

# Haile Gebrselassie

**B**y winning six gold medals in his first six World Championship and Olympic 10,000s—even leaving his three career World Indoor golds at shorter distances and phenomenal World Record string out of the equation—Haile Gebrselassie established immensely leafy laurels to rest upon.

As such, after his try at the marathon two seasons ago following a “mere” bronze medal at the ‘01 World Champs, one might surmise that six major 10K titles is as good as it will get for the Ethiopian great, who turns 31 in April. But is it?

His running last season punctuated the question. At the Worlds, two days after a 10K in which Geb scorched the track with a boggling 12:58.8 second half yet still lost to wunderkind teammate Kenenisa Bekele by just 1.2 seconds, T&FN sounded

about Brussels because Geb’s answer speaks as much to this Olympic year as to the past.

**T&FN:** Do you see Brussels as your last opportunity to break your WR?

**Geb:** Not the last. You know, if you say, “This is the last,” maybe you don’t do that in Brussels. Always, you have to just think about a long future. If you make a point somewhere, some [retirement] point, you can stop maybe before that.

And me, you know, this coming Olympic Games I’m going to run the 10,000m. That’s why I’ll keep the 10,000m and I will try to run the 10,000m in the future, as well.

**T&FN:** You said recently you feel like you have made a “new start.” Why is that?

**Geb:** Well, I feel that way because of, especially, my spectators, my fans. You know, people, what they are telling me about the way how I run and the way how I did it, how I am doing it. Just everybody says to me this really looks [to be] something very special. That’s why.

OK, great. If you support me this way, if people encourage you, you make more of it. If they discourage you, enough. It’s a matter of... what do they call it? Morale.

**T&FN:** Do you feel that with all you’ve accomplished, you have nothing to lose?

**Geb:** First of all, don’t forget what I did two years ago. I was not so good. I came only 3rd. And now this year I was 2nd.

You know the most important thing is how can you improve by time, by position and by your style of running and even the way how you become popular.

I mean I could have stopped running after I won Sydney. The problem is how long you can be remembered by other people. Once you stop, maybe people they forget you. Quickly. If you

are in action, people, they are talking about you. Even in 2nd position.

**T&FN:** That’s still important for you?

**Geb:** Yeah! Absolutely. If I stop somewhere, people, they’ll just start to talk about “Haile Gebrselassie during his time.” Once they know maybe, I’ve broken a World Record and other things, “Ah, the former World Record.”

**T&FN:** Most people can’t imagine what it would be like to run sub-13:00 for the second half of a 10,000.

**Geb:** The good thing last Sunday evening was there was no other event in that stadium. Only the 10,000m. And that’s why all the people, they could see the whole action. And people now they are talking about our good work: “Haile Gebrselassie is bringing all the medals with his teammates.”

**T&FN:** But what does it feel like to run that fast for that long?

**Geb:** Well, not that fast, actually, because, you know, after Kenenisa passed me, I just tried to keep up the pace that I had in the beginning, during the race. We didn’t fight each other.

**T&FN:** It didn’t feel that hard?

**Geb:** Nothing. Nothing. Of course, Kenenisa has the speed. I didn’t want to fight because, actually, you know, my speed is not competitive with him at this time.

**T&FN:** At this time? You can still improve your speed?

**Geb:** Yeah, I am still improving. I need some time to be like him. Of course, I had very good speed before I ran the marathon. I lost a little speed—mainly because of the marathon training. Always 2–3 hours in the forest, 30–35km road. Imagine what you expect.

**T&FN:** And to redevelop speed?

**Geb:** It’s not a secret, actually, because once you want to do speed training, you know, you have to have more strength. You do more gym training. You need to do speed instead of endurance.

Of course, you know, I’m trying to combine endurance, as well. To do endurance is easier

## Geb’s Change In Tactics

In the Atlanta Olympic 10K, rival Paul Tergat tried to run Haile Gebrselassie off his feet over the last 5 laps. Geb kicked him down in the final 200. In Sydney Tergat laid it down on the final backstretch. Geb kicked him down at the line.

Does Gebrselassie’s dramatic change to sharing-the-lead tactics in Paris signal intentions for Athens?

**T&FN:** You probably led more laps in the Paris race than you had previously in your entire championships career. Did you plan to take the lead that early?

**Geb:** Of course, this was a plan from the beginning that we discussed with my coach. And it was the only way to cut the others. If we would wait until the last 2–3 laps, I mean it could be something not so good.

**T&FN:** Your tactics earlier in your career were simple: wait until the final 200 or 400m. In Paris you were the Sherpa.

