

Nowhere

HE'S THE
WORLD'S
FASTEST
MAN. BUT
CAN TIM
MONTGOMERY
KEEP THE
PAST BEHIND
HIM?

To Run

BY SHAUN ASSAEL



TIM MONTGOMERY rocks back on ripped legs sheathed in red spandex, awaiting the starter's gun. The world's fastest man glances to his immediate left at the world's second-fastest man, Maurice Greene. The promoters of the April 18 Mount San Antonio College Relays in Walnut, Calif., had planned to run them in separate heats. Then Montgomery's agent called Greene's people. The rivals hadn't dueled in two years, he said. Let's give the fans a show.

The sprinters in the other eight lanes rock back too, but this may as well be a match race. Montgomery kneels forward, then back, trying to time his explosion. But when the gun fires, he's back on his heels. For the next 10 seconds, all he sees is the flapping bib on his rival's back. As Greene crosses the line first, he preens for the crowd. Montgomery staggers home third in 10.27, an embarrassment for a man who has run 9.78. He walks off the track, a shocked look on his face.

The Olympic trials in Sacramento will be held in



July, and Montgomery may not even be there. Being a nonfactor in a meet that lacked some of America's top talent is the least of it. A week after his flameout in Walnut, a San Francisco-area newspaper drops a bombshell: Victor Conte, the indicted head of BALCO labs, has told federal agents he gave steroids to 27 superstar clients. Among them: Marion Jones and her companion, Tim Montgomery.

All the principals deny the story, but its after-shocks are keeping Montgomery back on his heels. After running in Greene's shadow for most of his career, he is now in the worst kind of spotlight. Forget Athens. With U.S. Olympic officials poring over his recent past, and enemies ready to pounce, the world's fastest man could be on the verge of losing it all: his record, his reputation and his livelihood.

THE KID the folks of Gaffney, S.C., know as Slim Fast had the pedigree—mom Margie, a lab tech for the town's textile mill, ran track and raced rabbits until their hearts burst; dad Eddie, a department

manager for the mill, won a Purple Heart as a sergeant in Vietnam. Problem was, the third of four Montgomery children—all 125 pounds of him stretched over a 5'10" frame—didn't have the hands. His dropped passes frustrated the coaches at Gaffney High, a football-obsessed school halfway between Charlotte, N.C., and Greenville, S.C. When he fractured his arm as a junior, no one much cared that he turned to track.

Richard Kearns, a gentlemanly Southerner who runs Greenville's Quick Striders track club, saw him

at a meet in Columbia and signed him up. Soon, Montgomery was dueling future NFL running back Stephen Davis across the state. Kearns gave Tim a taste of the wider world, taking him to the junior Olympics in Seattle and to the nationals at Ohio State. Montgomery was so protective of his body that he wouldn't stand near anyone who was smoking. Back home, his friends' lives were framed by the edges of the Wal-Mart

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USADA officials have a lot of questions for Jones, Trevor Graham (left), Montgomery and Conte (right).



the circuit full-time. By '97, he was the fourth-ranked sprinter in the world.

The new star was befriended by a flashy ex-con turned hip-hop promoter named Ernest "Shampoo" Waller. They became constant companions in Norfolk and Waller's influence was obvious. Tim dressed in Versace and toiled around in one of three attention-getting rides: Navigator, Jaguar, Benz convertible. He stayed with Riddick but slid from the Top 10.

Waller got his nickname from a fight he had over a bottle of shampoo while serving time for felony assault and drug possession. He'd also been acquitted of a 1995 murder in which a hooded gunman sprayed the victim with shots from an assault rifle. So it was no surprise when on Sept. 13, 1999, police found Waller slumped over the wheel of his Honda, his body riddled with bullets. Tim called his coach in a panic. "Poo's dead," he said. "You better get out of town," Riddick replied.

For the second time in six years, he listened.

TREVOR GRAHAM, an up-and-coming sprint coach in Raleigh, N.C., was training Marion Jones for the Sydney Games when he got a phone call. "I need a new situation," Montgomery said. Graham, a 1988 Olympic silver medalist on the Jamaican 4x400 relay team, was primarily a women's coach, but he

OPENING SPREAD: DAVID MADISON/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED; (41) THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT: GARY HERSHORN/REUTERS, KIRBY LEE; AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

wanted to break into the men's game. He'd watched Montgomery slide so badly over the past two years, and believed he could turn him around. So he invited Montgomery to Raleigh.

When Montgomery arrived in fall 1999, Jones' first impression was of someone who talked too much for a guy who'd never won a world title. But Graham saw another side, such as when Tim would play with Graham's three kids, or take over his coach's kitchen to whip up some Southern cooking. One day the 24-year-old sprinter showed Graham a



Life hasn't been the same for the world's fastest couple since that night in Paris.

photo of Waller's bullet-pocked Honda. "I'm done taking life for granted," he told Graham.

