

Delisa Walton - Detroit Mackenzie 1979



(photo courtesy University of Tennessee)

When Delisa Walton's junior high PE teacher saw her beating all the boys in the class in races, he made a call to Richard Ford, the coach of the Motor City Track Club. Ford knew talent when he saw it.

He recalled, "The first time I saw her run, I called all the girls together and I told them, 'This is a superstar.' Some of the girls laughed, but that very day, with no training, Delisa ran one girl right into the ground... Who else could run two miles without training? Within three weeks they were calling her 'superstar.'"

At Detroit's Mackenzie High, Walton worked with coach Jan Chapman, who in interviews gave all the credit to Ford. She showed solid sprint skills, running 58.3y for 440y as a freshman and winning the state title in 57.0y the next year. However, Motor City TC coach Richard Ford urged her to take on the 800. Finally, in a December meet in Vermont, she tried her first one. "She hadn't trained for it," said Ford. "Well, she lost the race and she came up to me with tears in her eyes and said, 'I quit. I quit letting people beat me.'"

For the rest of that season, Walton went unbeaten, and at the State Finals she covered 880y in a national federation record 2:07.7y (worth 2:07.0 for 800m), and then set a meet record of 54.5y in the 440. As a senior, she was equally dominant, though her times weren't as fast: 55.5y and 2:11.5y. At one point she told an interviewer, "I'm not interested in guys right now because they all want me to quit track. But I can't because I can get a scholarship and do what I always wanted to do through track."

That plan panned out. The next fall, she started at the University of Tennessee on a full scholarship. As a frosh, she won the AIAW title (the forerunner of the NCAA for women), then

she went to the Olympic Trials (even though the U.S. would boycott the Moscow Games) and finished 4th in 2:01.93.

The next year she made AIAW runner-up, and in 1982 she won the first NCAA title and also captured the USA Nationals. A 3-time national champion indoors, at the first NCAA Women's Indoor Championships in 1983 she anchored Tennessee to a collegiate record in the mile relay.

The 1983 outdoor season didn't happen for her, as she was now known as Delisa Walton-Floyd, having married world-class sprinter Stanley Floyd. She was expecting her first child. The next year her bid to make the next Olympic team fell short. She made the final, but only finished 7th.

In 1987, she ran a 400 PR of 51.21 and she broke 2:00 for the first time with her 1:59.80 at the Bruce Jenner Classic in San Jose. She took 2nd at nationals in 1:59.20 to make the World Championships. However, in Rome she didn't make it out of her semi. She still finished the year on a high note, with a PR 1:58.70 in Berlin.

In 1988, Walton-Floyd was all business. She finished 2nd in the Trials in 1:59.20. At the Olympic Games in Seoul, South Korea, she ran the race of her life, clocking a PR 1:57.80 in 5th. After the fall of the Berlin Wall the next year and the eventual crumbling of the East German government, it was revealed that both the gold and silver medalists from East Germany had been part of the nation's state-controlled doping program. If they had been disqualified, Delisa Walton-Floyd would rightfully have the bronze medal. However, the International Olympic Committee has refused to disqualify any of the many East German doped athletes who were revealed at the time.

She continued racing all the way through 2000, while juggling job and family. By the time she was done, *Track & Field News* had ranked her among the top 10 Americans at 800 for an amazing 10 out of 11 years straight. At 400, she was ranked 4 times. Her collegiate indoor record in the 600 (1:26.56) would last nearly 40 years until Athing Mu broke it in 2021. She still holds the Michigan HS alumni record at 800 and 12 of the 16 Michigan times under 2:00.

Delisa and Stanley Floyd live in Texas. Their daughter, Ebonie, was an All-American sprinter for Houston (PRs 11.13, 22.32, 51.10) and in 2013 won the USATF Indoor title at 400. Grandson Cayden Broadnax ran 10.39/10.28w as a Texas high schooler and is an All-Big 12 sprinter for Houston.



(photo courtesy University of Tennessee)