

T&FN INTERVIEW

STEVE HOLMAN

by Sieg Lindstrom

In a conversation with Steve Holman one hears an athlete who has made a transition. With Mark Croghan, Bob Kennedy and the outspoken Marc Davis as his peers, he has made the jump to a level of psychological comfort with the regular practice of stepping to starting lines at the biggest meets in Europe to race against the best middle distance runners in the world.

"I've always felt it's bad luck to predict," Holman says, when asked what lies in his athletic future, but clearly he is confident he belongs in the world-class mile game.

"I personally think that I have the potential to be a World Championships medalist," he says. "I thought I had a not bad/not fantastic training year last year and I managed to be ranked No. 5. I think I could do better than that this year. Who knows?"

Ironically, Holman, whose No. 5 in the 1500 was his first-ever world ranking, sounds realistic in his assessments even though he missed the past two USATF finals.

A stress fracture of the left tibia in the spring of '93 limited him to a late-season campaign that year. Then he sustained another fracture in the same spot the following December and says he was unhappy with his winter training in '94 because pain in the leg kept him from running the mileage he would have liked.

He nonetheless got off to a strong start in his racing last season, clocking 3:36.95 at the Penn Relays and 3:36.11 in São Paulo a month later before a viral infection sapped his strength.

The illness, diagnosed after USATF, slowed him to a non-advancing 3:42.00 in his nationals heat.

Once the virus cleared his system, Holman hit his stride in mid-July at Stockholm's DN Galan meet, where he ran 3:34.96—0.01 off his two-year-old PR—to finish 2nd behind nonpareil Noureddine Morceli.

The Stockholm race was one of several—including 3rd-place showings in Oslo and at the Goodwill Games—that show Holman's right: on the right day he is a potential Olympic or World Champs medalist.

The Georgetown alum continues to work with his college coach, Frank Gagliano ("Gags"), for whom he has nothing but praise.

T&FN: What was your reaction to ranking No. 5 in the world last year?

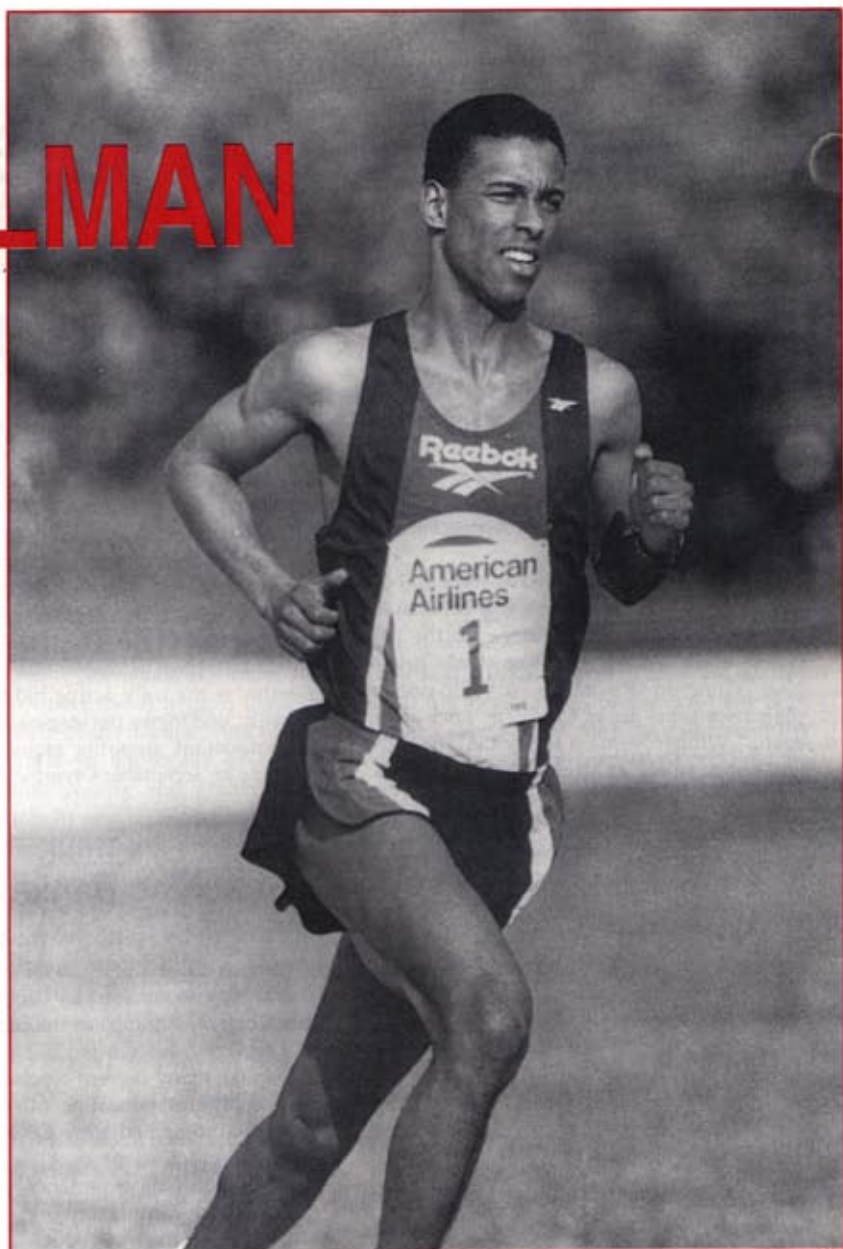
Holman: That was enormous for me. I was a little afraid that I'd think, "5th, that's pretty good, that's good enough." But what it did is it made me hungrier simply because the guys who were 3 and 4... I've beaten [Mohamed] Suleiman several times and I could reach out and touch Abdi [Bile] in half the races we were in. That's the difference between 5th and being a medalist. So that made me hungrier. Do the little things, work on the details, and perhaps this year and next year I'll be able to do better.