Trying to make up for lost time, Graham pushed Montgomery hard on the track and in the weight room, where Tim chiseled his now-160 pounds. But he may have pushed too hard. That July, running against Greene in the finals of the Olympic trials, Tim cramped up as Greene breezed to victory. A sixth-place finish left Montgomery with only a spot in the 4x100 relay pool. He ran one early round for the team that won gold.

A few months after returning from Sydney, Montgomery made another call. This one went to Conte, the former bassist-turned-supplement maker who'd been hanging around the fringes of the track scene since the late '80s. Conte's San Francisco-based BALCO lab had built a small, loyal following among elite athletes, who asked Conte to test their blood for mineral deficiencies and advise them on replacements. The two agreed to meet.

Initially, Graham says he was left out of the loop. When a sheepish Montgomery admitted to buying a

ticket to San Francisco, the coach asked his wife what he should do. "It's your reputation," she said. "You have to go."

So in mid-November 2000, Graham and Montgomery walked into a low-slung building across from a strip mall in Burlingame. Conte led them past a room full of lab techs hunched over whirling machines to a long conference room, where two guests were waiting. The first was Charlie Francis, the coach who admitted giving Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson steroids before the 1988 Olympics and was banned from coaching the Canadian national team. Though not accused of any wrongdoing since, he remains a kind of genius-in-exile. Also present was bodybuilder Milos "The Brain" Sarcev, an ex-Mr. Yugoslavia whose nickname refers to his claim of a degree in biochemistry. For five years, he'd been one of Conte's consultants. Conte handed out T-shirts that laid out what he was offering in exchange for an endorsement of his supplement line. Project World Record, the shirts read.

For three days, the group pored over photos of past races suggesting changes in the way Tim swiveled his hips, tucked his arms, rose out of the blocks. They visited a warehouse outfitted as a gym, where they created a new workout routine.

Graham and Francis both insist Montgomery left San Francisco with a drug-free plan to assault

in history—9.84—in shoes he borrowed from Jones, now his training partner. At the world championship in Edmonton in August, he battled Greene to the wire, his 9.85 just three-hundredths of a second too slow.

Montgomery finished the year ranked second in the world to Greene, and the money started pouring in; by one account as much as \$600,000 in 2001. And yet his team had begun to break apart. According to a source, Conte told friends he loaned Montgomery \$25,000 for personal expenses when they first met that the sprinter never repaid. By October 2001, Conte had quit. "I was happy to see him go," Graham says.

Montgomery blazed through Europe in 2002, finishing first in meets in Zurich, Brussels, Paris and Stockholm. Then it happened. At the Stade Charlety in Paris on Sept. 14, Graham placed a cone 25 meters away for a prerace warmup and watched Montgomery reach it quicker than anyone he'd ever seen. Then he did it again. When Graham caught Tim looking at Dwaine Chambers, Conte's new project, he said simply, "Don't worry about him."

On a cool, damp night before a half-filled stadium that included injured record-holder Greene, Montgomery lined up in Lane 5, the same lane Jones had used to win earlier that night. With a barely legal tailwind at his back, Montgomery anticipated the gun and rocketed down the strip faster than he ever had, faster than anyone ever had. With the stadium clock showing 9.78, Tim rushed over to Marion and the world's fastest couple embraced and kissed, publicly acknowledging a relationship that had been budding for months.

Montgomery was grinning broadly when he was ushered into the press area, hand in hand with Jones. But the mood shifted when a reporter asked if Tim was watching the day Ben Johnson set his record in 1988. "No, the first track meet I ever watched was in 1993," he answered, missing the implication. But Jones wouldn't let it slide. "It's unfortu-



Montgomery was buoyant

AFTER SETTING THE RECORD. THEN SOMEONE ASKED A QUESTION ABOUT DRUGS.

the world record. But a source close to the investigation says he left with something else: a supply of THG, a designer steroid for which there was no test at the time.

PROJECT WORLD Record got immediate results. After failing to break 10 seconds for two years, Montgomery did it six times in 2001, including a 9.95 that won him his first USA Outdoor title. In Oslo, he equaled the then third-fastest 100M time

nate that you have such an incredible performance and someone will immediately suspect something," she said. "We're all quite aware that we are proponents of a drug-free sport, so let's keep it at that."

Montgomery did Letterman and *The Today Show*. At a ceremony in his honor in Norfolk, he told the crowd he couldn't believe that "of all the bodies made by God, this is the fastest in history." But behind the scenes, the status quo was cracking again. Montgomery and Jones decided Graham

IAN WALTON/RETTI IMAGES (LEFT), AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

wasn't paying enough attention to them. Days after Paris, a shouting match on the phone ended with Graham saying, "Then don't come back." As with Conte, the split was punctuated by bad feelings over money.

