 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Posted on Wed, Aug. 6, 2008

## Merritt's brother runs with him

By MARCUS HAYES  
Philadelphia Daily News  
hayesm@phillynews.com

*Eighth in a series of previews,  
leading to the Olympics.*

OFTEN, AN athlete is driven by one other man.

Seldom, an athlete is driven by two.

Amid the Olympic intrigue of the 100-meter rivalry among Tyson Gay and Jamaica's Usain Bolt and Asafa Powell, as well as the cuddly story of 200 favorite and Sunday-school teacher Allyson Felix, there lies a thrilling one-on-one duel:

In one corner is Jeremy Wariner, gold-medal winner in the 400 at the 2004 Games and an aloof adidas billboard from Texas with trademark shades and a shaved head.

In the other, breakthrough chatterbox LaShawn Merritt, whose affable manner and everyman nature contrasts nicely with Wariner's personality.

Clearly, Merritt is driven by Wariner, who beat him the first 11 times they raced. Merritt beat Wariner on June 1 in Berlin and again at the Olympic trials, but Wariner held off Merritt's kick in Paris last month, possibly making their head-to-head competition one of the best for years to come.

But the push hasn't come exclusively from Merritt's primary competitor; it has also come from the memory of his late brother.

Antwan Merritt named his little brother. The man of a house shaken by divorce, Antwan taught LaShawn to play baseball. He saw LaShawn start to take trumpet lessons, an instrument at which Antwan excelled.

Antwan was 19 when, in November 1999, he jumped to his death from his eighth-floor dorm window at Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C., to escape a fight. Five suspects were cleared.

LaShawn was 13.

Abruptly, LaShawn stopped playing baseball. Eventually, he stopped playing trumpet.

Immediately, he started running for Woodrow Wilson High in Portsmouth, Va.

His sister, Antionesha, recently had a son and named him Antwan. In Beijing, on the gold medal stand - perhaps with Wariner beside him - LaShawn plans to supply a tribute of his own.

That has been the plan for years.

As ever, he prays before every race, then runs on a wind.

"When I was in high school, when I was running, it was like an out-of-body experience," LaShawn said. "It was like both of us were running."

It was Antwan, not Wariner, who pushed LaShawn to national high-school titles in the 200 and 400.

Antwan helped LaShawn excel at East Carolina, where he briefly attended before turning pro. His brother was there, he said, when LaShawn won the 400 at the 2004 World Junior Championships. He was there last year, when Wariner beat LaShawn at the World Championships - the first time LaShawn broke 44 seconds.

Antwan has been there every day, keeping LaShawn focused, and clean. In a sport wracked by drug scandal, criminal investigations and fallen champions, the memory of Antwan has helped LaShawn, 22, avoid temptation.

"He wouldn't want me to do it," LaShawn said. "When we were younger, growing up, him throwing the ball to me - it was natural. He'd want to keep it that way."

In his next breath the candid, practical side of Merritt surfaces.

"You won't catch me doing something because I have bills," he said, a broad smile beaming. He wears a Nike golf shirt and Air Force Ones, evidence of the stable to which he belongs. "When you get caught, get suspended, they cut your money. If I was to test positive for something, that stops my money. Then, what am I going to do? If I was to get second all my life, working hard, doing it naturally, that's just what I am."

He is what he is, in part, because of Antwan's guidance - and Antwan's death. He always will be.

"I'm not fully recovered," he said, now almost 9 years later. "Something like that makes you look at life a different way."

Of course, while Merritt might accept finishing second if that's how it has to be, he doesn't expect to finish second. He expects to be No. 1, and not just ahead of Wariner. His Beijing dream:


"The perfect race would be me coming out of the blocks, smooth, building the momentum around the curve, running a great curve, coming through the 200 at about 21.10. Not laying back. I have perfect form. Executing that curve. Coming onto the home stretch, dropping everything. Dropping my head, dropping my tail. Running down the track. All the way to the line. And the clock says, '43.17.' New world record. Gold medal." \*

**Tomorrow:** Media.

Buzz this story.

**Find this article at:**

[http://www.philly.com/dailynews/sports/20080806\\_Merritt\\_s\\_brother\\_runs\\_with\\_him.html?adString=pdn.sports/sports;!category=sports;&randomOrd=080608122451](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/sports/20080806_Merritt_s_brother_runs_with_him.html?adString=pdn.sports/sports;!category=sports;&randomOrd=080608122451)

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© Copyright | Philly Online, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Any copying, redistribution or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the express written consent of Philly Online, LLC is expressly prohibited.