I feel comfortable at the level I'm at. I was a newcomer, whereas now I'm established there. It's natural to me now, I guess. I think all of these things will help me this year: experience, better training, the input I've gotten from guys like Marty Liquori and Steve Scott, the coaching that I've had, the base that I've built up.

T&FN: So you've received guidance from a couple of your famous forebears in U.S. miling?

Holman: Yes, and I think Gags has done a great job when I come back from these trips all excited with the new ideas I have from these guys. He's done a fantastic job of incorporating it into my training.

Actually, if there is something I could say about Gags, it's how much I really respect him and how good that relationship has been for me not only as an athlete but as a person. I owe Gags a great deal. The



thing I like about him is that he doesn't have such a big ego as to dismiss all these things I bring to him. His feeling is that what really matters is the end result.

T&FN: You now run the big races in Europe, but those races are so competitive that, in a way, you're just part of the crowd. What's that like?

Holman: That's why I think I had my initial success: because I was completely anonymous over there. Whether I did well or blew up, no one in Europe would care. No one I knew was watching the races so I didn't even worry about it, and I ran fantastic because I wasn't hung up and all psyched out.

Even now, there's one or two guys that everyone looks at. If I'm going to race Morceli, I might as well be a line on the track; everybody's watching him. So I still don't feel the pressure that sometimes I do in the United States when I feel that I'm the center of attention. Which is not to say I can't run well in the United States. I think I've developed ways to deal with the pressure, which is to ignore it. But I am aware of it more so than when I'm in Europe.

Also, in Europe the people just go out and run. I guess it's partially my fault but there's more of a tendency to sit and kick, there's more uncertainty, in the United States, whereas in Europe you know it's going to be fast. You know the track is going to be in good condition, you know there is going to be good weather. All you have to do is just run. It's a gut-check every race.

T&FN: I guess that relieves you of the burden of playing psych games.

Holman: Yes, at the American level, mind games will work, but at the international level, since 1992 Morceli has been so dominant it's a fair assumption the race is going to be fast and I wouldn't necessarily be in control of the race.

In a way, that kind of makes it easier because you know if you if you want to medal, you have to run 3:30-3:32 after running rounds. And you're going to have to do it not running 2:50, but you're going to have to run 2:53 and then 39 or whatever it comes out to. That's a difficult way to run 3:32, but if you can focus your training to be able to do that, that makes preparation for the major championships a little easier. Only it doesn't make it easier in the sense that to win, you have to beat Morceli.

T&FN: But at Barcelona, Morceli lost in a slow, tactical race.

Holman: Yeah, but that will never happen again. He will never let it go slow like that again.

