Joaquim Cruz?

Born: 12. March 1963 in Taguatinga (BRA)

Event: 800 m

Titles:
- 1984 Gold
  800m Olympic Games - Los Angeles (USA)
- 1988 Silver
  800m Olympic Games - Seoul (South Corea)
- 1983 Bronze
  800m World Championships - Helsinki (Finland)

Personal Best: 1:41.77 sec.

How did you become involved in athletics?

It is a long story but I am going to make it short. I became involved in athletics as a practical joke. I was 14 years old. I had been playing basketball for Luiz de Oliveira's team for 2 years. I told a basketball friend (Carlos) that I disliked running, even though I was always finishing ahead of the other kids during my conditioning for basketball. I did not want anything to do with it. Carlos had an opportunity to play a joke on me, and when the time came, he did. One day, a Track coach was recruiting a student to represent the school in the State Students Championships and Carlos was among the kids who were asked if they knew anyone who ran well. Not only did Carlos give my name but he also told our basketball coach, Luiz de Oliveira. Luiz liked the idea right away. After I had already practiced for about an hour he asked me to run a time trial for 1500m. I was very introverted but was a very motivated young athlete when I was given the opportunity to show off my physical capabilities. I ran 4:47. Luiz told me that I was going to have a workout (a long run) before the basketball practices in order to get myself ready for the upcoming Championship. I did not like the idea at all but I didn't say anything. Instead I decided to disappear for a week, hoping that Luiz would get the message and give up on the idea of me running. However, it did not go as I planned. Luiz was determined to pursue his idea. He gave me a lecture the first day I showed up and convinced me to run.

What have been the most thrilling moments in your career as a coach/athlete?

The most exciting moment was definitely the 1984 Olympics Games in Los Angeles. The physical and mental preparation for the games was unforgettable. The emotion that I felt while I was running the last 100m to win the gold medal is indescribable. Every day that I grow older I appreciate that moment more.

As a coach, I have not experienced a similar moment, yet. Perhaps I will experience
it during the next Olympic Games in Athens.

**NSA** What is your profession today?

I am a personal trainer of elite triathletes and a sprints coach at the University of California at San Diego. I am also a technical coordinator of a Brazilian Track and Field Club and the founder of The Barefoot Club, which is a non-profit organization that distributes donated running shoes to needy young runners in Brazil.

**NSA** How did you manage the change from practical athletics to your profession?

I started to make the transition while I was still running so that it would not be a total shock in my life. I began to get involved with the Cross Country Team at the University and coach a few kids in Brazil. Now I have been helping more than 40 kids from my hometown, Brasilia. I believe I am still in the transition. It will take some time but I am finally developing a taste for my profession.

**NSA** Are there any qualities you gained from athletics, which you can use in your current profession?

Yes, anything you do in life that requires goal setting, time, dedication, perseverance and sacrifice, teaches you how to learn and succeed. As a coach I am interested in the natural transformation that a person goes through while living and experiencing the process. Not everyone can be an Olympic champion, but everyone can learn from the experience of attempting to become a champion.

**NSA** Do you have a family? Do you encourage your family to practice athletics?

Yes, I am married and we have two sons (7 and 4). I encourage them to play any sport they want and my wife enjoys running as part of her physical activity.

**NSA** What are your hobbies and interests?

I love to travel, learn about other cultures, read, and go to the movies.

**NSA** What sport are you actually practicing?

I am still running at least 4 days a week. I also play basketball and soccer.

**NSA** Are you still involved in athletics somehow or do you follow international athletics?

Yes. As a coach and a member of the Brazilian and IAAF Athletes’ Commission I have been keeping myself involved in the world of athletics.

**NSA** How do you judge the actual situation of international athletics?

International Athletics is progressing well, naturally and unnaturally. Great natural athletes come, break records, and make history until new athletes come to replace them. No athlete will reign forever and no records should last forever. That’s the beauty of athletics. On the other hand, it is going to be a real challenge for the IAAF to keep the traditional ideal alive and the competition fair and clean, especially since there is more money involved.

**NSA** What advice would you give to young athletes (and their parents) if they would like to join athletics training?

The advice I would give to parents is to make sure to allow kids to move freely. Let them grow to become athletes naturally among their friends and peers before bringing them into a structured and competitive environment. To young athletes, the sport after all is a personal choice and challenge. It should be a romantic adventure that she/he will decide to share with other people. Once you feel this way the sky becomes the limit.