

The Bolt Phenomenon

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By Mike Rowbottom

ABSTRACT

Usain Bolt is the world's highest profile athlete, an internationally known figure on the scale of any football player or movie star. Through his success in athletics' most popular events, he has almost single-handedly brought the sport to a new generation wherever it is followed, as well as some places where it was not previously strong. His star power has been confirmed with the signing of the largest ever sponsorship deal for a track and field athlete. This article traces Bolt's development, from his birth through to the end of the 2010 season. It chronicles his early career, his decision to become a professional athlete, his lifestyle adjustments and health problems, his emergence in the global sporting consciousness with a world record in the 100m in early 2008, and his phenomenal performances in the 2008 Olympic Games and 2009 IAAF World Championships in Athletics. Along the way the social and sporting background to the strength of Jamaica's sprinters, the role of Bolt's coach and support team and his impact on the whole sport of athletics are covered. The article concludes that Bolt is not bigger than athletics, but he is undeniably the biggest thing in the sport.

AUTHOR

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Introduction

Usain Bolt is a phenomenon. He is the world's highest profile athlete and has transcended his sport to become, for young people especially, an internationally known figure on the scale of any football player or movie star.

Part of the story is that he makes it look so easy – crushing the sport's toughest opposition without losing his cool or his sense of fun. But it is not quite as simple as it seems. Make no mistake, Bolt has worked hard and overcome difficulties to reach his current status.

In this article I will trace the steps of the emergence of this charming giant as an athlete, from his young days in the sprinting powerhouse of Jamaica to the peak of sporting fame and through the 2010 season. Along the way I will also discuss some of the impact he has had on his sport, both on and off the track.

2008 -Taking Centre Stage

For the majority of those now aware of Bolt, he appeared to arrive on the scene as a peerless sprinter in 2008. On a rainswept May evening at New York's Icahn Stadium, the 21 year-old shocked the home favourite Tyson Gay, the 2007 world 100 and 200m champion, to set a world 100m record of 9.72 sec in what was only his fifth serious race at the distance.

Later that summer, of course, the world became properly acquainted with Bolt as he lowered his record to 9.69, while simultaneously earning himself the Olympic title and beating his fist against his chest in excitement. The packed crowd in Beijing's Bird's Nest Stadium, huge television audiences around the world, and surely athletics' greatest YouTube following did not need to be told that something quite unusual had taken place. They could see the daylight he had opened up on the rest of the world's top sprinters, seemingly without a full effort.

Bolt followed up by beating the legendary world 200m record of 19.32, which many believed Michael Johnson had set for a generation in winning the 1996 Olympics. This time there was no showboating at the line as Bolt drove through, long legs working, arms pumping past his ears, intent on making an indelible mark in the event which has always appeared to be his speciality, the event where his lauded fellow countrymen, Don Quarrie, had earned a gold medal for Jamaica at the 1976 Olympics. This time the clock stopped at 19.30.

And at the stroke of midnight, Bolt turned 22.

As after the 100m, Bolt's competitors in the Beijing final were left straining for words. "It's mind-blowing," said Christian Malcolm of Great Britain, whose seventh place turned into fifth once the disqualifications were announced. "I hear he looked impressive, but I didn't really get to see."

"We thought the 100 record could possibly go to 9.6, but we never thought the 200 record could be broken," said another of his oppo-

nents, the 2003 world 100m champion Kim Collins of St Kitts and Nevis. "I didn't think it would happen while I was still running. How fast can a human being run before there is no more going fast?"

"Everything came together tonight," Bolt said at the post-race press conference, at which, characteristically, he appeared laid-back, almost childlike. "I just blew my mind. And I blew the world's mind."

The world certainly was agog at his demonstrations of superiority. But most of all, it was agog over the 6ft 5in showman who had energised his sport with a startling display of athleticism, and inimitable showmanship.

Before and after his triumphs, Bolt assumed the pose with which he is now synonymous – left arm raised with a forefinger pointing to the sky, right arm cocked back as if holding the string of a bow.

And as he celebrated his successive triumphs, the pose was supplemented with impromptu dancing – moves drawn from the Jamaican dancehall scene, which Bolt has embraced. Four years earlier, Hicham El Guerrouj had capered in joy after finally capturing the Olympic 1500m title at the third time of asking. But Bolt's moves were not the overflowing of emotion so much as a jubilant expression of personality.

