

# Abdi Bile

**A**lthough he had already twice been the NCAA 1500 champion—'85 and '87 for George Mason—Abdi Bile went to the '87 World Championships as an international neophyte. There, with some 150m remaining, the little-known Somali blew past favored Steve Cram and on to victory. He covered his final 800 in a mere 1:46.0.

Suddenly, he was a star, and the early-line Olympic favorite. To the pleasure of his East African nation—to which he plans an eventual return—he gathered 800 and mile PRs early in '88. Before he reached Seoul, though, the oft-injured Bile succumbed to a tibial stress fracture.

This season found him faster than ever. He won Oslo's Dream Mile (3:49.90 WL), PRed at 800 (1:43.60), 1000 (2:14.50 WL) and 1500 (3:30.55 WL) and triumphed with a devastating kick at the World Cup (see p. 5).

Bile (pronounced Bee-leh), now 26, is a friendly, apparently relaxed George Mason marketing student who lives in Fairfax, Virginia, with his younger brother and a cousin.

We found the multilingual runner at his home, once again immersed in his studies:

**T&FN:** It sounds as if you handled the Barcelona bumping incident with Coe quite diplomatically.

**Bile:** After the race I talked to him and, really, I didn't know what to say. He was complaining that I cut him off; things like that.

When I passed him, he grabbed me so hard on my singlet and just pulled me down. At the time I was upset; I didn't know what happened and why he had done it. I mean, I won the race and I expect things like that to happen.

**T&FN:** Jostling and bumping?

**Bile:** I have bandages on my leg. When I was running that race I had spike cuts everywhere.

**T&FN:** Were you spiked in that race?

**Bile:** Not in that race, but in races before. Elbowing, pushing, these things happen all the time. So when the race was over and I won, and Seb was just complaining, I didn't feel that I had done anything wrong.

At the same time, as long as the guy was upset, I just went to him and said, "I haven't seen the tape or anything but if I have done something wrong, I'm sorry."

**T&FN:** And then missing '88?

**Bile:** Right before the Olympics I was in my best shape. I try never to put myself into the position of thinking 100%, "You're going to win." You don't want to say something like that, but that's how I was feeling. I was 100% confident of winning the '88 Olympics.



Chuck Mahlock

I was very disappointed, but I couldn't do anything. I just had to stay calm, and relax, and not worry too much about what happened in the past. You know, "Forget it. This is life. Bad times, good times; just take it easy and try next year."

**T&FN:** *Did you watch on TV?*

**Bile:** I went to Seoul.

**T&FN:** *Because you thought you might run?*

**Bile:** No-no-no-no. One month before I couldn't even walk right. I was there just watching. I just went with the Somali Olympic team.

**T&FN:** *Was that frustrating?*

**Bile:** I think it would be worse watching on TV. At least when you know what the situation is, you feel that's reality. But if you don't see anything or you're just watching at your home, maybe by yourself, I think that could be worse.

**T&FN:** *You're still working on your marketing degree at George Mason. Do you enjoy school?*

**Bile:** A lot.

**T&FN:** *Do you find it balances your life as an athlete?*

**Bile:** At the level I'm running at this point, and going to school, it's kind of difficult. The schedule doesn't fit. To come into balance for a good outdoor season, in the spring and the summer I have so many classes to take, and I don't get the time to do the basic training and to prepare myself. I just spend so many hours at the library and sometimes I don't have the choice. The time I want to train it might be I have a class, and that is the only class I need to take.

**T&FN:** *Any college athlete can sympathize but few are running at your level.*

**Bile:** If you just worry about running and think about running all the time, it's kind of tough. It's boring or it's grief, and you might just eventually hate running. It's good to get away sometimes and to do some other things and go to school.

**T&FN:** *What do you like to do in your free time? Do you read? See movies? Spend time with a girlfriend?*

**Bile** [laughing]: The thing is. . . I'm still thinking, "When am I going to get free time?" I don't really get free time. I always have something to do, which relates to school, or running or just something.

**T&FN:** *As the World and Olympic champions, you and Coe certainly*

*shared disappointment at missing Seoul. What was that like?*

**Bile:** It's very difficult to explain the situation. I know as soon as I did my best race and had all that pain and frustration and got disqualified in 1984, I was really looking forward to running in 1988.

**T&FN:** *You ran your "best race" in 1984?*

**Bile:** To win the World Championships, that was the greatest race I have ever run; there's no question about

3:40 at the time, I made it all the way to the semifinal and ran 3:35.89. That day, I knew if I could have run the final, I could have done better.

I mean, winning a World Championships or the World Cup, I had the expectation. I can say that if I had run the Olympics last year, if I run the World Cup this year, I am going to win; that's it. But in the 1984 Olympics I was out of my mind. That was amazing.

**T&FN:** *What about Said Aouita?*

## Bile On His Competition

Abdi Bile discusses Said Aouita in the main body of the interview. His feelings on other leading rivals:

**Steve Cram**—He's very strong. I remember when I ran with him in '85 when he broke the mile World Record in Oslo. The race that he ran that night was so fantastic. It wasn't really WR pace. We passed like 2:53, and really he didn't wait for anybody.

