

by Dave Johnson

Early this year, Roger Kingdom said, "Setting the World Record would go a long way in strengthening my position in the eyes of everyone. I want to focus my efforts most on getting that record."

Kingdom's focus zeroed in with perfect clarity during his Zurich 12.92 WR (p. 4). The clocking lowered the fabled first sub-13, produced in 1981 by Renaldo Nehemiah, his idol as a youth. That was Nehemiah's only legal sub-13: Kingdom now has three such.

Coupling his record with Olympic titles in 1984 and '88, the 27-year-old Kingdom can rightfully take his place among the event's greatest exponents: men such as Towns, Dillard, Calhoun, Davenport, Milburn, Nehemiah and Foster.

But after all, establishing his name among the very best ever to skim ten 42-inch barriers has always been a major driving force for the powerful Georgia native.

Just 24 hectic hours after his triumphant Swiss race, he shared his thoughts with us. The setting was decidedly unusual for an interview, as the new WR setter sat in the swirling waters of a whirlpool in West Berlin's Hotel Intercontinental:

**T&FN:** You're the most important man in track & field today.

**Kingdom:** I'm getting there. I've had a lot of exciting races this year. I started out the season kind of slow so I didn't expect being able to break the World Record until maybe September.

Fortunately for me, the competitive edge I developed both hurdling and playing football just came out. I didn't want to lose that race in Zurich under any circumstances. That feeling led to breaking the World Record.

**T&FN:** Does that mean you feel you're ahead of schedule and the peak is still to come?

**Kingdom:** I really feel the peak is yet to come. I hit several hurdles in Zurich. I got a great start—and I had been told many times that if I just got out of the blocks well, I could break the record. That's what I did.

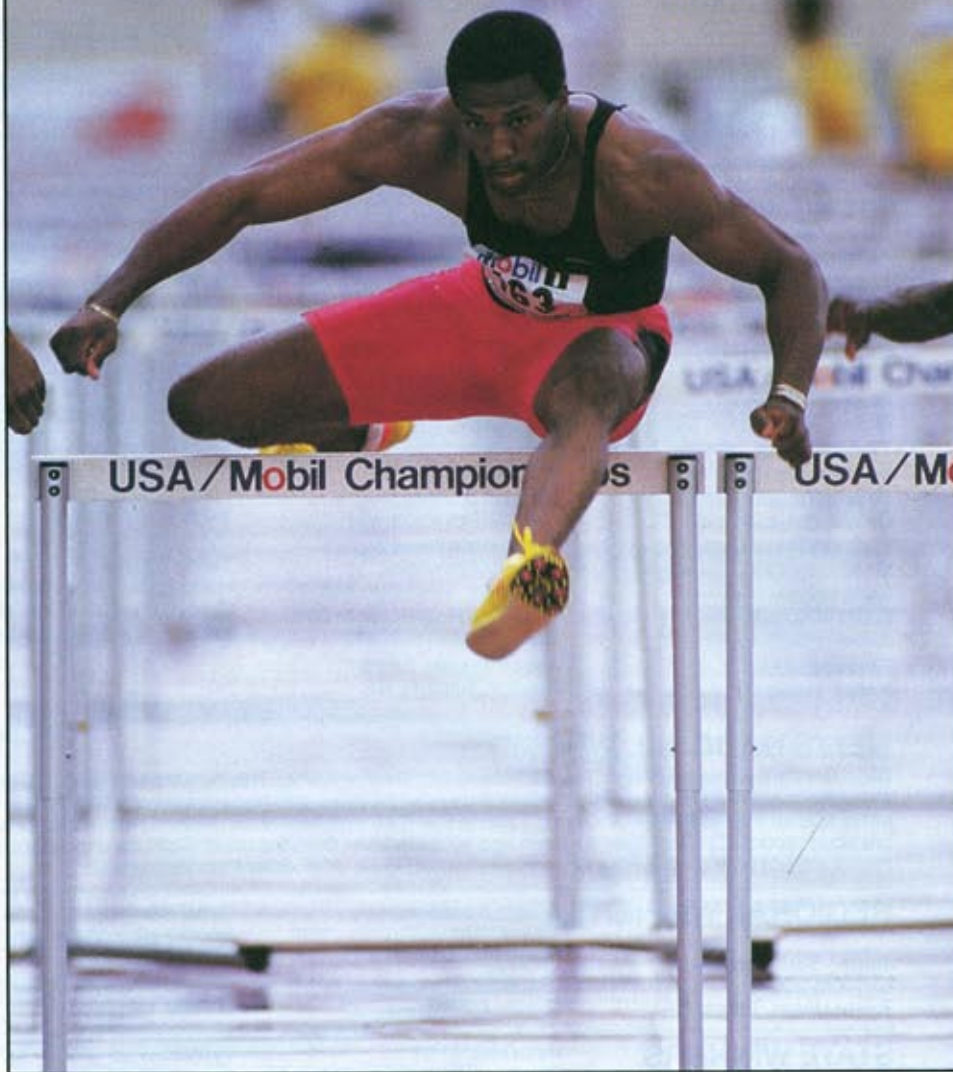
**T&FN:** What are your other strong points right now?