Bolt capped his efforts in Beijing by claiming a third Olympic gold as he ran the third leg in the sprint relay, handing over to the fellow Jamaican from whom he had taken away the distinction of being world record holder – Asafa Powell. The 2006 Commonwealth champion brought Jamaica home in a world record of 37.10 and added another gold to what was Jamaica's richest haul of medals at any Olympics.

With six golds, three silvers and two bronzes, this nation of less than three million inhabitants finished 13th out of the 200 competing countries. In terms of sprinting, however, it finished as far and away the dominant force of the Games,

with Shelly-Ann Fraser and Veronica Campbell-Brown taking the women's 100m and 200m respectively, and Melanie Walker adding gold in the 400m hurdles. Had it not been for a dropped baton in the women's sprint relay, the domination in the sprints would probably have been complete.

The Back Story

Beijing was where the world took full notice of Bolt. And yet, as Bert Cameron, the Jamaican coach who won the first ever world 400m title in 1983, remarked in the wake of Bolt's opening flourish at the Games: "We knew what was coming".

Bolt may have flashed onto the world's consciousness like lightning but, any Jamaican could have told you, he was no bolt from the blue. From the first moment he became an athlete, it was clear that he could do something special. Jamaica had been awaiting his overnight success for almost a decade.

After the impact Bolt and his fellow Jamaicans had made in Beijing, the sporting world was asking the question: how do they all, and how does Bolt in particular, run so fast?

A large part of the answer lies in Jamaica's unique competitive structure and heritage. To fully understand how an island with a population of less than three million people can match and beat a nation such as the United States, with a population one hundred times larger and a far greater advantage in terms of economic resources, you have to see how this great sporting tradition has evolved.

In his book entitled *Jamaican Athletics, A model for 2012 and the world* (BlackAmber 2007) Patrick Robinson points out that runners from the island have benefited down the years not just from the competitions established, but a legacy of inspiration from successive generations, starting with a sprinter who ended up as the nation's Premier from 1955 to 1962, Norman Manley.

As a member of Jamaica College, Manley ran the 100 yards in 10.0 (when the world record was 9.7) and the 220 yards in 23 seconds. The latter time would have earned him a place in the finals of both the 1908 and the 1912 Olympics.

The testing ground for Manley, as for so many other great Jamaican athletes who would follow him including Quarrie, Powell and Bolt, was a competition that emerged at the same time as he did, and in 2010 celebrated its centenary. Officially, it is the Boys and Girls High School Championships. But everyone who has ever been involved in this energising event knows it simply as Champs.

When Champs started, in 1910, there were six secondary schools and around 70 athletes taking part.

Nowadays, this four-day event held at the National Stadium brings traffic in Kingston to a halt. More than 2,000 young athletes take part in front of capacity crowds of 30,000.

And when he attends, Bolt is the ultimate role model, besieged by young athletes who ask to know how to run as fast as he does – "Work hard" they are told – or just want to get him to do "The Pose".

"This then – a rich athletic history and tradition, supported by the assertiveness, the combativeness, the self-belief and resilience that are native to the Jamaican persona – is the first explanation of Jamaica's success," Robinson writes.

Not only has Jamaica provided world-class sprinters down the years, to the point where they now dominate world sprinting in both male and female events, but many of the world's finest sprinters who have not competed for Jamaica have been Jamaican either by birth or descent, including Olympic 100m champions Donovan Bailey (Canada) and Linford Christie (GB), world 200m champion Ato Boldon (Trinidad and Tobago), world 400m champion Sanya Richards (US), double 2004 Olympic champion Kelly Holmes (GB) and former world 100m hurdles champion and record holder Colin Jackson (GB).

Interview with Usain Bolt



NSA *How are you? How did your recovery from the 2010 season go?*

Bolt: Recovery went fairly well with rest and visits to the doctor. I am back in training since the first week in October and things are going great so far.

NSA *You train mostly in Jamaica. Why do you prefer that rather than for example in the US or Europe?*

Bolt: I like being at home and as our facilities improve in Jamaica it makes training even more comfortable. I also get an opportunity to train with my teammates.

NSA *In a training period do you see Glen every day? Do you feel a training session without coach is less effective?*

Bolt: The coach has specific programmes for all his athletes and if he is not there, he has a capable technical team to assist all the athletes in the club.

