

T&FN INTERVIEW

Todd Williams

by Jon Hendershott

Todd Williams definitely knows what he wants. Already, he looks forward to the evening of July 22 at the Bislett Games.

In Oslo's storied stadium, in what is annually one of the world's best 10,000m races, Williams will take aim at Mark Nenow's seven-year-old American Record of 27:20.56.

That goal has been on Williams' calendar since the 1993 Bislett meet, where he clocked 27:40.37, a PR by some 22 seconds. Coupled with a 7th in the World Champs, Williams earned a No. 9 World Ranking. That's the highest U.S. 10K rating since Nenow's No. 7 in 1987.

Born in Michigan and schooled and trained at Tennessee, Williams has parlayed a gritty competitiveness into steady improvement throughout his career. He helped lead the Vols to the '91 NCAA team title with a gutsy 2nd at 10,000 and 3rd at 5K.

A year later, Williams won the Olympic Trials 10K, placed 10th in Barcelona and rated as No. 1 American. In '93, he jumped up to the global Top 10—clocking PRs at 3000 (7:47.69) and 5000 (13:20.13) for good measure.

Notably, Williams trains by himself in Knoxville. Only college mentor Doug Brown is there to hold a watch. But that's OK by Williams: strongly self-motivated, he knows that he alone will determine just how good he becomes.

Shortly after earning his first Ranking, Williams won his second U.S. cross country title in three years. But the honors are just bright detours on the road to Oslo:

T&FN: What does first being World Ranked at 10,000, then winning the national cross country title again, do for your motivation?

Williams: The last year has been great. But all it does is make me want to work that much harder, because now I'm a pegged man. When I go into races, people will want to knock me off the block.

It's great to have accomplishments, to get recognition and win awards and all that, but I look at it that you're only as good as your last race. So I just try to train harder and harder as each day goes by.

T&FN: An all-time great quote in Barcelona was your, "I'm a little fish and those other guys are sharks." You may not be a shark yet—but you aren't shark bait either. How do you view yourself after your '93 season?

Williams: I ran one race in Europe in '91, but '92 was my first time over there to race against what I called then "the big boys." In '93, I got to see and run in the Grand Prix meets, which was another first for me. I got to compete in Oslo and see what that level of track was all about for the first time.

I ran my 27:40 in Oslo and now I can look at my time, compared to other times in the world, and realize how close I am to being at the shark level.

You had a "whale" in Ondieki, but I'm right there. It's just a matter of staying healthy and continuing to do the things I've done in the past. Another 20–25-second jump and I'm right in there with those big boys.

T&FN: A 25-second drop in your best time would be right in the medals in



Victor Sailer/Agence Sport

most any championship race.

Williams: One factor in the next few years will be where the title meets are held: Göteborg could be fast. But then there's Atlanta for heat and Mexico City for altitude.

So I think the key for championship races coming up will be strength. If you can handle the prelims, then come back in the final and run what guys have done recently—the 27:35–27:45 range with a good, solid kick—you're right in there for a medal.

T&FN: Can you contrast the adjustments you had to make between '92—your first post collegiate season—with '93, when you arrived on the world scene? Sounds like one factor was just gaining experience at that top level of racing.

Williams: That was the big key. A lot of my improvement was just being exposed to those types of races. Same thing in '91, when I ran in Hengelo. I was a mid-28:20 type guy. Then, I thought a time like that in

the U.S. was pretty good. But I went over there and realized it was nothing compared to Chemlimo running 27:11.

So it's mainly a matter of you figuring out exactly what you have to go through and how much more you have to do to get to that level. It's just a process you have to go through in your mind.

Even in '91, people were asking me, "Why can't you run with the Kenyans?" Or, "Why can't you be one of the best in the world?" I'm patient enough to realize it's impossible to do that overnight—unless you're eating worms!

T&FN: After you won your first U.S. title, the '91 cross country, you said that when an athlete can focus on one main goal is when good results will happen. Is that the thinking behind aiming at the AR in Oslo next July, even though that's about eight months away?

Williams: Yes—it's been on my calendar since Oslo of '93. I didn't say last year that I wanted to do that, because my PR was 28:05 going into '93. But now I have cut a good chunk off my best.

