



ALISPORT/Cray Mortimore

## T&FN INTERVIEW

# OLLAN CASSELL

**R**ecent months have brought a storm of controversy over TAC's drug-testing programs. An unprecedented swarm of 3-month suspensions for athletes caught using stimulants commonly found in cold medicines has engendered charges that TAC has gone too far.

Retorts followed that athletes are taking suspiciously high doses, if cold medicine is all they're using. Meanwhile, retired steeplechaser Henry Marsh drew a much-criticized 2-year ban for allegedly "refusing" to take a test.

In the latest development (see p. 46), athletes Edwin Moses, Harvey Glance, Doriane Lambelet and Linda Sheskey—architects of the year-round testing program—have resigned, citing lack of trust in TAC's national office and the organization's Executive Director, Ollan Cassell.

Normally reticent to submit to lengthy interrogation by the press, the 52-year-old Cassell was

eager to talk to T&FN about the whole affair.

Our exclusive interview:

**T&FN:** Edwin Moses and his fellow resignees apparently felt betrayed to learn that a plan to test all 14 drawn athletes for 13 of the 52 weeks of the year [i.e., eliminating the 75M dispensation] had not yet been instituted. Will that plan take effect this year?

**Cassell:** The Substance Abuse Committee is the one that sets policy. It was discussed here, prior to our Board of Directors meeting in March, and the 13 weeks was approved to be an administrative effort that we would carry out here at the office, based on sample-collectors, based on finances, based on the

whole bunches of things that go into it.

**T&FN:** What's holding it up?

**Cassell:** Right now we're unable to find enough collectors.

**T&FN:** TAC has budgeted \$200,000 for this program in 1990, but you estimate it could cost \$350-400,000. How will this shortfall be covered?

**Cassell:** There was a resolution adopted in February '89 at the USOC House of Delegates meeting that the USOC should get into year-round testing.

**T&FN:** The USOC will eventually take over the whole program?

**Cassell:** The way the program is envisioned at the USOC level is that the USOC would have basic administrative functions common to all of the sports. Hearings, notification, sample collection, lab reports, all those things are done the same way in all the different sports regardless of what kind of sport it is.

**T&FN:** The Amateur Sports Act of the U.S. Congress, however, mandates some TAC involvement, correct?

**Cassell:** Federal law and the IAAF require each governing body to be the one that takes sanction against athletes. An outside group, like the USOC—even though they can have a hearing—they can give notification, they can do the testing, they can do all those things. It is still the duty of the governing body to take the final action. . . to take a sanction.

**T&FN:** If the USOC doesn't come on line soon, you'll have to take money from other programs. How might that be avoided?

**Cassell:** We're making a proposal to the USOC that TAC be a pilot project. Before they get all the way into their program, they can learn of some of the potholes that we have learned about. They could provide some support for that, because they would be in the learning curve too.

We also continue to have discussions with collecting agencies to see if we can forge an agreement with a collecting agency that they would have more collectors throughout the country. Right now we use USOC collectors, we use NCAA collectors, and we have a few of our own collectors.

**T&FN:** Do you think this is the best use for such a large sum of money?

**Cassell:** It could be useful in other areas, but I think that at the same time we want to have a program in drug test-



ing that is respected by everyone, that is fair, and that provides assurance to the athletes that they're competing on natural ability. Not on drug ability, not on a doctor's ability.

At the same time, we have to not just think about our own competitions; we have to think about the overseas people. We want those people to have the same kind of program that we have.

**T&FN:** Edwin Moses has called for a testing program completely independent of the national office, presumably to avoid conflicts of interest.

You currently have an accounting firm and an independent firm carrying out parts of the process, plus a Custodial Board to monitor the program. These are good checks, but since you are personally notified of all positive or missed tests wouldn't you have the opportunity to influence hearing panels' decisions?

**Cassell:** No, because the panelists' names are drawn by computer. I have no personal knowledge of who the panelists are, and our office's contact with panelists is restricted to providing them with information about the positive test.

**T&FN:** How do you feel about the public perception that TAC is ridiculously suspending athletes for taking cold medicines and vitamins?

**Cassell:** Some of those things are unfortunate because the levels of some of the athletes have been very high in the ephedrine area. They've complained about it, but the scientific studies indicate that when you get beyond a certain level, there's an advantage that you gain. The levels of the people that have been suspended have been high levels.

**T&FN:** Perhaps it's been hurtful to the sport's image, though, that some of this information about levels and other things has come out in bits and pieces.

**Cassell:** I think you may be right about that, but you see, we're bound by confidentiality—as far as the release of an athlete's name—until a certain process has been completed within TAC.

In some of these instances, some of these athletes have broken the confidentiality themselves. Larry Myricks went to the press and talked about it before it was ever released from here.

We had made a conscious effort to say that they were cold medicines. We were trying to make a difference between an ephedrine and a steroid.



Moses (l) and Glance had happier times on the track than they experienced as drug-testing administrators for TAC. See p. 46 for news on their resignations.

Hopefully the public and the press will understand that this is not something that an athlete has been doing for 2 years or for 6 months like they have to do with steroids in order to build themselves up so they can gain an advantage. Now, if you get to a high level [like some of those suspended] doctors tell us you would almost have to take maybe 10 or 15 bottles of those things in order to get to that level.

**T&FN:** Isn't it counterproductive for such negative news to come out before the hearing process is complete, when the end result might be exoneration, as it was for Andre Cason?

**Cassell:** The rules require us to release the names. Those were the rules that were adopted the '89 TAC Convention.

**T&FN:** Might not some bad publicity be avoided if B-positive tests were not announced per se, but if the names were simply available as public records?

**Cassell:** We don't like to get bad publicity, but at the same time, when this was debated by our Legislative Committee that was thought to be a deterrent, so they would not try to dodge the year-round testing.

**T&FN:** Do IAAF rules require TAC to release the names?

**Cassell:** Our rules in those instances are a little bit different than the IAAF. The IAAF rule says they announce after the A [sample tests positive]. Because the federal law says we have to give a hearing, we have gone to three different steps in our process. One



is a stay, and they have to ask for a stay within 48 hours after they've been notified that their B sample was positive. If the stay is granted then we don't release the name. If the stay is not granted then we release the name.

**T&FN:** Has TAC, as Marsh and others have claimed, failed to follow its own protocol in some instances?

**Cassell:** There have been some adjustments that it was necessary to make in the protocol, because when you go into a program that is this massive and this great—and totally a new program where you're going into new administrative areas—you're going to find that you have to make adjustments as you go along.

**T&FN:** In retrospect, do you think it has been good for track to be the guinea pig program that makes the initial mistakes and catches flak for it?

**Cassell:** I think part of the reason that we went into this program, or most of it, has been achieved. Maybe right now at this instant we're getting hit pretty hard on some of these suspensions because some of them are really misunderstood. Part of the reason was that we wanted the public and we want the press to feel that we have a clean sport, and we're against drugs, and we don't want drugs in the sport.

I think some of those things have been achieved even though they've been achieved at the expense of some negative publicity. I think the program, as we go forward, is going to be a very positive one. □