



*Former CU sprinter Jeremy Dodson will compete in the World Championships later this summer.
Photo Courtesy: Scott D. Weaver Photography*



Brooks: Pieces Starting To Fit For Jeremy Dodson

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BOULDER - If Jeremy Dodson wasn't at a crossroads a year ago, he was at least fast approaching a turning point. He had reached the end of his road - the one marked eligibility - as a sprinter at the University of Colorado. He was waiting for thumbs up or down from the CU Law School, deliberating on whether to stay involved in the CU track and field program as a volunteer coach, and all the while pondering where a running career might take him.

A year later, the stars and a number of other things have aligned quite nicely for Dodson, a Denver kid (George Washington High School) who speaks softly but runs thunderously fast.

With his first year of law school going "better than I thought," he was able remain within the close-knit Buffs track family as a volunteer assistant while continuing to run himself.

And if his law school debut proved to be a surprising success, training and running at a different pace from his undergraduate years also has been a bonus.

At last month's USATF Championships in Eugene, Ore., Dodson placed third in the 200 meters and qualified for the IAAF World Championships later this summer (Aug. 27-Sept. 4) in Daegu, South Korea. His knowledge of the Koreans is sparse, but he is tuned in to one important fundamental: "I know you should stay on the South side . . . that's about it. I've been looking at pictures; it's a beautiful place with a beautiful stadium."

In short, it's a beautiful opportunity, and here's how Dodson earned it: Running unattached at the USATF Championships, Dodson's time in the 200 was 20.07 seconds, placing him behind only Walter Dix (Nike) at 19.95 and Darvis Patton (Nike) at 19.98. Dodson also competed in the 100m, running a 10.29 in the prelims but failing to advance.

Still, he left Eugene euphoric, hitting a pinnacle that his CU sprint coach, Drew Morano, never doubted could be reached.

"He put things in perspective this year," recalled Morano, who had watched Dodson evolve into one of the Buffs' all-time best sprinters, setting school indoor and outdoor records in the 200. "He had to ask himself if he really wanted to make a career out of it or did he just want to run at the collegiate level?"

"I saw big changes in him - him taking practices more seriously, putting more responsibility on himself, doing a lot more work outside of practice. I watched him cruising around in the weight room doing extra things here and there. Just the way he approached USAs was very, very professional. It was just something I hadn't seen from him.

"I knew he was going to step up to the line and give it everything he had. We all knew he could reach it, but it was him finally just taking all the right steps, doing all the right things to get himself in a great position."

Hard work and a keener focus undoubtedly enhanced Dodson's USATF Championship performance. But he also points to a dramatic change in routine that allowed him to be fresher when he settled into the starting blocks last month.

Dodson, who graduated a year ago with a degree in sociology and economics and a certificate in neuroscience, said he surprised himself more in the 200 semifinal than the final: "I pulled up with an easy second place and an automatic bid to the finals - that was more surprising than anything. It just came so easy. It wasn't a hard race . . . I just went out there and did what I did.

When I asked him if he could point to anything that made those 200 finals any easier than any previous race, he immediately answered, "Not having that long NCAA season . . . my legs were fresh and strong, my mind was set. I don't know, I think it doesn't hit you mentally (the NCAA season), but more physically. When I'm fresh physically, it all falls in place."

In last month's 200 final, Dodson briefly allowed his mind to wander - all the way to another continent.

"You don't necessarily see yourself hitting such a high level; you just see yourself running and hope for the best," he said. "While I was in the race, I pulled up to third place with about 50 meters left and I started thinking, 'I wonder what Daegu is all about? I'm going to get to go to Europe.'

"Then I got back into the race, focused and finished. It hit me more during the race than afterwards. Afterwards, it was just like, 'Whew, finally it's over.' Or, finally everything clicked and now I'm on to the next level."

He'll leave for Europe on Thursday, and by then he hopes to have heard from Nike about a possible sponsorship. If that happens, it would fulfill a childhood dream.

"Sprinters grow up saying they want to get sponsored by Nike," he said. "I'm excited for that Nike shoe deal - it's what every athlete goes for."

The 200 will be Dodson's focus this summer, but that probably will change. Quickly. Morano believes (and Dodson agrees) that his running future also includes the 400 meters.

"I'm pretty sure after I cross the line in the Worlds that my training starts with the 400," Dodson said. "It's something I can accept. I'm a 400 runner by build, so it's something I'm supposed to do."

Dodson's transition to the 400 was to have begun last year, but Morano points out, "The problem is he did so dang well in the 60 (meters) indoors that we decided to give the 100 a try. He ran consistently well - in the 10.2 range - so obviously he's a good sprinter and everybody knows it. But we're going to stick to it (the 400m training plan) this

year."

In Daegu, Dodson likely will be called on to compete on a relay team. He believes it will be the 4x100, "but everyone who knows me says I should be in the 4x4 . . . they're all pushing for that," he said. "I don't care which relay I run or don't run. I'm just so happy to put on that USA. To get your free USA uniform instead of buying one . . . that's a thrill. That's when you know you're legit."

Those close to CU track and field have known for several years that Jeremy Dodson is legit. Now, the word's spreading.

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