

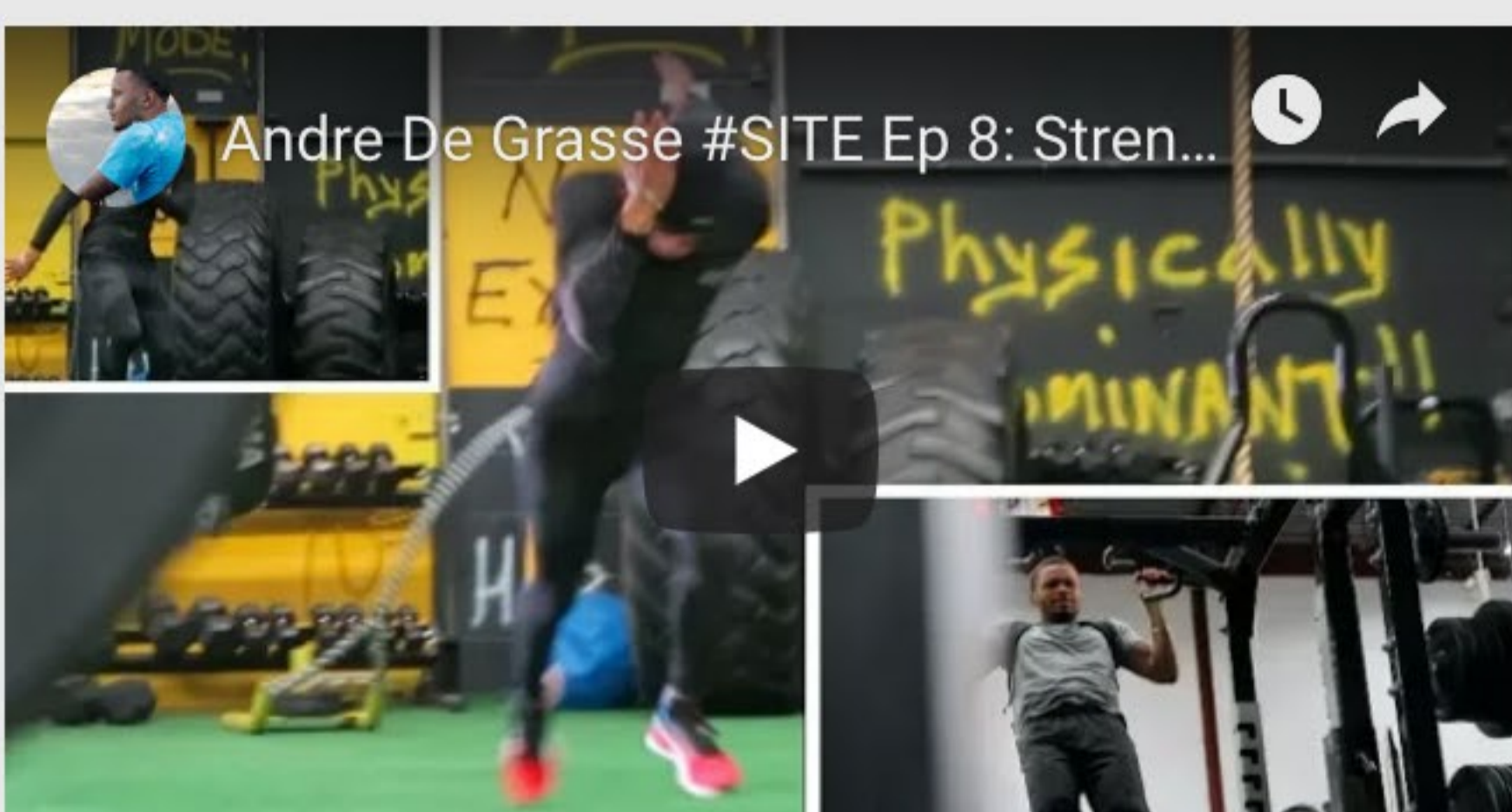
IS THIS THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR ANDRE DE GRASSE?

ALEX CYR · JUNE 29, 2018

So far, it has been a difficult year for Andre De Grasse.

A hamstring injury plagued the tail end of his 2017 campaign, and slowed him down over the early months of 2018. Consequentially, the three-time 2016 Olympic medalist has struggled to recreate the performances that made him a household name not only in Canada, but in global track and field. Despite having flirted with Canadian sprint records and setting personal bests of 9.91 and 19.80 in 2016, De Grasse enters this year's national championship with **only the fourth best mark in 2018 among Canadians** in both the 100m and 200m.

