

EDWIN MOSES

by Jon Hendershott

You could call the ascent of Edwin Moses to the top of the world in the 400 hurdles a Cinderella story.

It's not every day that an athlete forges an inaugural season in any event like he did in the medium barriers in 1976: he ran the race once in '75, ran 50.1 in his first race of '76, got down to 49.8 in his third, 48.8 in his fifth and by the time of the Olympic Trials was the fastest American ever with 48.30.

And at Montreal, the incredible ending to the Moses story was written: 49.95 in his heat, a US record 48.29 in his semi and then the blockbuster in the final, 47.64 to shatter John Akii-Bua's world mark of 47.82 set in winning four years ago at Munich.

What's more, Ed Moses did it all before his 21st birthday (8/31/55). Yet he knows without a doubt that all of his stunning potential has yet to be tapped—and so his story has really just begun.

The story authored by Moses was no easy one; it was written with uncounted hours of work, the disappointment of falling or hitting hurdles in meets he considered vital along the road to Montreal, but also with a quiet, determined confidence in his own ability and the course he had charted along with his coach at Atlanta's Morehouse College, Lloyd Jackson.

The only regret Moses has about his all-conquering season is that running took so much time away from his studies. A 3.57 student (on a 4.00 scale) in physics and mechanical engineering, he considers his books more important than his running.

Such an attitude, coupled with Moses' reserved demeanor (even after winning the gold medal), probably led some observers in Montreal to conclude that conceit had consumed Moses. Not true: he is simply a quiet, serious man who is honest in his expectations of himself and in expressing those expectations.

He is proud, of course. But he sets rigid standards for himself, so he has a right to be proud. Almost from the start of his medium hurdling career, Moses knew he could win the Olympic championship.

T&FN: You only ran the intermediates once in '75, so when did you decide to concentrate on them?

Moses: About the middle of March. Earlier in the year, I looked at the Olympic Trials schedule and I figured I could make it in the quarter and the highs. I hadn't given the intermediates any serious thought. I had myself programmed to run 45 in the quarter and 13.5 in the highs [he eventually ran 46.1 and 13.9]. Those were my goals for the year.

I had talked with coach last year about the intermediates, but I never worked on them and never had time for them in meets. I ran the highs and then *Bible of the Sport*

would come right back in the quarter, so by the time the IH came around I was getting ready for the mile relay. I didn't have time for four events, and three of them hard quarters, in every dual meet.

T&FN: How did you feel about the race when you first started running it?

Moses: I didn't know what it would take, or what to expect. For the Florida Relays, which would be my first serious meet in the IH, coach sent in that he thought I could run 50-flat. I thought he was crazy. So I was put in the fast section, but once I started running them, I felt pretty comfortable. I ran 50.1 and I wasn't tired at all. I had just been doing overdistance workouts, 1000s and 600s. None of those special workouts for the IH that coach came up with later.

T&FN: You said once that 15 strides actually slowed you down. When did you start working on going 13s all the way?

Moses: I've never run 15s. At Florida I ran 13s until the 6th hurdle, ran 14s for two because I wasn't sure of the pattern and then 13s to the finish. I knew even then I could do 13s all the way, but I didn't do it because the race was new. So after that, I worked on 13s all the way. I just did everything in my workouts with 13 strides.

T&FN: When did you become serious about trying for the team in the 400 hurdles?

Moses: Right after that 50.1. I knew then I could run 48 and as the season got on and I was running 48s and just easing

through them, I knew I could run 47. I just kept working at it.

T&FN: Did you think you would have to be in a race the caliber of the Olympic final to run that fast?

Moses: No, I was on pace to that in the AAU, before I started stepping on hurdles.

T&FN: What effect did it have on you to fall in the NCAA III and then get fourth in the AAU when you thought you should have won?

