

# STEVE CRAM



Steve Powell/All-Sport

**T**he road to Hebburn runs past the Gateshead International Track Stadium, where some of Britain's finest athletes have fought their hearts out. The place is quiet this day, just a few joggers turning into the structure.

Further to the left runs the River Tyne, silent, dark and deep. Huge shipbuilding cranes tower above the slipways and engineering sheds where many of Britain's greatest warships and merchant vessels have been forged, ready to move into the oceans of the world.

A few miles in the distance rise the high stacks of the Monkton coke works, processing coal gouged from the deep tunnels of nearby mines. And all around is suburban housing, cozy-looking with neat gardens out front.

It all seems so ordinary, part of daily life in Northeast England. As I turn into the Hebburn athletic track, home of the Jarrow & Hebburn Athletic Club, three runners emerge from through the gates and move easily along the road. From their effortless movement, it's easy to tell they are trained athletes.

The center runner is tall and fair-haired and as they pass, he smiles and laughs as the three enjoy a joke. They pass a group talking beside a front garden and the men glance up idly. The men don't stop talking, but recognition of the runners is apparent on their faces. Their expressions show more: a mixture of admiration, respect, approval.

The club track and clubhouse are crowded with children, young men, older men. It all seems very ordinary, but this environment has produced a man—Steve Cram—one of the finest middle-distance talents of all time. There certainly is nothing ordinary about Cram, and Tyneside, Jarrow and Hebburn know it.

Cram was born in Gateshead, just jogging distance from where Gateshead Stadium now stands. Steve and Karen, his wife of 2½ years, still live in Jarrow. Cram's talent was spotted early by friend and coach Jimmy Hedley, who encouraged young Steve to join the local track club, Jarrow & Hebburn. Hedley convinced Steve he could train him to become a top athlete, if Steve was prepared to work hard at it. Steve agreed.

Cram was no instant success, but he worked hard and by 1977, things started to click. Steve set a U.K. age-16 best of 3:47.7 in the 1500; the next year he lowered the age-17 mark to 3:42.7, breaking the record set by another Steve, Ovett by name.

That same year, Cram broke Jim Ryun's longstanding world age-17 mile record with his 3:57.43. It has been success upon success since: making the '80 Olympic 1500 final at age 19; winning the European and Commonwealth 1500s in 1982 and the World Championships gold in Helsinki; overcoming injury to take the silver medal behind Seb Coe's brilliant Olympic defense in Los Angeles.

But nothing has matched the 1985 Steve Cram: three World Records in 20 days over the 1500, mile and 2000. He is only the fourth man ever to hold that trio of records simultaneously, joining Paavo Nurmi, Jules Ladoumeque and Gunder Hagg. Plus Cram has run the No. 2 kilometer ever.

Perhaps what is most notable about Cram's

records—and most satisfying to him—is a fact that comes out in the conversation which follows Cram's return after a half-hour run. Cram's achievements have resulted from racing the competition off its feet, not in well-paced runs which have been little more than races against the clock.

*The finest middle-distance runner in the world today makes it clear that's how he likes it:*

**T&FN:** *What do you expect of yourself in running?*

**Cram:** Well, I know that when I finish up with my career, I want to have realized all the potential I felt I had. Regardless of the event, too, so it's not just in the 1500 and mile but maybe someday in the 5000 as well.

If I can do that, then at the end I can finish happily and say I did the best I could. Not feel I missed out on anything, or didn't achieve everything I felt I could achieve.

**T&FN:** *Do you have any particular goals at the moment?*

**Cram:** This particular year was difficult in terms of goals because there are no major championships. And I had a dodgy year last year; things didn't go quite as well as I wanted.

So it was important this year to try and get a lot of confidence back and basically try to improve on all the times I have done. And right across the board, even up to the 5000 if I possibly could.

I knew it would be a year of trying to go out and run fast times. But I also wanted to go out and race against people; whether I got beat or not I didn't mind. I just wanted to be in there racing and know where I stood against the Aouitas and Cruzes and Coes.

