

Kevin Sullivan

by Jeff Hollobaugh

Kevin Sullivan's mile career is back on track. One of the world's promising young milers, he ranked No. 6 in the world in '95, but was denied any shot at Olympic glory when an Achilles injury washed out the '96 campaign.

As the Canadian star wraps up his collegiate career, he was a dominant figure at Penn to close out April, but wasn't happy with his effort at the Phil Diamond Invitational on his home track in early May. He led from the gun, ripping off a 57.5 first lap, with a heavy wind coming straight at his face in the homestretch.

The gusts seemed to wear him down, and he finished in a pedestrian 3:44.69, having left the rest of the field well behind. "It wasn't even so much the wind. I was just feeling flat," he admitted. "Just one of those days, I guess."

After a long warmdown, Sullivan, a recent graduate in civil engineering (GPA 3.51), put the race behind him. "I get mad if I run a bad race. I like to take an hour to myself to work things out. To punch whatever walls I need to punch. Then I put it behind me and worry about the next race."

With that, the top collegiate miler shared his thoughts on the past, present and a future that goes far beyond Buffalo in June:

T&FN: To what extent do you feel you are still "coming back" from the Achilles injury?

Sullivan: None. Not anymore. I feel that with the [NCAA] win indoors, I pretty much have come full circle from having a high in '95 and being totally bottomed out in '96. I feel that I'm back at the level again of where my career should be heading.

T&FN: How hard was it for you to miss 1996?

— SULLIVAN IN A NUTSHELL —

Kevin Sullivan was born March 20, 1974, in Brantford, Ontario, and is 5-10³/₄/143. Graduated from North Park High in '93. He ranked No. 6 in the world in the 1500/mile in '95, when he set a Canadian Record in the mile.

PRs: 800—1:47.06 ('95); 1000—2:19.76 ('94); 1500—3:35.19 ('97); Mile—3:52.25 ('95); 3000—7:51.65 ('98); 5000—14:17.52 ('97).

Major Meets: 1500—3]WJr ('92); h]WC ('93); 3]NCAA, 2]CG ('94); 1]NCAA, 5]WC ('95); 2]NCAA 6s]WC ('97).

Progression:

Year	Age	Affiliation	800	1500	Mile
'91	17	Can HS Jr	1:48.3	3:46.52	—
'92	18	Can HS Sr	1:47.64	3:39.11	—
'93	19	Can HS 13	1:47.86	3:39.43	3:59.29
'94	20	Mich Fr	1:47.64	3:36.78	3:58.00
'95	21	Mich So	1:47.06	3:35.77	3:52.25
'96	22	injured	—	—	—
'97	23	Mich Jr	1:50.56	3:35.19	4:00.46
'98	24	Mich Sr	1:49.24	3:43.62	3:56.08

Sullivan: It was a tough year. Everything was going my way in '95, and then it all came crashing down in 1996. It was hard to deal with it. After a while, I had no desire to come down and be with the team, no desire to rehab, no desire to cross train. Nothing was helping my foot.

T&FN: Did you watch the Olympics on TV?

Sullivan: I did watch the 1500. I was disappointed. It seemed like a perfect race for me to be in. It was the race I had been dreaming of. I had thought at the end of '95 that I had a good chance to medal.

T&FN: Now that you're approaching the final race of your collegiate career, is there anything you wish you had done differently?

Sullivan: I probably would have been more careful after the World Champs in '95 when I started having my Achilles problem. I probably wouldn't have run the collegiate cross country season. That's the only mistake I really made.

If I would have looked after myself at that point, I probably would have been okay for '96. It's hard to say. At the time I still felt like it was going to be okay. It wasn't bad, just a nagging injury. I thought it was something I could run through.

T&FN: Do you think the end result of the injury and your comeback has helped make you a better athlete?

Sullivan: I don't know if it's made me a better athlete or competitor, but it's made me appreciate the sport and the talent that I do have. I tend not to take things for granted anymore. Now that I know what it's like to not have the sport, I finally realize what it means to me.

T&FN: That NCAA Indoor winning margin was a thin one.

