

The Virgin Islands Track & Field Federation

An Affiliate of the International Amateur Athletic Federation

P.O.Box 223094, Christiansted,
St. Croix, Virgin Islands 00822-3094

340-643-2557

340-692-5305 Fax

<http://virginislandstrackandfield.org>

isv@mf.iaaf.org



Laverne Jones-Ferrette in the 200m at The 2009 IAAF World Championships, Berlin, Germany

Laverne Jones Ferrette is the most accomplished female athlete in Virgin Islands history. She is interviewed here following a series of stellar seasons as a world-class track and field athlete who is the world leader in her events.

1. VITFF: First, on behalf of the Virgin Islands Track and Field Federation, congratulations on your Silver Medal at The IAAF World Championships...congratulations on the news that you will become a mother. Laverne, please tell us how you got started in track and field, from childhood until the end of high school...

At the age of about 14 I saw my older Brother running Track in High School, He would chase me and he could of barely catch me. At the time I was in the 8th grade attending The Authur A. Richards Jr. High School. I then graduated and attended The St. Croix Central High School. I decided to join the track team where Cipriani Phillip coached. It was going great until I discovered how strict he was and decided to quit due to the harsh treatment there. One day my mom went to one of my brother's track practices to pick him up and Devon Peters the track coach at The St. Croix Educational Complex High School inquired about me and my mom told him I quit the track team at Central High and immediately Coach Peters wanted me to attend Educational Complex so he spoke to the principal we completed some paper work and I transferred to Complex. That's where it all began!

2. VITFF: So at the end of high school, you are about to make a decision regarding your career, about going to college. Tell us about that decision.

That decision was base on scholarship preferences due to the fact my parents did not have the finances to pay the expenses for college. I was running fast enough in high school to get recognized by Jr. colleges. Unfortunately I did not do score high enough on my S.A.T. to get into a division I University. On top of that, I could have gotten accepted into a division I University, but I would have had to pay for everything; that would have been difficult, so when Coach Peters told me Barton County Community college wanted me and was giving me a scholarship we decided to go that route.

I think that was the best decision for me because it gave me an opportunity to start off at a small school and get the feel for college before jumping into the big scene of a division I school. I think at a larger school, the coaching staff and educational system expects a lot from you because they are paying for your schooling so it's less difficult to juggle school and track at a Jr. college. So coming from a small island and moving to a big school would have been overwhelming for me and I would probably not have performed the way I wanted to perform. After I graduated from Barton County and transferred to Oklahoma University a division I school, I was prepared for the duties I had to face, including more difficult classes and greater responsibilities for the team and otherwise.

3. VITFF: You ran at a very competitive junior college named Barton County Community College in Kansas; Take us through your first year there:

My first year was very difficult. Transitioning from Island life to country life was a culture shock! I gained tremendous amount of weight because I thought I could eat the same as I did at home, not knowing that the food at college is more processed than the food my mom prepared for me. Barton had athletes from all over the United States and the Caribbean who ran faster than I did, so I trained extra hard just to make a relay team. I did not know anyone when I arrived so I felt like a fish out of water. By the time we tested to see what classes we needed and completed paper work, going to around the third week I got used to the people and the surroundings.

4. VITFF: We recall that in your second year at Barton, it was becoming apparent that the Virgin Islands was on the verge of having an elite track and field athlete in Laverne Jones. What were your thoughts about your potential and advancing to the next level of your career, going from junior college to a major university?

I really wasn't thinking about taking my track career to a professional level, I was doing athletics because it gave me the opportunity to go through college without working or taking out a loan. When I went home for the summer break my freshman year at Barton and met Stephen (my husband) he knew way more

about track than I did. He came to one my training session (when you go home for breaks the coaches give you work out plan to stay fit) where Coach Peters was assisting me and I ran a 100m and Stephen came up to me and told me, " you have so much talent" and I ran with what he said and ever since he mentored me throughout my sophomore year at Barton and Oklahoma. There were so many times I wanted to quit because I was so frustrated with school and trying to compete at a high level and at the best of my ability. I would call Stephen and vent and he understood what I was going through and encouraged me. My senior year at Oklahoma is where I had my break through and ran under 23 seconds in the 200m and 11.24 in the 100m breaking the Virgin Islands record and qualifying for the 2004 Olympic Games. That is when the door to becoming a professional Athlete opened.

5. VITFF: You became an All-American at the University of Oklahoma. Tell us about your accomplishments there?

I was fortunate to make All-American at Univ. of Oklahoma four times: 60m, 200m indoor; 100m 200m. I made it to the finals in the NCAA Division I Championships indoor and outdoor. It was at this point that I realized that I could, with more hard work compete with the best in the world.