This coming year, all those other races are secondary. There'll be no World Champs team to be made. There can be just the straight focus on competing well in the Grand Prix meets—and my main focus will be Oslo.

I think more athletes need to do that. There are a lot of alleys you can take to get sidetracked. But you can see it when an athlete points toward one race and uses the others as buildups or time trials. They don't worry about how they do in other races—but then they can get that one major effort.

T&FN: What were your reactions to running in Ondieki's 26:58, a real barrier-breaker?

Williams: Well, I ran my 27:40 and it was great to lower my PR. But you also can look at the results and realize, "I just cut my PR by 22 seconds and still got beat by 300m."

On the other hand, and this also is good, you stay humble. There's no overconfidence, because you finished 300m behind. So you pat yourself on the back a little for the PR, but you also realize how much more work you have to do. There's always somebody out there who can knock down your door.

T&FN: The Barcelona and Stuttgart finals were vastly different for you, at least partially due to the experience you gained between them. But can you contrast what you feel you learned from those two races?

Williams: The Barcelona experience was just the overall Olympic experience. But I didn't go into Stuttgart quite on top of my game. I had contracted shingles about three weeks before the Worlds.

I'm not making excuses because I tried to put that out of my head, run as hard as I could and I finished 7th. But I also think that if I hadn't had that virus in me... well, I look at Stephane Franke [4th, 28:10.69] and I feel I could have been in that range.

What I learned, though, is that no matter what happens prior to a championship, you never know what to expect. So you just run as

hard as you can, no matter what the circumstances are.

T&FN: After the Worlds final, you were quoted, "I've still got to decide if I want to push it in a race hard enough to join the top guys." Some might look at that as an expression of self-doubt, but what

"Now I realize how close I am to being at the shark level."

exactly did you mean?

Williams: I meant that I can't run like my tactics have been for the past couple of years—going out slow, then catching people at the end. I can't do that in a championship race and hope to be in the top three.

When the break is made, those guys are too damn good to catch in the last 2000m. You can do that for a top-10 finish. But to medal, you have run smarter and you have to run a lot closer to the front.

T&FN: It sounds like you're trying to add an aggressive element to your attitude. Also, your admiration of the late Steve Prefontaine is well known. You now have run faster than Pre did at 3000, 5000 and 10,000, so is it the tough attitude and aggressive approach to racing which he had that you admire?

Williams: Exactly. After reading so much about him, I realized you only go through your career one time—and it's a short time. I think a lot of athletes just let races go by. It's an attitude of, "I'll do something different in the next one."

But Steve never looked at it like that. Each race to him was almost like his last one. I'd like to think I'm starting to run like that.

Plus that's part of the reason you see me race so seldom. When I race, I like to put in a good solid effort. If it has to be me taking it from the front, then so be it. I've always felt that if it's a 10,000m race, it should be a 10,000m race—not an 800 or a 400.

T&FN: Isn't it true that you train pretty much all alone?

Williams: Yes, I do everything by myself, so I don't have to worry about somebody else taking the pace. Then when I get into a race, it's almost like practice. When I do 20 quarters, 6 x a mile, or 10 x 1000m, everything is by myself. A race is always a harder effort, but mentally

I'm so used to be out at practice clicking it off. For me, it's a big help mentally to train alone.

T&FN: Is it actually motivational to train by yourself?

Williams: It is. People ask me why I don't move to a place like Boulder or Albuquerque. But the motivation I have is right here. If I can pull this off by myself—and I'm definitely driven, self-motivated; nobody has to push me out the door to do anything—then I'll feel that much more accomplished.

T&FN: You mentioned the expectations of people that you would go right from college to beating the Kenyans. There even have been comments already about you being the next great U.S. marathoner. What do you think of talk like that—or do you even recognize it?

Williams: I hear and read about it. Actually, it's a good position to have people talking about me. But I just let the talk go in one ear and out the other. The way I've been, and will continue to be, is to just set up my schedule, race when I want to race and train the way I want to train.

T&FN: On the other side of the expectations coin, you've been included among the "young lions" of U.S. distance running. Has there been some satisfaction to produce efforts that back up your inclusion in that group?

