

Nelio Moura and Florencio Aguilar

At the age of twenty-four you have just ranked number one in the world in the long jump after a season in which you won five out of the six Golden League meetings and set an Area record of 8.29m. What do you do for an encore?

That was the question facing Panama's Irving Saladino and his coaches Nelio Moura and Florencio Aguilar at the beginning of 2007. Saladino's answer, of course, was to go one better by becoming his country's first ever world champion.

In one of the most memorable competitions at the IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Osaka Saladino, who had led from the second round with a mark of 8.46m, was overtaken by Italian Andrew Howe's 8.47m jump in the last round. In what is best described as the response of a true champion, Saladino soared 8.57m on the last jump of the competition to snatch the gold medal and set a new Area record.

The dramatic performance in Osaka was more than a victory for the athlete. Saladino's success can also be seen as a high point in a special cooperation that has involved two coaches and far-sighted decisions by both the national athletic federation in Panama and the South American Area association CONSUDATLE (Confederacion Sudamericana de Atletismo) to move the athlete from his native Colón to the IAAF's High Performance Training Centre in São Paulo, Brazil, which is run by Moura.

On behalf of NSA, Victor Lopez, the Chairman of the IAAF Coaches Commission, interviewed Saladino's coaching team in Osaka after the gold medal. His aims included learn-

ing more about the partnership of former Panamanian sprinter Aguilar and the Brazilian Moura, coach to 2007 Pan American triple jump Champion Jadel Griogorio (BRA) among others, and the training methods they have used to bring Saladino to the top.

NSA First of all, congratulations on Irving's performance in Osaka. It was really a storybook competition and a fantastic result. Nelio, can you tell me what was going on in your minds before that final jump? Did you give Irving any advice at that time?

Moura: Thank you. It is difficult to describe our feelings in Osaka. Irving told me he was calm before the last jump. He saw the result of Howe's jump but did not see all the hype of Howe and his mother afterwards. He only wanted to do a good jump, because he REAL-LY wanted to be the World Champion. On the other hand, I saw everything and for a moment I thought how unfair it would be if Irving didn't win after being clearly the best in the field. But then I saw his face and it was clear to me that he was coming back. I only asked him to put his mark a little backwards but I didn't push him. I knew he would need a controlled approach and that there would be no second chance at that time.

NSA Florencio, I would like know a little about the beginning of Irving's career. How was his talent discovered?

Aguilar: Irving's older brother started athletics first and then brought Irving to the



Irving Saladino during the 11th IAAF World Athletics Championships in Osaka

track. So, like it happens in most South American countries, he got started and was found by luck.

NSA So what was their family background and how has this influenced Irving's career?

Aguilar: Their father (David) was a baseball player, so he acknowledges the value of sport. Both David and Cristina (Irving's mother) have been very supportive of Irving.

NSA How and why did you come to the decision to move Irving to Brazil?

Aguilar: After the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, where Irving jumped but didn't advance to the final, we were worried about his development as the conditions for training are not so good in Colón. The president of Panamanian federation, Ricardo Sasso, asked the CONSUDATLE president, Roberto Gesta de Melo, if he could help. They worked together to get a scholarship from the IAAF and we decided that Irving would spend most of the

year in Brazil. He went to the IAAF's High Performance Training Centre in São Paulo to work with Nelio. I also went to Brazil and stayed in São Paulo for six months. The transition was very smooth and since then we are frequently in touch. This move has proved to be the best decision for Irving's development.

NSA How does the two-coach relationship work in practice?

Aguilar: Irving follows Nelio's programme and when he is in Brazil he is also under the supervision of Tania Moura, Nelio's wife. I supervise when Irving is in Panama. Usually, he stays in Panama for two to three months (October – December) and spends the remaining time in Brazil.

NSA Have the IAAF and CONSUDATLE had any other role in Irving's development?

Aguilar: Yes, I am involved in the IAAF Coaches Education and Certification System. I just finished the IAAF Academy course at the



Irving Saladino, Nelson Moura and Florence Aguilar in Osaka.

Universidad Nacional del Litoral in Santa Fe, Argentina, under the guidance of Nelio, among others.