Montgomery filed suit to get back the \$12,500 left on Graham's contract when he quit. In a counterclaim, Graham asked for \$30,000, half of which he said was a bonus for getting Tim his record. Montgomery finished the year No. 1 in the world, but it was all unraveling. Tim and Marion hired Francis soon after firing Graham, sparking an international furor. Promoters threatened to ban the stars unless they dropped Francis. By March 2003, Francis was gone.

Marion stopped competing to give birth to their baby boy, Tim Jr., and Montgomery began to drift. At the Nationals in July, he placed second. A month later, at the World Championships in Paris, he showed up out of shape and finished fifth. A little more than a month later, Bay Area papers reported that a whistle-blowing coach had turned over a syringe to the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency that was found to contain THG. The sender fingered the source of the needle as BALCO labs.

MINUTES AFTER he's buried Montgomery at Mt. SAC, Greene is sitting in the white trackside tent answering questions about his rival. How did you feel lining up beside him? "It doesn't matter to me who I line up against." But didn't you watch him? "I could care less where Tim was." How do you feel about not holding the world record? "The record will come home when it's ready. I think Tim knows he doesn't deserve it."

As Greene keeps up the psychological salvos, Montgomery stretches in relative privacy on the track's infield. A few friends stop by to pat him on the back. Groping for answers, he's already told reporters he was distracted by the rocking at the starting line and that he couldn't get Marion's own poor performance (she finished fourth in the 200M) out of his head. "When it came down to it," he says, "I wasn't mentally prepared for the gun."

In truth, his list of distractions is quite a bit longer. Since the mystery syringe turned up—much speculated to have been sent by Graham—IRS agents have raided BALCO, hauling away vials, pills and more than 30,000 pages of files. Among all the files were calendars showing steroid cycles of clients. According to two sources, one calendar was labeled Tim M and listed a series of products, including "the clear"—the code name for THG.

In October, sprinter Calvin Harrison admitted he

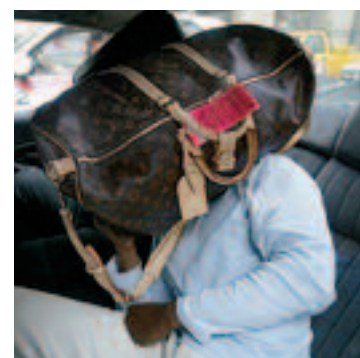
tested positive for the banned stimulant modafinil. A BALCO client, he's the sixth runner trained by Graham to flunk a drug test since 1999. In November, Montgomery and Jones were among almost 40 elite athletes brought in front of a San Francisco grand jury to tell what they knew about BALCO. Montgomery left the federal building covering his face with a valise. A week later, Jones walked out after her appearance accompanied by a bodyguard. "I can't make any comment to you guys," Jones, smiling, told reporters.

The stakes jumped even higher when the scandal became politicized. President Bush invoked the

life." Told that Jones, appearing at the same media event, is threatening to sue if she is banned without testing, Greene pushes on. "Somebody that didn't test positive, you wouldn't think they should be punished," he says. "But this BALCO-made stuff was supposed to be undetected. If you know someone possessed it, or had something to do with [acquiring] it, what do you do? That's the billion-dollar question."

The answer comes two days later. On May 19, Kelli White, the current world 100- and 200-meter champion, accepts a two-year ban after seeing the evidence against her in the BALCO files. "I am sorry

"The record will come home when it's ready."
SAYS GREENE. "I THINK TIM KNOWS HE DOESN'T DESERVE IT."



Montgomery's (in red) recent outings have gotten the wrong kind of attention.

for the poor choices I have made," says White, who admits to taking illegal substances over the past four years. Threatened with a lifetime ban, she has worked out a deal that includes cooperating with USADA's investigation.

White's sentence offers a glimpse of just how much an offending runner can lose. Every medal she earned in the last four years has been taken away. Race promoters are deciding whether to ask White to return the prize money she won while she was on steroids. And endorsement deals can be voided. (At press time, Nike had not decided whether to cut its ties to White.)

All of this can't have escaped the notice of Montgomery, who's admitted to having trouble sleeping before races lately. Scheduled to attend the Manhattan press conference, he calls in sick with a stomach ache.

He also brushes off reporters who want to talk about BALCO at a race in Mexico City on May 22. Though he feels cocky enough beforehand to order a vanity license plate that reads 9.75, he posts a 10.24-second time at the Banamex Grand Prix, good for sixth place against mediocre competition.

Then he flies home to hunker down with a defense attorney he's just hired, to map out what may remain of his future.

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS (LEFT); FRED LARSONS/AN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE