

# Watch Ted Ginn

# run

## It all looks so easy for Ohio State's Heisman candidate while he races down the football field faster than a speeding bullet. Appearances can be deceiving.

**T**ed Ginn Sr. was sitting at home watching on television last year when his son, Ted Jr., became a college football superstar. He scored three touchdowns in three different ways for Ohio State against Michigan State that Saturday in November. He took an end-around 17 yards for a touchdown midway through the first quarter. Barely a minute later, he scooped up a bouncing punt and hit high gear in two strides, blowing by Spartan defenders for a 60-yard score. And then, after Michigan State had taken a 19-17 lead, Ginn grabbed a short pass with 1:37 remaining and left two defenders looking at the name on the back of his No. 7 jersey as he ran 58 yards for the game-winner.

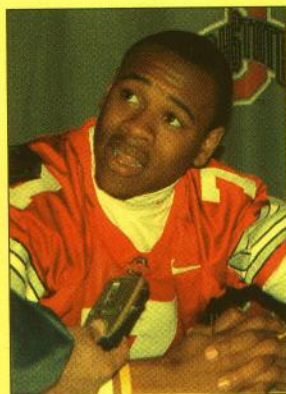
What had fans buzzing was not so much what he did, but how he

did it: effortlessly, with astonishing speed. His long, loping strides covered so much ground so quickly, it was like a Hollywood special effect: Everything around him

seemed to slow down when he touched the ball. The Spartans never laid a hand on Ginn during any of his three touchdowns. Buckeye wide receivers coach Darrell Hazell called Ginn's last score "the most impressive thing I've ever seen a football player do." He had a step on the MSU cornerback but, Hazell

says, "When Teddy caught the ball—*boom!*—he put eight yards between them before the corner could even blink."

As Ginn Sr. watched Ted, he understood that "effortless" is the last word that should be used to describe his son. Before the ovations ever started, before his game-turning



CRAIG JAMES

SCOTT BROCKWAY

Ted Ginn Jr. returns a punt 82 yards for a touchdown against Michigan in Ohio Stadium last season.

### BY ERIC LYTTLE

punt return against Michigan or the MVP performance in the Alamo Bowl, Ted was a shy child struggling with school—told point-blank that he'd never amount to anything more than a minimum-wage drone. Long before Ted became the cover boy for almost every preseason magazine lining the shelves this year, and certainly before the talk of him as a legitimate Heisman candidate after only one season, he was a frail 110-pound freshman who wasn't even the best athlete at his high school—not even close.

"When he's out there, doing it, he's showing the scars and the hurt from the people who told him he couldn't do it," Ginn Sr. says. "It's his way of letting the world know, 'This is what I know.' It's him healing."

Maybe the reason Ted Ginn runs so fast is because he never wants to endure the hard times again, trying to put as much distance between now and then as possible.

Cleveland gym owner Eric Lichter remembers the first time he met Ted Ginn Jr. It was 2000, and Ted was shoehorned into a car with four of his dad's Glenville High School football players. Ginn Sr. was bringing them to the gym, and, "Ted was the young son just tagging along," says Lichter.

A few weeks earlier, Ginn Sr. had visited the gym. Ginn Sr. had been coaching at Glenville, his alma mater, since the mid 1970s before finally inheriting the head-coaching reins in the late 1990s. He was starting to build a dynasty; Glenville had become the first Cleveland public school to qualify for the Ohio high school state playoffs a season earlier.

"He walks in, all decked out with his gold watches and earring," Lichter recalls, "and says, 'I have this football team that needs some help. But I just have so much to focus on, just keeping these kids out of trouble, just keeping them alive. What can you do for us?' We talked for a while and he says, 'You'll see me again.' And sure enough, we did."

One of the kids piled into that first

carload was senior Pierre Woods, a 6-5, 230-pound linebacker with sprinter's speed, who's now an all-Big Ten senior at Michigan. Joining him were two sophomores, Donte Whitner and Darius Hiley, who ultimately would sign with Ohio State. Then there was Ted, a scrawny freshman who, though only a year younger than Whitner and Hiley, was light-years behind them in terms of speed and ability.

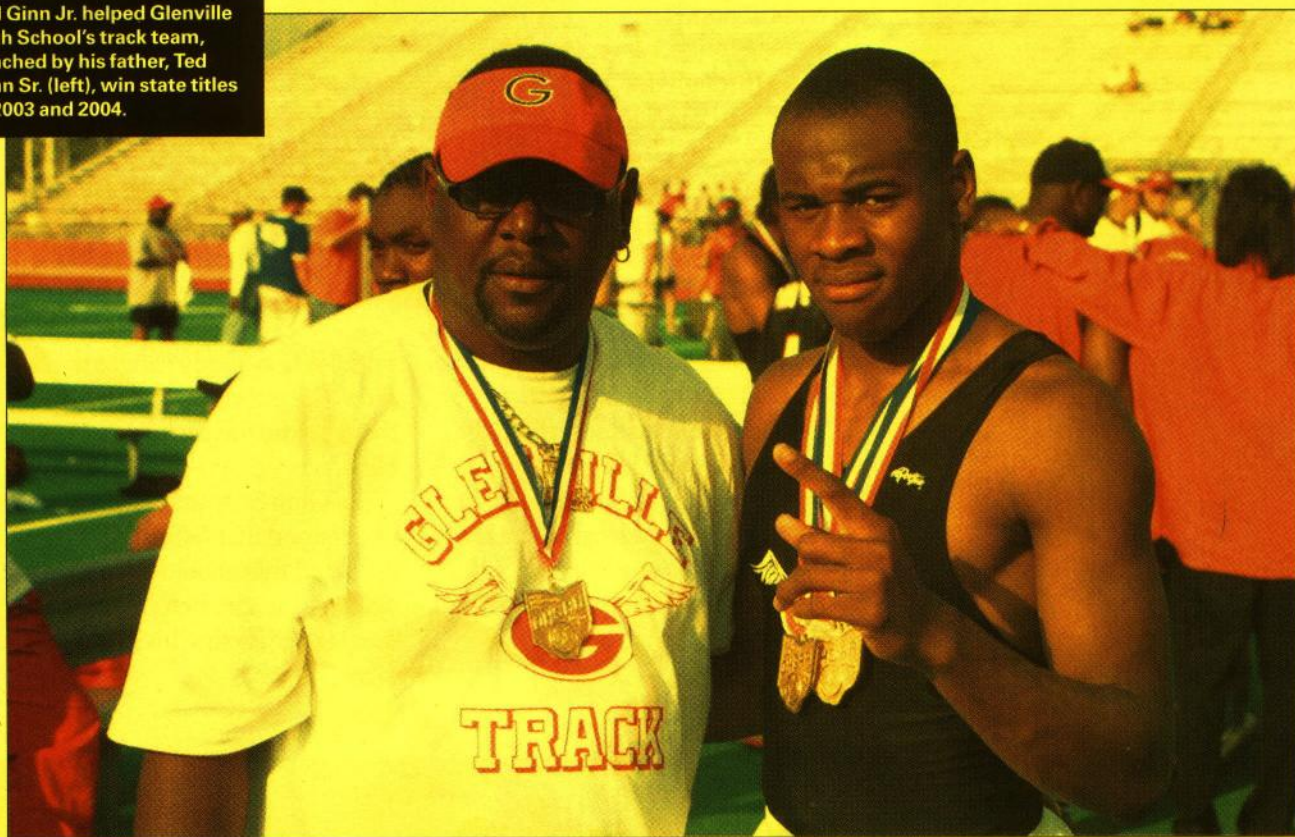
"When Teddy started, you would have thought he'd be very average at best," says Lichter. "Most people think he's naturally gifted, but he's more nurture than nature. He had average speed and, physiologically, he was very frail and weak."

"He was one of the slowest kids on the team in ninth grade," says Ginn Sr. "I was thinking maybe, with work, we could get him in a school like Toledo."

"I'd grown up with those guys," says Ted. "Pierre was like a big brother, and no matter how big he was or how small I was, I always played with him. I'd talk stuff to

**"I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM NOT RISE TO THE OCCASION. EVERY TIME YOU RAISE THE BAR, HE REACHES IT. RAISE IT AGAIN, AND HE REACHES IT AGAIN."**

Ted Ginn Jr. helped Glenville High School's track team, coached by his father, Ted Ginn Sr. (left), win state titles in 2003 and 2004.





Ginn's electrifying performances as a freshman made him a 2005 Heisman candidate and a cover boy for the preseason football magazines.

him all the time, like, 'You can't hit me. You ain't nothing,' and then I'd run away. I figured I'm here with all these guys. They're good. Pierre's getting all the national hype. I didn't want to be left behind. I never wanted to be left behind."

"In a lot of ways, Ted Sr. has a lot of sons," says Lichter. "He had a number of great athletes, and Teddy was there through it all. He's a very quiet and a very humble kid. But I think it burned him that he—the *real* son—wasn't at their level. His father taught him, 'If you want to be near those guys, you'd better outwork them.' Ted's not afraid of hard work. He knows what he wants and he's determined to achieve it."

Lichter put Ted on a five-day-a-week workout schedule that focused intensely on gaining muscle, speed and flexibility. He also designed a strict 5,000-calorie diet. "I remember the first day, at breakfast, I was supposed to start with six eggs, three pancakes, milk and water," Ted says. "I sat down and looked at it and said, 'I can't eat all this,' and my father said, 'Yes you can.' I couldn't argue with that. I'm scared of my father, to this day. He's got that voice. I don't like *that* voice."

For the next four years, Ted's diet was the same nearly every day. It included the big breakfast at 7:30 am, a foot-long Subway grilled chicken on wheat at 10:30, peanut-butter crackers at 12:30, a late school lunch at 2:30, a protein shake after school and a chicken-breast dinner at 8. "We kept it posted on the refrigerator," he says. "Monday was the same as Tuesday. Wednesday was the same as Thursday."

By the end of his sophomore year, changes began to occur. Not only was he getting bigger and stronger, he also was running faster. "All of a sudden, he was starting to push Donte and beat him in track practice," says Lichter. "It was like, 'Whoa!' It was awesome."

"He's just so competitive, he doesn't want anyone getting ahead of him," says Ted's mother, Jeanette. "He's come up in this environment. This is what we do."

One of Ted Ginn's earliest memories is throwing the football in the front yard with his father. "I was probably 4 or 5, and that was all the fun I had to look forward to, playing catch with Pops," says Ted. "I'd catch it, run upfield, put a move on Pops. We'd play situations, like third

down, first down. I'd pretend I was different players. It was great."

But Pops had a purpose for those morning games. There was one rule—Ted was allowed three drops. "After three, we were done, no matter what," says Ted.

"It gave him some structure," says Ginn Sr. "He really wanted to play, so it made him concentrate."

Soon, however, the pressures of dropping a third pass were replaced by other ones when Ted started in

Cleveland's Catholic school system. He struggled and repeated first grade. "Education can sometimes destroy a kid, and Ted's self-image was hurt," says the elder Ginn. Ted's mother and father say they continually sought help for their son. "We went for years with the struggle in the classroom," says Ginn Sr. "As a parent you ask, 'Will you help my son?' Everybody says they'll help, but in the end, they'd all say, 'He's lazy.' I'd say, 'No, he's not.'"

Through elementary school, Ted would see a tutor in a mobile unit outside the classroom—the van, as he called it. At the end of his fourth-grade year, however, Ginn Sr. says the school called him and said, "Ted has to stand up on his own now. He can't go to the van anymore." Ginn Sr. says the school didn't let his son return the next year. "It hurt," says Ted. "They just put me out. I had to go somewhere else, find new ways, find new friends."

Things didn't get better at his new Cleveland public school. An incident from that first year still sticks with him. "I was sitting in class, and I didn't know how to spell a word," he says. "The teacher kept asking me and asking me and I said, 'I don't *know* it.' And the teacher says, 'That's why you're going to be nothing but a burger-flipper at McDonald's! When I was a kid, I couldn't talk that well to stand up for myself. Everything just made me cry.'"

In middle school, he was ineligible to play sports as an eighth-grader after failing a television production project he says he worked hard on. "My kid was destroyed," says Ginn Sr. "He was embarrassed, he was struggling, he wasn't liking school."

The senior Ginn again stepped in and talked to a counselor who agreed to test his son. "He'd been tested before, but he tested OK," says Ginn Sr. "But after he was tested at Collinwood, the counselor agreed to put him in some of the special-ed classes. Once he got in the proper classes, he started excelling. And once we got his education in place, nothing was hard for him anymore. He's done it. He's survived it. You can't work him too hard."

If anyone should know, it's Ginn Sr. "Ted Sr. is never satisfied," says Cleveland Browns assistant coach Mel Tucker, a



SCOTT BROCKWAY (2)



former Ohio State defensive backs coach who recruited OSU's Glenville players. "He's always like, 'Oh, he can do better.' And it's not just with Teddy. He's like that on everybody—his son, his players, his staff, himself. It's relentless."

Ginn Sr., 50, a Louisiana native, moved to Glenville in 1966 just as racial tension was beginning to grip the near east-side neighborhood. It erupted in the streets of Glenville in 1968 during an hours-long shootout between militants and Cleveland police that left seven dead, including three officers, and a dozen more wounded; the riot caused more than \$2 million in property damage. "I just remember having to stay low, and tanks and National Guard in the streets," he says.

He attended Glenville High School and was a scrappy, lean linebacker for the football team. The moment that may have changed his life, however, occurred two years after graduation, when his mother died. It was his former coach, James Hubbard, who came to the rescue. "I was alone. Coach Hub called and said, 'Come stay with me.' He took me in and made me stay close so I wouldn't screw up."

Hubbard took him on as a volunteer football coach in 1976. Eventually, he was hired as the school's security officer—a position he still holds—and became a paid assistant football coach. In 1997, Ginn Sr. replaced Hubbard when his mentor retired.

It was also at Glenville that Ginn Sr. met Jeanette. They began dating during his

senior year and eventually married. Their first child, Tiffany, was born in 1979 and six years later Ted Jr. was born. "The very first toy we put in his crib was a Nerf football," says Jeanette. "It was part of his life from day one."

And Glenville's players were around a lot. Ginn Sr. treated them the same way Hubbard dealt with him. "I have a thousand brothers I could go to if I ever needed anything," says Ted. "And they'd all tell me, 'I'm doing it for you because your father did it for me.'"

**W**hen Ted Ginn played youth football, his mom worried about his safety. "There were times when I was afraid for him to be out there," she says. "He was skinny. I'm a football fan, but no mother likes to see her baby get beat up."

By his senior year of high school, Ted had gained more than 50 pounds in four years at Glenville and had shaved nearly a second off his 40-meter time. It wasn't just defenders who were chasing him; so were all the top college football recruiters. "At first they'd come into school to see Pierre or Donte and I'd just be the coach's son," says Ted. "Then it became, 'Hey, check out the coach's son. He's pretty good.'"

That season, he passed for 900 yards and 13 touchdowns, rushed for 850 yards and 12 touchdowns, picked off eight passes, returning five for scores, and returned four punts and a kick for touchdowns. He was Ohio's co-player of the year. Just as encouraging, Ted was now

making the academic honor roll.

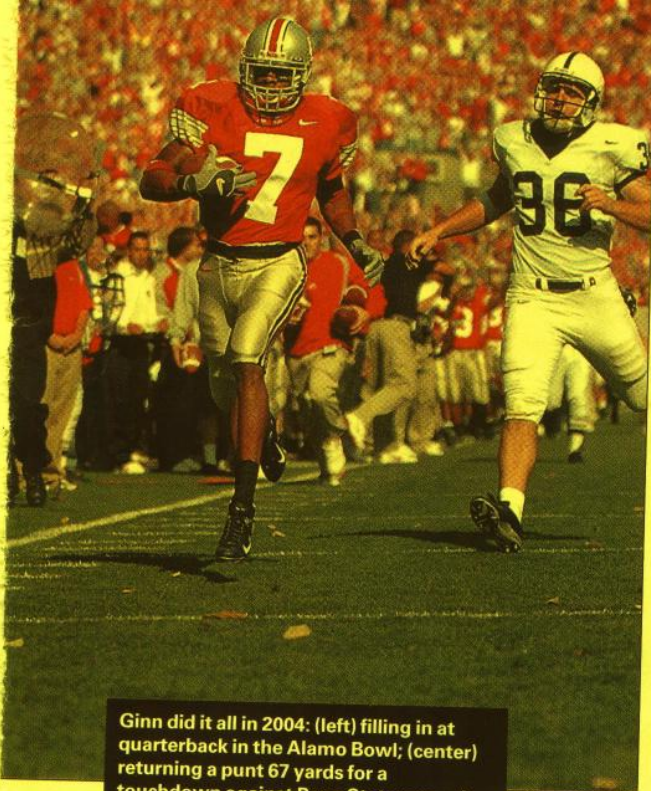
On the track team, he won the 110-meter high hurdles at the Ohio high school state meet for the second year in a row, setting a new state record with one of the fastest times in the nation. He also won the 200-meter, finished second in the 400, and ran on the winning 4x400 relay—leading Glenville to its second state track title in as many years.

