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Film Review: I Am Bolt

This energetic documentary takes an adoring look at Olympic sprinting champion Usain Bolt, “the world’s fastest man,” and his hardcore fans around the world will absolutely adore it. The merely curious may be put off by the film’s singleminded focus.

By **Shirley Sealy** ([Http://Www.Filmjournal.Com/Taxonomy/Term/288](http://www.filmjournal.com/Taxonomy/Term/288)) Nov 28, 2016

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In case there is any doubt in anyone’s mind that Usain Bolt is one of the greatest athletes of the early 21st century, the makers of *I Am Bolt* hammer home that point again and again. And again. Despite the heavy-handedness, however, this fast-paced documentary does have its charms—but only because its featured subject happens to be one of the nicest, hardest-working and most charming celebrity athletes the sports world has ever produced. Also, his life story truly is the stuff of legend.

That story began around the turn of the century in Bolt’s native Jamaica, when he was in high school and his natural talents as a runner were quickly spotted by professional trainers who groomed him to win the 2002 World Junior Championships—his first top prize—at age 15. Two years later, Bolt went pro and began to train with the Jamaican team heading for the Beijing Olympics of 2008. He earned Olympic gold that year in both the 100- and 200-meter races, and for his spot on the 100-meter relay team, and then went on to win the same three titles in the 2012 Olympics in London and in Rio in 2016, making him the only athlete, ever, to win gold medals in the same events in three consecutive Summer Games.

This unprecedented achievement was certainly not easy. And the lasting message in *I Am Bolt* may be that this tall (6’5”) and handsome young man—now 30 years old—got where he is not just through his unswerving belief in his own talents, but through years of very hard work on a sustained daily basis. The documentary’s best sequences feature Bolt alone in his room talking directly into a camera, and in these intimate moments he reveals a healthy sense of reality about himself in contrast to his boisterous public persona. He is, after all, only human, and he too has had to fight off the strong human inclination to simply chuck it all and kick back with a few beers and some sumptuous junk food.

Along the way, as this film shows, Bolt has often relied on the unwavering support of his coach, Glen Mills, and his best friend and longtime manager, Nugent “NJ” Walker, who’ve helped him find the motivation to endure the endless rounds of physical workouts—which prove challenging even to a perfect physical specimen

like Usain Bolt. And his friends and associates have also been there to encourage the discipline he needs to repeatedly deny himself some of life's most ordinary rewards. He does it all, though, with an optimistic outlook and a supreme confidence in his ability to overcome any obstacle—including the occasional physical injury.

All of this is interesting, of course, but not necessarily exciting, and it's amazing, really, that the filmmakers here so clearly eschewed the traditional big-buildup-leading-to-the-big-payoff formula for this kind of thing. *I Am Bolt* does get exciting (well, a *little*) when Bolt is shown running and winning his Olympic races, but otherwise it is essentially free of the kind of dramatic or moral conflicts that might make Bolt's successes seem even sweeter than they are. While it's refreshing, of course, to focus only on a sports hero's wonderfulness, this approach can—and does—get a little boring after a while.

Click [here \(http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4647900/?ref=nm_sr_1\)](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4647900/?ref=nm_sr_1) for cast and crew information.

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