

CLIFF WILEY

by Jon Hendershott

Kansas coach Bob Timmons still maintains, "I felt for a long time that Clifford ran the wrong event. He has beautiful arm drive and high knee lift. And all his indoor running on small tracks has made him a special runner on curves. You can just see him carry the curves out and not be hindered by them at all."

But what is the "right" event for a sprinter as versatile as Cliff Wiley, who made at least one NCAA sprint final in each of his college seasons? A sprinter who handled a leg on a World Record 4 x 100 team? A sprinter who ran only one open 400 in college, but who regularly ran outstanding relay laps? How do you get that versatile a sprinter to run the 400 seriously?

A variety of circumstances in 1981 did the trick—and now Wiley is the leading 400 runner in the world, front-runner for No. 1 World Ranking. That is no mean feat: the last American to top the global 400 rating was Vince Matthews in 1972, the year he won the Olympic gold.

For his part, Wiley steadfastly maintains he isn't a confirmed 400 man—but his running may be going a long way toward changing his mind.

A jolly, talkative man, Wiley is expansive when he speaks, recalling in detail the incidents of his life and career. And now that he is finally in the "right" race, he has much to talk about:

T&FN: Coach Timmons has felt for a long time that the 400 is your best event. Considering your achievements this year, might he be correct?

Wiley: Well, I feel you have to look at it in historical perspective. At the time I came to Kansas, I felt I had proven myself in all three sprints. I had won the Golden West 440—basically because they wouldn't take me in the 220.

I felt at the time—and I still feel it was the correct outlook—that the sprints were my better shot. In some ways, I have felt that this year I have had to defend my sprint career.

My thing has always been to run my best in the top meets. There are lots of guys who might have faster sprint times than my 10.21 and 20.39, but many times those guys get to the major meets and they don't produce. But I feel my record in the important meets is a solid one.

I was 5th in the NCAA 100y in '75 as a freshman. I was only 8th as a sophomore, but I had had only two meets prior to the NCAA because I had been declared ineligible [a court order permitted Wiley to run]. I was 6th and 3rd in the NCAA sprints in '77, and 7th and 4th in the AAU.

I was injured for most of '78, but still placed 5th in the NCAA [he broke a wrist in a fall at the end of the Big 8 indoor 300]. I was 3rd in the AAU in '79 and in '80 I was 2nd in the Trials.

So I may not have been one of those sprinters who ran the big flashy times, but I competed well. I can certainly look back on my sprint career and be proud of it. I

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have never felt, "You wasted your time; the coach was right about the 400." And I still feel I haven't done my best in the sprints.

So I feel it all has to be kept in perspective: where was I then and where am I now? Coach Timmons may have a point, but I was never afraid to run the 400. I always felt I could run 45, but I just didn't feel at that time that the 400 was the place where I wanted to be.

T&FN: *What was the chain of events this past spring, then, that brought you seriously into the 400?*

Wiley: I feel you're dealing with desire here, the desire to do something, the setting of goals. Of course, law school was the biggest factor. First year takes so much time and I couldn't train with the team every day.

So I would go down to the stadium late, after it was locked up, and jump the fence. I might want to do eight 200s, but I would get only six done before the cops came and kicked me out. They had no idea who I was and I would like to have told them, "Hey, I still hold the mortgage on this place."

I definitely wanted to run this year, but I didn't start training until late last December. I just couldn't get myself up even to jog. Even then, as the pressure of final exams built up, I would just go work out to relieve some of the pressure of school. By indoor season, I knew I wanted to compete, but I wasn't thinking about the 400, or even mile relays.

Outdoors came around and I was training pretty well. I went down to Texas Southern and ran a 46.4 from lane 1, plus a 10.2. I felt that 400 time was good; I was rounding myself into shape at my own rate.

Then I ran 10.37 and 45.47 at the Kansas Relays and I felt very good about how I was coming along. I just had to get through final exams, which held up the sharpening work for sprinting.