So then next year and the year after—when we will have major championships—I will know where I stand in relation to them and whether or not I need to train harder, or change my training, do more speedwork or whatever.

Next year, we've got the Europeans and Commonwealth and the year after are the World Championships, so those big meets will take precedence over running fast times. Probably next year we won't see so many fast times being run.

**T&FN:** *We spoke with you last after the '82 season, which was a very successful one for you as you won the European and Commonwealth 1500s and ranked No. 1 in the world. In '83, then, you won the World Championships in Helsinki—was that an important stepping stone in your career?*

**Cram:** Yes, it was. The Europeans and Commonwealth were important because they were the first major championships I had been in when I had any chance of winning a medal. And I came out with the golds.

In the World Championships, everybody was going to be there. The

European and Commonwealth fields had been a little weak, although those races gave me a lot of experience. The Worlds were very important for that reason; they signaled the fact that I wasn't a half step below everybody else. I was on the same level.

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## "It Was Much More Important To Win Those Races; The Records Just Came As A Bonus."

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After Helsinki, there was still some talk that Coe hadn't been there and Ovett ran a bad race. But I have always said that championships are decided among the guys who are there on the day. There's no point in worrying about the guys who aren't there.

I hit Helsinki on a high, really. I got over some injury problems before that and then had a good meet at the Worlds. Then after that, I ran some good races, too. I looked ahead very much to 1984.

**T&FN:** *In Los Angeles, you were considered the cofavorite in the 1500, along with Seb. How did you rate your chances?*

**Cram:** I really didn't know. I felt I would have to rely on the strength side of things because I had missed so much training. I had turned an ankle while training in America in the spring and then the calf problem cropped up. Running three rounds, I felt would mean the pace wouldn't be too fast. I planned to go from about 400 or 300m out in the final and just see what happened.

I tried to stick to that pre-race plan, but the pace had been so fast, there just was no way I could do it. I hadn't run anywhere near that pace all season because I had had so many problems. I just wasn't in shape to cope with that.

The race was lost because I wasn't prepared for that kind of race. I hadn't been able to do the training and I hadn't run the races to be ready for it.

Also, on the day, Seb ran really well. He ran above himself; I doubt he thought he would run that fast. Even if I had been 100% fit, there's no way I can see I would have won that race.

I would have liked to have been in that race in better shape and been able to do the things I wanted to do. I would like

to have felt I could have done something about it like I wanted.

I mean I was pleased with the silver. If you had said to me a month beforehand, when I was thinking of not even going, "You can have the silver medal," I would have said, "Great, thanks very much." You can always look back and think how you would have liked things to be.

**T&FN:** *And the World Records—did you have those in mind at the beginning of the season?*

**Cram:** Not really. I felt I probably was capable of running faster than what I had before. I felt if I did that, I could come close to running World Record times.

But the way the records came about was probably the better thing, not so much the records themselves. The fact the records came against Aouita in Nice and Coe in Oslo.

For me, it was much more important to win those races and the records just came as a bonus. Also, if I had been expecting fast times, I would have expected them to come later on in the season.

But my first race in Oslo at the end of June, when I ran 3:31.34, felt so good and so comfortable that it gave me a lot of confidence. I realized I was running quite well, and that I should go out and find good races because I didn't know how long it would last.

Sure, take advantage of the opportunity. "Make hay while the sun shines," as they say. In another couple of weeks, I might not have been running well.

**T&FN:** *Do you rate the Olympics above setting World Records?*

**Cram:** Yes, I would have loved to have won the Olympic gold. That would have been the four major championships. If I never set another World Record in my career, it would have been more of an achievement to have won those four championships.

I have known it has been within my capabilities to run World Records, just as it is for a number of people. But not everyone can win an Olympic gold medal. In the space of the four years between Olympics, only one guy will win a gold medal but maybe three or four will set World Records.

World Records come and go, but the Olympics come around only once every four years. You may get only that one chance. If you don't capitalize on that chance, you can't wake up the next morning and say, "Oh well, I'll have another go next week." You've got to wait four years. But with World Records, you always have more chances.