In the midst of his struggle, multiple sources with knowledge of the situation claim **De Grasse may be parting ways with Stuart McMillan** and the ALTIS men's short sprint training group. De Grasse first joined the elite training team out of Phoenix, Ariz. in December 2015. McMillan is prolific on social media, and has not recently posted about his star athlete. (ALTIS Education however has posted about De Grasse in recent weeks.) Meanwhile, De Grasse had been spending quite a bit of time in Canada, and was tagged in an Instagram post training at York University on June 18, as well as launching his new foundation and, of course, his disappointing performance in the Vancouver area at the Harry Jerome International Track Classic. In April, De Grasse posted a video detailing a strength and resistance session with Tony Sharpe, who discovered the raw talent in high school. The location of the training session is unclear. (Update: the gym is Shed Fitness And Conditioning in Pickering, Ont.)



We have contacted De Grasse's representatives about these rumours, but have not received a response confirming or denying him leaving McMillan or ALTIS.

De Grasse signed a "multi-year" deal (the term was not disclosed) with Puma in 2015 for a reported \$11.25 million, with bonuses skyrocketing his payout to up to \$30 million. Contracts for Olympic-focused athletes such as sprinters typically extend to the end of an Olympic year, suggesting that De Grasse's deal would expire after either the 2020 or 2024 Games.

His recent sub-par performances are eliciting knee jerk reactions from nervous track fans everywhere who cannot help but quietly question: is De Grasse done?

It depends how you define *done*.

Can he come back and be as strong a force on the Olympic stage as he was in 2016 by the time 2020 (and even 2024) rolls around? Probably. Will he ever run faster than his current personal bests of 9.91 and 19.80 (Canadian record)? Odds say no.

Since 2000, the average age of a male Olympic medalist in the sprints (100m and 200m) has been 25 years old. De Grasse is turning 24 in November, and will be 25 by the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. By 2024, he will be 29, which was the age of Usain Bolt when he stood between De Grasse and an Olympic 200m gold medal in Rio. When Donovan Bailey won Canada the gold medal in the 100m at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, he was 28. Age is not preventing De Grasse from flourishing—fitness is. It is reasonable to believe De Grasse has one (or even two) more cracks at Olympic gold if he reconciles his 2016 fitness and staves off injury.

