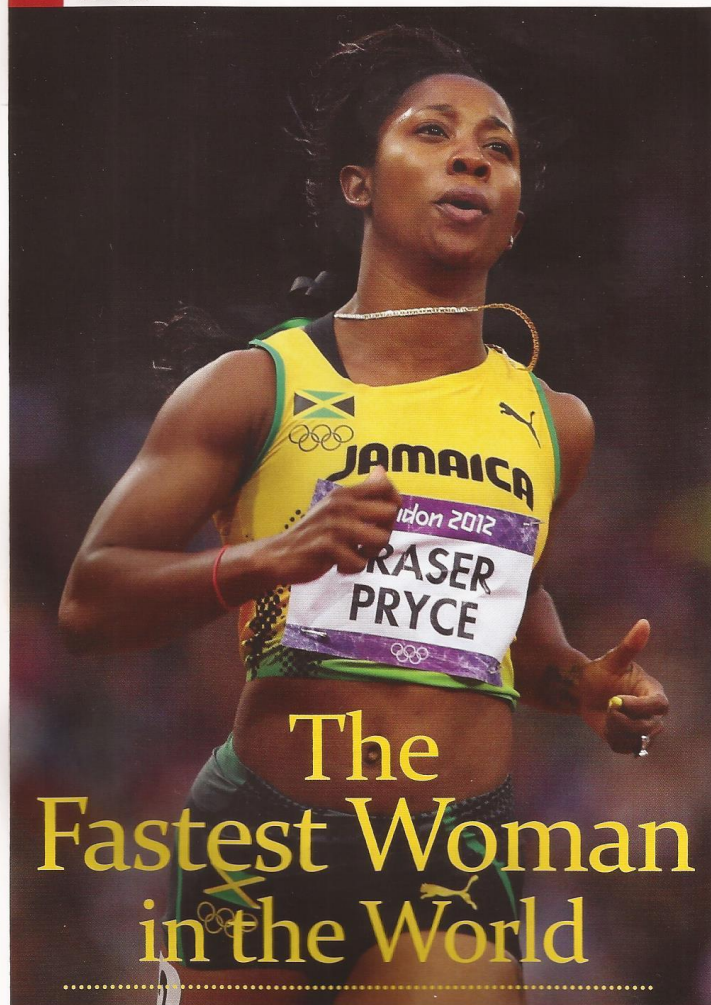


SPORT



# The Fastest Woman in the World

BY STUART WEIR

Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce is simply the fastest woman in the world. She won the Olympic 100 metres title in Beijing 2008 and successfully defended it in London 2012. Let's get the double hyphen out of the way right at the start. Born Shelly-Ann Fraser, she added Pryce when she married Jason Pryce in January 2011. Jamaican sprinting is on the crest of the wave right now. Of the 12 individual sprint medals on offer at the 2012 Olympics (men's and women's 100 and 200 metres), Jamaica won eight – plus silver and gold in the two 4 by 100 relay races. Yet the country's population is below three million people, making it just the 139th biggest country in the world. That dominance really started in 2008 when Usain Bolt set the Bird's Nest stadium alight by winning the men's 100 and 200 metres, as well as anchoring the 4 by 100 relay to victory: completing all three races in world record

time. While Bolt took the headlines, the Jamaican women were equally impressive, recording a 1-2-3 in the 100 metres and gold and bronze in the 200. Jamaican sprinting had come of age!

Shelly-Ann's victory in the 2008 Olympic 100 metres final was a remarkable achievement. The previous year she was only Jamaica's fourth best sprinter. She gained a relay silver medal at the 2007 World Championships, but was not selected for the individual 100 metres.

In Beijing, she won her heat, her quarter-final and her semi-final. In the final she ran 10.78 to beat compatriots Sherone Simpson and Kerron Stewart in the Jamaican clean sweep. Even Shelly-Ann was surprised by the win. "I was inexperienced. I was young and I never believed I could win," she says. Jamaica qualified for the 4 by 100 relay final with the fastest semi-final time, but the race was a disaster as they failed to get the baton round.

Shelly-Ann won the 100 metres at the 2009 World Championships in Berlin, making her only the second ever woman to be

simultaneously World and Olympic champion in the 100 metres. Jamaica got the relay changes right in Berlin to take gold in the 4 by 100.