Sullivan: I don't think I ran very smart. I was still at the stage indoors where I hadn't gotten all my aggressiveness back. I felt comfortable, and I felt good about my kick. But when I look back I realize that if I had been smarter I would have taken it from 300-400-500m out and really gone after it there.

If I go to the lead early then I put myself up front, and everyone sits on me and waits for me to make the move, and I'm just more comfortable reacting to what everyone else is doing up front.

T&FN: Would you consider yourself a classic kicker?

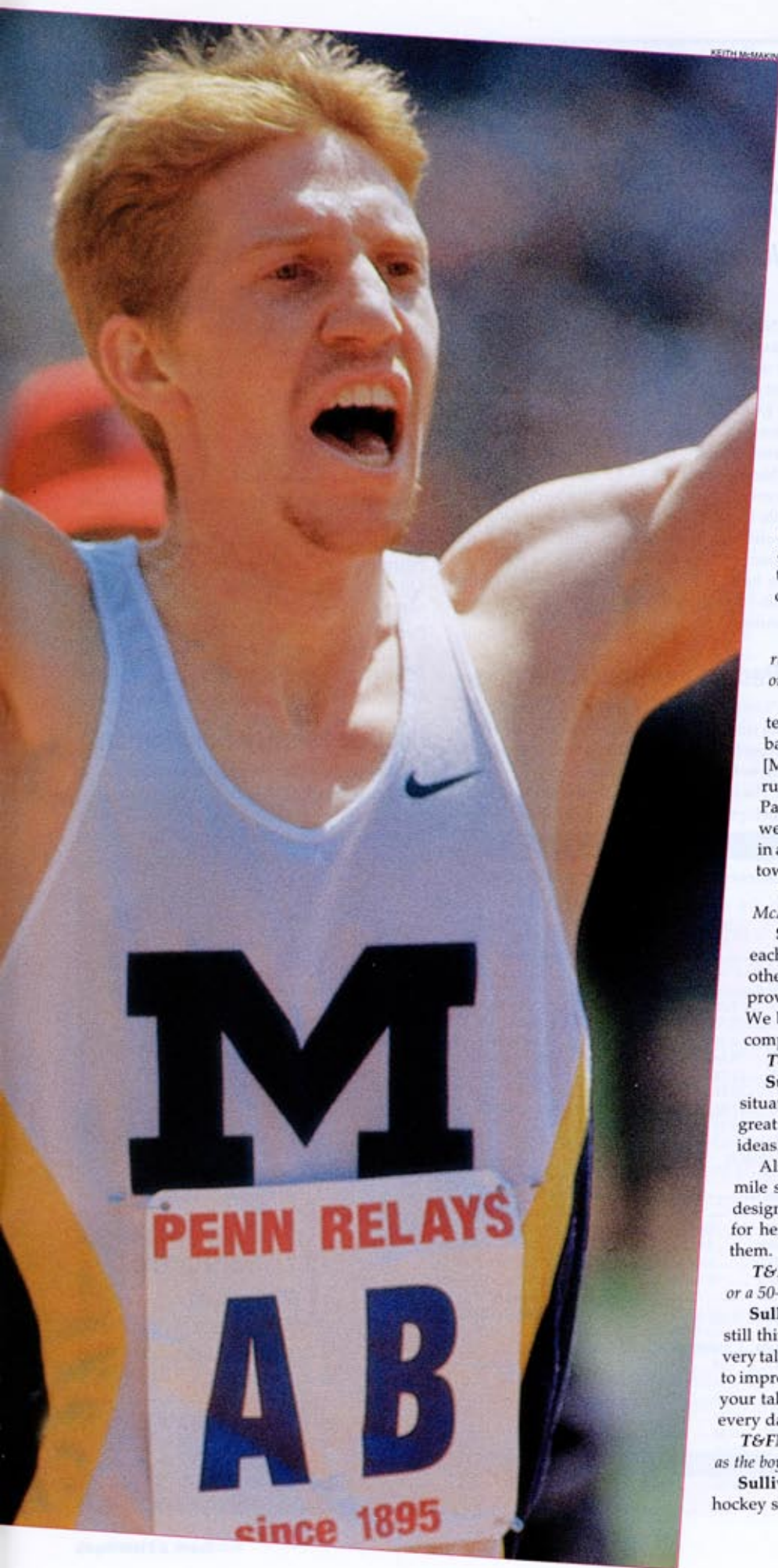
Sullivan: I hope not! I don't want to be labeled that way. I don't think that's my strength, especially off a slow pace. In a faster race like the '95 Worlds, it suited me great, running off a fast pace and kicking. That's my strength.