**Geb:** Sherpa. Thank you.

**T&FN:** That is unheard of for a runner who has 6 medals and a World Record. What motivated you to take that role?

**Geb:** Still I’m trying to do something special and something different, to make it exciting for the people. It doesn’t matter which way: World Record, world champion, Olympic Games. I hope you know at the coming Olympic Games I’ll be good enough.

**T&FN:** Usually the Kenyans try to attack and drop you. This time you were a fierce attacker. And you attacked early, after 5km.

**Geb:** This is model 2003. You never know what model 2004 will be.

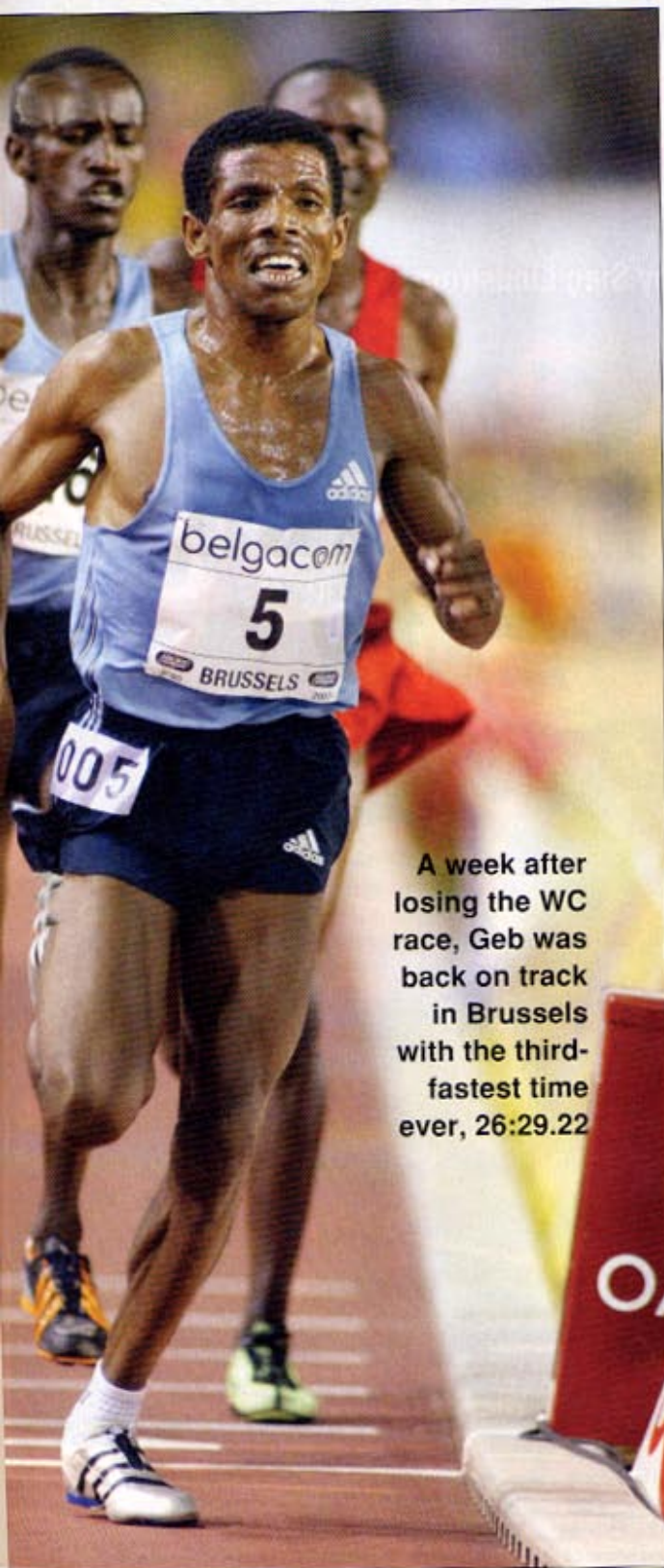
out the ever-affable star on the topic in a casual chat at a Paris hotel.

The fresh news then—old now—was that Gebrselassie—famously known as Geb in the U.S.—would try to break his 10K WR at Brussels last September. He missed, but with his 26:29.22, the third-fastest clocking ever, became the first to break 27:00 three times in a season. We include a question

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**A week after losing the WC race, Geb was back on track in Brussels with the third-fastest time ever, 26:29.22**

than to do speed. And, of course, I'm just much better than in June. When Sileshi [Sihine] came back from Rome I started different training—gym training, stretching, and concentrating on the way how to run, the action. Now the way I run is really very good. My foot [placement], it's fine. But what I'm saying is that if your foot or your leg is going the wrong way, it's going to reduce your speed. I'm trying to keep it

different businesses. But it's very rare to be famous. Because I run, I've become known wherever I go.

Just imagine what happened during the victory ceremony last Monday. I was surprised. Just the time when they called my name on the stage. Have you seen the people? How they were shouting and clapping? That is how sport changed my life.

