



## T&FN INTERVIEW

# BRIAN DIEMER

### by Sieg Lindstrom

Brian Diemer is a hard man to catch up with. American steeplechasers have had no easy time of trying in the nine years since he rose to world class as a Michigan senior by defeating eventual Olympic champion Julius Korir at the '83 NCAA. Diemer has U.S. ranked No. 1 or 2 every year since except '86.

The 31-year-old Michigander sets an equally hectic pace in his daily life, starting his job at 7:30 each morning in the burgeoning landscaping business he runs with his father, brother and sister. At 2:30 Diemer departs to coach the distance runners of small Calvin College.

His own training? Diemer pieces that around the puzzle of Calvin's schedule and relies on his assistant, Al Hoekstra, to be one of his two personal co-coaches. One day per week in winter, 46—November 1992

spring and summer, Diemer drives 250M round-trip to train under Michigan distance mentor Ron Warhurst with runners Gerard Donakowski and John Scherer and others.

The rest of his waking hours Diemer spends as a devoted family man with his wife, Kerri, and his two daughters, Kelsey (age 5) and Kaitlin (3).

Diemer notes the schedule has grown fuller with time and that he couldn't do it alone. Still he's the lone U.S. male distance runner to haul in an Olympic track medal (bronze in '84) since '68, and his high placings in Rome (4th), Tokyo (5th, first non-African) and Barcelona (7th) stand out.

April 15, Tax Day 1992, brought Diemer the pain of a stress-fractured sacrum. He trained in a pool and on a bike before he went on to win at the Olympic Trials.

**T&FN:** Contrary to the common rap against U.S. distance runners, you've con-

sistently run up to your capabilities in big meets.

**Diemer:** I don't know. I've been blessed with the ability to really focus on one thing. Maybe it gets into all this other "busyness" that I've got going on. When it comes crunch time, there's no ifs, ands or buts: it's time to do the job and I've been able to focus.

**T&FN:** Is it always the major championships you focus on?

**Diemer:** My best way is to focus for a championship meet, and then anything right around that championship

time I'm going to run well in.

**T&FN:** What do you think about the World Championships coming every two years now?

**Diemer:** It's going to be a little bit tough, actually. Not for myself because that will play into my plans just perfectly. I like having a major meet and actually I'm pretty excited about running and racing, and that wasn't the case in '84. I needed a lot of recovery time.

**T&FN:** Why was that?

**Diemer:** This year I ended on a good note and I felt like I could have even run faster yet when I ended, but I just ended the season real fresh and feeling real good about things.

In '84, the last race was in Europe, and my wife was along with me and,  
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hey, we did Paris. Boy, I was so tired from walking around and I just didn't care anymore. I ran a lousy race and then got home to the shock of all the people, the publicity and the expectations, and I think that was really just a burner.

**T&FN:** *The adulation was tough on you?*

**Diemer:** You're talking to a kid that never would speak up in class. All through high school and college, you never could get me to speak up in class. If it happened, my voice was cracking and I didn't like to deal with that. When I got back, I did 14 speeches and appearances in 19 days. It was culture shock.

**T&FN:** *You run with the Calvin cross country team, right?*

**Diemer:** [After the European season] I'll take a week off completely, no running at all, and then I'll just start running real easy, and then gradually get into it running with the guys.

So there's no motivation problems. Every day I go out the door I'm feeling happy and excited about it because Div. III runners are just full of excitement.

**T&FN:** *Is the atmosphere different?*

**Diemer:** Oh, it's a lot different from Div. I, at least from my experience. They're not expecting things on a silver platter. They're out there to work hard and, believe it or not, these guys will do anything that I tell them to. My biggest job is to try to hold them back. They want it so bad.

It's actually helped lengthen my career, I think, because it's kept the excitement in my career. These guys, being around them, it's contagious.

**T&FN:** *So the coaching helps your running?*

**Diemer:** If I didn't have something like coaching to be responsible for, to get to practice, I think what I would do with my own running is stay at work if something came up and I would say I can run later on. Pretty soon it's dark out and I have no energy left for my run, and I could see my career going downhill.

**T&FN:** *Has your approach changed at all since '83, when you reached elite level?*

**Diemer:** I don't think that much. I still try my hardest and give it my best shot and I'm usually pretty happy if I do my best. I don't put unrealistic pressure on myself. I have fun with it.

