

T&FN INTERVIEW

SHELLY STEELY

by Jeff Hollobaugh

Shelly Steely has just finished her morning run on a breezy day near the New Mexico home she shares with husband, Aaron Ramirez. The two Olympians—along with Irish marathoner John Treacy—started together, but eventually Steely peeled off for 5M while the men finished 10. "I just had to run all the way back in the wind," she says. "It was brutal."

In the midst of a banner indoor season, the Millrose mile champ looks back on '92 with mixed feelings: "I actually think '91 was a better year for me all around." But it was '92, she acknowledges, that gave her PRs in all of her main events, an Olympic team berth and her first World Ranking.

Now in her eighth year of being coached by former Athletics West mentor Dick Brown, Steely puts her running in perspective, and stresses the importance of pursuing a well-rounded existence.

That translates into plans for a career at rehabilitation counseling, along with a sprinkling of baseball card collecting and fishing expeditions with Ramirez. The better fisher? "I think I am," she says without hesitation. "I've certainly caught the biggest fish."

STEELY'S PROGRESSION

Anne Rochelle "Shelly" Steely was born October 23, 1962, in Reading, Pennsylvania, and is 5-7/117. Graduated from Bishop Conwell HS in Levittown, Pennsylvania in '80 and competed for Florida through '85. Currently represents Mizuno.

Major Meets: 1500—9s)OT ('88).

3000—3)NCAA, 2)TAC, 8s)OT ('84); 8)TAC ('86); 10h)TAC ('87); 7)TAC, 14)OT ('88); 6)TAC, 6)OF ('89); 1)TAC, 14)WC ('91); 2)OT, 7)OG ('92).

5000—dnf-h)NCAA ('85); 7)TAC ('90).

10,000—8)TAC, 1)OF ('90).

PRs: 800—2:05.12 ('91); 1000—2:48.86i ('85); 1500—4:05.07 ('92) (14, x A); Mile—4:25.49 ('92) (8, x A); 2000—5:45.56 ('93) (13, x A); 3000—8:41.28 ('92) (5, x A); 2M—9:57.10 ('85); 5000—15:08.67 ('92) (5, 8 A); 10,000—32:41.14 ('90) (U.S. Ranked No. 4 that year).

Progression (World & U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	1500	3000	5000
1980	17	4:30.2	—	—
1981	18	did not compete (injured)	—	—
1982	19	4:32.03	—	—
1983	20	—	—	34:25.5 (10K)
1984	21	4:16.40	9:03.86	15:40.97 (x, 8)
1985	22	4:16.51i	9:09.02i	16:10.8
1986	23	—	9:03.95 (x, 10)	—
1987	24	—	9:44.30	—
1988	25	4:15.99	9:11.42i	—
1989	26	4:19.17	9:18.60	16:27.82
1990	27	4:17.7	9:01.86 (x, 9)	15:41.23 (x, 5)
1991	28	4:06.01 (x, 4)	8:47.68 (x, 3)	15:15.05 (x, 1)
1992	29	4:05.07 (x, 4)	8:41.28 (7, 2)	15:08.67 (x, 1)

T&FN: What race last year meant the most to you?

Steely: Well, I have to say the Olympic Trials. That was probably my best race. I didn't even know that I'd run 8:41 until I saw the times up on the board. I was very focused and did what I had to do. My real goal was just to make the Olympic team. So it didn't matter if I was 1st or 3rd—if I made the team that would be fine.

Then I prepared just to put it all on the line in the Olympics, but the way the race went... I wasn't very happy about it. Tactical as it was, a lot of that was out of my control. But I think the biggest mistake I made was being on the inside. Up until about 250 to go I felt I did everything right. I was where I had to be, I wasn't wasting any energy getting pushed around. I wasn't happy with it.

T&FN: Now that you're working on '93, how important is the indoor circuit to you?

Steely: It serves its purpose. It's no more important to me than it was last year. The reason I run it is just to work on my leg speed a little bit. I actually like indoors. I think I like it more than outdoors. For me it's easier to concentrate; you don't have to deal with all the elements. Sometimes it's kind of brutal on the shorter tracks, but racing the mile like I do, I can handle that. 3000s become a little mental when you're running 22 laps.

T&FN: Is Toronto a goal this winter?

Steely: It isn't, and I'm prepared to receive some criticism on that. Racing at the level I'm racing at now, I can be a factor in a lot of races. I'm sure a lot of people expect me to go to Toronto. But the last couple of years have been real difficult. I feel I've tried to train and race at a high level, with the World Champs in '91, then the Olympics last year, then the World Championships again this year.

For me to really run at my best up until the nationals and throughout the summer, I think that I need to have a little down time. I need to look forward to the time when I can take a little bit of a break and start building toward the outdoor season. Toronto would

just be too much of an emotional strain.

T&FN: Why aren't you running cross country this year?

Steely: I've been on four World Championships teams, and every year I do worse. I got upset with banging my head against a wall. In '91, I finished within three seconds of Lynn [Jennings] at the Trials, ran 8:51 indoors, 15:22 on the roads. I thought I was in the best shape of my life and I ended up finishing 51st in Belgium. To me, it served no purpose anymore.

