

EVELYN ASHFORD

T&FN INTERVIEW by DAVID GLEASON

It's a mild November afternoon in Los Angeles, warm even for southern California. On the infield of the UCLA track, Evelyn Ashford has just finished her Monday workout and is relaxing with coach Pat Connolly, herself a 3-time Olympian.

At this time of year, improvements come slowly, almost imperceptibly, and Ashford is tired. "It's been one of those days," she moans, "when nothing seems to go right. I'll be glad when this week's over." We head for the Student Union, to find comfort in some ice cream.

I'm in the company of a remarkable sprinter, one who came from virtually nowhere to run PRs in every round of the '76 Olympic Trials and went on to become the U.S.'s highest finisher (5th) in the Montreal 100.

Since then, her wonderfully fluid running style and fierce determination have propelled her to the No. 1 spot among Americans in both the short dashes.

Being the top American woman, however, doesn't carry much weight internationally these days. So it wasn't until her stunning double victory in the World Cup that Evelyn Ashford came into real international prominence. Suddenly she's a prime contender for gold(s) at Moscow.

For now, ice cream achieved, we find a relatively quiet corner in the campus ballroom. Evelyn nibbles at her frosty delicacy and talks about the season which made her the unanimous choice as U.S. Women's Athlete Of The Year:

T&FN: Has it been hard to get back to the grind after the season ended on such a high note?

Ashford: Yes... [sighs] But that's OK.

T&FN: What has changed since last year, since winning the World Cup? Do you feel different; are your goals any different?

Ashford: My goals stayed basically the same. I still want to go to Moscow, I still want to win. They're a bit more realistic now than they were earlier.

T&FN: Were you satisfied at Montreal?

Ashford: Was I satisfied?

T&FN: Yeah, you won two big races, beat the best...

Ashford: Yeah... I had to think about that a while. Yes, I was satisfied. All I had wanted to do was to show that I could run faster than Gohr and Koch.

I had heard about their fantastic times, and I just wanted to show that I could run with the best. I thought I would run faster in the 100.

10-December 1979

I did 11 seconds [11.00] in Zurich into a wind, so I thought I would run faster, at least faster than that. But it was so still.

T&FN: Is there something special about the East German runners, some reason you want to beat them?

Ashford: I just don't know anything about them. They seem so strange, so remote... You hear all these fantastic times; they don't seem human, they seem, well, bionic. I think all us American female sprinters feel that way. We just don't know anything about them.

T&FN: Have you ever met any of them?

Ashford: Only on the track.

T&FN: Would you like to meet them off the track?

Ashford: Yes, I'd really like to know how they live. When we were in Berlin in August, we tried to get over to East Berlin on the subway, but they wouldn't let us. It was kind of scary, all these soldiers with machine guns.

I hear Marita Koch is going to become a doctor. Do you know what her birthday is?

T&FN: Do you want to do an astrology chart or something?

Ashford: Sure; you know, I'd just like to know something about her.

T&FN: How have you changed as a competitor since the Olympics in '76?

Ashford: I am more mature. That's the main difference, I'm more mature now than I was then. At the Olympics, it was all like glitter; it was all bright. That's about all I remember—everything was so bright. It was fun.

I think Montreal in '76 was probably more fun than Moscow will be, because then I didn't have a goal. I just wanted to go. And I didn't really think that I could go; Pat told me I could make it, but I didn't believe it. At Moscow, I'll have a goal.

T&FN: When did you start feeling mature?

Ashford: At the Nationals in '78, when I didn't do too well.

T&FN: When you lost both 100s to Leleith Hodges.

Ashford: Yes. I decided then that I wanted to get serious, more serious than I had been, and work on my mental

toughness. That's all I did that differently, really, work on my mental toughness.

T&FN: How did your two races at the World Cup feel?

Ashford: In the 100, I didn't feel as if I was running too fast. I didn't feel particularly quick; maybe I wasn't concentrating or something. And the 200 felt like a 400, like I was striding out in a 400.

T&FN: Did you see the races on TV?

Ashford: Yes. I don't like it; I don't like watching myself on TV—something is always not right, either my hair isn't right, or I say something stupid. I don't really like that kind of attention.

T&FN: How did your World Cup races compare with your American Record 10.97 at the AAU?

Ashford: In that race, I didn't feel like I was in control; as if my body was going to fall apart or something. It didn't feel good.

T&FN: What's the best race you've ever run, when you felt the best?

Ashford: The fastest race I ever ran was my first AR in the 200 ['77 AAU]. It felt just right, better than any other race. For the shape I was in at that time, that was my best race. It felt fast, and I was in control.

This year I could have run better races. Maybe not faster, but for what was going on during the race, that was my best.

T&FN: What would be the perfect race, if you could run it? Do you ever think about that?

Ashford: The perfect race? Oh, I don't know. I don't think about the perfect race; none of my races have been perfect.

I guess, when everything is clicking right, when you're running so well that you don't even have to think about it, when it's like *nothing*. Maybe that's the perfect race,

U.S. ATHLETE OF THE YEAR BALLOTING

	1	2	3	4	5	tot.	%
1. Evelyn Ashford	19	-	-	-	-	95	100.0
2. Deby LaPlante	-	11	4	1	1	59	62.1
3. Louise Ritter	-	-	4	7	4	30	31.6
4. Jane Frederick	-	3	4	-	5	29	30.5
5. Maren Seidler	-	1	4	2	2	22	23.2
6. Francie Larriue 20; 7. tie, Essie Kelley & Mary Decker 9; 9. Joan Benoit 6; 10. Kate Schmidt 3; 11. Julie Brown 2; 12. Candy Young 1.							