6. The IAAF World Championships and the Olympic Games are the ultimate competitions for the track and field athlete. Tell us about your experience as a competitor in the World Championships and the Olympic Games:

Competing at a world stage was a challenge. I was not really ready to face the world scene after just finishing my eligibility as a collegiate athlete. I was used to competing with girls in my age group and I saw them when we competed at other colleges. On a world stage you're competing with the best athletes in the world. These athletes are running times that I never thought I could ever run in my life. But as I got more experienced it became more comfortable to travel and compete against better athletes. I would get nervous going in the call room and on the track, but I realized Track and Field is an up and down sport; one day you may run really well and the next day you may run poorly, so every time I hit the track I gave it a 100%, I might not finish in the place I wanted or run the time I wanted to run, but I knew there would be a day when I would have a break through before I retire from Athletics.

7. VITFF: Last year (2009) is considered by Virgin Islands Track and Field Federation officials as the best year performance-wise in V.I. history. Four V.I. National Team members qualified for and ran in the IAAF World Championships in Berlin including you, Tabarie Henry, Courtney Patterson and Adrian Durant. You were the world leader in the IAAF World Track and Field (Athletics)Tour going in to Berlin last year. Tell us about your great performances up to and including Berlin:

The World Championships in Berlin was one of those competitions where I went in with the confidence that I was going to make the finals. I ran each round well and when I reach the semi-finals I missed the finals by one spot, resulting in me getting 9th overall at the world outdoor championship. That was the best I ever performed at a world outdoor championship. That just motivated me to become more a student of the sport and it proved I can be a threat to the best of the best.

8. VITFF: Several years ago, The Virgin Islands Track and Field Federation approached The Virgin Islands Olympic Committee with a proposal that would provide V.I. National Track and Field Team members a monetary stipend in the form of Training Grants to help the athlete make the transition from the college season to championship competitions where they would represent their country like the CAC Games, Pan American Games, Olympic Games, World Championships, etc. Please tell us how this program helps you and your teammates.

It greatly works in my favor due to the fact being a "professional athlete" does not mean you make large amount of money. I always describe myself as a starving track athlete because when you're not running fast your agent is scraping up meets for you to get into and when you do get into these meets they don't pay a lot of money. If you're fortunate to have a contract, as in my case. Mine didn't pay a lot of money

unless I win an Olympic or World Outdoor medal or make the finals. So receiving training grants has helped me tremendously in keeping my head afloat in athletics. Because being a professional athlete and taking optimum care of your body is not cheap!

The training grant program allows us to focus on training and makes it possible, the only way possible, for us to excel and accomplish these feats in athletics. It is not always easy in track, for unlike other sports where athletes have a team of doctors, assistants, managers and others to support them. In track you have limited resources, so these grants, I would say, are something like 90% of why we have great accomplishments here, particularly when they are used properly.

I just want to say thank you to the people of the Virgin Islands for supporting me in general and particularly the Government of the Virgin Islands, the Virgin Islands Olympic Committee, the V.I. Track and Field Federation, the IAAF, the IOC.

9. VITFF: You are a professional athlete now, this is your job, could you share with us how you make a living running track?

It's not what it is crack up to be. When you're on top people expect more of you and you're always under a microscope. So I may be running fast one season and for some reason not running as fast another season. With the public eye always on you, people want to know what happen, why is this athlete running so poorly, her days are done, etc. So when I improved I knew I would have to face more drug tests, more interviews, and more scrutiny. I'm really a private person and I like to keep my personal business separate from my track business, so when I became a household name I was fine with that, but when it came to family, friends, and what I like to do when I'm not competing that's between people who are close to me. That is why I don't do social networking!

11. VITFF: The Virgin Islands has seen overall improvement in the sprints over the past several years. Laverne, you are at the top of this group, what is it really like?

It is very difficult because I always have to prove myself among the world's best; this means the expectations are always high so I have to maintain my focus and level of fitness and competitive edge constantly.

12. VITFF: It is common knowledge that the only way to make what could be considered a comfortable living in track and field is to either win a world or Olympic gold medal, set a world record and run in Europe. What are your thoughts on this?

Yes, it is true, the fact is people want to see an Olympic or World medalist at their meet? It brings in ticket sales and without ticket sales or sponsors there would be no money in sports. So of course the people who win Olympic Medals or World outdoor medals make great money to live very comfortably. Moreover American athletes receive far greater endorsements than Caribbean athletes.

13. VITFF: We understand that you did not be represent the Virgin Islands in the CAC Games in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico in July of this year. Could you explain why?

The reason is because my husband and I decided we needed to take a break from track to start our family. We've been putting this decision on hold for a while so that I could pursue my profession. So this being an off year no Olympics or World Outdoor championship, we decided to do the indoor season and start our family after the indoor season.