Williams: When you're in high school or as a college frosh, you look at those "young lions" and always want to be a part. Now that I've worked to get to that point, it's great to be part of the movement.

I guess I'm kind of a "mid-aged lion" because I'll be all of 25 in March—but Steve Plasencia and Carlos Lopes have proved you can have a long career and hopefully I'll have one of those.

You need to just look at yourself and set your own goals. If you let other people rule

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WILLIAMS IN A NUTSHELL

Todd Dwayne Williams was born March 7, 1969, in Detroit, Michigan, and is 5-10/145. Graduated from Monroe (Mich) HS in '87, and competed for Tennessee '88-'91. Currently represents adidas. Never placed higher than 6th in the NCAA Cross Country Champs, but won the '91 & '93 USA titles, and was the top U.S. runner in the World XC Champs in '92 and '93.

Major Meets: 5000—3)NCAA ('91).

10,000—15)NCAA ('89); 4)NCAA, dnf)USA Ch ('90); 2)NCAA ('91); 1)OT, 10)OG ('92); 1)USA Ch, 7)WC ('93).

PRs: 3000—7:47.69 ('93); 2M—8:24.54 ('92); 5000—13:20.13 ('93); 10,000—27:40.37 ('93); half-marathon—1:01:52 ('91), 1:00:11 (aided) '93.

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

Year	Age	Affiliation	3000	5000	10,000
1986	17	Mich HS	8:33.1	—	—
1987	18	"	8:23.4	—	—
1988	19	Tenn Fr	—	14:24.29i	29:46.5
1989	20	Tenn So	8:14.3	14:14.08	28:57.7
1990	21	Tenn Jr	8:05.49i	13:48.16i	28:41.97
1991	22	Tenn Sr	7:58.94	13:41.50i	28:18.4 (x, 5)
1992	23	adidas	7:54.47	13:36.99 (x, 8)	28:05.9 (x, 1)
1993	24	adidas	7:47.69	13:20.13 (x, 3)	27:40.37 (9, 1)

Late-Season Track News

CAC GAMES

Quirot's Comeback Trail

Ponce, Puerto Rico, November 23-28—Ana Quirot returned to competition at the Central American & Caribbean Games, placing 2nd in the 800 in 2:05.22. It was the first race for the Cuban star since a severe burning incident last January.

Quirot, who qualified for the meet with a 2:03.19 several weeks earlier, ran a strong 2nd to Letitia Vriesde's 2:04.28. Vriesde, from Suriname, came back the next day to win the 1500 in 4:18.45.

Impressive as her return may have been, Quirot maintained that she "was not satisfied," calling the time "slow."

Quirot, who won the 800 bronze in Barcelona after ranking No. 1 the previous year, added, "I still have physical disabilities and I will have to have another operation in January. I'm thinking of the 1995 Pan-Am Games in Argentina and the Olympics the following year."

High jumper Javier Sotomayor settled for a 7-8 $\frac{1}{2}$ (2.35) win, then had three misses at 7-10 $\frac{1}{2}$ (2.40). Cuba dominated the competition, winning 25 events and tallying up a total of 56 medals.

100(-1.6), Isasi (Cub) 10.38. 200(1.3), Tynes (Bah) 20.64. 400, Tellez (Cub) 45.80. 800, Soto (PR) 1:49.40. 1500, Martinez (Ven) 3:43.89. St. R. Garcia (Mex) 8:38.43. 5000, I. Garcia (Mex) 13:57.84. 10,000, Ceron (Mex) 28:58.11. Mar. Paredes (Mex) 2:14:23; 2. Hernandez (Col) 2:17:21.

110H(-1.6), Valle (Cub) 13.87. 400H, Cordero (PR) 49.60. 20kmW, D. Garcia (Mex) 1:26:22. 50kmW, Oliva (Cub) 3:55:21; 2. Sanchez (Mex) 3:56:18.

4 x 100, Cuba 39.24 (Simon, Garcia, Isasi, Aguilera). 4 x 400, Cuba 3:05.62 (Mena, Herrera, Martinez, Tellez).

