



STEVE CRAM

Cram (321) in action at Athens. Others include Zdravkovic (265), Williamson (352), Abascal (83) and Flynn (508).

Boy wonders come and go. Steve Cram came into the boy-wonder category in 1978, when his 3:57.43 made him only the second miler ever (after Jim Ryun) to break 4:00 before his 18th birthday. No longer a boy, he's still a wonder.

Improving at every distance, the 21-year-old Briton became the world's No. 1 miler in 1982, winning the European and Commonwealth titles. The last perpetrator of such a double was Roger Bannister in 1954.

In a country with the richest of miling traditions, Cram made it to the top. Detractors, of course, will note that he did it in a year when Sebastian Coe and Steve Ovett were generally out of the picture, but Cram ran well enough to let the old guard know that they will not be able to come back and automatically reassume the mantle as lord of the manor.

Discovering a turn of speed he didn't realize he had, Cram led the world at two shorter distances (800 and 1000) and sewed up his Commonwealth title with a blistering 50.9 last lap.

An engaging conversation with the man who gave Britain its sixth No. 1 ranker in a row in the 1500/mile:

T&FN: No doubt a year ago you had your sights set on European and Commonwealth gold medals. Did you realistically think you might win both these major championships?

Cram: Well, you say that a year ago I had my sights on both gold medals—well, I didn't at all. I thought I would be lucky to try and get a medal of any sort at either of the championships, never mind both of them.

T&FN: But things developed as the season went on.

Cram: Yes, once I knew Steve and Seb were not there and I knew I was running very well... The Commonwealths were always in the back of my mind; obviously the Europeans were everything. It's a much more prestigious event.

T&FN: You ran a very fast 800 at Crystal Palace, 1:44.45. It was the fastest in the world. Did this not color your thinking at all?

Cram: A little bit, but the trouble

with the 800 is that no matter how fast you run, that doesn't count for much when you get to the championship. If that was the case then Seb would have won his medal at 800; he's streets ahead of everyone anyone else in terms of time. Fast times aren't what winning medals is about.

I haven't got the experience or the tactical know-how yet of the event. I haven't run enough 800s to know how to handle myself in a given situation. For that reason I didn't think it was even worth thinking about.

T&FN: Is it an event you would like to run?

Cram: It's an event I would like one day to do something at, but it's not an event that I consider I'm ever going to be any good at. I don't think I'm fast enough.

I think possibly in 1983 I could be running a lot more 800s. I'm sticking to the 1500 for the World Championships; maybe I could be running 800 in the World Student Games.

T&FN: *What about 5000?*

Cram: 5000 is completely out of my mind; certainly not in my plans for the next two or three years. At one time I thought of myself as a reasonably good 1500 runner who would move up to 5000, but my thoughts have changed completely on that. I certainly think I have a lot more to give at 1500 and 800 than I thought I had.

T&FN: *You can look forward to the next few years now knowing that you are at the top, but just casting your mind back a few years, how did you see your future then?*

Cram: At that time, Moscow did not figure in it at all. I didn't think I would go to Moscow. But I certainly was looking forward to Los Angeles to try and get a medal. I knew that at 23 I would be at my best at my event, but at that time I obviously didn't think I would be as well on as I am now.

I didn't think the event would have advanced as much as it has now. I thought that in 1984 I would be running 1500s with a view to 5000 being my best event in 1988. I thought then that if ever I was going to be the best in the world at anything it would probably be 5000 in 1988. I didn't think that I would be capable of winning an Olympic gold medal at 1500; that I would be fast enough.

T&FN: *If you have any weaknesses, where do you think they are?*

Cram: I would like to have a little bit more speed. My main weakness is probably acceleration. I can sprint just about as fast as anyone at the end of a race, but it's getting up to that speed. Steve and Seb are a lot quicker off the mark. I think I am capable of running about 48½ for 400.

T&FN: *Does this mean you would go a little bit earlier than they would?*

Cram: That's it. I have to wind it up earlier. I think it would be silly to wait until the last 100m and expect to outkick Steve or Seb. If I let them kick first they would probably get two or three yards, and although I might start pulling it back, you can't afford to give it. If the margin is that small between two or three people you can't afford to give four to five yards over the last 200.

T&FN: *You had made the Athens team. Did you think just about the Europeans or did you have both Athens and Brisbane in mind?*

Cram: At the time I was thinking almost purely in terms of the Europeans. I think you can't divide your attention between two big races. If I had run in the Europeans thinking, "It doesn't really matter how I run in the Europeans because I've always got the Commonwealth Games," then you're saying, "I'm settling for 2nd or 3rd." You got to go into it thinking, "This is the main target of the season," as if there was nothing else.

When I went to the Commonwealths I had to stop thinking I had won the gold

medal in the Europeans because then again you end up not giving everything because you are satisfied with what you've got.