When it came time to make a college recruiter happy, he surprised no one by following Whitner, Hiley and Troy Smith, Glenville's quarterback during Ted's sophomore year, to Ohio State (Hiley didn't make the grade academically and transferred to a junior college).

Ted was recruited as a defensive back—he spent the preseason practicing with the defense and even appeared with the DBs in the photo-day picture. But OSU soon recognized he could be more effective as a receiver and punt returner. Ted caught his first pass in the opener against Cincinnati—a tipped pass that resulted in a seven-yard loss. "Rookie mistake," he says. "I should have let it drop. But I was so thirsty."

Over the next three games, Ted had just one catch. His routes weren't crisp. He was playing tentatively, his dad says, trying to learn a new position. "Practices went from one week you'll run five plays at receiver, the next week it's 10 plays. By the third week, I had a new playbook," Ginn says.

By midseason, though, the Buckeyes' coaching staff was inventing new ways to get Ted the ball, including the "Shot-



DAN TRITSCHUH

Ginn did it all in 2004: (left) filling in at quarterback in the Alamo Bowl; (center) returning a punt 67 yards for a touchdown against Penn State; snagging a pass against Cincinnati in his first college game.



Ginn," in which the freshman lined up beside the quarterback in the shotgun formation.

Ted produced enough highlights in the second half of the season to make him a top-10 candidate for the 2005 Heisman. There was the three-touchdown game at

raise the bar, he reaches it. Raise it again, and he reaches it again."

Raising the bar to the Heisman level, though, brings a tremendous amount of pressure—now, the whole nation is watching. But OSU isn't shrinking from promoting Ted as a candidate. "There's no written rule about how old you have to be," says Tressel. "It's, 'What do you produce?' As Ted showed, he has game-

NFL—perhaps after his junior season. Before that happens, though, Lichter says Ted still needs to get bigger. "If he wants to solidify his status as a top three [NFL draft pick] he needs to be in the 190-pound range," Lichter says. Ted will be playing at about 180 pounds this season, but the sophomore isn't concerned. "Teddy says, 'You can talk all you want about 190, but I don't plan on getting hit, so let's not worry

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Michigan State, and also the short flare pass that became a 59-yard touchdown against Indiana. Jim Tressel, the usually staid OSU football coach, called the latter "electrifying."

There was the astonishing 82-yard touchdown punt return against Michigan that Wolverines coach Lloyd Carr called "a major turning point" in OSU's 37-21 win. The victory clinched a spot in the Alamo Bowl, where Ted was named MVP after catching six passes for 78 yards and rushing for another 40 yards, including a touchdown. In addition, he filled in at quarterback when Justin Zwick strained a hamstring.

"I've never seen him not rise to the occasion," says Tucker. "Every time you

breaking ability. He has the ability to create excitement and emotion out there. He has the ability to raise the rest of the group up with him. To me, that's what an impact player is."

Still, Tressel adds, "Do I worry? You're asking the wrong guy. I worry about everything."

Ted's mother, Jeanette, worries as well. "He's pretty trusting. I told him, 'The people who are out to try and manipulate and hurt you, they come to you as if they are your friend. You just have to stay in a little shell and close yourself off,'" she says. "I tell him, 'You just have to remember that where you want to go, everybody can't go. The road up is sometimes lonely.'"

That road most likely is leading to the

about it," Lichter says. "And he has a point. That kid doesn't just have speed. He has eyes all over his head like a fly."

To keep that head from getting too big, all Ted has to do is listen to his dad, using that voice. While saying he's proud of his son, Ginn Sr. says, "Ted is nobody, man. He's not arrived yet. To be successful as a person, as a man, is to be a role model to the people in your community. Ted can find a stage because of his ability. But he needs to use that stage to inspire some other kid in Cleveland, in Ohio. We're all family." ■

Eric Lyttle is a senior editor for Columbus Monthly.