Moses: I really wanted to go to the NCAA in Philadelphia. I think a lot of people thought I was a freak or something, didn't believe in me. After I fell in the division meet, I lost the last qualifying place by 0.02. I was real down for about five minutes, but then I told myself to forget about it.

At the AAU, I ran 48.86 in the heats real easy and I knew I could run 47 in the final. So I went out at 47 pace in the final and I don't know why but I decided to look around and see what was happening behind me. That's when I lost concentration and started hitting hurdles.

But when I saw my time [48.99] it didn't bother me that much. I knew I was on my pace if I hadn't made those mistakes. I don't know why I turned around. I guess I was just curious. It was my first meet against the real big guns so I guess I thought I should see what they were doing.

Before the Trials, I ironed out all those problems in training and in Eugene I just ran my normal pattern. Same in the Games, I just ran like I usually do. I guess I've got it perfected to where I don't need anybody to pace me. I just know what it's going to take for me to run a certain time.

T&FN: You make it sound so easy, and it looks easy. There has been a lot of training and concentration, but do you know why it seems to come easy for you?

Moses: Most of the hard work and concentration is done in practice, so when I get into a meet I know what it's going to take. I know what mistakes I've made during the week and in the race I just concentrate on what I've done during the week. I've got a log of all the mistakes I've made. My coach and I knew that I would have to get in just four months all the experience that those other guys got over the years. So we were just that much more intense.

T&FN: Going into the Games, then, September 1976—33

Moses Leads All-Time

And he owns not only the fastest time ever run, but 3 of the 6 fastest—all set in '76:

47.64	Edwin Moses (US) 76
47.82	John Akii-Bua (Uga) 72
48.12	Dave Hemery (GB) 68
48.29	Moses 76
48.30	Moses 76
48.51	Ralph Mann (US) 72
48.52	Hemery 72
48.54	Akii-Bua 74
48.55	Jim Bolding (US) 75
48.55	Quentin Wheeler (US) 76
48.55	Tom Andrews (US) 76
48.55	Moses 76
48.59	Alan Pascoe (GB) 75
48.64	Jim Seymour (US) 72
48.69	Mike Shine (US) 76

how did you see your chances?

Moses: I had a bad week of practice before the Games. I mean I felt bad; my legs were sore from the change of tracks between Plattsburgh and Montreal. But my times were right where they were supposed to be. Then in a practice meet I ran 49.3 in the hurdles and a 45.2 relay leg. I thought they were about 50.5 and 46.5. I knew I was ready and I just had to get into the race.

The first day I ran 49.95 and that was just a shake-out. I started decelerating right after the 10th hurdle. I knew I could have run 48 that day, so after that I really wasn't worried.

T&FN: The African boycott took out John Akii-Bua, but would it have made any difference to you to have had him in the race?

Moses: I think the final time would have been faster. I really feel I was in shape to run 46-point. I had programmed myself to be ready to run that if necessary. I was really looking forward to running against Akii-Bua.

T&FN: How did the semi go?

Moses: I thought I was running around 49-flat, but it was 48.29. I knew I was right where I was supposed to be. I was relaxed and not worried about the final. I looked at it as just another race. All I had to do was not make any mistakes. I thought it would take 48-flat to win, at the most. I knew I could run 47.5 and 47.64 is exactly that converted from automatic time.

T&FN: And the final?

Moses: I had a slow reaction to the gun, one of the slowest I can remember. I must have lost at least a tenth at the start and another tenth getting to the first hurdle. I was off balance at the first hurdle.

After that, I started smoothing out and I accelerated down the backstraight. At the 5th hurdle, all of a sudden I saw the Russian [Yevgeniy Gavriyenko] going into the corner. We hit the 5th hurdle about the same time, but I hit the 6th ahead of him. After that all I could see was the rest of the hurdles. I just maintained my normal pattern. I really wasn't sure about the race until the 10th hurdle. After the 10th, I cut my stride down more for speed and just went on into the tape. But I know I made at least five or six-tenths worth of mistakes.