T&FN: Have you ever talked to Morceli?

Holman: He's a difficult guy to get to. He's always surrounded by his people, his entourage. I've really, honestly never tried to hang out with or talk to him. I don't know if he'd be receptive or not. I mean he seems like a nice guy. He has an admirable lifestyle—not a lifestyle I would want to live—as far as maximizing his athletic potential.

It's sort of an ascetic lifestyle. Everything's focused on running. He has a dietician or a cook that travels with him, he has workout rabbits, a traveling massage therapist. It's an ideal situation if somebody wanted to completely immerse themselves.

Personally, I think it would drive me nuts. They leave nothing to chance. That's just simply not the lifestyle I could lead. If I thought about running all the time, well, I'd get hurt, but I'd drive myself nuts.

T&FN: If you're not a full-time runner, what else do you do?

Holman: Well, I've started a new job at Georgetown as a research assistant in the vice president's office. I work on various projects facing the main campus of the university. They're all sort of connected with maintaining affordability and access. For instance, the project that I'm working on now is helping to refine the sexual harassment policy, which really has nothing to do with affordability, but I guess it does have something to do with access to Georgetown, just to assure that there's a workplace free of discrimination.

T&FN: What is your daily routine?

Holman: I get up and I run in the morning, then I work for four hours during the day from 9:00 to 1:00, 9:00 to 2:00. Most of the time I have a work-

out at 2:00 or 3:00, or if I'm on my own I have this routine where I run and then I go to a local club and lift weights. I've even started to go lightly in the pool or on the bike. I can't do the superhigh mileage, so this is a way of getting the work in.

T&FN: What kind of mileage do you do?

Holman: I'm doing 85 [per week] pretty consistently.

T&FN: That sounds like a fairly busy day.

Holman: The thing I like about the job is it puts me on a schedule. When I wasn't working, I'd kind of just sleep in. I really like to know what I'm going to be doing throughout the day. I just need some external thing to force me to do it, but also it keeps my brain active. I feel like I'm doing something substantial besides running.

T&FN: You're the most accomplished member of the Enclave—now officially the Reebok Enclave—middle distance training group coached by the Georgetown coaches and Matt Centrowitz. Do you still train with the group?

Holman: I work out at the same time, and there's people that I work out with, but it's not the same person every time. I do a fair amount of the stuff alone.

I still think the Enclave is a fantastic concept because there definitely needs to be something for those people who are not at the

world class level the day they graduate from college. They need some support until they get there.

I don't think the United States as far as middle distance can rely on having its developmental program left to the likes of Bob Kennedy and I, who were flukes in that we were good young; we were able to support ourselves right after college. It generally doesn't happen that way in the United States.

It will be interesting to see what happens with a guy like Erik Nedeau, or even Louie Quintana when he gets out of college.

T&FN: Are we to construe anything from your mentioning Nedeau in particular among the recent crop of college grads?

Holman: If I had to single someone out as far as the younger generation—listen to me, "the younger generation" [laughs]—I really like him. He's trying to make the move up from the 800, but it seems like he's got a good work ethic and he's not afraid to push the pace in a race. I like his style, and I just hope he's getting the coaching and he doesn't have to be on his feet 8 hours a day at a shoe store so he can keep running.

T&FN: You've told us how you spend your working day. What do you do to relax?

Holman: This may sound corny—not corny, I should say "beany"—I like to drink

Holman The Politician

At the USATF Convention in December Steve Holman was elected chair of the federation's Athletes Advisory Council (AAC), representing elite athletes.

His thoughts on this new job:

"Everyone came up to me at the Convention with looks of pity on their faces and said, 'Well, you've got a big job ahead of you,' and things like that. I was really scared.

"Everyone says, 'You're the first active athlete to be in this position.' I sort of thought, 'Well, why is that?' If the idea of an athlete-advisory committee is to represent the interests of the elite athlete, the best person to have in there is an elite athlete.

"It says in the Amateur Sports Act that they encourage elite athletes to take on the role of athlete representation. And the USOC has sent some document that says elite athletes should be active in the positions.

"So my question is, 'If all these organizations are saying so, why is it so difficult for an elite athlete to be in that position within USA Track & Field?' With the travel to the meetings, the scheduling of the meetings, and so forth, it almost seems that it is discouraged.

