

# HENRY MARSH

**I**t would be easy to let numbers tell the story of Henry Marsh's steeplechasing career, but mere figures couldn't begin to cover the multifaceted contributions Marsh has made to American track & field over the past dozen years.

The numbers would reveal his athletic excellence: World Ranked every year since 1977; rated either No. 1 or 2 American since '76, the year he first emerged as a national and world force. Four Olympic teams; both World Championships squads; 9 TAC titles; '79 Pan-Am gold.

Those figures wouldn't reveal the vicious fall Marsh suffered while challenging for the lead at the '83 Worlds. Or the virus that sapped him leading to the LA Olympics where he placed a close 4th. Or an unexpected 6th in Seoul—or his poignant gesture of farewell at least to the competitive side of the sport by kneeling and kissing the track.

And the numbers surely couldn't reveal the role played off the track by the 34-year-old Utahn. Since 1979 he has chaired the USOC's Athletes Advisory Council, the body which gives voice to the desires of American athletes in national and international policymaking.

During Marsh's tenure that influential body has dealt with as wide a range of topics as the '80 Olympic boycott, the establishment of trust funds for athletes, the advocacy of tougher drug testing and even such decisions as who marches for the U.S. in the Opening Ceremonies at the Olympics.

Marsh always has been a busy man. He took a break from a recent business trip to tell us why he expects to stay that way:

**T&FN:** It doesn't sound as if you have become a sedentary businessman.

**Marsh:** Not a chance. I'm doing a lot of things: working with the USOC; with the Utah effort to bring the Winter Olympics to Salt Lake City; I still have my radio talk show. I work for the Franklin Institute giving seminars in corporate fitness, stress management and time management.

Also, I'm working on ways for businesses to utilize Olympic athletes and their knowledge. I've long felt that Olympic athletes haven't been able to get together with the right business people to best make use of the athletes' experience—so athletes can benefit financially and so the public can benefit from their knowledge.

**T&FN:** It seems like you haven't had to make many adjustments to retirement. You're still involved in the sport, still training to a degree and also establishing a strong base for your future.

**Marsh:** A trademark of mine has always been that I've had a very balanced life. One thing we talk about in time management is governing values: what is important in your life? Once you decide those things, you can go after them.

I couldn't be just a one-dimensional person, because life is made of too many things besides just athletics. Earlier in my track career, I had the goal of becoming an attorney and I achieved that. I have always aimed at establishing a strong groundwork for my future. I always wanted to make the transition as easy as possible when I did finally retire.

**T&FN:** Was it easy?

**Marsh:** The one struggle has been to find myself and become comfortable in a new routine. I have been running to prepare for competition for many years. When you start exercising for a different purpose, it's a strange new feeling to get used to—but I am still exercising. That is a basic part of my lifestyle, just as it has been for a long time.

It's always been important to me to stay physically fit, and I still work hard at it. In fact, I'm in better shape right now than I have ever been at this time of year—mainly because I went straight from the Olympics into my current fitness program. I didn't take a month off to lay around and get fat.

**T&FN:** Since you first emerged internationally in 1976, what do you feel has been the biggest change in the sport? Perhaps that athletes now can make a good living from it?

**Marsh:** That's one of the biggest. And I really feel that Nike deserves a lot of credit for being the first to make a corporate commitment to athletes. Nike created opportunities for post-graduate athletes to continue their ca-



Retirement from international-class competition has not ended Marsh's intimate involvement with the sport.

reers, then other companies followed suit.

We also saw cycles: from the late '70s things got better and better through 1984 and crescendoed with the LA Olympics. Then it dropped off more and more, and has continued to do so. I'm just glad I don't have to worry about it now—it sounds like the situation with athletes being cut by shoe companies is even worse than after LA.



**T&FN:** *What's the answer?*

**Marsh:** I have said before that the sport desperately needs more corporate support, not just from shoe companies. We *badly* need major corporations to say, "Yes, it's worthy and important to support athletes in Olympic sports. We support them because we believe in the youth of America and its potential."

As major a firm as IBM or General Motors has to decide such support is important to this country. I certainly feel it is—but right now, no major company seems to.

**T&FN:** *What are other major problems facing the sport?*

**Marsh:** Of course, there has been a lot of attention focused lately on drugs in the sport and, to a lesser degree, on the situation with South Africa, which involves the politicization of the sport.

The USOC's Athletes Advisory Council, which I chair, came out strongly against drug use and in favor of short-notice testing. In my view, such testing is the strongest way we can immediately begin to deal with the drug problem.

We simply must make a statement to athletes—and to the world—that the health of athletes comes first. That is far more important than how many medals one country wins.

Another vital question is, "How do we raise money? Should the government be involved?" Ever since the '80 Olympic boycott, the USOC has really kept its distance from government funding—which I'm not sure I totally agree with.

The Olympics always have been political. There's no way to take politics out of them, short of every athlete wearing a white jersey. But by the very nature of the Games, Olympians represent nations, so we represent the United States. As long as we represent this country, we have to have the support of the country.

The government shouldn't just write a check to sports, but should somehow be involved, like the Olympic Coin program. The government serves as a facilitator for contribution of funds by the public, rather than the controller.