But then, here came the rain. It seemed like it rained for 30 days and 30 nights. I really couldn't get in the type of speedwork that I needed to run a good 100.

I ran at the Tom Black Classic and I won the 400 in 45.31, but they had brought me back there for the Grand Prix 100. I qualified for the final, but the 400 final was run just before the 100 final, so I ended up watching the battle between Carl Lewis and Jeff Phillips after about 40m.

So I knew then I couldn't run both the 100 and 400 effectively, especially if the races were close together. But the deciding factor was when I ran a 200 in London in the U.S.-England-Belgium-Ethiopia meet.

I felt I was ready to really run, but things just didn't turn over. I ran only 21.35 and I knew I didn't have the time left to do the training to bring my stride cadence into order so that I could run the 100 and 200 at the TAC meet.

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So I felt I could do best by running only the 400. A year ago, I couldn't have made that decision, especially considering the amount of work I put in during '79 and '80. I went into a lot of debt—monetarily, physically and emotionally—in preparing for the 200 in the Olympics. I was just burnt out on the 200.

Plus I hadn't been able to get the coaching on those very minute, very technical points that you need to work on. But in the 400, I had developed some ideas of my own on how to train, what works best for me. I mean there are times I'm prone to laziness, but when I set out to do eight 200s and The Man throws me out after six, hey, what can I do?

I did some training this year that people might consider unorthodox. I never trained on the watch; I just went on feeling. So when people ask me what I went through the 200 mark or the 300 in a particular race, I can't tell them. Working with Clyde Duncan at Houston in preparation for the Olympics is where I got into training like this, because feeling is very personal while the watch can be very impersonal.

In fact, one day I was in a jewelry store and I saw a stopwatch. I thought very seriously about buying it—but then I went out and bought myself some lunch.

T&FN: *You say you run on feeling, how you feel on a particular day. Is that how the World Cup race went?*

Wiley: The race in Rome was unusual for me because I ran it thinking of what I didn't want to do, rather than what I wanted to do. I had made some mistakes in races leading up to Rome, basically because I feel I got overconfident after the World University Games in Bucharest.

In that race, Walter McCoy was leading me at the 200, but I was able to reel everybody in to win. So I thought, "Hey, it doesn't matter how I go out. I can beat these guys. It's my race to run." So I got a little overconfident.

Plus, I was getting sick. I have asthma and all the traveling, and all the different climates and all that, was wearing down my resistance. I was pushing it.

I came home after Bucharest and trained, lifted some weights, put in my training routine. I went back to Europe just the day before Zurich and all of a sudden I look up and there's Willie Smith hitting all kinds of gears. I'm trying to haul him back in, but he isn't coming.

T&FN: *That was your first loss ever in the 400, wasn't it?*

Wiley: Yes, it was. I just never gave it any thought; other people did but I never worried about it. Two days later in Berlin, I was 2nd to McCoy. In both of those races, I didn't feel as peppy as I like; those were the first races in which I ever actually tied up. I would get tired, but never tie up and lose form.

I wanted to do well in Rome, so I

knew I just had to get out a little faster at the start and stay relaxed, not try to force a kick or anything like that. I was a little afraid of tying up.

But I wasn't that worried because I knew that I cannot run like a Willie Smith or Walter McCoy or Tony Darden. I can't run a bunch of top-class races one after another. I mean they were running Zurich, Berlin, Cologne, Koblenz, Brussels.

There's no way in the world I can get my body up to run like that. Most of the year, I had a couple of weeks of rest between big 400 efforts.

My best race is wrapped up in me being rested, so I can't race like those guys do. Some guys need to race; I need to rest.

After the Berlin race, Walter McCoy said to me, "You can win the World Cup. But racing against all of us every day isn't going to help you win that race. You can't fight a war every day."

I knew that, so I decided to go down to a small meet in Italy to get away from those guys. If I had tried to race them in all those races, I wouldn't have had anything left. I won that race in Italy and even though it wasn't fast, it was a win and it restored my confidence for Rome.