Field Events

HJ, Sotomayor (Cub) 7-8 $\frac{1}{2}$ (2.35). PV, Diaz (PR) 17-4 $\frac{1}{2}$ (5.30). LJ, Williams (Tri) 26-1 (7.95); 2. Francis (PR) 26-0 (7.92); 3. Jefferson (Cub) 25-9 $\frac{1}{4}$ (7.85). TJ, Quesada (Cub) 55-11 $\frac{3}{4}$ (17.06).

SP, Montenegro (Cub) 61-11 $\frac{1}{2}$ (18.88). DT, Elizabete (Cub) 200-11 (61.24); 2. Delis (Cub) 194-7 (59.32). HT, Sanchez (Cub) 236-10 (72.20). JT, Lucumi (Col) 244-8 (74.58). Dec, Belanque (Cub) 7889.

—WOMEN'S RESULTS—

100(-), Allen (Cub) 11.52; . . . 3. Sturup (Bah) 11.89. 200 (1.6), Allen 23.14; . . . 3. Restrepo (Col) 23.88; 4. N. Mitchell (Jam) 23.92. 400, Duporty (Cub) 51.81. 800, Vriesde (Sur) 2:04.28; 2. Quirot (Cub) 2:05.22. 1500, Vriesde 4:18.45. 3000, Juarez (Mex) 9:16.27. 10,000, Del Diaz (Mex) 34:49.67. Mar. Cabrera (Mex) 2:42:29.

100H(-2.1), López (Cub) 13.46. 400H, Montelier (Cub) 57.61. 10kmW, Colin (Mex) 47.58.

4 x 100, Cuba 44.59 (Ferrer, López, Duporty, Allen); 2. Colombia 44.62. 4 x 400, Cuba 3:31.27 (Bonne, Duporty, Montelier, McLeon).

Field Events

HJ, cancelled. LJ, Montalvo (Cub) 20-10 $\frac{1}{4}$ (6.37). TJ, Montalvo 44-6 $\frac{1}{4}$ (13.57). SP, Fernández (Cub) 59- $\frac{3}{4}$ (18.00). DT, Echevarria (Cub) 200-2 (61.02); 2. Martén (Cub) 195-0 (59.44). JT, López (Cub) 201-8 (61.48). Hept, Garcia (Cub) 5903.



ALLSPORT/Bob Martin

Quirot was disappointed in her silver medal, but her fans were impressed.

ASIAN CHAMPS

Chinese Run For Medals

Manila, Philippines, November 30-December 4—Ma Junren's Army had no interest in running for records at the Asian Championships. Here he instructed them to run for medals only. Good call, perhaps, as the stifling heat and humidity punished the distance runners most of all.

Qu Yunxia, still nursing an injured left ankle, won the 3000 easily. Her 9:15.74 didn't raise many eyebrows, but a 1:33 for the last 600 showed all her zip isn't gone. "I did not come here to break a record," she insisted.

AOY Wang Junxia confined herself to the 10,000, where she ran an easy 34:19.32. While it was nearly 5:00 slower than her World Record, it was more than she needed. She finished more than 300m ahead of Zhang Lirong (35:28.99), and lapped the rest of the field.

The Chinese men and women dominated the medal counts, scoring 23 golds. South Korea and Kazakhstan were next, with 3 each.

100, Mansoor (Qat) 10.22. 200, Huang Danwei (Chn) 20.83. 400, Ismail (Qat) 45.55.

800, Lee J. (SK) 1:48.24. 1500, Kim S. (SK) 3:38.60; 2. Prasad (Ind) 3:38.95. St. Cheddad (Sau) 8:32.08. 5000, Prasad 13:41.70. 10,000, Al-Kahtani (Sau) 29:48.05.

110H, Li (Chn) 13.49. 400H, Hamed (Syr) 49.10. 20kmW, Chen Shaoguo (Chn) 1:26:30.

4 x 100, China 39.47; 2. Japan 39.65. 4 x 400, Japan 3:09.03.

Field Events

HJ, Lee J. (SK) 7-4 $\frac{1}{4}$ (2.25). PV, Yegorov (Kaz) 18-8 $\frac{1}{4}$ (5.70); 2. Potapovich (Kaz) 18- $\frac{1}{2}$ (5.50).

