

Terrence Mahon

by Sieg Lindstrom

Mahon pupil Jen Rhines has made 3 Olympic teams at 3 different distances

Chances are, you're reading this as Terrence Mahon is—or has just finished—coaching at the World Championships, for which four of his Mammoth TC athletes—wife Jen Rhines (10K, fifth Worlds team), Scott Bauhs (10K), Amy Hastings (5K) and Morgan Uceny (1500)—have qualified.

Mahon will serve as the U.S. women's distance coach in Daegu and has headed the elite Mammoth group, training most of its members (save Meb Keflezighi, whose mentor is Bob Larsen), for 7 years since master distance coach Joe Vigil gave up his spot at the helm for semi-retirement.

Though still relatively young—he will turn 41 in October—Mahon, who coached marathon AR holder Deena Kastor under the 2:20 barrier and

Ryan Hall down to 2:06:17 (after working with Mahon for 5 years, Hall now coaches himself), is one of perhaps a dozen coaches in the country you can be relatively certain will put someone on the team every time there's a Worlds or Olympic Trials.

A former Oregon Duck and Villanova Wildcat, who U.S.-Ranked in both the 10,000 (No. 10 in '96) and the marathon (No. 8 in '97), Mahon coaches with a tireless attention to detail, avid scientific curiosity and skills in flexibility development and massage.

T&FN caught up with him at the Mammoth group's summer training base in Lucca, Italy, a walled Tuscan town offering soft running trails, short travel times to European circuit meets and a warm climate suitable for preparation to race in what will likely be hot, sticky conditions in Korea.

One subject on which we wanted to pick Mahon's brain was how he guides an athlete—say USA 1500 champ Uceny, who went on a tear in the Diamond League in June and July—through the final weeks of major championships preparation:

Mahon: A lot of that depends on the mentality of the athlete. With Morgan, she's on a roll. Basically what we have to look at, because we took her out of the last couple [pre-Daegu]

European races, is what more do we have to gain from running the extra races?

For us psychologically, we knew some things we had to tinker with to get her ready for Worlds, and physically we're looking at what has her volume been for X amount of time—do we feel we can hold that or not?

So it's like, "You could race but it's going to create a greater risk for your Worlds performance, but if we take you out of these one or two races then it gives us two weeks to work on a couple of different components and we put a little bit of mileage in so we definitely know you'll be strong enough to roll through three rounds."

You have to read the athlete and the athlete has to buy into it and be psychologically sound with all of that as well, so there's no exact science because it still has to fit the psycho-emotional component of the athlete.

T&FN: Never underestimate the personality-component, sounds like. They must vary widely within your group.

Mahon: I think you have wildly different personalities all the time. You look at Anna Pierce and Morgan. They run the same events and they have very similar PRs but their personalities are totally different.

Morgan's an emotionally much more low-key athlete. She's equally as driven as Anna. She's just not emotionally as fired up as Anna can be. So with Morgan you can do different things than you can with Anna.

Anna can get amped up really fast all on

Mahon's Current-Pupils List

Scott Bauhs—3rd US 10K... WC team... 13:28.92, 27:48.06
 Angela Bizzarri—3rd US 5K... '09 NCAA XC champ... 4:11.26, 15:28.74
 Josh Cox—50K AR holder... '01 WC marathon... 2:13:51
 Alistair Cragg (Ire)—7-time NCAA champion... '05 Euro Indoor 3K champ... 3:36.18, 3:55.04i, 7:32.49, 13:07.10, 27:39.55, 60:49
 Amy Hastings—2nd US 5K... WC team... 15:14.31, 2:27:03
 Deena Kastor—'04 OG marathon bronze medalist... Marathon AR (2:19:36), HMar AR (67:34)... 4-time US 10K champ, 7-time US XC champ
 Anna Pierce—'10 US 1500 champ, '08 OT steeple champ... 10th '08 OG steeple... 4th '10 World Indoor 800... 1:58.80, 3:59.38, 8:58.07, 9:22.76
 Jon Pierce—'08 World XC team... 8:37.73 steeple
 Jen Rhines—3-time Olympian (5K/10K/Mar)... 5-time WC team member; 4:09.52, 8:35.03, 14:54.29, 31:17.31, 71:14 ('11), 2:29:32
 Patrick Smyth—3rd US HMar... 2nd '10 US HMar... 3rd '10 US 10K... 28:25.85, 62:01
 Morgan Uceny—1st US 1500... Diamond League leader... 1:58.37, 4:01.51