**T&FN:** *That's important. And you've stuck with the steeple all along. In what ways are you suited to the event?*

**Diemer:** First of all I think my best distance is around 2M or 3000m. I think that's my best distance because of my ability to focus. If I get in a race and I'm just *The Bible Of The Sport*

really focused, if I've been thinking about this race for a year, I lock in mentally so hard on it that I think I block out a lot of the fatigue, a lot of the pain. If I don't have that focus, then I can't block out that fatigue, and that tends to happen to me

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## "If I had any event that I wish I could be in, it's the mile."

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in a longer race.

**T&FN:** *Yet I assume you don't feel suited to the mile?*

**Diemer:** No. I wish I was. If I had any event that I wish I could be in, it's the mile. As a matter of fact, if I had a little more miler's speed, I think that I would have a real good shot at winning a major championship like the Olympics or the World Championships.

That's the only thing that I lack—I have a hard time finishing with guys that can run 3:37 for 1500. My best is 3:42 and it shows.

**T&FN:** *How would you describe your racing strategy? You hang back, like Henry Marsh used to, but move up sooner.*

**Diemer:** By the time we get to three laps to go or so, I try to be in the top 5. That isn't done by putting in surges. That's done by hurdling better, without stuttering, making my moves strategically throughout the race. I can see the barriers better. If I go out faster, I get pushed and bumped around.

Also, I've liked running negative splits. I'm just that type of runner: as it heats up I get more and more into it.

**T&FN:** *Is that a mental or physiological phenomenon?*

**Diemer:** I think it's both. I remember I was tested out in Eugene, Oregon, by Jack Daniels on the treadmill and, boy, the results were not good.

**T&FN:** *What were they?*

**Diemer:** I can't remember exactly what they were but I had a low VO<sub>2</sub> max, I was low on everything except two things, Jack said: I was very efficient in my running—I didn't use a whole lot of energy in my run—and the other thing he said was, "Well, you can't measure what's above your shoulders."

**T&FN:** *Did that discourage you?*

**Diemer:** Not really. You like to hear that you can do amazing things. He told me what my 10K PRs could be and this and that. It didn't matter. All that matters

is how you do at race time.

I was never that good. Even in college I would be way behind on the workouts. I was working my hardest but I'd be way behind. But then race day came and it seemed like I was putting out less effort but I was running way up front. I just always excelled in racing.

**T&FN:** *Your schedule keeps your mind off running for much of the day. Some athletes have virtually nothing else to think about all day.*

**Diemer:** As a matter of fact, I do get that once June rolls around, because that's race time. All of a sudden I can't even work. I go to work and I can't think about work; my mind's not in it. All of a sudden my mind is on TAC coming up, or making the team, or some other races. No matter how hard I try, I just can't get away from it.

This past year I went up fishing with my brother. That was when I still had the stress fracture, the last week of May. I went fishing up north to get away from it all and I didn't think that I was even going to be able to start on the line down in New Orleans.

Way up in Canada, 60M from the nearest telephone, out on the lake, somehow I still knew I was going to make the team. I just couldn't get it out of my mind.

It's the same way with work. I'm trying to concentrate on getting somebody's proposal out but I keep thinking about the running. So when it gets to that point, I say, "Dad, it's to that point again. I'm not doing you any good anymore. I've got to go do this running thing." □

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Brian Lee Diemer was born October 10, 1961, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and is 5-10/141. Graduated from South Christian HS (Grand Rapids) in '79 and Michigan in '83. Currently represents Nike International.

PRs: 1500—3:42.48 ('89); Mile—3:59.93i ('83); 2000—5:07.89i ('87); 3000—7:47.31 ('92); St—8:13.16 ('84) (3, 5 A); 2M—8:30.49i ('83); 5000—13:47.15 ('82); 10,000—30:08.8 ('80).

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

Yr	Age	Steeple	Major Meets
'78	16	4:21.5 mile	—
'79	17	4:14.9 mile	—
'80	18	14:04.4 5000	3)TAC Jr 5000
'81	19	8:45.48	11h)NC
'82	20	8:37.96	11h)NC
'83	21	8:22.13 (x, 2)	1)NC, 2)TAC, 8s)WC
'84	22	8:13.16 (4, 1)	2)OT, 3)OG
'85	23	8:20.64 (x, 2)	2)TAC
'86	24	9:09.4	—
'87	25	8:14.46 (5, 1)	3)TAC, 4)WC
'88	26	8:20.44 (x, 2)	1)TAC, 3)OT, 7s)OG
'89	27	8:16.92 (9, 1)	1)TAC, 4)WCp
'90	28	8:20.61 (x, 1)	1)TAC
'91	29	8:16.57 (8, 1)	3)TAC, 5)WC
'92	30	8:16.51	1)OT, 7)OG