NSA *How often do you actually train in a week?*

Bolt: I try to train five to six days per week now.

NSA *What's your favorite training content?*

Bolt: The early days are challenging, but training gets better once there is competition. I am a very competitive athlete plus we get an opportunity to see the progress we have made.

NSA *Is there any type of training you don't like?*

Bolt: No one likes the multiple runs of 300/400 metres.

NSA *How much of your success would you put down to mental and psychological strength and how much to physical abilities?*

Bolt: I have been blessed with a great deal of talent but as I grow I have become stronger, mentally and psychologically. Also, my opponents are very strong so that helps to make me stronger. I take no one for granted.

NSA *There is one thing that makes you very special: your ability to switch from being very relaxed to highly focused. Where do you think you get this skill and do you do anything to develop it?*

Bolt: When I am on the track, there is only one thing I am aiming to do and that is win and once that is over I enjoy myself. I have realized that apart from competing well, people watch track and field for entertainment, so I do both.

NSA *Most people associate Jamaicans, even top athletes, with a more relaxed attitude about life in general. How do you square this with the hard work and dedication it takes to reach your level of performance?*

Bolt: We have a rich history of sport in Jamaica. While the laid back attitude is there, people expect the athletes to do well. Plus we have a rich tradition to follow

NSA *How do you usually warm up? Is your competition warm-up different from training?*

Bolt: The basic warm up is important and I do a few stretches for my back. I listen to music too.

NSA *What do you do to promote recovery after an intense training session?*

Bolt: Athletes must remember to keep hydrated and get as much rest as possible. Those things are very important.

NSA *Does it happen that you are not motivated for a training session? What do you do when it happens?*

Bolt: Coach is very quick to determine when I am not in the mood, but he always has an alternative, so we are not allowed to get away. I am motivated because I set goals for myself

NSA *What kind of scientific and medical support do you have? In other words, do you work*

regularly with any sport medicine doctors, biomechanists or psychologists?

Bolt: Our technical team has a masseur and I have access to sport medicine doctors. I also visit Dr. Wolfhart in Germany for special treatment. Racers Track Club has meetings to discuss other aspects of training, so we work with several professionals from time to time.

NSA *If you look back, when did you realise that you really would become an elite athlete? What made you see it?*

Bolt: I always knew I had the potential...had a bad rap in 2004, but changed coach and recovered since the 2007 World Championships.

NSA *Have you already recognized a Usain II in Jamaica yet?*

Bolt: Jamaica has a good set of athletes. My club Racers also has a talented bunch of athletes.

Interview by Bill Glad



The innate sprinting ability of so many Jamaicans is something that Robinson acknowledges has prompted speculation regarding hereditary factors.

“It has long been claimed that black people of the West African diaspora (to which the vast majority of Jamaicans belong) are genetically predisposed to excellence in sports that call for explosive talent,” Robinson says. “A Jamaican journalist, Patrick Cooper, in his book *The Black Superman*, advances the thesis that there is a scientific basis for the dominance of blacks of West African descent, sports such as athletics, basketball, baseball, football, American football, boxing and cricket.

“To his credit, Cooper anticipates the objection that his thesis feeds into the stereotype of blacks as people with brawn and no brains; he, therefore, takes care to highlight the many achievements of blacks in areas outside the field of sports, and identifies the social and political factors explaining their relative underachievement in those areas.”

Growing Up and Finding His Sport

Bolt himself has no difficulty in embracing this idea of African influence, and has credited the African influx and its strong genes for the Jamaican success, along with the country's warm climate and increasingly good coaching.

But part of Bolt's athletic accomplishment may be down to an even more local accident of birth – over the years his home town of Trelawny has provided an above average number of outstanding sprinters, including Olympic and world champion Veronica Campbell-Brown, Olympians Michael Green and Michael Frater, and the infamous Ben Johnson, the naturalised Canadian who was stripped of the 1988 Olympic 100m title for doping.

Usain St Leo Bolt was born on August 21, 1986, and his starting blocks in life were firm – he comes from a close, grounded, loving and religious family.

Bolt's father, Wellesley, and mother Jennifer ran the local grocery store in the rural district of Sherwood Content. Usain – who has a sister, Sherine, and a younger brother, Sadiki – was born two years after the couple met in 1984, and they married when he was 12.

