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# Heartbreaking finish for Tyson Gay

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Jim Caple, Senior Writer, ESPN.com

LONDON -- When the stadium announcer introduced Tyson Gay before the 100-meter final, he described him as "the second-fastest man in history." That was both an enormous compliment and a painful reminder that no matter how fast Gay has run and no matter how hard he has trained, it hasn't been enough.

When it matters most, there is always someone faster.

In 2008, Gay injured his hamstring during the 200 at the U.S. Olympic trials, which prevented him from qualifying in that event for Beijing. The injury persisted at the Olympics and the fastest man in American history could not run fast enough to reach the 100 final. He and Darvis Patton also botched the baton exchange in the 4x100 relay heats, costing him another Olympic medal opportunity.

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Tyson Gay missed out on a medal by one one-hundredth of a second in Sunday's 100-meter final. Cameron Spencer/Getty Images

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Sunday night, he lined up with perhaps the most impressive group of sprinters to ever race in the Olympics. To his immediate right was Yohan Blake, the defending world champion and one of the two other sprinters to beat Usain Bolt in a race. Next to Blake was Justin Gatlin, the 2004 gold medalist. And next to Gatlin was Bolt, the 2008 gold medalist and fastest man in history.

The sprinters lowered into the starting blocks, the starters' gun shot and less than 10 seconds later the race was over. Bolt was again the Olympic gold medalist. Blake was the silver medalist. Gatlin was the bronze medalist. And Gay again lost an Olympic medal, this time in the most painful way possible. He finished fourth to Gatlin by one one-hundredth of a second.

One one-hundredth of a second. Think about that the next time a bus or subway door just closes in your face, or you just miss a green light. Then imagine the red light won't change and the next bus or train won't arrive for four years, and you've already been trying to reach your destination for more than a decade. Then you might begin to appreciate Gay's pain Sunday night.

When Gay made his way through the mixed zone, where reporters are allowed to ask the athletes questions, the sprinter was in tears. "I really tried to do it for my family, but I came up short," he said in between sobs. "I felt like I ran with the field and I just came up short. That's all I did."

He could say no more. Tears rolling down his face, Gay walked away.

Gay had overcome much to get to the line Sunday night. He underwent hip surgery last year, and by this spring it still hurt enough that he needed to train on grass to alleviate the pain. That is not the best way to prepare for beating the world's fastest human at the Olympics. And yet he made it to the finals.

"He was coming back from hip surgery, so I knew it was going to be hard for him to come back," Bolt said. "For him to even come out here and make the finals is a big step. It shows what a fighter he is. I always say that Tyson is one of the greatest competitors I've ever run with. He's strong, he's determined, he wants to be the best."

"I take my hat off to him," Gatlin said. "That can be a career-ending injury, and to come back and drop a 9.80 in the finals in such a great race shows his competitive spirit, it shows the things he did at the Olympic trials to make the team. There's more to come with Tyson Gay."

Gay turns 30 in two weeks, which means he'll be 34 by the time of the 2016 Rio Olympics. Perhaps his last chance for an Olympic medal could be in the 4x100 relay later this week.

"The journey of an athlete is always difficult and everyone's story is different," Sanya Richards-Ross said in her media conference after winning the women's 400. "Tyson and I are really, really, really good friends and I really hoped this would be his night. I know it's been tough for him to

come back, but he came back and opened up with a 10 flat and the possibilities were there."

The possibilities were there, and then they were gone, missed by one one-hundredth of a second.

"To my friend I would just tell him to keep on keeping on, because the best is yet to come," Richards-Ross said. "And I believe in time, he too, will sit where I'm sitting."



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