His biggest competitor at the time, Seb Coe, was there, and you could tell Cram didn't worry about anybody. He was very confident. He just took off and ran 53 the last lap and 25 the last 200.

I think he's the kind of athlete who can do something anytime he's totally healthy and mentally feeling good.

**Seb Coe**—He's incredible. The other day they asked me, "What do you think of Sebastian Coe's retiring?"

"He's a good athlete," I told the press. "If he is retiring, maybe I should retire too, because we are at the same level." He ran a 52 last lap, 37 last 300, and 25.1 the last 200 at the World Cup. The guy's better than anybody else.

**Peter Rono**—Really all I can say is, the guy won the greatest race [in Seoul].

You may say that I wasn't there, or Aouita was not there, Jim Spivey was not there, Gonzalez was not there; Cram was not in good shape; but I think the guy deserves the credit that he ran a great race and he's the Olympic champion.

He hasn't been doing well this year, but sometimes you don't know what the reason is.

**Wilfred Kirochi**—He's one of the best young milers coming up now. He's someone who has the talent to run from 10K and cross country to the 1500. I think he will have many good years.

that. But to myself, when I think about a race and say that was my best race, in a way I think the race I always like was in the 1984 Olympic Games.

I got a stress fracture. I was not training for one month; I had a cast and everything. When I came back, I just started walking for two weeks, and then jogging, and then I went to the Olympic Games. I was doing just weights and swimming and things like that.

Doctors told me that I was not able to run. They told me not to do anything, or to jog even, till August.

**T&FN:** *But you ran anyway.*

**Bile:** I said, "I don't care how much pain I have. I don't care about anything. This is my first Olympic Games; I just want to line up."

I had tape on my stress fracture. I was putting ice on it. For having all that pain and frustration, and running

*He's truly a great runner but he is very vocal about his abilities and often critical of his opponents. Do you think that's his personality or the way people in his culture express themselves?*

**Bile:** I think that's just his style. I don't even know if he has a coach, whether a Moroccan coach or any other coach. I think that's his personality. He just a little bit exaggerates and he talks too much.

**T&FN:** *Do you ever speak with him?*

**Bile:** Not too much. Just sometimes. I think everybody's different, and some people might not like to talk about their rivalries or say too much about running. They just like to run and express their feelings in their hearts with how they run. [See box for Bile's comments on other milers]

—continued—

by SIEG LINDSTROM

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## BILE INTERVIEW — cont:

**T&FN:** You have won a World Championship and now a World Cup. What would be more important to you now, Olympic gold or a World Record?

**Bile:** I'm still shooting to run the '92 Olympics; and I want to set some World Records. I know I can do it.

**T&FN:** You're obviously close in the 1500 and mile. Do you think you could run under 1:41.73 for 800m?

**Bile:** I feel the 800 is the toughest. I have run 1:43 without really being in good shape; I mean I have never trained for 800. I just know, really, 1:43 and 1:41 are different levels. It's not really that easy. I think I have a good chance. I would like to train for the 800 for a year and see what the possibility is.

**T&FN:** You ran one 3000, 7:52.23 at Prefontaine. Is Aouita's 7:29.45 a record you think about breaking?

**Bile:** The chances are always there to move up to 3000 and 5000, but I really don't have any intention at this point. I'm running well for 800, and 1500 and 1000. I think that's enough.

It's just the opportunity cost; you put a lot of time for other events or think about other events, you might just take away from the events where you have been doing well.

**T&FN:** Time is at a premium for you, but maybe now that the season is over, you can relax for a few weeks.

**Bile:** Exactly. It's time for soccer. Yes, this is the season.

**T&FN:** Do you play on a team?

**Bile:** No, it's just kick-around with friends. I have a lot of Somali friends here.

**T&FN:** Well, in that case, enjoy playing soccer. But don't get hurt, OK.

**Bile [laughing]:** I'll be very careful.

Abdi Bile was born December 28, 1962, in Las Anod, Somalia, and is 6-3/4/165. He attends George Mason University, competing for the school in 1984-85 and '87, and still lives in the Washington, DC area.

Major Meets finishes: 800—5)OG of '84. 1500—dq)OG of '84; 1)NCAA '85; 2)Afr Ch '85; 1)NCAA '87; 1)WC '87. 1)WCp '89. PRs (with position on all-time list): 800—1:43.60, '89 (17); 1000—2:14.50, '89 (5); 1500—3:30.55, '89 (5); Mile—3:49.40, '88 (12); 2000—4:59.77, '87; 3000—7:52.23, '89.

Progression (with World Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	800	1500	Mile
'81	18	1:50.0	—	—
'82	19	1:52.8	3:51.6	—
'83	20	—	—	—
'84	21	1:46.01	3:35.89	3:57.43
'85	22	1:47.24	3:34.24	3:53.08
'86	23	—	3:34.01	3:55.771
'87	24	1:44.47 (7)	3:31.71 (2)	3:50.75
'88	25	1:44.42	3:33.6	3:49.40
'89	26	1:43.60 (?)	3:30.55 (17)	3:49.90

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