T&FN: *What was your reaction to winning, especially after you had enjoyed the success of being part of the 4 x 100 World Record in Dusseldorf in 1977?*

Wiley: I was in a different position in Rome than I was in Dusseldorf. In '77, there was a lot of uncertainty about the relay spot. Several guys were running really well in Europe, especially Clancy Edwards, who was beating everybody in the 100 and the 200.

I think I came very close to being put off the relay. It was my first major international experience, but Steve Simmons must have felt I could do the job. I think I reacted more to the pressure than to anything else.

I don't think I was less confident in the relay race than in the 400 in Rome; I was just reacting to the pressure of the relay. I knew that in order for me to win the 400, I just had to get out and run like I knew I could run. In Dusseldorf, I certainly might have run over my head.

But in Rome, I knew I had the ability to win the race and run however fast I needed in order to win. Nobody made any decisions for me; it was all me.

Winning the World Cup was the culmination of a complete season. I wanted to win all the big ones, a grand slam of the TAC, USSR dual, World University Games and the World Cup. Those were the meets I considered most important, the ones I wanted most to win.

T&FN: *Have you ever considered why you are so good in the 400? What do you do differently from other 400 runners?*

Wiley: I think it's perception of the event. With my sprint background, going through the 200 under 22 doesn't faze me. And there are certain places in the race that

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WILEY INTERVIEW—continued—

I feel should be emphasized.

T&FN: *Would it be correct to assume you will continue running the 400?*

Wiley: For the most part, I think I'll run the 400 in the big meets. Most likely, they will be the meets I ran in this past season.

But I also feel that my performance is wrapped up in my background and I'm not going to divorce myself from what I feel got me to where I am now—in other words, the 100 and 200. I'm not going to stop running the sprints just because I had a good year this year in the 400. I still feel I can run a pretty fair 200.

T&FN: *What was the prime motivational force behind your 400 running this year?*

Wiley: I really didn't have any goal other than to just get out and run the best I could and test myself. Maybe I also wanted to get away from some of the pressure of the sprints, because they are very pressure-packed. I really didn't feel any pressure in the 400 until after the TAC.

There was an element of curiosity in the whole thing, too. I was running against the good competition, I wanted to win because I enjoy winning and I think there was a lot of self-motivation involved. I wanted to see how I could do.

T&FN: *There must be a streak, a trait, in Cliff Wiley that drives him to excel—whether in a tough academic challenge like law school, or a tough athletic challenge like the 400. Can you describe at all what that drive is like?*

Wiley: One thing about this year was that I felt I had freedom. There wasn't anything anyone could force me to do. There weren't a lot of responsibilities to meet this year. My running became purely recreational, just for my own achievement. Before, I felt a lot of people had invested in me.

This year, I felt I could run only because I like to run. It was total freedom. But I also realized there are many other things in my life which are more important than running. Track became fun; my attitude toward it became very loose.

I don't know about the drive. The 400 came much easier this year than I ever thought it would. Actually, I'm just as surprised as everybody else at how things turned out. □

Clifford A. Wiley was born May 21, 1955 in Baltimore, Maryland. He now measures 5-8/135 and is a second-year law student at Kansas. Graduated from Douglass High in Baltimore in 1974. His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	Affil	Class	100	200	400
1973	17/18	Mid HS	Jr		20.9ys	47.5y
1974	18/19	"	Sr		20.9yw	47.8y
1975	19/20	Kansas	Fr	9.55y	20.93y	
1976	20/21	"	So	10.2	20.48	
1977	21/22	"	Jr	10.2	20.41 (x, 8)	
1978	22/23	"	Sr	10.44	20.70 (x, 9)	47.2
1979	23/24	DCI		10.29	20.39 (x, 10)	
1980	24/25	"		10.43	20.49 (x, 8)	46.10
1981	25/26	"		10.37	21.02	44.70