**T&FN:** *Have you been criticized for considering going to South Africa?*

**Marsh:** I didn't get any real criticism. I was approached and, frankly, I was ignorant about that situation initially. I said I was interested because I

hate the fact that sports and politics are mixed.

But then I did a lot of reading, I talked to a number of people, including Sydney Maree, because I wanted to make an educated decision. I wanted to decide on the basis of what was right, not because I was being offered money to run.

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## "I was worried that there was so much flag waving in Seoul—by everyone."

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After I learned as much as I possibly could, I decided it was the wrong thing to do. It was a political situation first, which put it above the general principle of politics and sport not mixing.

**T&FN:** *Can sports and politics really remain separate? Or is that a pipe dream of athletic purists?*

**Marsh:** Of course they are mixed. At the same time, though, what else besides the Olympics can bring more than 160 countries together harmoniously?

At the Olympics, I can sit at the lunch table with Iranians and Soviets and East Germans, or just about any other nationality, and there is good will and friendship. In that situation, some degree of the politics is removed. For no other reason than that, it's extremely important to keep the vehicle of the Games alive and operating.

I have to be honest, though, and say I was bothered that there was so much flag waving in Seoul—by everyone. It's good to be proud of your country. But all the flag waving, and the medal counts, inject an added element of politics in the Games which I feel is a bit dangerous.

**T&FN:** *How much longer will you chair the Athletes Advisory Council?*

**Marsh:** A member can serve two 4-year terms. The Amateur Sports Act of '78 defines "athlete" as anyone who has competed in the Olympics or Pan-Am Games in the past 10 years.

I've been on for 9 years. I was elected in '79 while I was in law school, so I got an extra year. My last meeting as chair will be this coming February at the House of Delegates meeting.

I'm not sure yet what direction my USOC involvement will take after that. I might try to serve on the Athlete Eligibility Committee, so I can still have a voice on the Executive Board.

**T&FN:** *Sometimes people in administrative posts can become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. How might a member realize it's time to step down, regardless of his or her best efforts to stay in touch with the sport?*

**Marsh:** It's an individual thing. Mac Wilkins stepped down in the past. The AAC work takes a lot of voluntary time, particularly if you are on the USOC Executive Board. I was elected to the Board at my very first AAC meeting, so I've served on it since '79 as well.

There are *lots* of meetings. If the time becomes too much, or someone isn't effective, he or she might resign. But we try to involve athletes by giving them committee assignments. Every athlete on the AAC is on at least one committee.

**T&FN:** *Such committee work, then, makes it a virtual necessity that an athlete stay in touch with the sport.*

**Marsh:** I felt like I was in a vacuum before I got on the AAC. Athletes may feel that administrators are in the sport just for themselves, that they keep money, that the athletes get little or nothing, that the athletes are pawns who are being used. I heard those things.

But once you get involved, you see what really goes on. It isn't perfect by any means, but you do gain a much better perspective.

Actually, it would be hard for most people to believe how much the USOC relies on the input from athletes in its decision-making process. Athletes have a *tremendous* impact with the Committee. President Robert Helmick and the entire USOC have been totally receptive to the needs and desires of the athletes.

**T&FN:** *The suggestion has been made that nobody in USOC administrative posts should be over age 40. Is it a matter of age, or attitude or exactly what traits that make an effective administrator?*

**Marsh:** It probably was Al Oerter who suggested that! No, I don't agree with that idea. It definitely is a matter of attitude and background. There are many people in the USOC—and TAC—who are over 40 and who are strongly



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## MARSH INTERVIEW—cont:

pro-athlete. People very firmly in favor of athletes. I don't see that as a problem at all.

**T&FN:** *You experienced the change in running from a hobby to a business. Did that change the basic fabric of the sport, when it became more joblike?*

**Marsh:** I felt I differed from many athletes in that running never really was a full-time job for me. I purposely had other goals and activities in my life, so it never was like a job. But we both know a lot of athletes who do nothing but train.

I feel that's detrimental, for two reasons: first, they aren't pursuing career objectives they can use after they retire from the sport. So they aren't well equipped for the future.

Secondly, if you focus only on running, then that's all you see. It can be a vicious cycle: you can burn out, mentally and physically, you don't have balance in your life and you can't become a complete person.

**T&FN:** *What do you feel was the most significant achievement in your running career?*

**Marsh:** Well, if people say "Henry Marsh, who's he?" they probably think of one of two things: he is a four-time Olympic team member. That in itself says a lot. Or, three times he ranked No. 1 in the world. Three years he was rated the world's best steeplechaser.

I feel those are my two most distinguishing achievements. Then after those, we get to ranked 12 straight years in the world's top 10; four American Records; nine national titles with seven in a row; being ranked the top U. S. steepler for the decade of the '70s.

Something that for me would just about make my career would be if I gain enough World Ranking points this year to become the highest scorer ever in the event. Then you could make the argument I could be considered the greatest steeplechaser of all-time. But either way, it has been a fabulous career. I just never won the big title.

**T&FN:** *Finally, in all the interviews you have done over the years, is there one question you're surprised you've never been asked?*

**Marsh:** No, not really. I usually say what I want, even if I'm not asked!

Actually, I thought you would ask, "When will you come out of retirement?" I won't answer that—chiefly because my wife will read this and then I might be in real trouble. □

*Track & Field News*