

Akwasi Frimpong - "Stick to the fight, when you're hardest hit"

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My season of studying in America is drawing to a close. It definitely ended on a high note with winning the championship title with Utah Valley University at the 2010 Great West Championships, where I was part of the team. Apart from this, there were a few other good results, namely setting a personal record on the 100m, a school record in the 4X100m relay, winning a silver medal with the UVU men's relay team at the 2010 Great West Championships, as well as achieving a place in the final at the Great West Championships. The last time I experienced such an exciting track season was in 2003 when I earned the title of youth champion in the 200m at the Dutch National Championships. Besides these athletic achievements, I have also successfully completed my fall and spring semester, and I am currently still busy with my internship at Neways in their Global Sales department.

From the beginning my thoughts were occupied with my history in The Netherlands. My youth in the Netherlands did not always go as smoothly as I had hoped. During my first year in America, I was still too consumed with wrestling with my past in the Netherlands. Then, in my second year in America, I realised that I was making progress in letting go of the past and being able to move on to the future. I sensed that a feeling of rest and hope was being born again. What I lacked in the Netherlands, is added two-fold here in America. In America I have more space, literally and figuratively; perhaps the Netherlands was too small for my problems.

My 2009/2010 seasons started with an operation on my sports hernia injury. In the Netherlands, no doctor could explain to me where my pain came from, and sometimes they gave me the feeling that they thought I was faking my complaints. Fortunately, Dr. Muschaweck in Munich knew better. She is the doctor who has successfully treated nagging sports hernia injuries in soccer players from the likes of Michael Owen, soccer player from the England national team, and a lot of other professional sportsmen. In August 2009, Dr. Muschaweck successfully operated on my injury. With one successful operation she gave me back my sporting career thereby freeing me of an injury to my hip that had lasted over two years. She is the number one doctor in the world when it comes to sports hernia injuries. After the operation, I was able to jog after only 2 days, and after one week I could do sprints again.

After my operation, I resumed my training and athletic events in the USA. The athletic events went well. I did this in a manner that I was accustomed to, but rapidly my running technique was changed by my sprint coach, Paul Smith. With the new technique, I ran slower at athletic events and quickly developed an injury to my hamstring. This problem started devouring me! In April I sent Coach Smith an e-mail in which I told him that I wanted to stop athletics and that I was afraid that I will never be able to run without injury again. I also told him that I was frightened that I had lost the speed I had in my former days. To be patient in life is good, but sometimes it becomes too much. I was afraid of being disappointed for the umpteenth time. Coach Smith's reply to my e-mail was short, but powerful: "I am teaching you how to be patient in your running and how to run smart. I don't doubt your ability as a sprinter, but you will need to give me the chance to work with you. Furthermore, you have experienced some tough things in your life that go beyond your sport. This is the time not to give up, but to stick to the fight when you're hardest hit". I spoke to my girlfriend about this, and she convinced me to let Coach Smith work with me, especially since it was his first year

at UVU. After all, “You must first have a lot of patience to learn to have patience” - Stanislaw J. Lec.

Three weeks before the end of the season coach Smith’s running theory started to have an effect on my performance. Suddenly I started running faster in the 100m. Finally I started running in the 10 seconds region. Then my coach gave me the chance to run as the starter in the UVU men’s relay team. Suddenly, I was part of the team that would break the school record twice, and win a silver medal at the Great West Championships. As a "freshmen" I obtained a place in the final for the 100m during those Championships. For the championships I was ranked ninth. During the championships I had to fight for a spot in the final in order to score points for my school, and that is what I did. For me this was important, because I knew how to perform at the right moment. The last three weeks of the season made all the difference and helped me decide whether to continue with athletics or not. Rightfully so, I had developed an appetite for more. My head coaches, Scott Houle and Kirk Adamson, have extended my scholarship for another season. This means that during the next academic year I will still be a proud Wolverine. The wolverine is the mascot of Utah Valley University. I will continue to combine athletics with my studies in Business Management; my emphasis is in Marketing. Neways, the company where I did my internship, has also extended my contract. This means that I will also be able to continue working for them as an intern, where, at this moment, I am performing the function of a Global Sales manager. Here I get the chance to work and communicate with all kinds of companies and divisions worldwide and soon I will also be travelling to Europe to deal with top Neways business partners.

The season of “running smart”, “running patiently” and “sticking to the fight when you’re hardest hit” has had a positive impact on both my sporting and my social careers. At this moment, the only thing I need is a good vacation and where better go to than the Netherlands. First however, I have to finish Summer School. SEE YOU SOON NETHERLANDS!



Frimpong during practice in Orem, Utah 2009
www.akwasifrimpong.nl/column