As a child, Bolt played football, and lots of cricket, in the streets of Trelawny. But he began to show his athletic prowess while attending Waldensia Primary and All-age School, running in the annual national primary schools' meeting for his parish. At 12, he was the fastest 100m runner in the school and he also ran 52 seconds for 400m on a grass track.

When he moved up to William Knibb Memorial High School – which had an impressive athletics tradition and had previously produced Olympic sprinters such as Michael Green – Bolt's main interest was still cricket, where he was a fast bowler, but his coach noticed his general speed around the pitch and pointed him towards track and field.

Under the coaching of Dwayne Barrett and Pablo McNeil, a former Olympic 100m sprinter, Bolt was encouraged to concentrate his energies on running. McNeil had to work hard to keep his exuberant charge in line, particularly when he decided to start playing practical jokes. But he predicted that Bolt's huge stride would take him to world record performances within the space of five or six years.

Champs, naturally, would be the big testing ground. In 2001, at age 14, Bolt won his first Champs medal when he took silver in the 200m with a time of 22.04.

The Start of an International Career

A few months after his first Champs success, Bolt performed for Jamaica in the CARIFTA Games, an annual international meeting that brings together the top talents from around the Caribbean, which took place that year in Bridgetown, Barbados. There he was second in both the under-17 200m and 400m, running

21.81 and a personal best of 48.28 respectively.

It was also in 2001 that Bolt made his first appearance in a global event when he competed at the IAAF World Youth Championships in Debrecen, Hungary. Racing against opponents who were two or three years older than he was, he failed to reach the final of the 200m, but lowered his personal best to 21.73.

At the 2002 CARIFTA Games, held at Nassau, Bahamas, Bolt set under-17 records in the 200m and 400m with 21.12 and 47.33 respectively. And within months he had improved those marks by running 20.61 and 47.12 at the Central American and Caribbean Junior Championships. The times were heading in one direction.

That summer the young prodigy earned his first major honour at the World Junior Championships, which were held in his native Kingston. On the evening of July 19, at the age of 15 years, 332 days, Bolt became the youngest male world junior champion after clocking a time of 20.61 for the 200m.

It was an exceptional result for an athlete who, though grown to his full height of 6ft 5in (1.82m), was still a relative novice in the sport, and racing against opponents who were two or three years older.

Dave Martin, who reported the event for the Press Association and the IAAF, remembers vividly the noise that crowd made – and the impact the emerging sprinter made upon the world of athletics.

“Covering the championships was a fantastic experience, but without a doubt the highlight was young Usain Bolt. When I first saw him I couldn’t believe he was only 15 years old. He stood head and shoulders above all the other runners in the 200 metres, He was already 6ft 5in. It was truly amazing.

“When it came to the final, what a night that was. I remember being in the press hotel before the race, and it was already Bolt-mania then. I was told by the hotel security to make

sure I got onto the coach early and get into the stadium because the streets would be packed.

“And they were – they were jam-packed. There were buses, bicycles, people just walking in the streets, all dressed up in the yellow and green national colours. They were roaring “Jamaica, Jamaica”.

“In the stadium it was unbelievable. There were more than 25,000 there – there wasn’t a spare seat to be had. People were crowding the gangways, anywhere there was a space.

“The wall of the stadium was 30-feet (9m) high, and people were climbing up it, trying to get in, and the police were standing there on ladders and knocking them back down. It was just a total sell-out to see Bolt run that night.

“To win it in 20.61 was not exactly bad for a lad of 15. You knew as you were watching him run that you were watching someone who was going to be special.

“At the press conference he spoke quietly, but he was very confident. You could tell he was really serious about his sport. Even then he said he wanted one day to be the best in the world.

“When we got back to the press hotel that night it was well after midnight, and we couldn’t believe what we had just witnessed. We knew we had seen an athlete who had what it took to be a world-beater.”

Becoming a Professional

There was concern in Jamaica that Bolt might be tempted by one of the six offers he had already had to take up university sports scholarships in the United States. The situation prompted Howard Hamilton, who held the office of Public Defender in Jamaica’s government, to write to the Jamaican Observer urging the Jamaica Amateur Athletic Association to make sure Bolt’s future on and off the track was safeguarded.

