



Errol Anderson/Agence Sport

T&FN INTERVIEW

MICHAEL MARSH

by Jon Hendershott

Because he had ranked among the Top 10 Americans over 100m every year since '87, it might have been natural to assume Michael Marsh favored the short sprint over the 200.

But in '92, the Houston-based dashman went all the way in the half-lapper: an AR (and low-altitude WR) 19.73 in his Olympic semi, a runaway to the Barcelona gold and his first No. 1 World Ranking.

But Marsh kept his hand in the 100, too, clocking a PR 9.93 and leading off the WR-setting 4 x 100. This year, he has expanded his sprinting portfolio with a 45.53 PR over 400m (see p. 14), making him one of history's greatest all-around sprinters.

Yet all the honors and all the numbers are only the surface manifestations of the deep inner drive

that motivates the 25-year-old UCLA graduate: to be simply the very best he can be.

With that in mind, in the fall of '90 he moved from LA to Texas to train with the fabled Santa Monica TC speedsters under the tutelage of sprint guru Tom Tellez. Less than two years later, Marsh owned a pair of Olympic gold medals.

Now comes the formidable task of following up his Olympic successes. But Marsh is a realist—he takes nothing for granted, preparing for '93 as a season unto itself. This year is all that counts; the rest is history:

T&FN: Can you estimate how being a double Olympic champion has changed your life compared to this time a year ago?

Marsh: There are the usual things. I'm expected to produce more. There are higher ex-

pectations. Money changes. The attention I get from fans and the press; that changes.

The basic, internal things that drive me, though, haven't changed. That's what's important. I don't think my life has been turned upside down.

It's just caused a few inconveniences. I feel that as a sprinter the key is to never let my life be defined by what is temporary.

T&FN: Do you feel those Olympic-year successes really were just temporary in the overall scheme of your life?

Marsh: I believe so. There have been plenty of gold medalists. They've come up and gone back down. I feel that what really makes a career is consistency over a number of years, when you want to chase greatness.

I've taken the first step. I don't want to play down a gold medal—because it isn't the kind of thing you play down. But you don't want to play it up out of proportion either. Everything always has to have balance.

T&FN: What are those internal drives in Michael Marsh that haven't changed?

Marsh: Basically, I just try to be the best I possibly can be, in whatever I do. I have faith in God, and I feel that's first and foremost. But I'm basically just trying to be the best.

Well, *attempt* to be the best, because I never know what's going to happen tomorrow. I don't know what life is going to hold. But whatever is thrown at me, it's my hope that I can handle it in the best way possible.

T&FN: You mentioned consistency earlier. You also have been quoted that you felt some people consider your win in Barcelona a fluke because Michael Johnson was ill. But is establishing consistency important to you?

Marsh: If the view of others is that what I've done is a fluke, then they might expect me to go out and try to prove something this year. But I don't believe that my entire life is defined by what I do on the track.

It's a big part of me, but it's not everything. What I want to do is just the best Mike Marsh can do. While some people can consider last year a fluke, that definitely is *not* a driving factor for me. When I run, I have fun. Whether I'm 1st, 2nd or 8th, I look at it that I get the chance to run, to display my talents. That's the most important, and most fun, thing to me.

T&FN: The attitude of always striving for your best is central to the Santa Monica TC athletes who train together at Houston.

Marsh: It's a very competitive environment and I owe so much to Coach Tellez and Carl and Leroy. In practice here, I have something to gauge myself against, and so do they. Even just in practice, the tiniest errors are visible. In another situation, I don't know if

they would be.

T&FN: *Other SMTC athletes have said that you have to prove yourself every day, just because of the people you train with.*

Marsh: I feel that has a lot to do with our outlook. There are Olympic and world champions here, but we can come out to practice and any one of us can humble everyone else.

T&FN: *From your wanting to be simply the best you can be, can we then conclude that you don't have any particular time goal for the future?*

Marsh: I don't. I did once, a long time ago in high school. But I found that didn't work, so I ceased to make time goals. You could set time goals for yourself, but that actually could limit you.

So if you just shoot for your best, shoot for the stars, there's no telling where you can go. I have to admit that I really don't know how fast I can run—until I go out there and do it. So a goal that's a bit ambiguous can be helpful sometimes.

T&FN: *You were a relay alternate on the '88 Olympic team, but before Barcelona—maybe even up to the 200 final—had you ever given much thought to the meaning of "Olympic champion"?*

Marsh: I'd have to say yes. When I started training for the '92 season, that was my goal. I didn't know what event, the 100 or 200; I didn't even know if I'd make the team.

But I wanted to be an Olympic champion. I also have to say that at that time, it was a far-, far-, far-fetched goal. But things developed and I was able to make it.

T&FN: *So how do you see it now that you are one? Or was that last year and this season is now?*

Marsh: I feel you have to have a balance between the two outlooks. I'm proud of what I've done and obviously it has been a confidence-builder.

When I step on the track now, it isn't like years ago, when I wondered if I could do it. Now, I know I can do it and if I don't, it's impossible for me to attribute it to lack of talent. So, in that way, winning those titles has helped me.

On the other hand, that is the past. It's over. What I did in Barcelona and last year will in no way help me this year. I believe that all events are mutually exclusive.

I'm not guaranteed anything—but that's what makes it fun. Part of the fun of track, and life, is uncertainty. If you learn to deal with uncertainty in effective ways, you can have fun.

