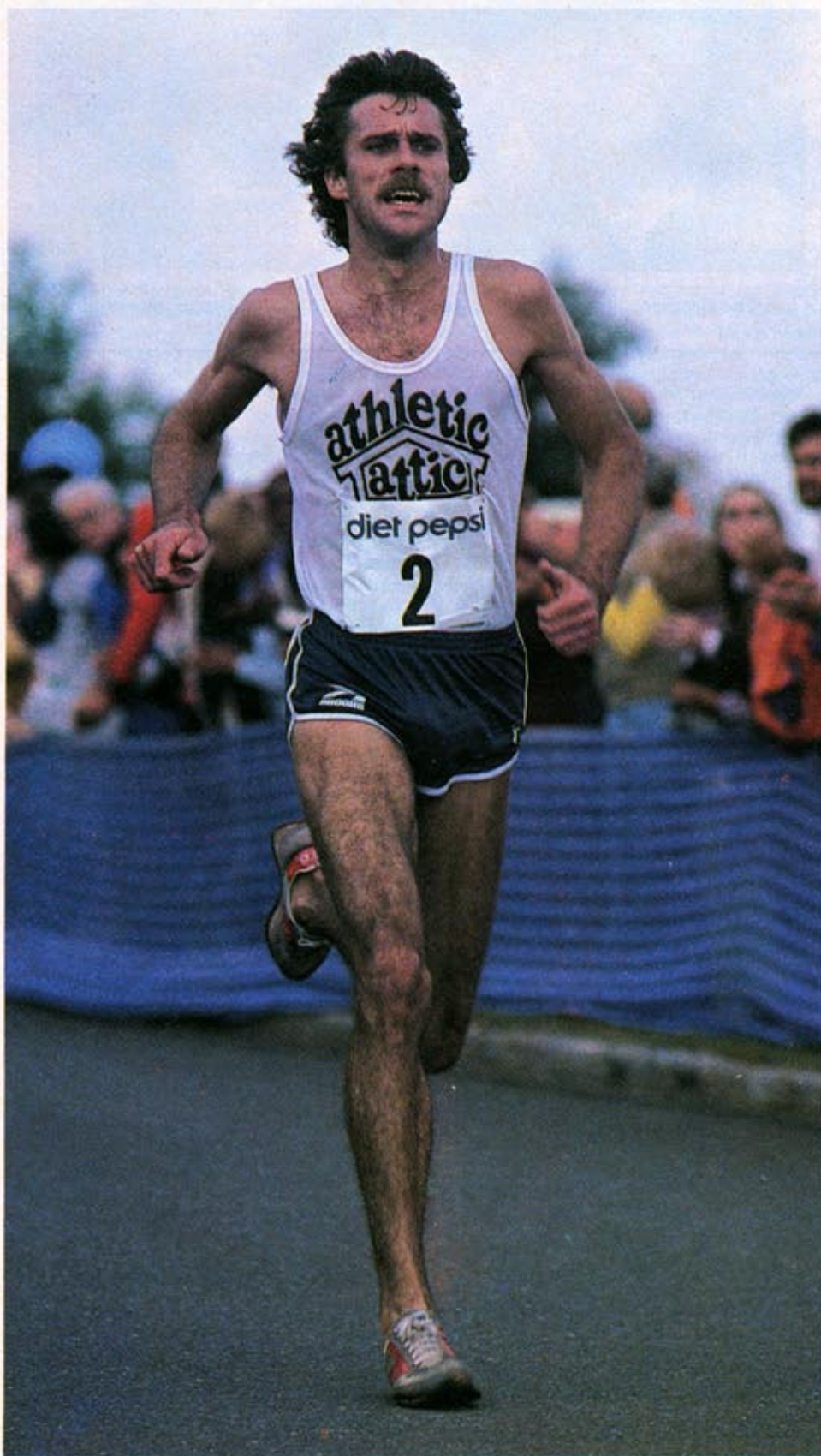


ROD DIXON

by David Gleason



Conspicuous by his absence from the top 50 of the world lists in 1980 was Rod Dixon, who had appeared in the 1500 and/or 5000 annually starting with 1971.

In fact, save 1977 it was also the first time since 1971 in which he didn't earn a spot in the Top 10 in the World Rankings.

No, the 10-year international veteran didn't hang them up. The 30-year-old New Zealander has simply and gracefully moved into a new realm of running. There are new worlds to conquer on the U.S. road racing circuit.

The subjugation of the U.S.'s best had an auspicious start in the second part of the 1980 campaign—Rod's first on the roads—as he ran well enough to earn No. 1 Ranking in the short-distance North American road rankings.

So complete is his devotion to off-the-track racing now that he cancelled his indoor appearances after one race and headed down under for some summer training back home.

Our in-person interviewing suddenly an impossibility, we reached him at his Auckland home for a telephonic discussion of his metamorphosis:

T&FN: *We missed you indoors this year.*

Dixon: Yes, I decided to come back here to train for the World Cross Country Championships in March.

My track involvement has had to become less and less because the emphasis is more on road racing. There's so much happening around the world in road racing.