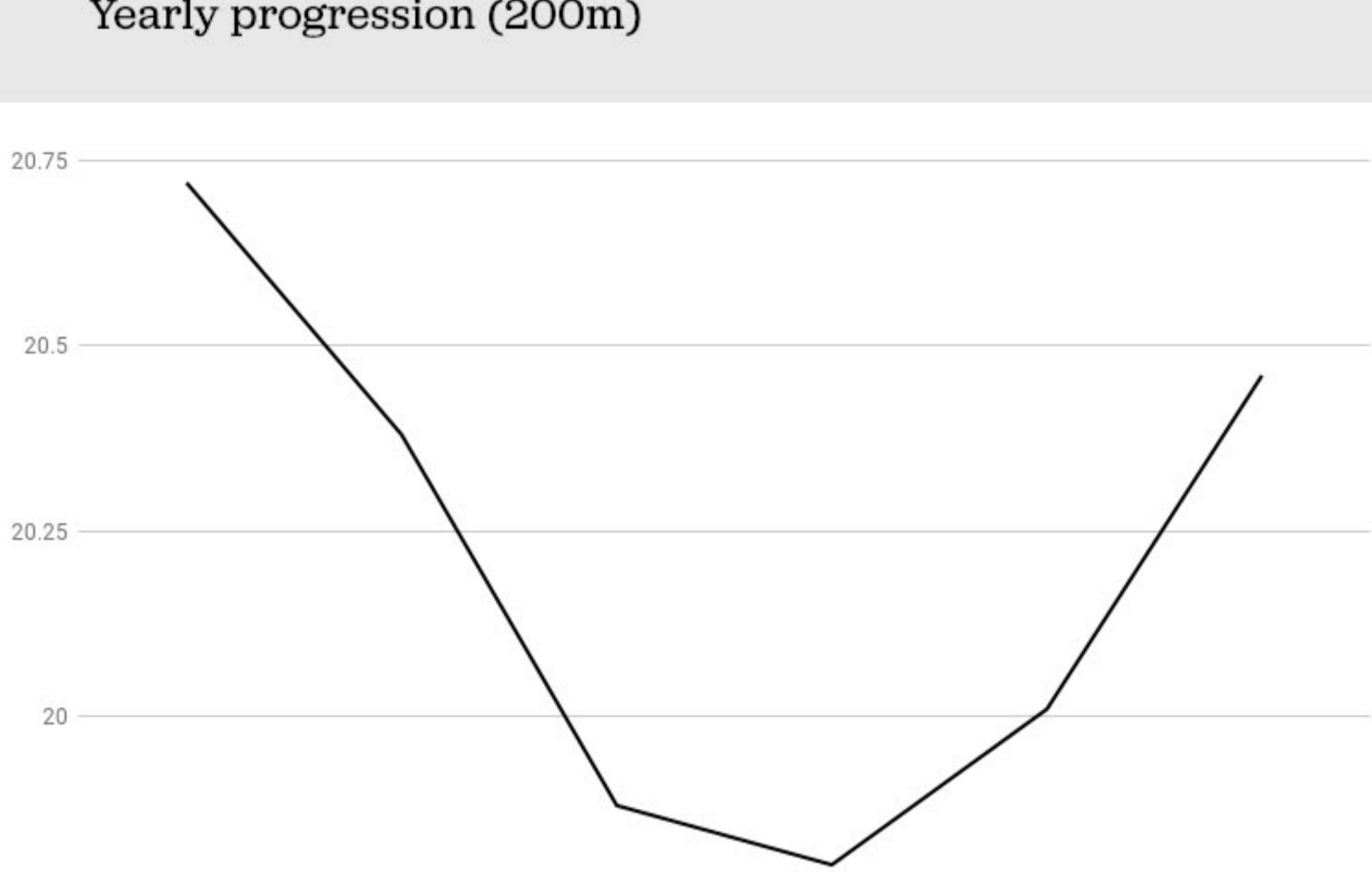
But that is the big if. With his coaching situation unclear, the future seems to hold many uncertainties for the Puma athlete, who desperately needs a change in trend. His results have been declining in prestige as the months, and now years, pass. De Grasse hasn't run fast this year, and not out of lack of opportunity. He raced the 100m once in April, May and June, clocking efforts of 10.15 (+1.9), 10.25 (-0.5) and 10.36 (-0.4), respectively. He appeared in one 200m, registering a disappointing time of 20.46 (+1.4) in Qatar in May. Those results pale in comparison to his best 2017 marks of 10.01 (+0.2) and 20.01 (+0.6), which in turn are slower than his personal bests achieved in 2016. Granted, 2018 is an off-year globally as there are no IAAF World Championships or Olympic Games to drive big races for fast qualifying times. But as others in the track world are taking advantage of this relatively low-pressure year to take risks and go after records and times, De Grasse's season seems to be a non-starter as we head into July.

If you think this is a harsh analysis of De Grasse's career to date, take a look at the graphs below. The trend is troublingly downward, as his times head back north in both the 100m and 200m, towards where he was when he started competing at a high level.

Yearly progression (100m)