The time didn't surprise me; if it had been close to 47-flat I would have been surprised. I expected to run as fast as I did so it wasn't surprising. I was in shape for a time like that for more than a month but I never had the opportunity. The Games were the perfect opportunity and I capitalized on it.

T&FN: You talk about mistakes, so it wasn't a "perfect" race for you?

Moses: No, not at all. Right now, I'm working on a program so I can run 46s in just a matter of time. I might get down to 45 if I really find a pattern. I'm capable of doing that and it's reasonable, too.

T&FN: That's a whole new era, like climbing Mt. Everest.

34—September 1976



Jeff Johnson

"I might get down to 45 if I really find a pattern."

Moses: Well, that's why I'm not that excited yet.

T&FN: Is 12 strides one of the keys to running that fast?

Moses: Yes and I've worked on that in practice. I'm doing it comfortably, more so than before the Games when I was concentrating on 13s. I didn't want to work hard on 12s then because I didn't want to upset the pattern I had.

T&FN: We spoke of opportunities: what kind of opportunity would you need to run that fast?

Moses: Moscow in 1980. It's a long way off, but my consistency right now is around 48.3 anytime I get on the track. In the next couple of years, it will be down to 48 and below.

T&FN: Does 46 seem formidable to you or is it just a natural progression?

Moses: It's a bit of both. I'm definitely going to have to work at it, but I know I can do it. I know I can do 46.

T&FN: Well back to the present—what does it mean to you to have won the Olympic gold medal?

Moses: Oh wow. Well, I have my own way of looking at it, just like everybody would. To me, it means I started something I thought I could do and I just kept working at it, going over all kinds of obstacles, to the finish.

T&FN: You seem to set a very tough

standard for yourself and you don't seem satisfied yet because you feel that you can do so much better.

Moses: Yes, that's true. I think a lot of that is due to my major. A lot of time you'll get a problem in physics, you may work three or four hours on that problem, but you may get it wrong and not even come close. It's disappointing. I know I get to the point sometimes where I don't even react to things. I have a good time and I'm happy, but things don't excite me a lot. Being in school for nine months is pretty intense and I don't have time to react.

T&FN: School is very important to you, as important as athletics?

Moses: More important. There are times when I regret losing time from school because of track. I could have had a 4.00 average, but I had to make sacrifices. I wouldn't trade my gold medal, but that's one reason I had to win it—anything less would have been disappointing. I put in so much and anything less would be like I wasn't getting something back.

T&FN: Is it possible your interest in running might fade?

Moses: I don't think so. I'll probably run some other events next year, like the highs and the quarter, because I don't want to intermediate hurdle every week.

I'm sure many people will expect a lot out of me. I can't please everybody and I won't even try to. As long as I keep in contact with myself, and my coach, I won't worry.

T&FN: You seem to be able to put challenges into perspective and realize they are within your capabilities.

Moses: I try to look at everything realistically. Back in March, when coach and I looked through the lists of who there was to beat, he said, "It might take 48-flat," and I said, "Okay, let's get on that right now." We just started working for 48-flat. After Penn when I ran 49.8, I knew I still had about two seconds to go, but I just kept working at it. I didn't think I could cut off two seconds off 49.8 but I knew I could cut some.

T&FN: Before this year, had you ever considered what the term "Olympic champion" meant?

Moses: No, I hadn't. Thinking now, I guess it means the way people react to you. I guess it means you're the best in the world.

T&FN: Might it be hard to live with?

Moses: I'm adjusting now. At first everybody was pulling at me and turning me around and I had to say, "Hey, wait, slow down." I never really thought about that part of it beforehand. I just thought about the medal, not what would happen afterward.

One thing is that now I know I'm in a position to help people or to make people happy and I'm glad about that. I like to help people. I know now that just by talking to people or shaking their hand it makes them happy. That makes me feel good. □