

When Usain Bolt was a young boy growing up in Jamaica, his parents took him to the doctor because he couldn't keep still. He was gifted at cricket, his first love. 'But I just happened to run fast. It was easy and I was winning. And my dad said I should concentrate on running because it's an individual sport and, if you do good, you do good for yourself.'

Nobody can hold a light to Usain Bolt — he is a one-off (уникум). There's the size, for a start: 1.96 metres (ideal sprinters are thought to be no more than 1.85 metres). Then there's the scoliosis, a curved spine which means one leg is shorter than the other. (1) __ And the attitude — at warm-up his rivals look as if they will explode with tension, but Bolt smiles, even dances. And, of course, Bolt is said to be the fastest man ever.

Bolt maintains that he isn't quite as cool and laid-back as he appears to be. There are things that bother him. (2) __ For example, he says he was so uptight before the junior World Championships final — where he became the youngest gold medallist at the age of fifteen — that he put his shoes on the wrong feet.

(3) __ That's when Jamaica turned on him. His own people said he was undisciplined, he partied too much.

And yes, he did; but the truth was he was suffering with his spine. People, he says, are quick to criticise.

Bolt arrived in athletics at a time when the profession had lost a lot of respect over drug-taking. Here was a man who looked and acted differently. In 2008, though, he had to beg his coach to let him run the 100 metres at the Beijing Olympics. (4) __ Despite that, not only did he win gold but he broke the 100 metre world record. He broke his own record at the 2009 World Championships and went on to win gold in the 2012 London Olympics in the 100 metre and 200 metre races and the relay.

'The image on the track is that he just turns up and runs but it isn't true,' says his manager. 'He's very competitive.' And the thing is, says Bolt, if he weren't easy-going, he wouldn't run so fast. He looks a little blank when I ask him what makes him such a good runner. Perhaps his height help., and those huge strides, he suggests. (5) __ 'The way his feet move, the way the mechanics are so perfect. Everything is perfect for running.'

I've never met a sportsman quite like Bolt. He is opinionated, funny and grounded. I ask him about his ambitions. Eventually, he says, he'd like to make a go of playing football professionally. (6) __ 'People say I'm a legend but I'm not until I've fulfilled my potential.'

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1 — It took a lot of persuasion because Bolt had been running the distance for less than a year and was surviving on a diet of junk food.

2 — But before that he has more to achieve on the track.

3 — I ask him what's it like to run so fast, to race the wind.

4 — His manager says he runs like a cheetah.

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