

Some observers consider Rob de Castella to be the fastest marathoner in history. His 2:08:18 in 1981 came over the storied Fukuoka course, an out-and-back route as compared to the point-to-point New York course on which Alberto Salazar clocked a World Record 2:08:13 some six weeks before de Castella's effort.

Regardless of which is the "best," Australia's de Castella proved to be one tough competitor in the '82 Commonwealth 26-miler, coming from well behind in the latter stages to score a fine 2:09:18 victory.

Now the stage is set for the first-ever marathon meeting between de Castella and Salazar in Rotterdam, April 9.

De Castella, for one, looks forward to the race—just as he looks forward to any competition. Clearly, he is a man who thrives on challenge, particularly over 26 miles of macadam in a test of physical stamina and mental toughness.

He is also an engaging man who enjoys talking about marathoning and marathoners. We spoke twice with the 25-year-old biophysicist, the second time in February shortly after his World Record 42:47 effort in the Gasparilla 15K:

T&FN: Can you compare your Fukuoka race with the Commonwealth as competitive efforts?

de Castella: It's difficult because I went into Fukuoka for a fast time, while I went into the Commonwealth race shooting for a gold medal. I wasn't so concerned about the time in Brisbane. I was lucky in some ways because the course wasn't a fast one.

They were two completely different types of races. The Commonwealth I see as being more typical of an Olympic marathon, where you aren't concerned about the time but rather just winning. So they are hard to compare.

T&FN: You are known for a very serious approach to the marathon and also as being a hard racer.

de Castella: Well, I always like to run hard in my races. I have always believed that after a race you should know honestly within yourself that you couldn't have run any harder. You should never be able to say after a race, "Gee, I know I could have run harder."

But if you go into a race to run as hard as you can, you won't be able to look back and think or say what you "might" have done. Likewise with my career, I don't want to get 5 or so years in the future and look back and say, "I wish I had done this or that." I want to do *now* everything that I feel I should be doing.

That's the main reason I approach my marathons as I do and also why I'm not concerned with making big bucks in the U.S. I believe that fulfilling your potential and running the very best you can is more important.

T&FN: What motivates you now? The World Championships? The Olympic gold medal?

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ROB de CASTELLA



John Punshon

de Castella: They all are things I'm aiming for. But I get motivation from, I suppose, unusual things. I get motivation from just doing specific training sessions. I get motivation from past races; I got a lot of motivation from the Fukuoka and Commonwealth races. I get motivation just from traveling and meeting and talking with people. I get motivation from basic things like media coverage and general recognition.

T&FN: *Of course, there must be great motivation for you from the fact that you and Alberto Salazar have never met in a marathon, and your first meeting is eagerly anticipated. Can you give some thoughts about Salazar as a competitor?*

de Castella: He is without doubt one of the most competitive and determined of all athletes. He has incredible drive. We approach the marathon from different angles, Salazar concentrating on his speed and me on my strength.

I've got a lot of respect for him—but I think I can beat him. [Laughs] When we do meet, it should be a very close and exciting race.

T&FN: *What do you see as his strengths and weaknesses?*

de Castella: One obvious strength is his speed on the track, which is so much faster than mine at present. Obviously, he is very strong and his mental approach must be phenomenal to enable him to just cut out the final sections of races the way he does.

As for his weaknesses, I think he has to be very careful not to over-race. In fact, one problem he may have is being ranked No. 1. Everybody wants him for their race, especially in the States.

Something else, too, is that none of Salazar's marathons have been real elite-level races. They have been over one-way courses and run in just a completely different atmosphere from a top international-level race. I think he will find the Olympics, or any elite marathon, to be an entirely different situation.

On the other hand, he has raced a great deal on the track in world-class races. There is a certain amount of experience that carries over regardless of the race, but there are certain things about the racing environment of an international marathon that are just completely different from one that is pretty much domestic in nature.

T&FN: *You have been a well-known name in Australia virtually since you were about 15 years old. First you were a star at the Junior level, then you moved to the Senior national level and finally to international prominence. Did you ever feel a great amount of pressure or expectations at these levels?*

de Castella: I've basically always just had my own expectations that concern me the most. Also the expectations of those who are close to me, like my coach and my family and my wife and a couple of the *The Bible of the Sport*

guys I train with. Theirs are the only expectations that concern me.