NSA Nelio, how do you train Irving for speed and which specific training exercises are you using?

Moura: When Irving first came to Brazil we used to do some sessions of speed training similar to those done by sprinters. However, he had very weak hamstrings, and injuries were frequent. We changed our approach, concentrating more on running technique and specific power development. Nowadays, our typical speed session consists of "contrast" sprinting on the speed ramp we have at our training centre (uphill – flat – downhill), in many combinations.

NSA How do you structure the load in strength training and what are the main exercises you use in this area?

Moura: Strength and power training is probably the core of our programme. I try to

use the idea of the "overshoot phenomenon" to organise the strength training, reducing drastically the amount of maximum strength stimulus during the special and competitive periods. We keep doing specific power training, including weight training with lighter loads (we use Muscle Lab to determine the optimal load to develop power), plyometrics, and assisted jumps. Every two or three weeks we have one very short session with heavy loads, trying to maintain the level of strength developed before (mainly the neural adaptation) without the negative structural changes that chronic training can provoke. This is very speculative, but the practical results have been quite acceptable.

NSA

Which drills are you using for the take-off? How do you practice the take-off preparation?

Moura: The take-off action cannot be separated from the take-off preparation. One of Irving's strongest points is the take-off, even though we can find many things to improve in this phase. In order to practice the take-off phase and its preparation, we use many different drills with low boxes (maximum 10cm high). The take-off itself is always done from the track:

- Variation 1: Walking, simulate take-off preparation and the take-off itself, with the next-to-last support on the box;
- Variation 2: The same, jogging;
- Variation 3: The same, running;
- Variation 4: The run-up is done on the elevated runway, the take-off from the track, landing normally in the sand pit;
- Variation 5: Similar to the previous one, but with two contacts on the track before the jump (next-to-last and last stride);
- Variation 6: Sequences of take-offs from the track, landing onto the boxes.

We use the last exercise also without boxes, with one or three strides between the take-offs, sometimes jumping over small hurdles. We also have a test that helps us to make some performance prognosis.

NSA Do you use double periodisation and, if yes, why?



Nelio Moura

Moura: As matter of fact, I prefer a multiple periodisation. It fits well to the competitive calendar, and allows us to use shorter cycles. Short cycles make adjustments easier, and allow us to never stay away from specific training for too long.

NSA Where do you see Irving's performance reserves?

Moura: I don't like to put any additional pressure on Irving, but he certainly has the potential to do something really big in the near future.

NSA What, if anything, do you do in the specific training to prevent long jump specific injuries?

Moura: Monitoring is a fundamental aspect of injury prevention. We use daily exercises – barefoot – to improve proprioception, and follow a prophylactic routine of strength exercises at least once a week. After each training session, we use regeneration measures, mainly of jogging and cryotherapy. Nutritional strategies also help to keep him healthy, to better adapt to the training loads and to reduce injury risks.

NSA How do you prepare for major competitions?

Moura: We prepare to major competitions mainly by using tapering strategies. After an overreaching phase, we reduce drastically the amount of training. Activation strategies are also used.

NSA Do you use any mental preparation methods?

Moura: Even though I consider the mental preparation extremely important (and Irving demonstrated in Osaka how important it is to be mentally strong), Irving doesn't follow a "formal" mental training programme.

NSA What are the main aims for Irving's career?

Aguilar: Irving is achieving everything he aimed for when he went to Brazil. His next – and biggest – goal is to win a medal in Beijing, and we all believe it can be gold.

NSA What impact has Irving's success had on athletics in Panama? Are there more Saladinos waiting to emerge?



Florencio Aguilar

Aguilar: Irving's performances have had a big impact in Panama. He is like a national hero, and athletics is increasing its popularity. We have talented people in Panama, I am sure we will develop more top-level athletes. Of course, the conditions have to improve. We need better facilities, more accredited coaches, etc.

NSA Have you learned anything that will help athletes from your region make it to the top level in the future?

Aguilar: Well, I hope so. Our technical expertise has improved, but this is only one face of the coin. Commitment, by the athlete, coaches and officials is what it takes to make a difference.

Victor Lopez can be contacted at: victorlp8@aol.com.