14. VITFF: As an elite athlete, you are tested for drugs quite often. Tell us what that's like:

Random drug testing comes with being one of the best athletes in the world. In 2007-2008 I did not know about filling out a whereabouts form, that is where the athlete gives a 3 months in advance location where

you will be for each hour. Meaning when you fill out this form you have to be at the location where you say you'll be at for one hour, so if the testers arrive at the given time and the athlete is not at that location he/she have only one hour to be at the particular location. Now remember this is random so the athlete has to be at the designated location each and everyday so they don't miss a test. The rule is if an athlete has three missed tests it counts as a failed test and the athlete can be suspended for a period of time. The other test is in competition where they randomly test athletes after they compete. At first it was uncomfortable to provide a urine sample in front of a stranger but after a while it's like let's get this over with.

15. VITFF: There is a very complicated procedure that the athlete and the athlete's national federation must follow when an athlete tests positive. What is your experience with this?

It can be very agonizing news when an athlete finds out that they tested positive for a substance on the WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency) list. You are dealing with an entity that doesn't tolerate cheating. Drugs that are on the listed are used by people for other purposes so I understand why they are very strict about the drug list. The procedure is very time consuming and stressful, but I've learned a lot from the experience helping me to become more mentally prepared.

16. VITFF: Let's make sure we understand this. By testing positive, you possibly could lose your medal and you could get suspended correct?

Yes, That's the price you pay when you become a World Championships or Olympic medalist or even be in the top twenty in the world. You have to be extremely careful about what you put in your mouth. But in my situation no medal can replace what is growing inside of me. Medals will always be around but I'm very fortunate to be able to conceive and still pursue my profession. It's sad how this happened. At the moment numerous athletes test positive for substances that are on the list, I don't know the details of all these situations but that shows how now-a-days anything you take can be in your food, water, even in you medicine cabinet.

17. VITFF: The past few months for you must have been as intense as they get. You have complications with starting your family, you tested positive for a fertility drug that help you with that, and now you are expecting and won't be competing for a while...what are your plans for competing again?

My plan is to deliver a healthy child. This is a gift I always wanted for myself and my husband. As soon as I have my child in February or March I will start serious training for the summer season and perhaps the IAAF World Championships and Pan American Games.

18. VITFF: The V.I. Track and Field Federation, our Olympic Committee the IOC and the IAAF, your local track club, your schools and colleges and of course the Government of the Virgin Islands, have all played a major role in supporting you over the years, what persons have been instrumental in assisting you in becoming who you are?

The Athletes that represented the Virgin Islands past and present both male and female inspired me because I know what each athlete has to go through to get where they are today. I hope to inspire them upcoming athletes also. My best friend/husband played a tremendous role in mentoring me mentally and physically. Another major person who played a huge role in my track career is Wallace Williams. Whenever I had a question about any issue relating to finances, travel, or anything relating to track and field he will always be available to answer any question I had. The senior chaperons who traveled with the team played a role in keeping me safe and making sure everything was taken care of. So I would say the whole Virgin Islands Track and Field community as played a role in my achievements.

19. VITFF: As a role model for young athletes, what advice would you give them?

Don't get caught up in the hype of the sport. It can and will swallow you up then spit you out alive. So take one day at a time and everything will come in time. I believe in working hard but also working smart, don't try to be something you're not. Make sure to always have fun in whatever you do or you would put too much pressure on yourself and that can backfire. Lastly, this is something my husband always preaches to me; What will be will be, try not to stress over anything, especially how I perform.

20. VITFF: So, Laverne, it's taken you almost a dozen years to reach the very elite level of track and field. You are obviously one of the most talented athletes to ever do the sport. You have made the people of the Virgin Islands very proud of you. Let's look ahead, say 15 to 18 years, your child expresses an interest in track and field, what will you tell him/her when asked which event is the one you really loved the most, the one you had your very best performance in. What will you say to your child when asked "mommy, what is the best race you have ever run"?

I will explain to my child that my favorite events were the 60m, 100m, and 200m. The one I loved the most is hard to distinguish because all of them go hand in hand, the 60m helped with my start and the first part of the 100m. It helped my 100m transition to outdoors where you have 40m to go so you have to hold the speed you generate from the 60m then you have the 200m where you need speed and strength. So you need to get strong to do well in any of these events. I love all three events equally because I'm pretty good at all three. The 60m event is where I had my best performance. In this particular event (60m) I came really close to breaking world record! That was very exciting for me. So I will tell my child that the best race I for me is when I ran the fastest time in the world! A time that had not been fun in over the period of a decade!