

# Andre De Grasse's ascent continues with 100-metre bronze in Rio

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By Israel Fehr

8/15/2016

RIO DE JANEIRO – Andre De Grasse stood shoulder-to-shoulder – or at least as close as the lanes on a running track will allow – with the man the tens of thousands inside Olympic Stadium and the billion watching around the world came to see make sprinting history.

Usain Bolt towered over his competition – literally, at 6-foot-5, and figuratively, with a stretch of dominance in his sport thought to be impossible to achieve and on the precipice of adding to his legend – in the sixth lane of the 100-metre final. De Grasse was in lane seven, having come closest to Bolt's 9.86 time in the semifinals earlier in the evening with a 9.92. He was close, close enough for Bolt to turn to him before getting set in the starting blocks and crack a joke like only he can, which he did. But like everyone who has gone up against Usain Bolt at the Olympics, that's as close as De Grasse would get.

Bolt [won his third consecutive Olympic gold medal](#) in the 100 metres Sunday night with a time of 9.81 seconds, with American Justin Gatlin coming in behind him at 9.89 for silver and De Grasse's 9.91, a personal-best performance, good for the bronze. It was also good for Canada's first medal of these Olympics from a male athlete and also kept the streak alive of at least one medal daily from Canadian Olympic athletes in Rio so far.

When De Grasse crossed the finish line he thought he might have been second. The thought of beating Bolt, however, was still in the realm of imagination. The hamstring injury that forced Bolt out of the Jamaican trials was the furthest thing from anyone's mind. Like everyone watching De Grasse was in awe of the greatness that was, in his case, right next to him.

"He's just a different beast, a different animal," De Grasse said of Bolt. "It's fun competing against him. It's always fun being a part of history – he's the fastest guy ever – and to be a part of that I'm excited.

"[Bolt] just had that extra gear. I probably did a couple of things wrong in the beginning of the race that cost me in the end, but overall, I feel like I'm happy with it. After battling a couple of injuries at the beginning of the season, it's an incredible feeling for me."

The moment was Bolt's. The crowd chanted his name at every turn and he delivered the show they, and those glued to their TVs, craved to see.

But if they looked eight inches to Bolt's right, De Grasse gave them a glimpse of where to look before long. At 21 he's the youngest Olympic medallist in the 100 since 1984 and the first Canadian to reach the podium in the Games' marquee event since Donovan Bailey was atop it in 1996. This was his arrival, and the man of honour took notice.

"De Grasse is showing that he's ready," said Bolt. "The future of the sport is in good hands."



The 9.97 De Grasse posted at the Pac-12 championship in 2015 raised eyebrows. Who is this Canadian kid?

The wind-aided 9.75 that followed at the NCAA championship is what thrust him into the spotlight. Is he for real?

A gold at the Pan Am Games in his hometown and a bronze at the World Championships in Beijing, where a 9.92 put him in a tie with American Trayvon Bromell and behind Bolt and Gatlin, in the same order they finished in Rio.

Watch out.

The successes he quickly stacked over each other led to an even bigger number: the reported \$11.25 million Puma offered him to leave the amateur ranks at the University of Southern California and turn pro. That was the sign. Puma, the same the company that sponsors Bolt, believed De Grasse belonged.

It was a transition De Grasse wasn't entirely prepared for, though. He moved from Los Angeles to train full-time near Phoenix. He entered fewer races and his times were not progressing like they had the year before and doubt began to seep in.

"At the beginning of the season I was a little bit worried," said De Grasse. "I was contemplating a little bit if this was a good decision or not to leave USC, (but) it came along. The last month of training was great for me. I came out here after my first race and it was the best I've ever felt."

Andre De Grasse's night at Olympic Stadium ended sitting shoulder-to-shoulder at a press conference with the man who had made sprinting history, close enough for Bolt to turn to him and crack a joke, which he did.

For now De Grasse grins back – he still has the 200 metres to run in Rio, which he considers his speciality, as well as the 4x100 relay, where Canada is a medal contender – because the day he ran the 100 metres in high school wearing basketball shorts and borrowed spikes isn't a distant memory and now he's in the presence of the best sprinter ever, and perhaps the greatest Olympian of them all. Life comes at you fast. And soon De Grasse's place at the top of his sport will be no laughing matter.

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