"It is the responsibility of the JAAA to ensure that this new-found treasure receives nurturing and protection," Hamilton wrote. "Usain Bolt is the most phenomenal sprinter ever produced by this island and history will judge them harshly if they fail."

By this time, Bolt had a manager in Norman Peart, a former athlete whom he had met on the track where they both trained.

While his big future remained a topic for anxious discussion – and Puma signed him up on an initial sponsorship deal - Bolt was still producing outstanding performances. Everything looked bright for Bolt at that point.

But although his talent was never in question, circumstances and a succession of injuries were about to start hindering his progress.

In 2003 he won the 200m at the IAAF World Youth Championships in Sherbrooke, Canada, as well as earning another gold at the CARIFTA Games in Port of Spain, Trinidad, with a time of 20.43. Another 200 metres title soon followed - at the Pan-Am Junior Championships in Bridgetown, Barbados.

This was also the year when Bolt left his last-ing mark on Champs as he altered the record books in the under-19 age group, recording an easy 45.3 in the 400m, a 0.87 improvement on the previous record, and 20.25 in the curved sprint, to lower the old mark by 0.57.

Peart told Bolt's parents there was little point in him continuing to run for his high school , as he had run 20.25 there was no real local opposition. Instead it was planned for him to move to Kingston, where he would start training at the University of Technology on what was described as a five-year plan leading to Beijing.

But transferring the gifted 16-year-old away from home - and Coach McNeil - to the capital proved to be a challenge. The youngster began to succumb to off-the-track distractions - partying and night clubs - and to suffer criticism for his conduct. He also started to pick up injuries.

The switch in location was starting to look like a bad idea.

"He almost lost himself," McNeil recalled.

As world youth and world junior 200m champion, Bolt had the opportunity of trying for an unprecedented treble as he prepared for his first senior global event, the 2003 IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Paris.

A victory in the Pan-American juniors, a month before the Championships in the French capital, was achieved in a time of 20.13, equaling American Roy Martin's world junior record set in 1985. Despite this show of good form, Bolt's stated ambition was relatively conservative – he wanted to set a personal best, even if he didn't make the Paris final.

But there was to be no 200m final, or personal best for Bolt there. The Jamaica Amateur Athletics Association took the controversial decision not to select him, even though he had beaten all the seniors in the 200 at the national trials. It cited his youth and inexperience, taking into account also the fact that his training schedule had been badly disrupted by conjunctivitis six weeks before the championships.

As a newly established professional receiving coaching from Fitz Coleman in 2004, Bolt lowered the world junior 200m record he shared with Martin and became the first junior athlete to break 20 seconds, with a winning time of 19.93 at the CARIFTA Games in Hamilton, Bermuda.

Although a hamstring injury in May prevented him from defending his world junior title, he was still looking, at 17, like a genuine prospect for an Olympic medal at that summer's Games in Athens. But, the problems with his leg, which mainly stemmed from a serious back condition – a curvature of the spine or scoliosis – persisted and prevented him from giving anything like full expression to his gifts and he was eliminated in the first round of the 200m.



A New Coach

Returning from Athens, Bolt began with a new coach – Glen Mills.

Mills had helped guide Kim Collins to unexpected 100m victories at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester and at the 2003 IAAF World Championships in Athletics. His previous Jamaican athletes included Raymond Stewart, who finished sixth in the 100m final at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, and the man to whom statues had been raised, after whom roads had been named, for whom songs had been composed – Don Quarrie.

Bolt's partnership with Mills would produce riches even beyond the dreams of Quarrie - eventually. But before that could happen, several critical adjustments had to be made – not least to the Bolt work ethic.

By June 2005, Bolt was declaring himself ready to make a serious flourish at the World

Championships due to be held two months later in Helsinki.

"I am working much harder now. I really want to make up for what happened in Athens," Bolt said. "Hopefully everything will fall into place."

He backed up his optimism the following month by smashing Ivan Garcia's eight-year-old 200m championship record at the Central American and Caribbean Senior Championships in Nassau, Bahamas, recording 20.03, his fastest time since his world junior record of 19.93, despite effectively running the second half of the race on his own.

He dipped under 20 seconds once again in the London Grand Prix at Crystal Palace, recording 19.99.