"We thought that a way to circumvent that would be for the chair and the vice-chair to be able to designate someone to go to the meetings for them if they would be unable to attend. That way there's always the assurance of full athlete representation at the Executive Committee meetings.

"We're currently working on this, but we've run into a fair amount of resistance. They'd have to change USATF's bylaws, but they change the bylaws all the time. . .

"We're dealing with two things. One is to come up with a plan; what the athletes want out of the organization. The second thing is what do we do about the 'resistance' that we encounter? Obviously, I think the first thing will be a little easier than dealing with the resistance. I think it's really a cultural thing in the organization that they're simply not used to having athletes make demands.

"The theme of the Olympic Congress in Paris last year was athletes' responsibility, and I think that was the theme that ran through the Convention in St. Louis. The ultimate exercise of this responsibility would be to form some sort of an athletes' association, some sort of organization, put on meets, come up with progressive and creative marketing ideas, attract sponsors, generally develop the sport.

"Now whether that organization is within or without USA Track & Field is to a large extent up to USA Track & Field. I've made the commitment to try to work within the system. I think USATF has to realize that if the resistance continues to exist, the athletes are going to figure it out and go outside the organization. That's just a fact.

"There's always been talk of forming a union. It's just that nobody has really had the skill, the time, the ability to pull it off. But I think now the time could be right because there are some very capable and influential people seriously discussing the idea."

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HOLMAN — continued:

coffee a lot. I'm part of the coffee generation. That sounds so yuppie and I don't know [laughs]. . . I spend a lot of time in coffee shops.

Particularly when I wasn't working, I would go to a coffee shop and read and write just to keep my mind active.

T&FN: What do you like to read?

Holman: For serious reading, I like reading authors like Cornell West—he wrote *Race Matters*—and other sociological type books regarding blacks in America. Things that are relevant to my life. As far as recreational reading, I like legal thrillers. The last book I read wasn't a legal thriller, but Ken Follett is one of my favorite recreational authors. Teri McMillan, too. She wrote *Waiting to Exhale*, black fiction basically. Men and women, black male-female relationships.

T&FN: And what do you write?

Holman: Well, letters. And just stuff to be writing. I guess they would qualify as short stories or essays, musings. I guess maybe a journal is a better way to describe it, although it's not a day-to-day thing.

T&FN: Do you write about running?

Holman: No, not that much, to be honest. I see how people turn running into a spiritual exercise and so forth. I don't know if I really get into all of that, but I like keeping a journal so I can look back a month or a year ago and say, "This is where I was then. This is a sort of interesting perspective that I had back then. Wow, how things have changed since then."

I enjoy writing and I did it to stay stimulated. That's really all there is to it.

Some people like going out to clubs, or whatever people do as their hobbies. I'm more of a loner, more of a sort of reflective type person.

HOLMAN IN A NUTSHELL

Clyston Orlando "Steve" Holman III was born March 2, 1970, in Indianapolis, Indiana, and is 6-1/145. Graduated from Richfield, Minnesota, HS.

PRs(with year and all-time list positions): 800—1:46.13 ('94); 1000—2:19.96i ('93); 1500—3:34.95 ('92) (10, x A); Mile—3:50.91 ('94) (7, x A); 2000—5:07.72 ('92); 3000—7:46.27i ('93); 5000—13:47.63i ('92).

Major Meets: 1500—3)US Jr ('89); 8)NCAA, 5)US, 3)OF ('90); 7)NCAA, 5)US ('91); 1)NCAA, 2)OT, s)OG ('92); h)US ('94).

Progression (World & U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	Affiliation	1500/Mile
'85	15	MnHS Fr	c10:08 (3200)
'86	16	MnHS So	/c4:21
'87	17	MnHS Jr	/4:16.1+
'88	18	MnHS Sr	3:52.8/4:09.26
'89	19	Gtn Fr	3:45.41/4:06.31i
'90	20	Gtn So	3:39.60/4:03.74i (x, 7)
'91	21	Gtn Jr	3:38.37/4:01.13i (x, 4)
'92	22	Gtn Sr	3:34.95/3:53.31 (x, 2)
'93	23	Nike Int	3:35.29/3:55.41i (x, 2)
'94	24	*	3:34.96/3:50.91 (5, 1)
'95	25	Reebok	