T&FN: You seemed quite emotional in anchoring the winning distance medley at Penn. Are you an emotional guy in general?

Sullivan: No. It's funny you ask that. When I put my finger up with the No. 1 at Penn, my teammates said that was the most emotional they had ever seen me. They tend not to see a lot of emotions whether I'm finishing a workout or a PR mile.

It was phenomenal, winning at Penn. It's been real frustrating to go there for four years and finish 2nd or 3rd or 4th every year. It was especially frustrating last year, when I thought we had a good shot of winning the 4 x 1500. I just didn't have enough to catch Lassiter that day. Just winning the distance medley this year was





KEITH MCMAKIN

huge for us. We hadn't won at Penn since 1980, and we hadn't won a distance medley since 1960, so the emotions were powerful. I kind of let them all out in that last 100m.

T&FN: *What priorities have you set for the rest of the season?*

Sullivan: Hard to say. My first priority was going to be the Commonwealth Games, but I'm hearing conflicting rumors on the status of the Games, with the big fires in Malaysia. The European season is definitely my focus right now. That's where I want to run my fastest. Then my secondary focus is my national championships and the NCAA meet.

T&FN: *Do you ever target any specific rivals, such as Seneca Lassiter?*

Sullivan: I like the rivalry. But I don't focus on one single rival. I consider my rivals to be every person in the race; everybody's my rival. I'm just out there trying to win.

I'll race anybody. If you put me in a field with the top 10 guys in the world, I'll be happy. I'm confident that I can run with them and I'm very eager to test my ability against them. I'm more than happy to run against a Noureddine Morceli or an El Guerrouj, the top North Americans or whomever. I'm eager to get out there.

T&FN: *Speaking of rivals, what's the story behind the rumored heist of Michigan's Big 10 Cross Country Championship banner?*

Sullivan [laughs]: There are about nine guys on the team who live in a house off campus. We had a Big 10 banner on the roof. A few of the guys from Eastern [Michigan] came over one night and took it down. But rumor has it Paul McMullen was involved too. I think Paul was driving the getaway car. They took it just after we won it at Big 10s but we found it the next week. It was in a tree at the district meet. That was the big joke around town that week.

T&FN: *Would you say you have a friendly rivalry with McMullen, Washtenaw County's other national champion?*

Sullivan: Yeah. We both really enjoy racing against each other. I think we really bring out the best in each other. We're driven by the same things: wanting to improve and wanting to prove ourselves on the world stage. We both have those same great aspirations to be able to compete at that level.

T&FN: *How long do you plan to stay in Ann Arbor?*

Sullivan: At least until 2000, then we'll reevaluate the situation. My relationship with [coach] Ron Warhurst is great. He's always there when I need him. He listens to my ideas. But that doesn't mean he always uses my ideas.

Also, I'm getting married in August to [former Michigan mile standout] Karen Harvey. She has a job as a graphic designer, and she's very happy here. She has different goals for her running career, but she's just as passionate about them.

T&FN: *What got you where you are today? Talent, hard work, or a 50-50 mix?*

Sullivan: I think it's a real combination of the two, but I still think it's more hard work than talent. There are a lot of very talented athletes out there who don't have the dedication to improve or get to a world level. I think you can only rely on your talents so much. I'm a very hard worker. I'm out there every day giving 100%.

T&FN: *Where would you be today if you hadn't been discovered as the boy wonder of Canadian running?*

Sullivan [laughs]: I don't know. Probably playing pickup hockey somewhere. □