**T&FN:** What kind of mileage do you do? Does it change a lot throughout the year?

**Geb:** Once you go to the forest how can you measure that? There are no kilometers.

**T&FN:** No, but you know how fast you are running.

**Geb:** Of course: time. I can tell you how many kilometers a day. Like in the morning just a maximum when I prepare for 10,000m. I mean 20km maximum. And 10 or 8km in the afternoon.

It's about 25–30km [c15–19M] a day, altogether. Because, you know, when you go to a track you have to have warmup, main program and cool down. It becomes 15–20km in one session.

That means two times a day seven times a week, and at the end it becomes like 200km [125M] a week.

**T&FN:** Is Kenenisa's training pretty similar to yours at this point?

**Geb:** He's younger. Mostly, we train together.

**T&FN:** How is Kenenisa different from you?

**Geb:** Our difference is, of course, that Kenenisa is very quiet; he's shy. I'm just what you are seeing. This is his character. Of course, in the future, he will be different, I am sure.

**T&FN:** Did you used to be shy?

**Geb:** Yes, now it's much better than before.

**T&FN:** But I remember that even 10 years ago in Stuttgart, you didn't seem shy.

**Geb:** Ah, yeah, yeah. I'm always bad for running.

**T&FN:** How did sport change your life?

**Geb:** A lot. Well, in many ways. Financially. Most important is not financially, actually, because, you know, of course, you can make money out of

Sometimes I thank God to be like this. I'm trying to do more and I hope God will be with me.

**T&FN:** What do you think you'd be doing today if you hadn't been a great runner?

**Geb:** Well, this is really a difficult question, you know. I hope... I'd become a runner. That is the answer. Actually, when I was young my first aim was to be a runner. And besides that I was doing a lot of things. I was doing some art things. I liked to do arts.

**T&FN:** What kind of arts?

**Geb:** Painting. Making things with... What do you call it? I mean it's a big stone and I used to make...

**T&FN:** Sculpture.

**Geb:** And I also used to be a carpenter. I used to make a lot of tables and chairs. I did my bed, I did my chairs, my table. And also I did things for selling as well.

**T&FN:** Paul Tergat, your arch-rival in Atlanta and Sydney, has said his career would be incomplete without you. Do you miss Paul in the 10K?

**Geb:** Oh, yeah. I want to tell you one thing I realize now—of course I realized also before—about the Kenyans, about Paul Tergat and Daniel Komen. Those two athletes pushed me to break many records. It was because of those two guys.

You know Tergat came to Ethiopia for [Gezheghe] Abera's wedding. You know he was popular in Ethiopia. He was one of my rivals, but the people there in the stadium—the wedding was in the stadium—ask Tergat. Ask him how was the reaction of the people in Ethiopia. Oh, it was incredible.

**T&FN:** Did you train with him during his visit?

**Geb:** Yeah, we did. We did one training [session] and I wanted to keep him a few days, but he had to go back home immediately.

**T&FN:** How was that training session?

**Geb:** He was complaining about the altitude. Of course, the place where I took him is around 3000m above sea level. He was complaining the whole training session.

**T&FN:** You and your wife now have three children. Is it true that your eldest daughter, Eden, was curious about why the Paris silver medal looked different from your others?

**Geb:** Yeah.

**T&FN:** She'd never seen a silver medal?

**Geb:** There is a silver medal also in my collection, from '93, but it had become a little bit darker because I'm not keeping them very well. I'm starting to get my museum. Let me finish first. □

#### — Geb Facts —

•**Personal:** born Arssi, Ethiopia, 4/18/73; 5-4"/117

•**PRs:** 800—1:49.35i '97; 1500—3:31.76i '98; 3K—7:25.09 '98 (4, 6 W); 5K—12:39.36 '98 WR; 10K—26:22.75 '98 WR; HMar—59:41 '02; Mar—2:06:35 '02 (12, x W)

•**WRs:** 5K (4), 10K (3), 2K indoor, 3K indoor (2), 5K indoor (3)

•**Biggest Honors:** OG10K gold '96, '00; WC 10K gold '93, '95, '97, '99; WJr 5K/10K gold '92; WC 10K silver '03; WC 10K bronze '01; WC 5K silver '93; WIC 3K gold '97, '99, '03; WIC 1500 gold '99, WCHMar gold '01; WJrXC silver '92; WXC bronze '94

•**T&FNAOY Voting:** 5 times in top 6, No. 1 in '95 & '96

•**World Rankings:** 5K—9 times in top 10, high of No. 1 ('95, '97, '08, '99, '00); 10K—11 times in top 10, high of No. 1 ('95, '96, '97, '98, '99, '00); Mar—once in top 10, high of No. 7 ('02).