



My name is Aliann Pompey and I've competed in 4 Olympics under the Golden Arrowhead - the flag of Guyana. I didn't grow up dreaming of being in the Olympics, and while I was always impressed with the unifying element in sports - I fantasized about being a librarian when I grew up. It was during my college career at Manhattan College, sometime AFTER winning the Indoor NCAA 400m title that I really felt in my heart that my next move was to chase the Olympic dream. After dedicating over a decade of my life to living and loving sports - track and field in particular, I couldn't get it out of my system. Currently, I am the Assistant Coach (sprints and hurdles) and Recruiting Coordinator at St. John's University in Queens, NY. My career now combines the things I have grown most passionate about: Athletics, young people and education. If that manages to allow me any free time, I am the founder and meet director for the Aliann Pompey Invitational - Guyana's first international track and field competition - which will now be an annual event. The upcoming Olympics in Rio will be the first time since Atlanta in 1996 that I will be watching the Games as a spectator. I'm asked a lot how I feel now, or how I think I'll feel "just watching". I gave it my everything, every time. And I did so clean. I don't know if I'll cry, be too busy to miss it or stare wistfully into space at the firing of every gun. Right now, though, I have minimal regrets and am grateful for the destination to which my journey has brought me.

There are stories and elements I loved from each Olympics I competed. They each taught me something, and each experience was special in its own way. I was a newbie in Sydney, petrified by the thundering sounds of the crowds as they cheered for Cathy Freeman. I remembered thinking that it was so loud that the ground would open up and swallow me. I was having a good year leading up to Athens. While returning from my last meet before the Games, I was in a minor accident and suffered a bruised rib. Another thing I remembered about Athens was Usain Bolt. More specifically, Kim Collins telling me that Usain Bolt will be the next thing, and watching this lanky kind with an intense amount of energy moving through the village, seemingly idolizing Kim. I loved the colors of Beijing. Mentally, I was ready. I'd ran a 300m time in practice a week before my race. I never remember the time, just the look on my coach's face. I'd ran a 1:23 something in 600m about a month before that, and he was wondering out loud if I should try the 800m again. Time was of the essence, and I argued that my small frame and inability to joust while I run wouldn't get me past the first round. I went on to the semi-finals that year and I believed I finished 11th.

It's no exaggeration when I say 2012 was a blur, punctuated by visits to physios, rehab facilities and doctors. I saw the trainer as much if not more than I saw my coach. When I did get on the track I managed to put decent races together. For the first season ever, I was chasing a qualifying time. In the past, I'd have made the standard by mid-season, and would have the luxury (and it really is a luxury in my sport) of just trying to put the perfect race together. This time I qualified just days before the deadline. I believe at that point I knew it would be my last Games. And I went out to the track and ran as hard as I could, without making a much of an impact. I made it past the first round. Barely. From the last 100m of my race until I woke up the next day - time moved like molasses for me. It felt like I was running that last straightaway forever. The walk through the mixed zone, a long conversation with one of the first reporters who interviewed me after I won the Commonwealth Games in 2002 halted time-space continuum. It was only then that I didn't want it to be over. He let me talk about why Beijing was my favorite, about how much of the dreams of the 23 year old had become the reality of the 33 year old. I mentioned how much I liked competing in England, and that it usually brought me luck - that it was only right that my last race be in the country where I won my first major title. He listened to me ramble on about how I was working full-time and was grateful to be able to segue immediately into a career off the track. I've brought many firsts for Guyana and set our national record along the way.

After my last race in London I left everything at the track. Not metaphorically speaking - I left my spikes, outer warmups and my bag. I met up with my coach as I exited the mixed zone and the unspoken was said, and I may have cried. My coach offered to buy me a drink to celebrate my career. "There's a bar across the street, come on" and I followed him - leaving everything at the track.