T&FN: *Was it a disappointment that both Seb and Steve pulled out?*

Cram: It was a little bit. People will always say, "Oh yes! But what would have happened if Seb or Steve had been there?"

It's disappointing because I was running very well at the time and I would like to have taken either one or both of them on. Having said that, I think that neither of them was at peak fitness. It would have been even worse to have beaten either of them when they were not at their best.

T&FN: *Do you feel in any way athletically inferior to Seb or Steve?*

Cram: No, not in the slightest. I think we are three completely different athletes, with talents in slightly different areas. We are similar in ability; some would say I've got more ability than them because I've run faster than them at the same age.

T&FN: *Would you be overawed by them?*

Cram: Not in the slightest. I've been running against them for so long that I've got past the stage of being overawed.

T&FN: *Do you think Ferner was in any way overawed?*

Cram: No. If he had been overawed he wouldn't have gone past Seb. That's one of the things about athletics. There's no bounds to what people can bring out of themselves. They always like to think that one day they can beat the guy they have never beaten before. I have always been like that. I have always aimed a little bit higher than what I thought I could attain. If you aim low, then you'll finish low. You've got to aim high to achieve high.

I think that around 1980-81 people were letting Steve and Seb win because they were a bit afraid to take them on. Not because they were frightened of being beaten by Steve or Seb, but rather if they set out to win they were setting themselves up to be beaten by the rest of the field.

T&FN: *Coming up to [a major championships race] are you very highly strung?*

Cram: No, probably the opposite way. I get nervous, but on the outside I appear to be very cool and calm. I don't get over-anxious about things. Possibly I have been lucky that I have been involved in big races when I was younger.

This year I'll be in a very good position for the World Championships. Being a bit younger, I'll still be the underdog to Steve and Seb. People will be looking for Steve and Seb to prove they are still as good as they were, more than to put pressure on me to prove that I can beat them. The onus will be on those two. If I don't beat them then I can still say there is next year. I'm getting stronger and stronger.

T&FN: *Do you ever race without a plan, or do you always have some plan?*

Cram: I would hate to go into the race

with just one plan. I think you have to go in with 3, 4, maybe 5 ideas. What I like to do is to try to put myself in the position of the other athletes and think what they would like best to do, then work out, "If they do that, what will I do?" Then from all that I try to work out what I would like to get out of the race.

I think it's silly to go into the race with one concrete plan. Suppose you decide to go at 600 and someone else goes at 800; what do you do? Go with him? Stay with the pack and hope he comes back to you?... I like to have an ideal plan, so that if the race went ideally for me this is how I would like things to happen. But you have to have contingency plans.

T&FN: *How would you view a World Record? Is it something you would dearly like to hold? Would it mean more than a gold medal in a major championship?*

Cram: If by the end of 1984 I have a World Championship gold medal and an Olympic gold medal without breaking a World Record it wouldn't bother me. If I won two bronzes and had a World Record I would be a lot more disappointed. It's the medals that come first.

T&FN: *In a situation where you are favorite, is it a situation you like?*

Cram: It's a nice situation as long as you are confident, and you think you're favorite. It's very difficult if you don't consider yourself the best man in the field.

It gives you that extra bit of confidence and gives you the chance to dominate the race. Because you are the favorite it gives you the chance to do things they are waiting for you to do. They tend to let you run the race you want to run. They tend to watch and see what you are going to do instead of concentrating on things they should be doing themselves.

T&FN: *How important do you think the psychological approach to racing is?*

Cram: If it was a question of ability, and the best man—in physical terms—won every time, then it would be a very boring thing. Seb would have won his 800 title. Luckily, it's not just about the person with the best physical attributes. □

Steve Cram was born in Gateshead, England, on October 14, 1960, and is 6-½/152. Competes for the Jarrow & Hebburn AC; coached by Jimmy Hedley, with Brendan Foster as an adviser. Pursuing a degree in Sports Studies at Newcastle Poly. A member of the 1978 Commonwealth Team (9th heat) and 1980 Olympic Team (8th), he was the 1979 European Junior Champion at 3000m. PRs: 400—49.1 ('82); 800—1:44.45 ('82); 1000—2:15.12 ('82); 1500—3:33.66 ('82); Mile—3:49.92 ('82); 3000—7:47.82 ('81); 5000—14:13.5 ('79). On the all-time lists, he's No. 4 in the 1000, No. 10 in the mile. His progression (with World Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	800	1000	1500	Mile
1973	12			4:31.5	
1974	13	2:11.0		4:22.3	
1975	14	2:07.1		4:13.9	
1976	15	1:59.7		4:07.2	
1977	16	1:56.5		3:47.7	
1978	17	1:53.5		3:40.09	3:57.43
1979	18	1:48.5		3:42.5	3:57.03
1980	19	1:48.41	2:24.5	3:34.74	3:53.8
1981	20	1:46.29	2:18.5	3:34.81 (9)	3:49.95
1982	21	1:44.45	2:15.12	3:33.66 (1)	3:49.92