**T&FN:** *The first of your three World Record races this season was the 1500 at Nice against Aouita. Did you see it as just a race to win, or was it a record attempt?*

—continued—

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## STEVE CRAM INTERVIEW—continued:

Cram: Probably a bit of both. I wanted to win the race, first and foremost. But both of us, Aouita and me, were looking to run very fast. Cruz was a late addition to the race, but I didn't think he was going to be capable of running 3:30 or faster.

But I knew Aouita was certainly capable of it. And we both wanted fast times and we both wanted to win the race. I felt it would be a case of hitting the bell in a very fast time and then just trying to win the race.

Then I knew if I won the race, I would have to run very fast to do so. In the end, that was the case.

I felt if we reached the bell in 2:35 or 2:36, we would have a chance. When I heard [clubmate] Dave Roberts call out 2:36, I thought, "Well, the record is on." But it was first the instinct of wanting to win the race than consciously trying to go for the record. That's why I kicked away so early.

I didn't mean to kick so hard, but I felt comfortable and so I kicked harder than usual. I tried to concentrate on just staying relaxed and going for the line. I couldn't see any shadows and, as far as I was concerned, I was quite far ahead. It wasn't until the last five meters that I realized Aouita was so close.

I think I caught Aouita by surprise when I kicked so hard so early. He wasn't expecting it and it took some time for him to react and get past Gonzalez, who also was trying to react. Aouita got very close at the end, but I know when I'm dragging everything out. I had something left.

T&FN: Many very informed observers of the sport have said it probably was one of the very best 1500 races that has ever been. It had everything: a fast pace, a World Record, a tight finish. How do you react to it?

Cram: For me, obviously, it was the best 1500 I've ever run because it's the fastest. And I beat somebody like Aouita. But I feel it's very difficult to measure races, one against another as far as which race is better. I think every race has its own particular merits and people remember them for their own special reasons. It's very difficult to judge.

T&FN: From Nice, it was on to Bislett and the mile, which could be seen in a number of ways: a rematch between you and Coe; a record attempt; just another race. How did you approach the race?

Cram: Moreso than Nice, this one was just a race to me. The important thing was to win; there would be no point in me running a fast time but finish 2nd to Seb or anyone else.

It was a race which had been building up since right from the start of the season. We knew most everybody would be there, although Aouita decided to do the 5000.

But I certainly knew that Seb would

be there and that was important to me, especially after Los Angeles. It was important for me to still feel I was able to beat him.

Also, it was the first chance both of us had had in a long time to go into a race feeling 100% fit, both confident and both looking forward to the race.

T&FN: It must have been especially pleasing then to beat him and take his record. Did you find that exhilarating?

Cram: Well, running any personal record is pleasing and on that occasion it was even moreso because I really didn't think we would do it. I hit the bell in 2:53-something and I knew I wasn't going to kick from the bell. I would start winding up down the last backstraight and then kick over the final 200.

At best, I thought we would run only a 55 last lap, so I was looking at maybe 3:48 or 3:49. I was really surprised when I went across the line and saw 3:46.

T&FN: Now that 3:46 has been run, people will inevitably say 3:45 is next. Is 3:45 in the cards for you?

Cram: Oh, yes, I think so. And not just for me but for several other runners as well. We had a slow third lap, simply because everyone was watching each other. In a race where someone goes specifically just for the time, then 3:45 certainly is in the cards.

T&FN: Many people feel the mile has something very special about it, more even than the 1500. Does it have an extra quality for you?

Cram: To be honest, I probably prefer the 1500. I'm a bit younger than some of the other guys and maybe the mile has lost a little of its mystique.

The 1500 is the championship distance. The mile isn't even run in most countries and it isn't run here in England as much as it used to be.

T&FN: Your third record came in Budapest over 2000. You have said since, as have others, that it was an especially tough record to beat. How do you view that?

Cram: It was hard to beat in the sense that I really didn't have any competition in the race. For me, that is always much more of a spur than running against the clock. But because I knew I wouldn't have any real competition, I knew I would be on my own for at least two laps.