But I'm a road racer who's going to come back and run a few good track races. *[laughs]* I still want to run a good 5000, and maybe a good 10,000 on the track.

T&FN: *You've had a long and successful career.*

Dixon: I first represented New Zealand in 1971, so it's almost 10 years now. I picked up the issue when Walker was your Athlete Of The Year in 1975. I was going through it, and suddenly I realized, "Hey, I had a good year that year."

In the 1500 I ranked something like 4th [3rd] then I got the No. 1 Ranking in the 5000. When I looked at it, the consistency and the depth of my running, you know, I was pretty good, and it reflected right through.

And then, when I came to the States for road racing last year, I suddenly realized I had to try to prove something all over again. People sort of said, "Who's this guy?" *[laughs]*

They really didn't know. The track nuts and statisticians, they sort of said, "Yeah, we know who he is." But people tend to forget. Like Falmouth! I felt like a young kid in school coming into that race!

T&FN: *Why do you think that is;*
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because you weren't a road runner per se?

Dixon: Yeah, I think you need to prove yourself, that you are capable of running on the roads. It may be like a Grand Prix driver who wants to race Rally; he's got to prove himself before people give him a little respect.

T&FN: *I suppose there are a lot of good track runners who don't make it on the roads. It's not that easy a transition to make, really.*

Dixon: No, I don't believe it is. A lot of people here, I guess, see that I run roads, and they feel, well, here is a good track runner, so road racing must be easy. I don't look at it that way. I think I have a pretty good natural ability.

Even back in '70-'71, I considered that my thing was going to be cross country. The Olympics were coming up the following year, and I thought I perhaps I should try the 5000 or the 10,000.

Then, as part of my training program, I ran a few mile races, and I started to get my time down. Before long, I was very competitive as a 1500 runner, and as it turned out, I got the second team berth, and ended up medalling in the event, while all the coaches and experts believed I should have been running something closer to cross country.

T&FN: *How did you get into cross country?*

Dixon: In our background in New Zealand, most children are introduced to the harrier situation before they go into track & field. I'd play hockey in the morning and ride my bike to the afternoon run with the harriers, and that would normally be 4-5M over the countryside.

And then you'd all come back for a big afternoon tea, and cycle home with a tummy full of cakes and cream biscuits and things. I wondered whether that was why I was going, actually. I guess that gave the background that later developed into track.

T&FN: *You've said that the cross country training you did—especially in '74-'75—provided you with the strength to be a road runner.*

Dixon: I think so, yes. I've always been very strong in training. I've won our New Zealand cross country title a couple of times, and I won the British cross country title and finished 3rd in the international, but track was taking more emphasis then.

When I'd get to the line with the likes of Liquori and all these other fine 5000m runners, we'd all come from different backgrounds to get there. The final result may be only a second or two between us, yet perhaps Liquori has spent most of his time on the track, whereas I have done 75% of my running in fartlek or cross country-type background.

So I sort of achieve my speed through strength, whereas a lot of athletes, like Walker and those guys, achieve their strength through speed. It certainly does me no harm, and I think the stress factor is *The Bible of the Sport*

less on me than on a guy who relies on speed work.

I did some tests at Northridge and I'm aware that my oxygen uptake is very high, but my transportation—my utilization of that—is quite slow under stress.

I get far more benefit and far less stress if I go out and run 10 times 56-57 for

"I'm Certainly In A Niche That Suits Me Better-- As A Road Racer."

a quarter than try and do 3-4 at 52. Somebody like Walker can handle that, but I can't get into oxygen debt and fight fatigue like he can. I am better running all day at 60-65 seconds.

I train more to my capabilities, rather than be influenced by what others are doing. So often you read where guys do these incredible workouts, and others will say, "Well, if Sebastian Coe does that, or Ovett does that, or Walker does that or Scott does that, then maybe that's what I'm not doing right."

So they go out on this tremendous speed program and before long, they're on the sidelines. It's very important to realize what your own particular facets are, and stay with those.

My brother John who is 3 years older than me, basically guided me in the early days. The thing that he always said... in fact, he made a big sign and it went above my bed, and it said, "Don't be influenced by others."

Now, if you look at 1972, that's a prime example, where I watched Keino and Prefontaine training, and those guys were doing absolutely incredible workouts. And of course, I rang my brother in New Zealand, and said, "I know why I'm not running so well, because I'm not doing the training that these guys are."

He said, "Have confidence in what you've got, get down on the track and do it, and put blinkers on if you have to. *Don't be influenced by others.*" And when it came to the day of the race, he was right.

I mean, I watched Prefontaine run a 3:59.8 time-trial for a mile. Do you realize how long it took me to run that time? [laughs] And that is probably what puts a lot of guys off; they see this, and they immediately think they have to change.

T&FN: *You mentioned John Walker. You've both represented New Zealand for a long time, and you are both still running successfully. Have you ever felt overshadowed by him?*

Dixon: Yes, I think so, definitely. I think it's very hard to run against an athlete of his caliber, coming from such a small country. You think, "Why couldn't I

belong to the Cayman Islands?" I'd be a national hero; in any other country I'd be sharing the same sort of limelight.