The 2011 World Championships were a disappointment for Shelly-Ann as she finished fourth in the 100 metres, which was won by American sprinter Carmelita Jeter. The Americans also took relay gold with Jamaica coming in second.

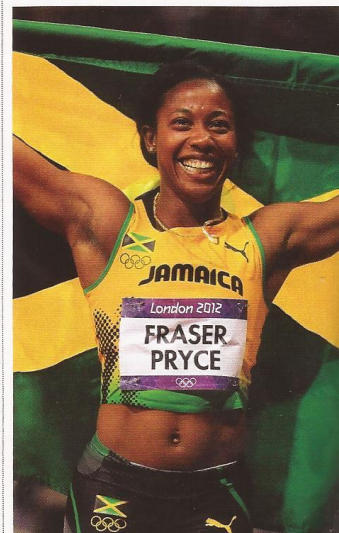
The women's hundred metres was one of the highlights of the 2012 Diamond League series. While Usain Bolt, Yohan Blake and Tyson Gay rarely race each other, Carmelita Jeter and Shelly-Ann never shirked a confrontation. In fact, Shelly-Ann is a little critical of the men for avoiding each other: "I definitely think there should be a lot more clashes. You would get a lot more excitement instead of just one top athlete competing."

"You have seven of the best female athletes in the world competing in one race as opposed to one male athlete who is dominant with 15 others and he gets most of the attention. In the women's race we have seven of the best in one race."

She also thinks this is good preparation for major championships: "My coach would say when you go into a championship there isn't going to be anything different because you have raced these people over and over again. He is sick and tired of persons going into a major championship and feeling extra nervous and getting butterflies when you have been racing these people consistently. For me, when I get on the line in a major championship, it's like: 'I raced her last week in Zurich!'"

Shelly-Ann came top in the 2012 Diamond League series, winning in New York and Zurich with second places in Paris, Rome and London's Crystal Palace. That set her up nicely for a busy programme at the London Olympics, where she was not only defending her Olympic 100 metres title, but also going for a medal in the 200; not to mention the relay.

The Jamaican sprinter won the 100 metres final in 10.75 with Jeter coming in second. She said afterwards: "London's completely different to Beijing, because here I believed I



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could win. This time I was a bit nervous, but I believed in God and I trusted him to carry me through."

That she was only the third woman ever to defend this title delighted her. "I don't know much about track history, but I am honoured to be part of a club like that," she says. She was also thrilled that in London the women's 100 metres was scheduled before the men's, giving her the honour of winning Jamaica's first gold medal in 2012. In fact, the achievement had added significance, as 2012 marked Jamaica's 50th anniversary of independence from England.

Four days later, Shelly-Ann was in the 200 metres final taking silver behind Allyson Felix; not bad for her first major championship 200 metres competition! Team USA took the 4 by 100 relay, breaking the world record and Jamaica came second. Shelly-Ann said: "The Americans were better than us, but we have had enough celebrations in Jamaica already."

One gold and two silvers wasn't a bad London haul for Shelly-Ann and she loved the whole London experience: "I would definitely say that the London Olympics, crowd-wise and atmosphere wise has been really great, because when I entered the stadium I found myself starting to rock. They were playing music and the crowd was cheering. As an athlete who wants to be totally focused and zoned in, I found myself rocking to the music and zoned in. It was a great atmosphere, I really liked it."

Shelly-Ann, who often thanks God publicly after races, says that her faith in Jesus Christ is an important part of her life. Despite being a Christian most of her life, she admits that she "went away from the Church" in her teens but is now back in the fold.