T&FN: *In a variation on uncertainty, an athlete never can plan to break a World Record. But can you guess what kind of competition might bring out that kind of performance in you? An Olympic final?*

Marsh: You have to pay attention to the practical. There's always a rift when we think between our dreams and what's practical. But you do need that kind of competition: eight guys in there who are really going for it.

You have to know that if you make even the slightest mistake, you'll lose. There has to be that kind of tension. But that's a healthy tension, the kind that can produce a record.

The main thing is that the sport goes forward. I feel that's more important than even our individual goals and sometimes that's hard

to see. Those situations—setting a record—benefit the sport, cause excitement with fans and media, and so on.

I definitely feel the World Record can be

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broken. By whom? [laughs] I don't know. We have plenty of sprinters who could do it: Carl, Michael Johnson, Leroy, any of the guys down here.

T&FN: *You missed the WR by 0.01 in your Barcelona semi, when you slowed down. For only the millionth time, why did you slow?*

Marsh: I simply followed Coach Tellez's directions. He told me, "Slow down if you're comfortable. Just make the final."

I never knew I was running that fast—and after the race, he told me that he didn't expect me to run that fast. He might have changed his decision had he known that. Maybe not.

But I do feel it isn't fair to judge either me or him about a past race with information that nobody had at the time. And it depends on how you look at it. Some say that I missed the World Record. But I choose to look at it that I was just 0.01 away.

T&FN: *In past years, it seemed you ran the 100 more. But you became the premier 200 man last year. Was it a conscious plan, by you or Coach Tellez, to concentrate more on the 200 in '92?*

Marsh: Not at all. When I first moved to Houston, Coach Tellez told me I wasn't just a 100m sprinter just because in the past I chose to specialize. I had run a few deuces, but I always felt I was a 100m sprinter. He's the one who told me I could run both of them.

When I went to the Trials, I fully planned to try to make it in both sprints. I didn't chose one over the other. Because of how things turned out, I was perceived as being a 200 specialist. I made a mistake in the 100 and didn't make the team.

But making it in the 200 changed the focus of my whole season. Now, I'm in a new year and I'm pursuing them both equally. No bias toward one.

T&FN: *What was the mistake you feel you made in the 100?*

Marsh: It was a mental mistake. I knew I had a chance to make the team in the 200. In that kind of pressure situation, when I thought I had another way out, I didn't treat the 100 like a life-and-death situation. In the 200, my

focus was different: "If I don't do it now, I'm not going."

I had a degree of that healthy tension in the 100, but it wasn't enough. I knew I could come back in the 200 later in the week. It's every human's tendency to procrastinate and that was my mistake.

T&FN: *How do you avoid that trap now?*

Marsh: I've learned that you have to stay in the present. I should have taken my mind out of the past and not put it in the future, but focused it only in the present.

T&FN: *Some champions claim it's tougher to stay at the top than it is to get there. What are your thoughts?*

Marsh: I disagree with that totally. I don't think it's tougher to stay at the top. I feel the mistake most people make is they forget what it took to get to the top. They forget what manner of person they used to be, as if something is guaranteed.

Again, it's the idea of your thinking remaining in the past. It's just as dangerous to hold on to past failures as it is to hold on to past successes. What you have to do is simply forget; just work as if nothing is guaranteed.

T&FN: *What is the most important thing to you personally that happens in your life as a result of being an Olympic champion?*

Marsh: I would like people to be influenced by my character and discipline more than anything else. When I meet fans, or do interviews, or when I run; I want those to encourage other people. They can draw confidence that they can do the best at whatever they choose.

That's what I'd like to do with the rest of my life. Track is temporary. Rather than have people say, "Wow, what a fast guy!" I'd much rather have them say, "What a good guy."

My goal, while I'm visible in the sport, is for people to be pleased with the way I handle success. But just as much, with the way I handle defeat. □

MARSH IN A NUTSHELL

Michael Lawrence Marsh was born August 4, 1967, in Los Angeles, and is 5-10/165. Graduated from Hawthorne (Ca) HS '85 and ran for UCLA '86-'89. Currently trains in Houston and represents the Santa Monica TC.

Major Meets: 100—3h)NCAA, 3)TAC Jr, 2)PA Jr ('86); 3)NCAA, 5h)TAC ('87); 4)NCAA, 6)OT ('88); 9)NCAA, =5s)TAC, 1)OF ('89); 4)TAC ('90); 7)TAC ('91); 4)OT ('92).

200—3h)NCAA, 3)TAC Jr ('86); 7)NCAA ('89); 5s)TAC ('90); 5)TAC ('91); 2)OT, 1)OG ('92).

PRs: 100—9.93 (=6, =8 W; =4, =6 A) ('92); 200—19.73 AR, l-a WR (2, 2 W) ('92); 400—45.53 ('93).

His progression (World & U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Yr	Age	Affil	Class	100	200
'85	17	Ca HS	Sr	10.6	20.82
'86	18	UCLA	Fr	10.22	20.69
'87	19	"	So	10.26 (x, 10)	20.59
'88	20	"	Jr	10.12 (x, 7)	20.35
'89	21	"	Sr	10.07 (8, 6)	20.42
'90	22	SMTC		10.08(A) (x, 7)	20.47
'91	23	"		10.15 (x, 6)	20.44 (x, 6)
'92	24	"		9.93 (x, 5)	19.73 (1, 1)
'93	25	"		9.97w	—