But I think it's good in the competition sense, and I'm always trying to beat John. In the last year or so, now that I've drifted away, I don't know whether that was intentional or not—to get away from that feeling.

But I'm certainly in a niche that suits me much better—as a road racer, and I feel now that I'm coming into an identity of my own here at home.

T&FN: *You feel you're getting more attention now, or recognition, as a road runner?*

Dixon: Yes, more recognition, because I've run some very good road races down here. When I got back, I ran a 1:03 half-marathon, and then I ran a 10K over a very, very hilly circuit in 28:50. That was awesome, because it was such a heavy circuit.

I think that started to have people realize, well, that I'm just that much better on the roads than I ever was on the track.

T&FN: *You've got a good situation here with Brooks, working as a consultant. You've even been living in Pennsylvania.*

Dixon: Yes, they've helped me to get settled there. It was Ron Stanko and Brooks who encouraged me to come and try road racing.

Once we boycotted, I realized that I had to make a move to get over to Europe like I normally do. So when I came through the area, Ron said, "Why don't you stay for the local Diet Pepsi race?"

I got 3rd in that race, and I must have done everything wrong that is possible. I ran a hard race and I was spent, but I knew that I could improve so much more.

Of course, when you see that, you get excited about it. As a result, I cancelled going to Europe and started picking up the road races. The more I did it, the more I realized that it was like settling in: you have a rhythm, you have a program going, and it felt much more comfortable than touring Europe and feeling uncomfortable with so many races.

I like the idea of racing on the weekends, because I have a wife [Debra] and small children, and my wife comes with me, and it means I can spend some time with them.

I can take care of commitments to Brooks. Walker and I have the Athletic Attic franchise back here, and it gives me time to work on ideas and thoughts. We've got some manufacturers making some textiles, so we can send back samples.

I mean, it means I can combine everything and have a way of life, rather than saying, "We don't have time for doing this and that." Everything is sort of fitting in. Of course, nothing is ever really like "cruising," but it feels much more comfortable.

T&FN: *Tell us about your children.*

Dixon: Well, there is Kate, who is 3½,

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ROD DIXON—continued

and Emma, who is 16 months. They've been in and out while I've been on the phone. They're so busy. It's exciting, now that they are getting to where I can communicate with them.

Maybe on a Sunday, we'll organize a picnic, and I'll head off about an hour and a half before, running in that direction, and then they come and catch up with me in the car. I'm feeling hot and tired. It's sunny, and then to hear the little voices, and see the faces at the window, it's just so good, it makes you feel very good.

T&FN: *You sound very happy.*

Dixon: Yeah, I am. When I came back here, I had some problems; I had sore tendons and so forth, but I'm over that, and I'm settling down to some good training.

I'm pretty keen on the International Cross Country race in March, and I know it's going to be tough. I hear Salazar, Nick Rose and Virgin are all going, and I think that's exciting for the sport.

We didn't have a chance to have a go at Yifter during the Olympics, and it looks like the World Championships are obviously going to place more emphasis on getting the world's athletes together. It doesn't look like the Olympics can do that anymore.

I've been subjected to so many boycotts; we've been boycotted against and we've boycotted, and I don't see that anybody has gained anything. The people who boycott are the losers.

I saw at the Millrose Games that the Russians boycotted because Sydney Maree was there, but nobody said anything about the fact that Walker was there!

The Springboks are coming to New Zealand to play rugby and I'll bet that next year at the Commonwealth Games we'll be back in the limelight again.

So I say now, to hell with the boycott and all that. It's not so much that the years are closing in, but that the years are getting more valuable to me.

Every day and every week is exciting for me, and I'll run against whomever I can, whenever I can and however I can. □

Rodney Dixon was born in Nelson, New Zealand, July 13, 1950, and now measures 6-2/156. Nicknamed "Rabbit" in his early running days. Married, 2 daughters. Placings in major competitions: Olympics—3rd in '72 1500, 4th in '76 5000; Commonwealth Games—4th in '74 1500, 8th in '78 1500, 8th in '78 5000; AAU—1st in 1500 in '74. PRs: 1:47.6 ('73), 2:17.2 ('74), 3:33.89 ('74), 3:53.62 ('75), 5:01.67 ('75), 8:29.0 St ('73), 7:41.0 ('74), 8:14.32y ('74), 13:17.27 ('76), 28:35.69 ('81). His progression (with World Rankings in parentheses):

Year	1500	Mile	3000	5000
1971		4:00.1		
1972	3:37.46 (3)	3:59.6	7:51.0	
1973	3:37.3 (3)	3:57.9	7:46.8	
1974	3:33.89 (4)	3:54.9	7:41.0	13:32.6
1975	3:37.45 (3)	3:53.62	7:45.0	13:21.6 (1)
1976	3:36.1 (6)	3:56.44	7:43.46	13:17.27 (4)
1977	3:41.2	3:57.47		13:35.6
1978	3:39.0	3:58.1	7:41.1	13:17.37 (7)
1979		3:58.4	7:44.21	13:18.64 (6)
1980			8:25.6y	
1981			8:01.12	13:58.2