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Chandra Cheeseborough

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Chandra Cheeseborough

Known as the “Black Goddess,” Chandra Cheeseborough was born on January 10, 1959 in Jacksonville, Florida. Influenced by her athletic family, she began competing in field and track in middle school, along with basketball and volleyball. She became a high school star athlete in these sports and was given the title, “Florida Flash.” By the time she graduated from Ribault High School in 1977, Cheeseborough had received fourteen athletic scholarship offers for basketball and one scholarship offer for track from Tennessee State University. While she excelled in basketball, track became her passion. Cheeseborough had the opportunity to attend TSU Coach Ed Temple’s summer training camp for track, and this is where she would meet many of the Tigerbelle greats including Wilma Rudolph. With strong support and encouragement from Coach Temple and the Tigerbelle, Cheeseborough decided to pursue track over basketball. Reflecting upon this decision, Cheeseborough explains:

Most colleges assumed that I was going to become a Tigerbelle because I had been under Coach Temple as a summer recruit, so I didn’t get any track scholarship offers, but I did get fourteen basketball scholarship offers. I was really good in basketball, but the reason why I chose track was because I knew I could go further in track at that time. There was not a WNBA or other opportunities for women basketball players then. I believed that my running would take me all over the world. I also knew that I could make a little bit of money with track (as cited in Salisbury, 2009, p. 228)

Cheeseborough would ultimately make the right decision, as she won her first gold medal in the Pan American Games in 1975 when she was just sixteen years old. She would then follow such an achievement by qualifying for her first Olympic games in 1976 in which she placed sixth

in the 100-meter dash. Although she did not earn a medal in this appearance, good things would come for Cheeseborough. In 1978 she enrolled at TSU and became the first Tigerbelle to have a full-NCAA-governed scholarship to attend the university.

While at TSU, it soon became recognizable that Cheeseborough would be another talented Tigerbelle with great potential. She could quickly run both short sprint races, the 100 and 200 meters, as well as the longer sprint, the 400 meters. She also had the ability to compete in both individual races and relay teams. During her time at TSU, Cheeseborough acquired many victories at national and international competitions and held a multi-year Amateur Athletic Union All-American title.

In 1980 Cheeseborough would again qualify for the Summer Olympic Games in then Moscow, Soviet Union. This time for both the 100 and 200-meter sprints. Unfortunately, however, she would not get to show off her abilities, as the United States boycotted the Moscow Games in response to the Soviet-Afghan War. Cheeseborough graduated from TSU in 1982 with a degree in health and physical education. For the next two years, Cheeseborough maintained a strict training schedule, which led to her third opportunity at the 1984 Olympic Games held in Los Angeles, California. The third time was a charm for Cheeseborough, as she became the first female athlete to win gold medals for being a member of both 4x100 meters and 4x400 meters relay teams within the same Olympic Games. She also claimed a silver for the 400-meter dash that same year.

After her victories at the Games, Cheeseborough remained one of the top 200 and 400-meter runners in the country. She became one of the first female track athletes to be rewarded with shoe contracts, personal appearance fees, and other sponsorships. In December 1993

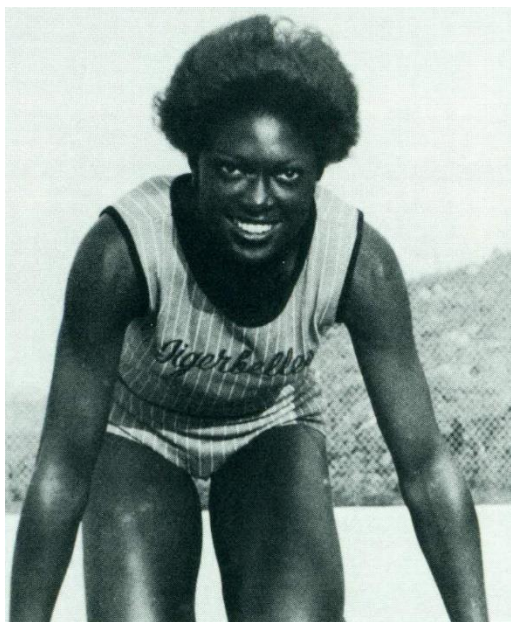
legendary Coach Temple from TSU retired and with his support, Cheeseborough applied for his position. Coach Temple optimistically commented in an interview:

She was the best choice. She was one of the best Tigerbelles and the last Olympian. Folks will listen to her and respect her. She's tough and she will be more than prepared to put up with some of the administration's shenanigans. I knew that Cheese had a good eye for talent and that she would be a disciplined coach, but a fair one. I feel confident in retirement that I had someone that was going to continue what I started and help rebuild the program. She may never get back to the Olympic heyday TSU enjoyed in the past, but she has the ability to develop international level athletes and most certainly great athletes at the national level. I was extremely happy and excited for her and the school. I am greatly impressed with Chandra's coaching. She's very determined to bring the Tigerbelles back to where they belong, at the top. She is stressing discipline with training and with the books, just like I did with her when she was in school (as cited in Salisbury, 2009, p. 233).

Coach Temple's confidence in Cheeseborough as a coach has indeed come true. Since starting her 1994 position as women's head coach of TSU's Track and Field team, Cheeseborough has elevated her career to the TSU Director of the Track and Field program in June 2011. She has led the women's track and field program to nine Ohio Valley Conference Track and Field Championships. The titles including: 2001 (outdoor), 2002 (indoor and outdoor), 2003 (indoor), 2008 (indoor and outdoor), 2014 (indoor), 2015 (outdoor) and 2016 (indoor) crowns. She is also a nine-time OVC Coach of the Year.

In addition to her successes at TSU, Cheeseborough would continue to advocate greatness for USA teams internationally. Cheeseborough would have the opportunity to participate in the Olympic Games again. This time as the sprinter's coach for the 2008 USA Track and Field Team who, as a whole, seized twenty-three medals in Beijing, China. In 2009, Cheeseborough served as the women's head coach for Team USA at the 2009 International Association of Athletics Federations' World Outdoor Championships in Berlin, Germany. Under Cheeseborough's guidance, the team collected 22 medals overall, winning more than any other country to dominate the placing table with 231 points. During the summer of 2015, Cheeseborough helped guide Team USA as an assistant coach at the Pan American Games in Toronto, Canada. Cheeseborough worked with the women's sprinters and hurdlers, who took home 10 of the team's 41 medals.

Chandra Cheeseborough has proven her earlier statement to be true—running has taken her all over the world. With so many triumphs, it is apparent that she has done what few can do. First, as an all-star athlete and gold medalist, then as an outstanding coach. When asked about her achievements, specifically in regard to coaching, Cheeseborough remarks, “I try to do what Coach Temple did, I try to pick the ‘pure in heart’ as my athletes, so I rarely end up with athletes that can't follow the TSU Tigerbelle way, the Ed Temple way and now the Chandra Cheeseborough way” (as cited in Salisbury, 2009, p. 234).



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