It not only gets down to every week being important, but also every training session during that week being very important. People have a hard time understanding that it's more than just getting out and running a couple of times a day. It's a lot more complicated and a lot more demanding than that.

To me, the marathon is the ultimate athletic challenge because it brings together so many variables that you have to manipulate to your advantage to get your best performance. There isn't any other sport or event that brings so many factors into play, and just having one out of tilt can make such a difference.

Choosing your races is so important, because your overall program is so paramount. Your races have to be based around your training and you have to be able to fit everything in.

T&FN: *How do you pick your races?*

de Castella: I don't choose to race without serious consultation with both my coach, Pat Clohessy ['61 and '62 NCAA 3M champion while attending Houston], and my wife Gaylene. I've run under Pat for 10 years and I've as much confidence in him as anyone can have in another person. It's so important to have someone in whom you have complete confidence. . .

I believe that my best time is pretty close to the World Record as it is. The World Record is definitely within my capabilities.

But an Olympic gold medal is something again. You can run a World Record anytime; you don't have to do it on a set date. But the Olympics is being able to manipulate all those variables that I mentioned earlier to be in the right situation for that one particular day.

T&FN: *You have met another of your prime foes before, Toshihiko Seko. That was Fukuoka in 1980 when he won and you were 8th.*

de Castella: I respect him a great deal, too. He too has speed and strength, but he also has the best self-control of probably any marathoner. That may come from his very disciplined lifestyle, or just the Japanese lifestyle in general. But you have to be able to hold yourself back in a race, to utilize your fitness and your strengths as best you can. His approach to running is superb.

T&FN: *How about Waldemar Cierpinski?*

de Castella: I've raced him several times, the first being the Moscow Olympics where he impressed me greatly with his single-minded approach to his race tactics and race plan. His self-control was impressive.

I also raced him at Fukuoka a couple of times and he didn't impress me nearly as much. So I have to conclude he is just a different runner in the Olympics. I certainly

wouldn't write him off in Los Angeles; he is potentially a medal-winner.

T&FN: *Gerard Nijboer of Holland?*

de Castella: We ran in Moscow, but I didn't take that much note of him. But he was 2nd there and he must be very good to have run just over 2:09 and be European Champion. He is one of the many runners with the potential to break through and set a World Record or win an Olympic gold medal.

T&FN: *How about the Africans?*

de Castella: Yes, how about them! Crikey, there are so many good ones around, it's hard to keep track of them! But Juma Ikangaa of Tanzania, who ran such a tough race in Brisbane, definitely has to be a threat. With more experience, he could definitely become one of the event's stars.

I've got a lot of respect for the Ethiopians, especially Mohamed Kedir and Kebede Balcha. If Kedir moves up to the marathon from the 10,000, he would be a major concern—but maybe with a bit of luck he will stay down at the shorter distances. But many of the African runners have to be considered a major threat because they all have such a physiological advantage from having lived and trained all their lives at altitude.

T&FN: *Frank Shorter once said that the Olympic race is unlike any other marathon in that it becomes very competitive early on and is more a set of surges.*

de Castella: One major advantage I have over Alberto is that I have run an Olympic marathon before. Moscow's race, in fact, was just as Frank described; there were many surges in it. You can either go with all of them and hope to gut it out in the end. Or you can run like Cierpinski: run at a pace that maintains contact with the leaders but which doesn't dramatically change your tempo. I think that's the best way to do it.

The thing is, there won't be just a few people up front racing for that gold medal in Los Angeles. There are a lot of good athletes out there all pointing for the same thing, so there will be a lot of good guys up there really racing. I'm looking forward to that. □

Francois Robert de Castella (dee Ca-STELLA) was born February 27, 1957, and is 5-10 $\frac{1}{2}$ /143. Married to marathoner Gaylene Clews, he lives in Canberra and works as a biophysicist at the Australian Institute of Sport. His progression, with placings on the World List and in the World Rankings, plus his finishes in major marathons:

Year	Age	10,000	Marathon	WR	WL	Races
1975	18	29:11.8				
1976	19	28:50.4				
1977	20	29:23.6				
1978	21	28:58.0				
1979	22	28:23.6	2:13:23	—	33	
1980	23	28:16.12	2:10:44	—	14	10)OG
1981	24		2:08:18	2	2	1)Fuk
1982	25		2:09:18	2	2	1)BCG
1983	26	28:12.2				

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