LJ, Asahara (Jpn) 26-8 $\frac{1}{4}$ (8.13); 2. Chao (Tai) 26-6 $\frac{1}{2}$ (8.09); 3. Nai (Tai) 26-6 $\frac{1}{4}$ (8.08).

TJ, Fatianov (Aze) 55-5 (16.89); 2. Sakirkin (Kaz) 55-2 $\frac{1}{4}$ (16.82); 3. Arzamasov (Kaz) 55- $\frac{3}{4}$ (16.78); 4. Asadov (Aze) 54- $\frac{1}{2}$ (16.47).

SP, Liu Hao (Chn) 62-5 $\frac{3}{4}$ (19.05). DT, Bhadoria (Ind)

182-2 (55.52).

HT, Bi Zhong (Chn) 231-5 (70.54). JT, Zhang Lianbiao (Chn) 258-11 (78.92).

Dec, Beletyelenikov (Uzb) 7601; 2. Ganiyev (Uzb) 7558.

—WOMEN'S RESULTS—

100, Tian Yumei (Chn) 11.36. 200, Chen Zhaojing (Chn) 23.24; 2. Darsha (Ind) 23.29. 400, Ma Yuqin (Chn) 51.23.

800, Liu Li (Chn) 2:04.18; 2. Liu Huirong (Chn) 2:04.32. 1500, Yan Wei (Chn) 4:17.78; . . . 4. Lu Yi (Chn) nt. 3000, Qu Yunxia (Chn) 9:15.74; 2. Zhang Linli (Chn) nt.

10,000, Wang Junxia (Chn) 34:19.32; 2. Zhang Lirong (Chn) 35:28.99.

100H, Zhang Yu (Chn) 13.07. 400H, Torshina (Kaz) 56.70. 10kmW, Gao Hongmiao (Chn) 47:09.

4 x 100, China 43.84; 2. Taiwan 45.12. 4 x 400, China 3:33.76.

Field Events

HJ, Zalevskaya (Kaz) 6-3 $\frac{1}{2}$ (1.92); 2. Ruban (Uzb) 6-3 $\frac{1}{2}$. LJ, Yao Weili (Chn) 22-1 (6.73).

TJ, Ren Ruijing (Chn) 46-1 $\frac{1}{4}$ (14.05) (x, 2 WJ). SP, Zhang Lihong (Chn) 61-3 $\frac{1}{2}$ (18.68). DT, Cao Qi (Chn) 202-0 (61.58). JT, Zhang Li (Chn) 203-10 (62.14).

Hept, Shouaa (Syr) 6260.

Todd Williams — cont. from p. 57:

what you do, you might think, "Oh, man, I was only 27th on the world list last year, but I thought I did all I could." When you start thinking that way, you go backwards instead of forwards.

T&FN: *What's the toughest track race you've ever been in?*

Williams: Probably Oslo last year. I had come off the 10 at nationals, which had been hard with all the surging in it. Plus I really wanted to run a fast time in Oslo. It wasn't one of those "perfect" races, like I felt in the Prefontaine 5K when 64s per lap clicked like 72s. In Oslo, the 66-67s felt like 63s.

For me, Oslo was a good, hard race. I fought through and achieved a fast time while I was forced to go through some pain.

T&FN: *Has one race in your entire career been the most satisfying?*

Williams: I'd say the most excited I've been after a race was the '91 national cross country. That was my first national win, but before the race nobody really knew who Todd Williams was. Beating Pat Porter and John Trautmann and the names that people knew, that was probably the most gratifying.

T&FN: *Is there one aspect of distance running that's toughest for you to accommodate to?*

Williams: I'd say the one thing that bugs me most about distance running and training is wind. I hate it—and it seems that the day I schedule an interval workout and really want to pump one out, I'll wake up and the trees are touching the ground.

Everything else about running, I like and enjoy doing. It's a heck of a job to have. These next 10-12 years seem like they'll be the best of my life. Traveling to different countries, competing, meeting people—and getting paid on top of that.

It's pretty much a dream come true. I want to continue to do this and, knock on wood, I'll continue to stay healthy so I can. It's something I'll continue to do and love doing. □