her own excitement whereas Morgan needs races to get amped up. So with Anna you can't run as many races as you can with Morgan. They take more out of Anna because she puts more into it. It's energy management, I guess.

Anna, if she knows she's going to race indoors, she'll get super-duper excited; she's thinking about it day in and day out. Therefore her adrenaline levels are raising higher and all the hormone things that go with that.

She can rally a lot of big performances out of that, whereas Morgan's someone who wants to invest a lot in the training and then when the training has reached a certain level, OK, she needs to race but she's not thinking about the race 24/7.

So she'll use the race and then that race builds the next race and that race builds the next one, whereas Anna can hit a peak with a smaller number of races, but it's because of the psychological component she brings to it. Morgan's never going to do the one-off race.

With Morgan, if we think she's in really good shape and we're going to send her to Europe to run a 1500, we've learned she's going to need at least two and maybe three.

Because she's going to need that many just to kind of get her invested in it, whereas Anna maybe only needs one race.

T&FN: *What is it like coaching Jen and balancing the husband/wife and coach/athlete sides of your relationship?*

Mahon: Jen and I always say I would only coach her in a group setting. If it were just her and I it wouldn't work. I'm too intense and I would drive her insane.

She's very driven and has her own motivations but Jen's a very instinctual runner, whereas I'm a very intellectual coach. So sometimes my intellectual side just bombards her with too much information.

If it were just her and me she'd be the only recipient of the stuff I'm learning and working on. That would probably kill her and then she'd kill me.

Being that I have Amy and Deena, Morgan and Alistair [Cragg] and all of them, it gets spread out a little bit so it balances much better.

T&FN: *What do you aspire to in coaching? To develop champions, recordsetters, or is it something more intrinsic?*

Learning Behind The Scenes

As a coach, Terrence Mahon can roam behind the scenes—in places like Olympic warmup tracks—where most of us can never enter. Does he get occasional free moments where he can watch, say, Usain Bolt as he prepares for a final?

"Without a doubt," Mahon says. "I always say one of the coolest things I've ever seen was I saw Blanka Vlašić warming up for..."

"I forget if it was a Worlds or Olympics. They had a little weightroom area really close to the warmup track, and I saw her do a single-leg snatch. With a decent amount of weight on it, and it was like the day before the final.

"I was like, 'Omigod!' The balance and coordination. My distance runners, we teach them Olympic lifts and to teach a snatch takes

years for someone to get it right. And here's this woman doing it on one leg. Just the power and the explosion and you watch that; unbelievable.

"Recently we were watching some stuff on [Swedish high jumper] Stefan Holm. If you want to see some crazy stuff gymnastics-wise, plug 'Stefan Holm plyo hurdles' into YouTube. You'll just see some amazing feats.

"To me, I have a license to steal when I'm at a warmup track. So I'm watching what the Russian coaches are doing and the Jamaicans, and the Europeans. If I have a group I've kind of always wondered what they do, I watch them; I watch the Ethiopians.

"It's really interesting to see how they work and you're trying to figure out how it all works within the construct of how they coach and how they race."

Mahon: Ultimately, my goal as a coach is to get my athletes what they want. I don't have a goal of creating an Olympic champion

think they can really do.