But in August, having become the youngest Jamaican male to reach an IAAF World Championship sprint final – 10 days before his 19th birthday - he suffered another injury in the chill, rainy conditions that blighted so much of the

championships, eventually trailing home last - in 26.27. His ambitions of making his mark in the world of senior sprinting continued to be frustrated.

And the injury problems came back again in 2006. In March, yet another hamstring injury forced Bolt to withdraw from the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, where his friend Powell, by now established as the fastest man in the world, finally took possession of a major, if not global, title.

The general opinion in Jamaica had begun to shift a little as Bolt's meteoric progress appeared to be over and he struggled to complete a full season of running. The 19-year-old, for all his brilliance at the world juniors in Kingston, was perceived as being in danger of becoming an athlete who might not deliver on all his huge promise.

The latest setback kept Bolt off the track for two months. But it had a silver lining – when he

returned, he was given new training exercises to improve his flexibility and basic strength. And plans to move him up to the 400m were put on hold.

Interestingly, Coach Mills reported that his new charge was suffering from poor co-ordination, and that his scoliosis was affecting his hamstring. Which meant a new regime that consisted of not working so hard.

Bolt reflected: "From 2004 to 2006 I was pretty much injured every year because of my back - I have really bad scoliosis. I went through some rough times. I was wondering if I was really going to get to the level I wanted to run. But after joining up with Glen Mills we solved the problem, we really worked hard on exercises.

"I have to do a whole lot of work on my core and my abdominal muscles to make sure my back stays strong. As long as I keep doing that then I should stay away from injury. We don't try to push my body too much now."



When a long-awaited move to the European circuit arrived, the re-emphasis on the 200m – and the new approach to training – appeared to have paid off. On May 30, Bolt indicated his refocused state by winning the 200m in Ostrava with 20.28 in poor weather, breaking the meeting record of 20.30 set by Justin Gatlin in the year he won the Olympic 100m title. And intriguingly, Bolt was also keeping the idea of the 400m in play.

A month later, Bolt had achieved the target he might have managed in Ostrava but for the weather – another sub-20 second clocking. His time of 19.88, however, was only enough to give him third place in the Lausanne meeting as two US rivals broke through their own personal barriers ahead of him. Tyson Gay was second in a best of 19.70, but the race went to newcomer Xavier Carter in 19.63, a time only Michael Johnson had ever bettered.

In September, however, Bolt claimed his first major world medal at the IAAF World Athletics Final in Stuttgart, finishing third in 20.10. And before the year was out, he had another medal, this time silver, from the IAAF World Cup in Athens, where his time of 19.96 was bettered only by American Wallace Spearmon's 19.87.

On the Right Track

Going into 2007, Bolt's confidence was rising, as his body seemed finally to be becoming resistant to the injuries that had thwarted his progress.

Chris Turner of the IAAF Communications Department recalls a graphic illustration of Bolt's evolving attitude to his sport. It came at the 2007 IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Osaka, where he ended up taking his first senior global medal, the 200m silver, with a time of 19.91 behind Gay's 19.76.

Turner believes that, although Bolt's progress had been undermined since his 2002 World Junior victory by a succession of injuries, there was a more profound reason for his failure to break through immediately.

"It was not so much injuries, it was the way he was looking at his life," Turner said. "He obviously had not trained as hard as he should have in the past.

"When he got to Osaka, people were asking: 'What's happened to all his chains and his jewellery?' He used to wear lots of it. He had all kinds of gold slinging around his neck.

"And this seemed like a visual sign that he had changed his attitude. It was as, if a transformational thing had happened in his head.

"His coach, Glen Mills, was the one who had told him what he could be if he did the training required. Usain also had support from his manager Norman Peart, whom he had known for years, and an agent in Ricky Simms – you couldn't find a more stable and reliable agent if you tried.

"I remember meeting Ricky regularly over the years before Usain started to succeed at senior level, and he would always tell me 'Don't worry. Be patient. He'll do it.'"

For his part, Dave Martin thinks Bolt's injury problems may have been a blessing in disguise: "He would have got to where he is now a lot more quickly if he hadn't had all the injuries. But in a way I think that helped him, because although it slowed him down, he could well have burnt out and been lost to the sport if he had carried straight on."

Taking over the 100 metres

With Bolt's increased confidence came an increased sense of which events he wanted to be running. For all of Mills's desire to make him a 200/400 runner, Bolt was set on something a little less strenuous – 100/200. As for new events – he has said repeatedly that when he has finished with sprinting, he fancies having a go at long jumping. World record holder Mike Powell has offered, only half jokingly, to help him better the mark he set at the 1991 World Championships if he does take to the sandpit.