I find that running indoors is much more fun. To run a race that takes 4½ minutes certainly is much more appealing than running 6km in mud and dirt and the elements.

T&FN: Are you concerned about a possible Stuttgart boycott?

Steely: That's unfortunate, and I'm sure [potential boycotters] have their reasons. They probably have much greater awareness of funds and really believe that prize money should exist. I'd love for it to exist. But I compete for the sheer love of competing.

Most athletes have bigger problems than worrying about prize money at the World Championships. I'd like to see more clubs and support for runners. I think it's real tragic what's happening to a lot of my fellow athletes as far as shoe company support. People who have had longtime support are being dropped. These people have bigger problems than prize money at the Worlds.

T&FN: How did you get your start?

Steely: I started running when I was 10. I was a sprinter. In fact, I sprinted up until I was a senior in high school. I had a lot of leg speed. Except when I got to high school, believe it or not I didn't have the coaching that I had in 7th and 8th grade. I only practiced 2 days a week and I kept getting slower. My junior year, the coach said if I didn't place in the 100 that year I'd have to move up to the mile my senior year. So I moved up.

My first year at Florida I had tendinitis in my knee so I sat out most of the year. My sophomore year I did okay. My junior year I had an Achilles injury. I ran okay. But by '84 I was running pretty well.

I get so aggravated. One of my friends told me that when they did the TV commentary for [a recent indoor meet], they said something like, "Shelly Steely virtually came out of nowhere in '91." And I'm like, furious, because in '84 in Eugene in the NCAA Championships Patti Sue and I are duking it out for 2nd place.

I ran 15:40 in college, and I was 2nd in NCAA cross country in '84. It seems so strange to hear people say I came out of nowhere like I just took up running a couple years ago.

T&FN: What did it take for you to progress from a 9:03 runner to world class?

Steely: You know, I didn't realize at the time that I didn't do enough work to be a 3000 runner. To be honest with you, I never felt comfortable in the event till about '91. I'd get to the mile and I'd fall asleep for 400-600m, and then I'd wake up and say, "OK, I can handle this." I don't think that I did enough work.



T&FN: At what point did you decide you were really going to be a serious runner after college and beyond?

Steely: I always wanted to be a serious runner. I guess I was misled into thinking what exactly I should be doing. All throughout '86, '87, '88 I was running 9:05s or so. I would be in the final at TAC but no one would even know I was there because I wasn't in the top 3.

I was always competitive, and I was running my 50M a week, but I was working full-time for a couple of years. I was in graduate school. It was real important for me to get my masters. I felt like with that in my back pocket I was now in a

position where I could just put everything on the line.

T&FN: Has marriage to Aaron helped your running?

Steely: People ask me that all the time. Let me think about that [laughs, and pauses]. The thing that marriage has done for me is it has added a lot of stability to my life. Before I was dating Aaron I was goofing off a lot. I'd hang out with my friends, doing the things you do when you hang out with all of your girlfriends. Stay out late, things like that. Now I just stay out late with Aaron. But it has added a lot of stability to my life. Anytime you can have stability, you'll definitely

run a little bit better.

T&FN: You've said it was important for you to finish your masters' degree. What are your plans now for a post-running career?

Steely: My degree is in health science, with an emphasis on rehabilitation counseling. I'll be working with people with disabilities.

I would like to be using my degree, even now. But I find that counseling is very emotionally draining. The two years I spent in graduate school I had a couple of internships to do, and on some days I couldn't even finish my run because I was so exhausted. I know better than to even embark on something like that now.

T&FN: How long do you hope to keep running on a top level?

Steely: I plan on being competitive through '97. I have no plans to run a marathon until after that.

T&FN: A marathon is lurking in the back of your head?

Steely: Yeah, definitely. I think that—and perhaps I'm wrong—but I think that a lot of distance runners, they'd probably all like to try it before they finish running. Aaron may even run a marathon sooner than I would. I think he'd be a great marathoner, because mentally he can keep it together for so long. And I think that he can translate that into a really good marathon. Plus he's very strong. He's got a real good stride. He's very efficient.

T&FN: What's your biggest strength as a racer?

Steely: I can run from the front or the back. Which is good because so many times you get into races and you almost know what they're going to do. I can be a little unpredictable.

T&FN: Just how intense are you about your running?

Steely: There's a tendency for people to think that at this level you have to have tunnel vision and be an athlete exclusive of having a life. I've never thought of myself that way. I certainly take time to enjoy other things in life. I pride myself on that. I don't live and die by my races.

Someone asked me, "What happens between you and Aaron when one of you has a bad race and one of you has a good race?" Absolutely nothing. It doesn't change things at all, because that's not what our lives are about.

T&FN: What do you tell someone who asks what you do for a living?

Steely: People ask us that a lot. I've got to tell you this. We went to the bank one day and we were depositing a check and it said "prize money" on it. The bank teller says, "So what do you guys do for a living? Do you just go to game shows?"

She really thought that we went from game show to game show. I thought that was really funny. Normally people say, "Well what do you do?" and we say, "We run." And they say, "Well, what do you mean you run?" We'll say, "We compete, you know, as athletes."

Sometimes you wish you could say something a little more impressive. But people are always supportive. We have yet to run into anybody who says, "God, when are you going to get on with your lives?" □