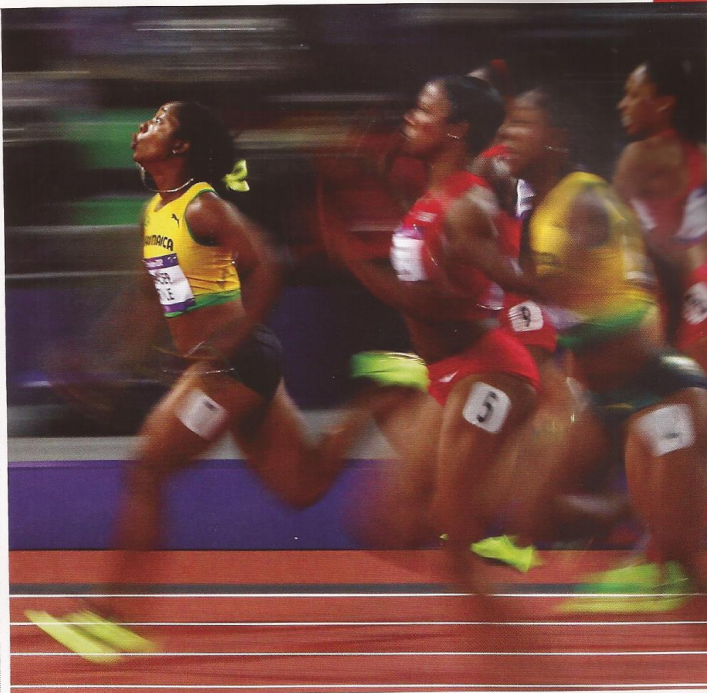
**"A LOT OF PERSONS WOULD BELIEVE THAT IF YOU DON'T WIN, GOD IS NOT THERE, BUT HE IS ALWAYS THERE. IT DOES NOT MATTER IF I WIN OR LOSE."**

Speaking about her faith, she says: "Believing in the God I believe in has worked miracles in my life. I know God for myself, so I am able to say, 'thank God', because I know who He is and I know what He has done in me and through me."

"So my faith is very important and at the forefront of everything I do. I believe that everything I have, every gift I have is from Him, and He has given it to me for a reason. The purpose He has given me has shown me how to live and how to experience life differently. It motivates me and directs my life."

Despite all her successes, there have been hard times. She went into the 2011 World Championships as defending champion and Olympic champion, but Carmelita Jeter won the title with Shelly-Ann coming fourth. In the final race before the Olympics, the Crystal Palace Diamond League event, she placed only eighth. Where is God on days like that?

She feels her faith keeps it all in perspective: "A lot of persons would believe that if you don't win, God is not there, but he is always there. It does not matter if I win or lose. Just to



be able to stand on the line and know I am a child of God makes me special, makes me able to say, 'OK, whatever I am doing today is for Him'. And I hope that by me running He'll get the glory and He'll enjoy it as much as I am enjoying it."

"I believe we are given special abilities, gifts and talents for a purpose, and I also believe there is a time for everybody. There is a time for me to be at the top and there is a time for somebody else to have their time. When I run, the first thing I say [to God] is: 'I hope you are pleased with my worship', for running is my worship; my way of worshipping Him, because He has given me the talents."

According to Shelly-Ann, part of her preparation for a race is to remind herself of God's promises: "I always say that He has given me a spirit of boldness and never a spirit of fear. So I should not fear. Why should I fear when God is controlling everything and His will will be done?"

"I also say to myself: 'Greater is He that is in me than He that is in the world.' What more can I have than that Jesus is inside me? There is nothing in this life that I fear. I fear God, but the fear I have for Him is different, because the fear I have for God is reverence in His presence. In everything I do I am aware that there is someone greater and more powerful looking over me, and He is the person who warrants anything in my life."

Shelly-Ann sees real practical differences in her life through knowing Jesus: "I no longer fear things that I used to fear, like planes. When I go on planes, I was really afraid like I am cringing; I can't stand it. But knowing that I have a personal relationship with Him, I am able to sit on the plane and I am OK; I am covered, I am protected."

"Everything about me has changed: where I am from, where I am going. He has totally shifted the paradigm. He has set me on a different course and I am loving the course. I am enjoying my life more than I have ever enjoyed it before."

The big event in 2013 is the World Championships in Moscow. On August 12 at 6.50pm, Shelly-Ann is due to go for gold in the 100 metres. Get it in your diary now! ■



## Unsung Hero

Despite her amazing achievements, Shelly-Ann never seems to get the recognition she deserves. Asked if she is recognised when she goes out, she replies: "I go to the supermarket and people recognise me ... and they ask me, 'How is Usain Bolt?'"

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