But the question of whether Bolt should run the short sprint led to a deal being made in early 2007 which was to re-shape athletics. Mills told Bolt that he could have his wish of running a serious 100m – but only if he broke Don Quarrie's 36-year-old national 200m record at the Jamaican Championships.

Bolt accepted the challenge, running 19.75 – 0.11 inside the mark set by his long-time idol.

Mills kept up his side of the bargain, entering Bolt for the 100m at the 23rd Vardinoyianna meeting in Rethymno, Crete. Bolt won in 10.03. And as we know by now, the following year all that promise in the 100m came good – first in New York, then Beijing. Bolt was established as the highest profile performer in his sport.

With the successes of 2008, new pressure was on for the following year's World Championships in Berlin. How Bolt dealt with that pressure is now part of sporting history: he lowered his world 100m record to 9.58.

"I keep telling you guys, my main aim is to become a legend, that's what I'm working on," he shrugged as he addressed the assembled media. "It's a great feat for me to have broken my world record. I didn't know I was going to break it."

Then he lowered his 200m world record to 19.19 and ran on Jamaica's winning relay team. By the time the 12th IAAF World Championships had come to a close, Bolt had taken three more giant strides towards the legendary status of the sprinter who achieved his finest hour in the same stadium at the Olympic Games of 1936 – Jesse Owens.

2010 – An "off year"

Inevitably, Bolt was not able to remain at the same pitch of achievement in 2010, although he did produce some outstanding performances, notably a 19.56 win over 200m in Kingston on May 1, which remained the fastest performance of the year, and a 30.97 300m on May 27, which was the second fastest ever.

Unfortunately the latter achievement, in heavy rain in Ostrava, exacerbated an Achilles tendon problem, forcing him out of action for six weeks.

His return to the track, at the Lausanne Diamond League meeting on July 8, saw him win the 100m in 9.82, which equalled the season's fastest time set by Powell. On July 16 he beat Powell in the Paris Diamond League meeting in San Denis, winning the 100m in 9.84.

But on August 6 Bolt suffered his first defeat over 100m in two years at the Stockholm Diamond League meeting, where a keenly anticipated showdown with Gay ended with the American clocking 9.84 and Bolt a disconsolate but philosophical second in 9.97. It was only the third meeting between the two men over 100m – on both previous occasions, in New York and Berlin, Bolt had set a world record.

"Just one of those days," Bolt said. "I told you I'm not unbeatable. I did not train as hard as in past years, so I can't complain. And it was Tyson Gay. My congratulations to him. I'm not in my best shape and he is in great shape."

Four days later, Bolt called his season to an early close in order not to exacerbate the long-standing problem with his lower back.

He is already targeting the 2011 IAAF World Championships in Daegu, and the Olympics a year beyond them. After that, he has hinted he might retire and put his feet up. But it is too early to tell what course he will take post 2012.

Conclusion - The phenomenon is still growing

If his track activity had come to an early end in 2010, Bolt's activity off the track began in earnest and his phenomenon kept growing. On August 24 he signed new deal with sports manufacturers Puma, billed as 'by far the largest ever given to a track and field athlete' and thought to be worth £10m over three years.



The following month he embarked on tours of the United Kingdom and Australia promoting his new book "Usain Bolt: 9.58 My Story (Harper Sport).

Wherever he appears, the marketing goes with him. Puma supply "Bolt hands" – set in his trademark stance. Tiny Jamaican flags also appear at trackside when he races.

And, as a thoroughly modern star, Bolt has thousands of followers on his official Facebook site.

At a recent appearance in Britain to open the Kip Keino Stadium at Filton College, in north Bristol, which will be the venue where Kenyan Olympic competitors train before the 2012 Games in London, Keino himself spent much time talking to young athletes who were competing on the day, and awarding them prizes.

As he approached one school group, several exuberant "Bolt signs" from the boys in the

group greeted the double Olympic champion of 1968 and 1972. He smiled, acknowledging the gesture.

Bolt and everything about Bolt have become instantly recognisable.

The world 100m and 200m record holder is not bigger than his sport. But he is undeniably the biggest in his sport.

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