

Francis Agyepong: 17.18m triple jumper represented Britain at the 1992 and 1996 Olympics

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CASSI BERKELEY-AGYEPONG



Francis: H&M granddad shirt, Gap jeans
Cassi: River Island Puff blue jacket, BaBaash Volt blue jeans, Lollipop the Brand golden shell necklace

OUR SERIES ON OLYMPIANS AND THEIR OFFSPRING CONTINUES WITH TRIPLE JUMPER-TURNED-CHEF FRANCIS AGYEPONG AND HIS DAUGHTER CASSIOPEIA

In my genes

FRANCIS AGYEPONG competed for Britain in the triple jump at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 and Atlanta Games in 1996. He also won silver at the European Indoor Championships in 1996 and his best mark of 17.18m puts him No.9 on the UK all-time rankings.

Now aged 54, he also competed in the 1993, 1995 and 1997 world championships and works as an executive chef at a Covent Garden restaurant.

Cassiopeia, his daughter, is an actress, singer and theatre writer. The 26-year-old's debut play, *Shuck 'n' Jive*, co-written with Simone Ibbett-Brown, premiered at Soho Theatre in October 2019 and is published by Oberon Books.

In 2020, she will join the cast of *Phantom of the Opera* for their UK & Ireland Tour.

Francis Agyepong

AW: When and why did you retire?

FA: In 2000 after the British trials when I was trying to make the team for the Sydney Olympics whilst carrying an injury I had since March 1998 from a meet in Tokyo. I had tried to get fit for the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur but had an operation on my ankle and I just thought after seeing the stadium that things happen for a reason and maybe it was time to retire.

AW: How has the transition been and what do you do now?

FA: I am an executive chef at Christopher's restaurant (@christopherswc2). My former agent Andy Norman always said I was still one of the old-school athletes that continued to work at another profession while striving to reach the highest pinnacle in my chosen sport. Even so, it was a weird change when I retired as I was used to training around work and all of a sudden you have a lot more free time. I started to help coach and run the football team

at my children's school (I have five children) and coaching cricket. I also run Vanilla Black Coffee and Books in Kennington and the ND Cafe and Bar cafe at the New Diorama Theatre in Camden.

AW: Are your hopes and dreams reflected in your child/children?

FA: Yes and no. My dreams are that my children grow or have grown up with the same values that their grandparents instilled in me as well as what my wife Mary Berkeley (also a former athlete) and I instilled in them. Being respectful, hardworking, remembering their Ps and Qs, and being humble, whilst always being confident in their abilities and adapting to their surroundings and situations.

As far as I can see once they have these values, then their dreams become my dreams. I followed my dreams in sport to be the best I could be for me and that's why I'm happy that they are following their passions and becoming the best they can be for themselves and forging great careers.

AW: How do you feel your sport has helped you help your children?

FA: Well simply it has taught me practice; hard work; dedication; passion; attention to detail; planning; mental training; having a definitive focus on your goals; dealing with failure, knock backs and injuries; and also, something

as simple as how you meet and greet people. Sooner or later all this comes into fruition, that's why your mind has to be very strong. All of the above which I have learnt through sport we have instilled in our children.

AW: What are your aspirations for your child?

FA: My aspirations are her aspirations, that in whatever profession Cassiopeia is in, she is happy and sets her goals to be the best. I always say to her I am blessed to have such wonderful daughters and sons.

AW: How has parenting been and how has it changed you, if at all?

FA: Parenting for me has been emotional, breathtaking, brilliant, wonderful, amazing, awe-inspiring, and of course tiring. But if you think about all the things you enjoy, they evoke all the above and I would never change any steps for me. It's made me a better person, when you have a child it's not about you anymore, or you and your wife. There's another wonderful addition that you have to care for, love, take on their pain, their emotions, their happiness, their love as they grow day by day. If these things cannot make you change, then I don't know what would. And as your children grow you have those same emotions – are they working? Are they happy? It's a lifelong bond.

It's funny, but when my children are happy in their field of work, I wake up every day thinking life is wonderful because you feel they are happy, strong, independent and financially stable.

Cassiopeia Berkeley-Agyepong

AW: Has your parents' sporting success influenced you?

CBA: My parents' athletics careers inspired me to follow my passions and put my all into the pursuit of success in the creative industries. In many ways performing on stage is similar to competing in a sporting event. The crowd in the stadium parallel the audience in the theatre. The rehearsal process is akin to a training programme. You spend years practicing to hone your craft and then when the time comes you go out there and do your best.

AW: Do you believe that your talent and your success have been the direct result of your parents' success?

CBA: I feel that my achievements in the arts so far are the product of the unfailing support of my family paired with hard work and consistent practice on my part, values instilled in me by both of my parents.

AW: What would you say about your father?

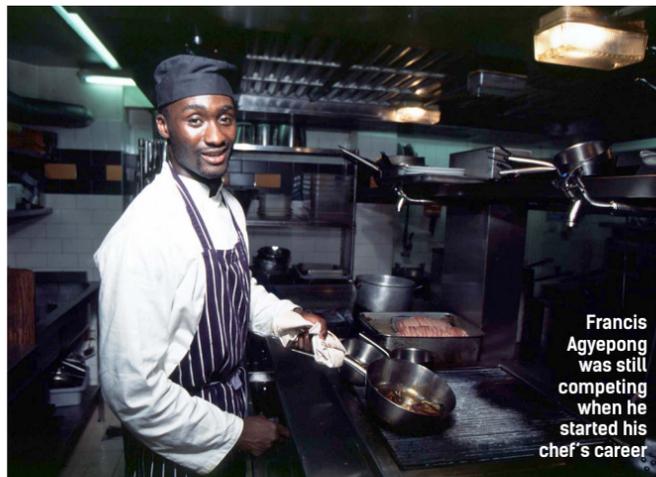
CBA: He's incredibly hard-working and his success as an athlete, chef and entrepreneur, all while being a great husband and fantastic dad to me and my siblings (there are five of us!) is a huge source of inspiration to me. I'm infinitely grateful for his example, support and love, and wouldn't be where I am today without him!

■ **Michelle Pierre-Carr is a former international sprinter with a 400m best of 52.77. She now works as a fashion stylist and you can find out more information about her at pierreccarr.com**



Double Olympian Francis Agyepong, with daughter Cassi

Francis: Gap dark denim jacket, straight leg jeans and navy blue roll neck
Cassi: Asos white shirt dress, Lollipop the brand cowry earrings, Outhouse stallion drop choker



Francis Agyepong was still competing when he started his chef's career

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