Track & Field News

when you don't have to give it too much effort. It just comes, without conscious thought.

There have been times when part of the race is that way, but never totally, never the whole race. Maybe when I can get them all together, all these little things together, maybe that will be the perfect race.

T&FN: Which race do you prefer, the 100 or 200?

Ashford: I still prefer the 200. I had more success with the 100 at first, but I always preferred the 200. If you make any mistakes, like a bad start, you have time to correct it. I like being able to do that. The 100 is over in a flash.

T&FN: Do you think you are still able to improve on any part of your race? Is there anything you try to correct now?

Ashford: If anything, my start. I worked on that a lot last year, but this year, well, it's pretty much just everything. No one thing in particular.

T&FN: Are you planning to run more 400s?

Ashford: All I can think about is, "Oh, the pain!" It seems like it lasts forever, and that's all I can think about that race, the pain.

T&FN: How about running the 4 x 400 at Moscow?

Ashford: Don't even say that; it's not funny. Really, it's not at all funny. Pat has already mentioned it, but I don't want to think about it.

T&FN: Tell me about your training situation with Pat. What is it that you like about her?

Ashford: What do I like about her? I like the fact that she has patience and she'll listen to me. In high school, the coaches really didn't have time to be personal, because there were a lot of people on the team. The coaches would have this certain workout, and whether you felt like you could handle it or not, you had to do it.

With Pat, she'll ask me how I feel, try to find out how I feel about the workout before I have to do it. She pays more attention to me as an individual.

T&FN: Is that why you aren't running for UCLA now?

Ashford: Well, I want to do well at Moscow, and I think a team situation wouldn't be to my best advantage.

Pat has time for me now. Before, she was always handling so many different things, she wasn't always concentrating on just me.

But I didn't like it at first; she was always on me for everything. I couldn't get away with anything. But Pat can get me to do anything.

T&FN: Why is that?

Ashford: I just believe in her.

The Bible of the Sport

T&FN: Can you explain?

Ashford: Well... I just think she is right. I believe in her; I just believe in her.

T&FN: Do you do any other sports besides running?

Ashford: No, not really. I roller skated some, but not any more.

T&FN: Have you ever wanted to do anything other than track?

Ashford: No... Oh! [laughs] I wanted to be a dancer. I even took ballet lessons for a while, but I quit. I was too tall; all these little girls going around in their little tutus.

Horstmuller



I still like to dance; I've even taken classes, modern dance.

T&FN: What will you do if you win the Olympics?

Ashford: Here's my plan. If I do really well at Moscow, gold medals, records, the works, I plan to quit while I'm ahead. If I don't win, then I'll keep training and try to win next time. But if it all goes really well, I'll quit when I'm ahead.

T&FN: Well, Muhammad Ali said that a few times, but he kept coming back... Do you have a model, someone you look up to in particular? I've read that you admired Wilma Rudolph.

Ashford: Yes, I admired her, when I was younger. But I don't really think about that now. I don't really have anyone that I try to model myself after.

T&FN: What do you plan to do when you finish running?

Ashford: I don't know, I really don't. I do plan to finish school. I've been at that for so long. That's important.

T&FN: Do you think you might do something related to track, like coach?

Ashford: I really don't know. I might want to have my own business. Maybe something will work out, but I'm doing this right now; I have to let things come one at a time.

T&FN: What's your major in school?

Ashford: Oh, it'll probably be sociology, eventually.

T&FN: What class do you have today?

Ashford: Latin American studies.

T&FN: Are you interested in politics?

Ashford: Not really; more in the people, in the culture, how the people live.

T&FN: You don't appear really enthusiastic about going to class.

Ashford: Sometimes I really have a hard time making myself do things, like go to class.

T&FN: Do you feel that there is a limit to the sprints, to how fast women can run?

Ashford: A limit? No, women haven't reached their potential yet.

I don't know how fast I can go; I feel I can run faster than I've run. I don't know how much faster.

T&FN: Is it more important for you to explore your own personal limits, or to be the best in the world?

Ashford: I don't know how fast I can run, but I feel that if I do my best, I will be the best.

T&FN: What does it take to go faster, besides more hard work; or is that the answer?

Ashford: You know, you have to have it mentally as well as physically. There are girls on the team at UCLA who train very hard, who train harder than I do, but they haven't been able to compete very well.

T&FN: How are you different that way?

Ashford: I think I'm a loner. I'm more into what I have to do; I'm more selfish than others. I think it takes some selfishness to be good at what you do.

T&FN: Why is that?

Ashford: You just have to be selfish, be into what you want to do. You have to set a goal, and don't waver from it, one way or the other, not let other things interfere. □

Evelyn Ashford was born April 15, 1957 in Shreveport, La. She scales 5-5/115 (1.65/52) and is married to Ray Washington, an LA State basketballer. Her progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	100	200	400
'75	17/18	11.5	24.2	
'76	18/19	11.21 (9, 3)	23.9w	
'77	19/20	11.25 (11, 2)	22.62 (7, 1)	
'78	20/21	11.16 (4, 1)	22.66 (3, 1)	
'79	21/22	10.97 (1, 1)	21.83 (2, 1)	51.57