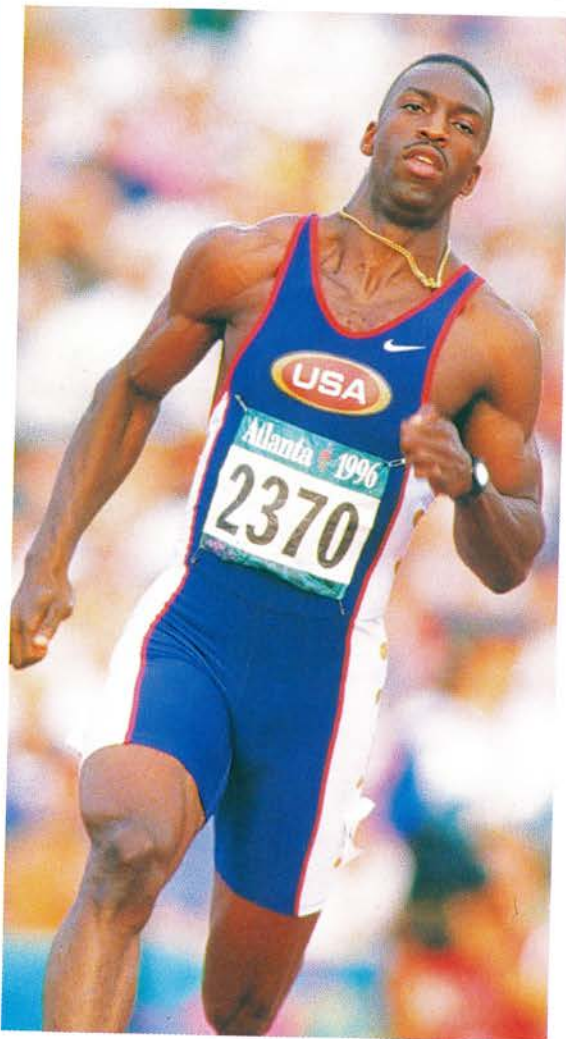


# Michael Johnson

*Talks about  
disappointment*



*'I refuse to give  
myself permission  
to do less  
than my best.'*

I never go into a race expecting to lose. It has been years since I expected anything but to win every race in which I compete. At one point I had won 21 straight 200 metre races. As I'm writing this I've won 57 straight 400 metre races, every 400 I've competed in since 1989.

Most of the time I don't think about losing. I've prepared myself for winning and my confidence comes from knowing I am the best prepared, most disciplined person in the race. That translates into a belief that if I'm in a race, then I'm going to win. After all, this is competition. The very point of competition is winning. If I'm going to run I'm going to try to win. I'm going to do everything I can to win, and I'm going to expect to win every time.

Here's what's important: I would not be the runner I am today if it weren't for a string of losses dating from my first years in college to my disappointing performance at the '92 Olympics in Barcelona. It was a harrowing, bitter streak that threatened to define me as someone who couldn't win the big race but my reaction was – *determination* – a force that tempered my strong dedication and led directly to my performance in the 1996 Olympics. I am stronger because of those losses.

Without the awful taste of Barcelona in my mouth who can say how furiously I would have gone after the 200 and 400 in Atlanta.

But, it is a strange balance, learning how to handle defeat without allowing yourself to think too much about it. I believe that to anticipate failure is to welcome it at some level. I've heard other sprinters say that the best they can hope to finish is about third or fourth. And, guess what – they usually finish third or fourth, or worse. I refuse to give myself permission to do less than my best.

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*Those people that bounce back and keep on going are the winners.*

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Loss is a horrible, unwelcome guest that you know will show up eventually. And so you deny it, reject it, ignore it and laugh in its face. You toss it out in the street, push it away and fight it off, but when it lands squarely in your lap, only then do you have to deal with it.

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*I try to be the same person after a loss as I am after a win.*

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I don't hide my feelings. When you win, don't gloat, celebrate then move on. When you lose, cry, kick, scream, do whatever you have to do to get it out of your system. Don't mope or mourn.

While the taste of loss is still fresh in your mouth begin all over again the process of returning to excellence.

Think of any prominent person – athlete, actor, artist – and what are the first things that pop into your mind? Their personal and professional highs and lows. We are all remembered by how high we climbed and how far we fell. To assume that your life will be an uninterrupted ascension is to fool yourself – and yet to anticipate failure is the perfect recipe for failure. That is the tenuous balance, another of those slim edges that separates success from failure. We all like to think of our lives as a succession of triumphs punctuated by occasional failures. If only that were true.

Remember we all have losses in our lives. Those people that bounce back and keep on going are the winners. ]

*“Our greatest glory consists not in never failing but in rising every time we fail.”*