This year I've been super-excited to see Amy Hastings develop. With her banging her head against the wall for a couple years post-college and just needing one or two things to click, now she's seeing them click [2:27:03 for 2nd in her marathon debut at Los Angeles and cutting a half-minute from her 5K best].

So you get as much joy out of that as you do out of someone who's as thorough and professional as Deena being able to break 2:20.

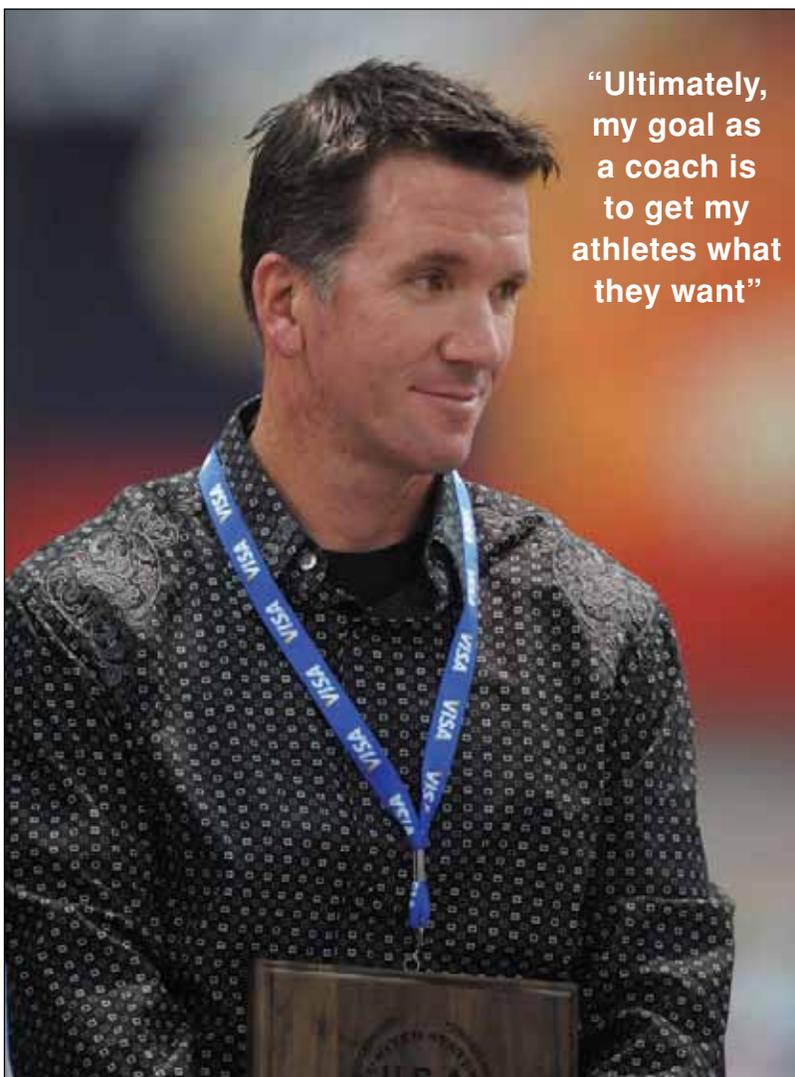
It goes back to the athlete and what the athlete wants. My goal is to get smarter and work harder to find a better way, or a quicker way, or a more efficient way or a more professional way to get them that goal.

And if they don't get it, then I always take a step back and say, "OK, where did I screw up? Is there something I could have done or should have done different?" And then I work to get smarter at that.

I never feel like I'm done. I'm going to coach for a long time because my ultimate goal is coaching mastery and the more I learn the more I learn I don't know.

T&FN: *I must say, it sure seems like your job would be fun. Really fun but clearly a 24-7 occupation.*

Mahon: It's definitely my life, without a doubt. But it's free choice, you know. □



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or whatever because it's not my thing. I have a sit-down with the athletes and say, "What do you want?" The only time I jump in is if I think their goal is not big enough for what I