For me, it's never easy to just run against the clock. It didn't matter to me if I broke the World Record or not. I have described racing the clock as having a guillotine hanging over your head all the time! Without the incentive of someone behind you—without that fear of being beaten—it's not as easy to push yourself. At least I don't feel it is as easy.

When I first crossed the line, the first

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reaction was that I hadn't broken the record. Nobody was sure until it was checked on the finish photo. Actually, I wasn't too disappointed at all. I hated to miss the record by such a small margin, but I was pleased with the way I had run and was quite happy with my performance. When the finish picture was checked later and I was given the World Record, it was extra pleasing.

John's record was very tough to beat. It was remarkable at the time it was run because the mile record was 3:49 and now it is 3:46. So, theoretically, we should be running the 2000 about three seconds faster.

I do feel we could run a second or so faster with good competition in the race. But, having said that, John didn't really have any competition in his race either.

**T&FN:** *As a nation, Britain has reached a tremendously high plane in world athletics in the middle distances. There have been Steve Ovett and Seb Coe and now you, as well as many other guys who have kept this country at that high level. Can we keep it up?*

**Cram:** I feel our tradition in those events will mean we will still have very, very good athletes in the middle distances. Whether or not we will have a period like we have had the past 7-8 years, I don't know.

Steve isn't running as well as he once was. Both of them are talking about moving up to the 5000. Seb is even talking of retiring within a couple of years. At the moment, there isn't anyone you can say will immediately step into their shoes.

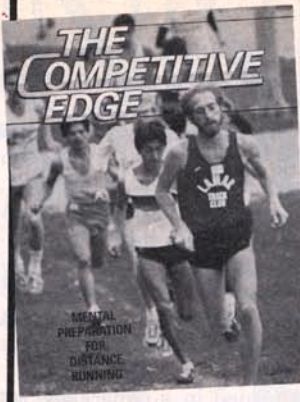
There are a lot of good youngsters around, but they will need a few years to mature. And certainly not all youngsters make it to be Olympic champions and World Record holders. I think it will be a while before we see again another period like we have had, where two or three guys like ourselves are all running well at the same time.

**T&FN:** *I have watched you perform since your teenage days in the mid-'70s and obviously you have always enjoyed running. With all the pressures which are put on you now, do you find it is still as pleasurable as it has always been?*

**Cram:** Athletics itself is; the going out and running and training and racing gives great pleasure. When you are running well, obviously, it is even more so.

The other side of it sometimes gets you down a little bit, but it is all part of being successful. If you can't accept that and can't take it, then it probably makes the running that much harder.

I try to have the same attitude toward that side as I do toward some aspects of training: I wouldn't call it a "necessary evil," but it's something which is there and there's no point in getting worked up or



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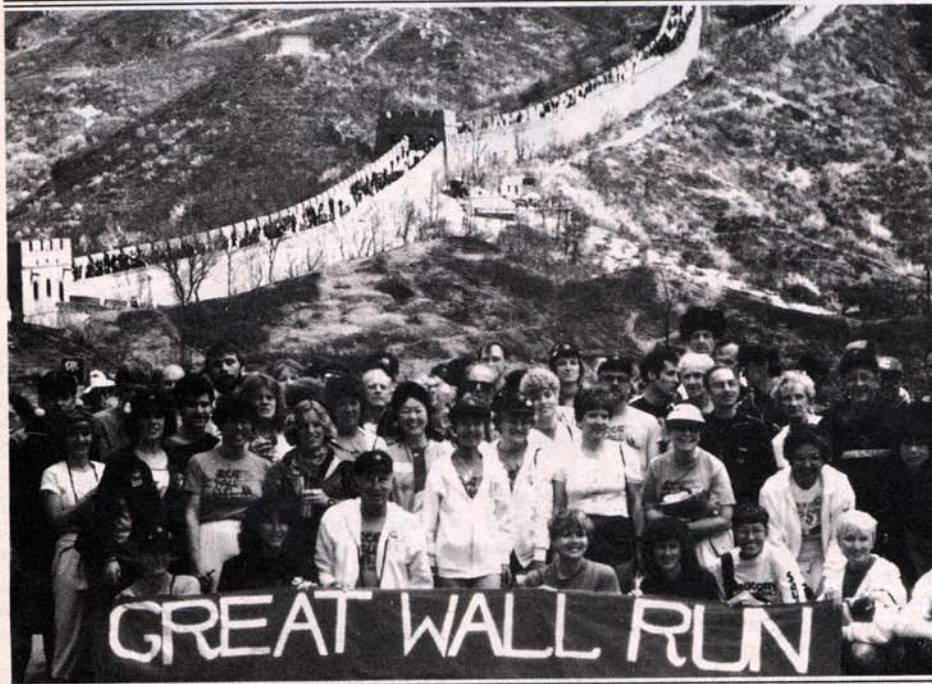
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## CRAM INTERVIEW—continued:

worried about it. Doing that just makes it 10 times as bad.

So I try to be friendly, or fairly friendly at least, towards the press and treat things very much in a lighthearted manner if I can. Certainly it makes things a little easier at times.

There *are* times when I get fed up with the press phoning all the time, or people wanting to do articles or wanting to take a photo of this or that. I've tried very much to keep everything tied down to the running side of things. As long as people want to do stories about the running side, fair enough. I don't mind talking to the athletics press.

But when the general press wants to do things on what I like to eat, or my social life or silly things like that, I don't particularly like it.

**T&FN:** *Now what about the future? Are you looking forward to the 1500 in 1988, or might you have moved up by then?*

**Cram:** I don't think I will have moved up by then. It's possible, but I feel there is a bit of a void in my record since I didn't win in '84. That's my long-term goal.

My short-term goals are the European, Commonwealth and World Championships coming up in the next couple of years. So I have all those things to deal with before 1988. But the Olympics is always at the back of my mind and I would think I'll still be running 1500s in '88. I'll be 27 then and I should still be capable of running it well.

Certainly there will be new guys coming up and running the distance. But as long as I still consider myself to be improving and running the event well, I'll still do it.

**T&FN:** *Alright then, thanks very much, Steve. Smashing. □*

Stephen Cram was born October 14, 1960, in Gateshead, England, and is 6- $\frac{3}{4}$ /152. Competes for Jarrow & Hebburn AC and is coached by Jimmy Hedley. Has set 3 World Records this year.

His placings in major 1500 competitions: '78, 9h) Commonwealth Games; '80, 8) Olympics; '81, 3) Euro Cup; '82, 1) Euro Champs, 1) Commonwealth Games; '83, 1) World Champs, 1) Euro Cup; '84, 2) Olympics.

His PRs (with current all-time performer positions in parentheses): 400—49.1 '82, 47.6 relay '84; 800—1:43.61 '83 (8); 1000—2:12.85 '85 (2); 1500—3:29.67 '85 (1); Mile—3:46.31 '85 (1); 2000—4:51.39 '85 (1); 3000—7:43.1 '83; 2-Mile—8:14.93 '83 (5); 5000—13:48.0 '84. His progression (with World Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	800	1000	1500	Mile
1973	12			4:31.5	
1974	13	2:11.0		4:22.3	
1975	14	2:07.1		4:13.9	
1976	15	1:59.7		4:07.2	
1977	16	1:56.5		3:47.7	
1978	17	1:53.5		3:40.09	3:57.45
1979	18	1:48.5		3:42.5	3:57.0
1980	19	1:48.41	2:24.5	3:34.74	3:53.8
1981	20	1:46.29	2:18.5	3:34.81 (9)	3:49.95
1982	21	1:44.45	2:15.12	3:33.66 (1)	3:49.90
1983	22	1:43.61 (9)		3:31.66 (1)	3:52.56
1984	23	1:46.0	2:15.98	3:33.13 (3)	3:49.65
1985	24	1:46.46	2:12.85	3:29.67	3:46.31