**Kingdom:** At this point, I have a good move from the fifth hurdle to the finish. I concentrate on snapping right off the hurdles. When I do that, I get into a better running position right away, ready to attack the next hurdle. I feel I do that better than any other hurdler out there today. That's what enables me to run down people at the end of a race.

But I feel if I work a little more on my technique, sharpen it to the point it 8—October 1989

T & F N I N T E R V I E W

# Roger Kingdom



ATLSPORT/Allen Steele

was in '88, then I can take the record down to 12.85.

**T&FN:** Was there one point of your career where you first felt the record was within your reach?

**Kingdom:** Last year. After I ran the 12.97 at altitude in Sestriere, I knew I was within reach of the record. I ran a nice fast race, yet smooth, calm and conservative. I just blew the field away.

At that point, I knew the World Record was just a half-step away. To break it just meant getting out of the blocks faster.

**T&FN:** There's a good story about the record race.

**Kingdom:** Yeah! And it's crazy. My

manager, John Nubani, came to me the morning of the meet and said, "Roger, I had a dream last night that you won the race in 12.92!"

I told him, "John, don't put that kind of pressure on me, man!" That's another reason I went so crazy when I saw the 12.89 on the scoreboard. Then when the time was made the official 12.92, we both nearly died. I told him, "You ought to dream more often!"

**T&FN:** What didn't go as well as it could have?

**Kingdom:** I think I could have run a bit taller and thus not hit hurdles as hard as I did. I scraped several, but I really whacked the 10th which caused me

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to glide a little and that could have cost me the record. If I hadn't smashed that last hurdle, I might have run in the 12.85-12.87 range.

**T&FN:** *The scoreboard showed 12.89 and you did go just a little nuts.*

**Kingdom** [laughing]: I loved it. I think I was a little dumbfounded. I saw 12.89, but took it just matter-of-factly. My mind was thinking 10ths because at a lot of meets, the scoreboard clock is unofficials in 100ths.

Then the next second I realized, "Oh! This is official timing. It's either one [hundredth] up or down." Then the announcer was yelling, "New World Record!" And Colin [Jackson] was screaming, "World Record!"

I realized, "My God, I broke the World Record!" I just jumped up and down before I dropped to my knees and said, "Thank you, Jesus," because I knew it was a blessing.

**T&FN:** *Did it mean much to you to break the record on the same track where Nehemiah ran his 12.93?*

**Kingdom:** It meant a lot. Renaldo was my idol when I started running. In high school, I followed everything he did. So to break his record in the same place where he set such a respected mark was a great thrill for me.

I just hated it when he left track to go into football. It was probably a good choice for him at the time, but it meant I never raced him when he was in his prime shape. So we never could find out who is the greatest hurdler.

**T&FN:** *Now you have the record. Any thoughts about when that realization might finally hit you?*

**Kingdom:** I suspect it will be a couple of weeks after the season is over. Right now, I'm still really focused on winning the Grand Prix final and the World Cup. That's what I really want. I just have to continue to train hard, remain focused and keep my motivation at a high level so I can continue to win.

**T&FN:** *How do you do that? How does a world-class athlete get in much training over here?*

**Kingdom:** I keep my motivation high by concentrating on not losing a race. Keeping that competitive edge will keep me on top.

As far as training goes, I try to train through the meets. I train very hard when I have two or three days between meets. Then I take a break the day before a meet to rest my legs.

When I have a meet every other day, on the off day I jog and stretch to get any cramps out, sit in a whirlpool  
*The Bible Of The Sport*

and just relax and stay off my feet. Then I can compete the next night. Doing it this way, I can rest but also stay in shape.

**T&FN:** *What time did you get to sleep last night?*

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## "I know running won't last forever, so it's important to get that education"

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**Kingdom** [laughing]: I didn't get to sleep finally until about 4:00 in the morning. And I didn't even go out to celebrate.

The press conference after the meet lasted a long time. Then I went out to dinner, which lasted late. I got back to my room about 3:30, then a couple of reporters from my hometown papers in Georgia and Pittsburgh called and I talked with them.

So it ended up being late—but that's the position you work hard to get into. I'm now in that position so I had to fulfill those obligations.

