

## For Fastest Man, A Slower Step Toward London

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**OSTRAVA, Czech Republic** — Combining flamboyance with a knack for electrifying audiences, Usain Bolt has become the savior of track and field, a sport well beyond its glory days.

On Friday night, he thrilled the crowd that packed 21,000-seat Metsky Stadium here, though he did not perform up to his lofty standards.

Dashing into a slight headwind, Bolt won the 100 meters in a modest 10.04 seconds, his slowest time in the event in three years. He had to chase down the 36-year-old Kim Collins of St. Kitts and Nevis in the final 30 meters.

“It’s kind of hard to explain, because I really don’t know what went wrong,” Bolt said of the race, his first in Europe this season, as he prepares for the London Olympics. “I didn’t seem as explosive as I normally seem. That’s where my power comes from, and then in transition, everything comes together.

“I think I was just very bad starting out of the blocks.”

Bolt’s time was substantially off his season best, 9.82, which he clocked on May 5 in Kingston,

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Jamaica.

“I always do extremely well here, but I guess its just one of those days,” said Bolt, 25. “Hopefully, I can go back, look at the replay, and my coach can explain to me what I need to do.”

Despite his lackluster result, Bolt entertained the crowd as usual, dancing after the meet and riding around the track in a convertible Rolls-Royce as he waved to the fans.

At a news conference on Wednesday, Bolt also tried to entertain reporters, particularly regarding the Yankees cap he was wearing.

“It’s just a hat,” Bolt said when asked if he had any allegiance to the team. “Actually, I think baseball is kind of boring. Soccer, the N.F.L. and even athletics is more exciting.”

While fielding nearly 40 minutes of questions, Bolt flashed quick poses and highly exaggerated smiles, toying with photographers.

Catching the 6-foot-5 Bolt on the track at London’s Olympic Stadium in early August will be an unenviable task for his opponents. Bolt plans to run in the 100- and 200-meter races and the 4x100 relay, as he did in Beijing in 2008.

He will face fierce competition from his Jamaican countrymen Yohan Blake, 22, the 2011 world champion, and Asafa Powell, 29, a former record-holder in the 100. The United States sprinters Tyson Gay, 29, a former world champion; Walter Dix, 26, who won two bronze medals at the 2008 Beijing Games; and Justin Gatlin, 30, an Olympic champion in 2004, could also challenge him.

Blake, Powell and Gatlin have already clocked sub-9.9 times this month.

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“It shows that the intensity of the competition is good and it’s going to be a great season, but I’m never worried,” Bolt said. “I’m in great shape and really focused on what I need to do.”

As for the sprinting rivalry between Jamaica and the United States, Bolt said, “It’s been back and forth, but Jamaica is on top now, and I’m trying to keep it that way.”

Should Bolt repeat his 100-meter victory from Beijing, he will become the second man to win consecutive Olympic titles in the event, after Carl Lewis (1984 and ’88). In the 200, Bolt has the opportunity to become the first in history to capture back-to-back gold medals.

“This Olympics can give me my legend status, so that’s my aim and what I hope to do,” he said. “I haven’t run in London for a long time. I think there will be great energy with the fans, and I feed off great energy.”

Four years ago in Beijing, Bolt attained his superstar status by blazing to three gold medals, all in dominating fashion.

He duplicated the three-event performance with another stellar showing at the 2009 world championship in Berlin, smashing his own world records in the 100 and 200.

Off the track, he remains one of the most-sought-after athletes for endorsements; his annual income is estimated to be more than \$12.5 million. Bolt recently joined the rapper Ludacris in endorsing a new brand of fashionable headphones, and he is starting his own online video game.

“It’s his personality; he’s fun, he’s friendly, and he’s a marketer’s dream,” his longtime agent, Ricky Simms, said.

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In the critical final months before the London Games, where he can further burnish his legacy, Bolt will compete at Diamond League meets on May 31 in Rome and June 7 in Oslo before heading home for Jamaica's Olympic trials.

His final Olympic tuneup is scheduled to take place July 20 in Monaco, where he will compete in the 200.

The season-long drama will reach its climax in London as Bolt tries again to etch his name in track and field's record books.

"It will be the most awesome show," Bolt said, "and I'm going there to do great things."