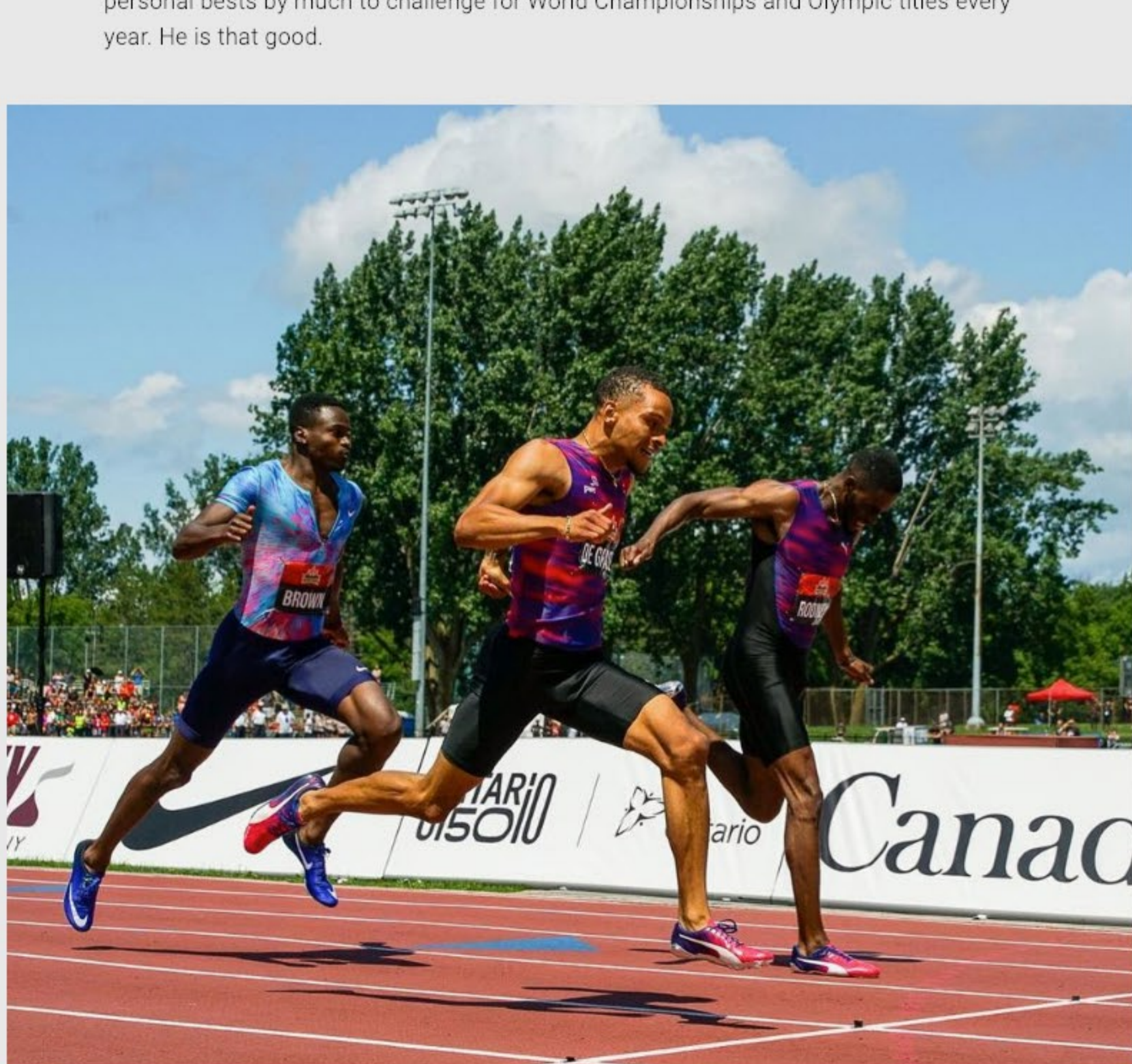


Yearly progression (200m)



And even if De Grasse does regain fitness, health and consistency, nothing is to say he will get faster. In fact, the odds suggest he will not. While age may not prevent De Grasse from being a top contender through the next Olympic cycle, it might hinder his way of his ability to get much faster than he already has been. The top ten 200m runners of all-time had an **average age of 24** when they ran their personal best (two athletes on that list are still competing). Since 2000, 10 of the 15 Olympic medalists in the 100m (multiple-time medalists were counted once for each medal won) have run their personal best in the event at the age of 24 or under. For the 200m it's nine out of 15. Interestingly, the very fastest men in the world tend to run their best times in their early 20s. Usain Bolt's best marks came at age 22 for both the 100m and 200m. Yohan Blake ran fastest over the sprint distances at 22 and 21 years old, respectively.

What does this mean for De Grasse? He might have reached his ceiling as far as time is concerned—it is possible that Rio is as good as it gets. But, like many uber-talented sprinters before him, he may not let the early discovery of a possible ceiling prevent him from having a long championship-filled career. Besides, he does not need to improve his personal bests by much to challenge for World Championships and Olympic titles every year. He is that good.



But before asking ourselves questions about where De Grasse's speed ceiling may be, he will once again need to regain the fitness level needed to challenge it. For that to happen, matters of coaching, training groups and physical health must quickly be addressed. Perhaps this dip in performance is a blip, and with a non-championship year to play with (and other [significant changes in his life](#)), it could be that the pressure is off for De Grasse in 2018, with the focus remaining 2019 IAAF World Championships in Doha and then, of course, The 2020 Olympics. After Rio, the expectation was that De Grasse would take over for Usain Bolt as the marquee figure at the next Games. With 2020 just two years away and this outdoor season seeming a non-starter, next summer will become perhaps the most pivotal in De Grasse's career to date.

[Update (July 9): [De Grasse is done for the year with a hamstring injury](#) after finishing third in the 100m and finishing last in the 200m heats at the 2018 Canadian Track Championships.]

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