw or as fresh as you can get, just basically learning the sport itself and he has been very receptive to instructions that myself and coach Little give him", expounded the 2005 World Championship 100 metres silver medalist.

Blake first appeared in Frater's radar at the 2019 National Junior Championships when the Merlene Ottey High School prospect won the U17 100 metres in 10.41 seconds. "When I got the information on him, that he had just started track and field two years before, I was very excited", Frater stated.

He praised the coaches at Merlene Ottey for carefully grooming Blake. "They're not going to be pushing to try to win Champs and everything so he's not going to be under a lot of work from a young age. That really captivated me", he explained.

Now Ackeem is training with the likes of star namesake Yohan Blake and 2014 Commonwealth 100 metres champion Kemar Bailey-Cole. "We're not pressuring him as yet, just having him develop naturally", Frater said, in reference to the youngster who finished 2019 with a bronze medal in the 100 metres at the NACAC U18 Championship.

It is clear that the young prospect has impressed Frater and Little. "He's still a junior but he now realizes the work that it takes to be a professional athlete and I don't think he has missed a day of training since he has started so that's the good thing. He's there every day putting in the work, watching what the guys do", Frater confirmed.

The 19 year-old clocked 10.50 seconds in the 100 metres, 75 minutes before his breakthrough in the longer event. "What you saw in the 100, trust me, he's a lot better (than that)", the coach promised.

In keeping with the gradual approach implanted into Ackeem's training programme, his target is the World U20 Championships, which is set for Nairobi, August 17 – 22, 2021. "He's just biding his time", Frater concluded, "and we are just doing our best to actually prepare him."

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