**T&FN:** *So it wasn't just a matter of waiting for the adrenaline to wear off. There was enough going on that kept your mind occupied?*

**Kingdom:** Yes, there was so much happening to keep my mind off dwelling on the World Record, to keep me focused. I thought, "There's another meet coming up soon. I've got to get some rest; I've got to prepare." My mind was racing, thinking about what I had to do next. So I never totally lost focus.

**T&FN:** *You spoke about fast starts. You were in Italy training with Jack Pierce on starts in the week leading up to Zurich.*

**Kingdom:** Right. I trained with Jack in Rieti for about five days and we worked almost solely on getting out of the blocks and to the first hurdle. It really helped; we were getting out in 1.9-2.0 seconds, which is fast for me.

Another thing I found out was that my butt was being raised a little too high, which caused me to pop straight up out of the blocks. When I did that, I took a long step and then a short step.

But when you drive out of the blocks, your first three steps should be very short and fast. Then you can start lengthening your stride, building up

into the hurdle. I hadn't been doing that, but I concentrated on it in Zurich and that's why I got such a good start.

**T&FN:** *Something that's noticeable on replays of the record is that as you attack the hurdle you pivot your hips to the right just before you thrust out with your left lead leg. It's like you almost sidestep the hurdle. Is that something conscious?*

**Kingdom:** It's a special technique of mine, but it's something you can't teach. I'm able to utilize the technique to my best advantage. The hip rotation allows me to get my lead leg down and snap my trail leg through as fast as possible.

Some people don't like the technique because I scrape hurdles, but I get over them very quickly. When I hit hurdles, I've heard some broadcasters say things like, "Kingdom has no technique," or, "If hitting hurdles was a crime, Roger Kingdom would draw a life sentence."

**T&FN:** *Your girlfriend, Joy Shepherd, is your coach, but in terms of technical things like this, what really does she do?*

**Kingdom:** She's my eyes. She has watched me hurdle for more than eight years. I coached her in my hurdling style, how I wanted to do it, and she started pointing things out to me even before I taught her.

This year, both of us have been involved with school; I'm going full time to finish up my degree in economics at Pitt. So I had to do a lot of the work on my own. I want her to graduate and I couldn't be selfish to take up all her time.

**T&FN:** *How do you reconcile school and full-time training?*

**Kingdom:** It's been difficult going to school. I definitely want my degree, but I also realize there's a lot of money I can make in track right now at my age. I won't always be in a position to make this kind of money. And I know running won't last forever, so it's important to get that education and degree to have something to fall back on.

**T&FN:** *This is the first day you've been able to say, "I am the World Record holder." Have you met a lot of people who already recognize you that way?*

**Kingdom:** Oh man, all over the place. People stopped me in the airport in Zurich, at the airport here in Berlin, on the streets. Before Zurich it was like, "Who is this guy? We know of him,"



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KINGDOM — continued:

but who is he?" I guess now they know me.

T&FN: Has there been more attention after the World Record than there was after either of the gold medals?

Kingdom: Yes. Today, it seems that people believe being the World Record holder—the fastest man ever in my event—is more important than winning at the Olympics. So today, every athlete strives to set a World Record so he can be compensated.

I feel we are losing focus on the value of the Olympics and the World Championships. There was a time when being an Olympic champion or World Record holder weighed a great deal. But now, in negotiating an appearance fee, if you say you're a gold medalist, meet directors almost don't care.

T&FN: Of course, you want to run faster in the hurdles, but you have talked about doing the decathlon. How serious is that, aside from just next year?

Kingdom: I feel I can perform well in it. But I'm going to relax and do it for fun, just to get the feel of it. If I score 7500-8000 points, then I know I can score very high if I choose to be serious about the decathlon.

But if I score less than 7500, I'll know I should put thoughts about the decathlon to rest until after 1992, because I have a big goal for '92: to become the first hurdler ever to win three consecutive Olympic gold medals. It's a grand opportunity for me and a position not many athletes have ever been in. It's an opportunity you just don't pass up.

But I'll have to map out my priorities. I have talked about doing the decathlon and I always want to be a man who's true to his word. □

Roger Kingdom was born August 26, 1962, in Vienna, Georgia and is 6-0/185. While at Vienna High School, won state meet triples in the 120yH, high jump and discus.

His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	110H	Major Meets
1980	17	14.2y HS	—
1981	18	13.7y HS	—
1982	19	14.07	—
1983	20	13.44 (8, 6)	1)NC, 7)TAC, 1)PAG
1984	21	13.16 (1, 1)	2)TAC, 1)OT, 1)OG
1985	22	13.14 (1, 1)	1)TAC
1986	23	13.40 (4, 2)	5)OF
1987	24	13.51 (injured)	—
1988	25	12.97A (1, 1)	1)TAC, 1)OT, 1)OG
1989	26	12.92 (1?, 1?)	1)TAC

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