

Fleet Feet

Lancford Davis is a Bronx runner striving for gold

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Growing up wasn't easy for Lancford Davis. He lived on one of the most dangerous corners in the Bronx. The four story apartment building where he and his family lived was located on the corner of 217 street and Bronxwood Ave on the Bronx's east side. There drug dealers conducted their daily business with their occasional fights and disagreements which sometimes lead to shootouts.

Davis remembers coming home from his high school track practice in his sweats, carrying his book bag which contained his running spikes and shorts. He would see fire trucks, ambulances, nosy onlookers and police lines blocking his building where a shoot out just occurred.

Shootouts weren't an everyday occurrence on Bronxwood Ave, but they happened "way too often," says Davis. However, for 13 years of his life Davis, 24 was able to survive the chaos of his neighborhood where he lived from the ages of ten to twenty three. His involvement in after school sports prevented him from being affected by the negative influences around his home.

He is one of the newest members of the Jamaican National Track and Field Team. Running 21 seconds in the 200 meter and 46 seconds in the 400 meter enabled him to qualify for the team. He is the second youngest member of the team, which has about 35 members. The youngest, Omar Fagan is 21. Davis is the third fastest male in the 100meter -400meter on the team. His 100 meter time is 10.23, his 200 meter time is 20.75 seconds and his his 400 meter time is a 45.85 seconds. The fastest times on the team, held by Garth Robinson is 10.19sec, 20.66sec and 45.73 sec respectively.

Davis returned from his first meet in Guatemala as a member of the Jamaican team in August, 2001. He ran the 200 meter, where he unfortunately pulled his hamstring and was unable to run the 400 meter, his best event. Davis recently finished his last semester at Barton County College, a junior college located in Great Bend Kansas. He will be enrolling in Texas Christian University in the Spring on a track scholarship. TCU is a division one college where Davis plans to major in computer Graphics and Design.

Compared to the noise and chaos of Davis's old neighborhood, Barton was too quiet for him. It's a very small town of mostly white residents, unlike his predominantly black neighborhood. Davis says what stands out about the town of Barton is the college, which is also relatively small, with a population of about four thousand students. He says "Most of the students there are in sports and come from all over the United States as well as overseas." One such student is Davis girlfriend, Sheline Moore, a sprinter from Kingston Jamaica's Meadowbrook High School. Barton residents find the games at the school to be

exciting. He says, "The entire town usually watches whatever game or event is going on there."

Davis, at 6 feet, 170 pounds was born to Millicent and Glenford Davis on October 11, 1977 in Kingston Jamaica. His parents left Jamaica for America when he was five years old in order to ensure their children a better future. He and his younger sister, Kady, 21 were left in the care of their grandparents. During that time his mother held a job as a housekeeper in Co-op City and his father worked as a chef in Ronnie Bob's Restaurant on 226 St and Bronxwood Ave. They saved their wages and returned for their children in 1988.

Davis came to the U.S at eleven years old. Since then his parents repeatedly threatened to buy him a one-way ticket back to Jamaica because he was always getting into trouble. At his Middle School 113, located a block from his home, he got suspended for things such as fighting, lighting fire-crackers

and throwing stink bombs in the school hallways. He was not even allowed to attend his graduation ceremony. His guidance counselor, Miss Capers felt he didn't deserve it because of all the trouble he caused. Davis says she never put out an effort to help him. He remembers how she prevented him from getting into Lutheran High School. His mother wanted him to attend Lutheran because his zoned school Evander Childs had a bad reputation for fighting and shooting. After passing the test Miss Capers informed the school that it was no point accepting him. "It's people like her that make me proud to be where I am today," he says.

At the age of fourteen, Davis learned that causing and getting into trouble with the wrong crowd was leading him to what he calls "a dead end street." This he realized after one of his best friends went to jail for shooting another one of his friends in the head in the deadly game of Russian Roulette. Davis knew he could have easily been the victim that day had he

not been warned by his father, who told him to stay home because of a bad dream about Davis's death. That incident turned Davis's life around and made him the person he is today.

In Evander Childs High School on Gun Hill Road, Davis says "I began to explore my talents as an athlete." He played football his first two years there and did extremely well as a kick off return, punt return and free safety. He was a fast runner and barely ever got caught when he had the ball, making a lot of touchdowns for his team. He recalls running a 75 yard kick off return touchdown his first season. When Davis did get caught his size played against him. He was a lot smaller than the other players and got

a lot of injuries. He would go home with back and knee pains which was usually a result of being tackled or jumped on by the bigger players, which was practically



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everyone else.

Davis tried basketball for a while, but when that didn't work he reverted to the sport he knew he was destined for, which is track and field. He remembers his very first race when he was a little boy at Rock Hall School's annual track meet in Kingston Jamaica. He heard the gun go off and instead of running he stood looking at the crowd. Half the other runners were way ahead of him when he realized what was going on. He finally began running and flew past boys almost twice his age and ran that race.

Davis decided to join the track team his Junior year at Evander. In his first track meet at the Armory in Manhattan, he ran 56 seconds indoor in the 400 meter, which was fairly good at the time His first outdoor time was 52 seconds. In the 400 meter he now runs 47 seconds indoor .

Before starting Barton, Davis attended Bronx Community College on University Ave. While on the Bronx Community track team Davis says, "I no longer enjoyed running because I felt I wasn't getting any better." His times barely improved and his grades dropped significantly. Davis never did like school, which he believes is why he gave so much trouble there in the first place. "I hated school and books, so sports became my life." In 1998 he was placed on academic probation for one year and could no longer be a member of the team. For that reason he had essentially given up on track.

During that entire year most of his time was spent in front of the television in his boxers. He would have either the VCR remote in his hand watching old Olympics and National championship track tapes or a Nintendo controller playing games when he got tired of the track tapes. He would watch the tapes over and over, rewinding

his favorite parts, which usually had something to do with Michael Johnson or Otto Bolden. He still loved track, but felt that he would never be as great as his idols.

It was during that year that his friend Chris Williams, an Olympian who is also a member of the Jamaican team told Davis about Barton. Davis became interested because he knew that he couldn't attend a four year college with his low grades. Barton was a junior college with a good track and field reputation which could help him get into a good Division One school. Davis, therefore applied and got accepted. He enrolled at Barton as a freshman that August even though he had already completed a year at Bronx Community.

Like Williams, Davis also wants to be an Olympian. He plans on taking the gold medal in the 200 and the 400 meter, running below 44 seconds in the latter. He says "that might sound impossible, but three years ago, it sounded impossible for me to be on the Jamaica track team." To get a head start on making his dreams a reality,

Davis knows he has to continue training and running track meets to keep in shape and improve his times. He is currently training for the NCAA championships, the Pan American games and the Commonwealth games in June, July and August respectively.

Davis says these games are important because if he makes top 3 in the finals, he could get sponsored when he graduate from TCU, which will be in 2004, the year of the Olympics. Davis plans to make money in track and field before he gets too old to run, which is usually about thirty six years old. After that he might get a job in computer graphics. He says, "If you look at it, I have eight years to make some real good money."