

AKWASI

-“Dedication”- 1 October, 2009

When I think of dedication, I think of devotion, trust, giving one’s all, passion, self-sacrifice and zeal. These words go through my thoughts as I start training with my new sprint coach Paul Smith here in Utah. My sprint coach from the previous season, “Sheriff” Randy, will be focussing on the 400 meter athletes this year whereas Coach Smith will concentrate on the 100 and 200 meter sprinters. Coach Smith is still active as a sprinter and has also in the meantime started a career as a sprint coach.

In the past five years, Coach Smith has not been beaten in the sprints in Utah. His philosophy is "dedication". On my first training day with Coach Smith, I hear him saying towards the rest of the sprinters "This is not a joke guys. If you want to run fast, I can help, but you need to show dedication". While he says that, I am reminded of the saying by Linda Mastandrea, "What I've learned in my years as a competitive wheelchair athlete is this: what separates a winner from the rest of the pack is not raw talent or physical ability; instead, it is the drive and dedication to work hard every single day, and the heart to go after your dream, no matter how unattainable others think it is."

Gradually, I am able to put in more energy and effort into my training. In due course I will get used to the new training method of Coach Smith, but I do encounter some difficulties. It does not always work out in the way that I would have liked. At first I realize that it is more difficult to make a comeback after an injury than I had initially thought. Every now and then Coach Smith comes by me to make sure how I am holding up. It seems that the good start in the beginning ultimately contained a couple of obstacles which I was unaware of at first. I could decide to give up, say farewell, and go away in search of a new challenge, but that is not what I am going to do, because in the meantime, step by step, I am making improvements in my training. The beauty of this is that it goes gradually. I find new inspirations to carry on. To keep carrying on, is a pattern which has in fact never changed inside of me. In actual fact, it is motivation: obtaining an impulse to accomplish more, outside of my boundaries. I believe that this is an unwritten rule.

Dedication is also what I notice in my new team members. Besides having African and Western team members, I now also have Jamaican team members. Latoya Shaw and Dean Swimmer have flown over from Jamaica to take on a challenge in Utah. They find Utah Valley University very important and for this reason have decided not to immediately start pursuing a career as professional sportsmen, but to combine their studies with athletics. Patois, the Jamaican Creole language, is the language in which they continually talk to me. I understand approximately 60 percent of what they are saying. I really have a lot of fun with Latoya and Dean. Despite having to work really hard both on the track and at their studies, these two know how to have fun. I hope that they could perhaps also teach me the sprint secrets of Jamaica.

Devotion is what Coach Smith was trying to get across to the sprinters of the UVU. His charisma, pep-talk and his knowledge as an active sprinter will certainly make a difference this coming season. "Only if we can be dedicated as sprinters. It’s now in our hands".



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