

## Meet Yohan Blake, the Beast who is driving Usain Bolt nuts

As a youngster growing up in Bogue Hill, near Montego Bay, Yohan Blake used to skip school to bowl at a stick in the back yard.

"Cricket is my first love," he admits. "As a boy I'd rather have played for the West Indies than go to the Olympics. That was my dream." Instead of becoming the next Michael Holding, at the age of 22 the boy from Bogue Hill has become the man who has knocked Usain Bolt for six – not once, but twice – on the eve of the London Olympics. In the 100 metres final at the Jamaican trials at the weekend, Bolt got caught napping in his starting blocks and couldn't catch his training partner, Blake winning by 0.11sec in 9.75sec. In the 200m final in the early hours British time yesterday, Bolt was ahead going into the home straight but Blake (right) powered past him to win by 0.03sec in 19.80sec.

"It's back to the drawing board," Bolt said. "I feel a little bit weak but I have three weeks and hopefully it will be enough to get me into shape. I am the Olympic champion and I have to show the world that I am the best." For the time being, Blake can claim to be the best sprinter not just in Jamaica but in the world. He has struck down the Lightning Bolt twice in 48 hours. He has shown that his victory in the World Championship 100m final in Daegu last year, when Bolt was disqualified for a false start, was far from hollow. He has demonstrated that his 19.26sec clocking for 200m in Brussels at the end of last summer was no fluke indication of his potential over the longer distance. All of which sets the scene for a mouth-watering double head-to-head at the London Olympics. Think Ovett v Coe, but with a Jamaican high-speed twist. Nobody is writing off Bolt, least of all Blake. "I know what Usain has to offer," he said yesterday. "I know he was not 100 per cent here." Glen Mills, the veteran sprint guru who coaches both men, warned: "Usain may be a little off at the moment but by the Olympics he'll be on top of his game." Bolt was just about at the top of his game at the last Olympics, in Beijing four years ago, blitzing to gold in the 100m in 9.69sec and 200m in 19.30sec (world-record times he lowered to 9.58sec and 19.19sec at the World Championships in Berlin the following year). Late in 2008, he was asked on Television Jamaica's Morning Time show if there were "any athletes out there who he saw as a potential threat". Without hesitation, Bolt replied: "Watch out for Yohan Blake. He works like a beast. He's there with me step for step in training." Blake was 18 at the time and did not even make the Jamaican team for Beijing. He had finished fourth in the 100m at the World Junior Championships in 2006, 0.05sec behind the winner, Harry Aikines-Aryeetey of Great Britain. It was in the summer of 2008 that Blake moved to Kingston to join Bolt's sprint stable, the Racers Track Club. It was not long before his work ethic prompted the easy-going Bolt to call him "the Beast". The nickname has stuck. "Why do they call me the Beast?" Blake says. "Because even when we have breaks I still train. On Christmas break, coach Mills has to call and say, 'You are on a break. You need to take some rest.' "That is how I work. When you guys are sleeping at night, I am out there working. That's why they call me the Beast. I work twice as hard as everybody else." The remarkable thing is that Blake and Bolt work together side by side every day on the track at the University of West Indies.

When Steve Ovett and Sebastian Coe were at their peak as the British kings of middle-distance running, they would go to such lengths to avoid one another in races that one broadsheet national newspaper ran an editorial lamenting: "It is as if they are playing a game of postal chess." Blake has overcome one blip in his career. In 2009, he was one of five Jamaican sprinters who tested positive for a stimulant contained in an energy drink. He served a three-month suspension. A quietly spoken soul, Blake says that when he is not beasting away on the track and in the gym, he prefers to stay at home playing dominoes rather than going out partying like Bolt. It might all have been different for him had his school principal at Bogue Hill not seen him bowling on the cricket field. O'Neil Ankle was astonished by the speed of Blake's run-up. He persuaded him to try sprinting instead. Not that Blake has forsaken his first sporting love. During the track-and-field off season, the Beast can be found performing as a demon bowler on Sundays for Kingston Cricket Club. In one match earlier this year, he took four wickets for 10 runs. It is the sporting personal best in which he takes the greatest pride. Source: The Independent