

by Jack Welch

## BILL RODGERS

**B**ill Rodgers. Former AR holder at 2:09:27. Olympian in 1976. Four times winner of the Boston Marathon. Four times winner of the New York City Marathon. Three times ranked as the No. 1 marathoner in the world.

At age 33, the one-time undisputed King Of The Roads remains an intensely competitive athlete, businessman and human being. He is the last first of all—human. Enduring many of the same personal problems most of us have, Rodgers continues to compete. He gives quarter neither to younger athletes who would challenge him in a race nor to older men who would jeopardize his livelihood.

Bill Rodgers has that frail, elfin, furtive, wide-eyed appearance that denies his physical strength. Strong, too, is his sense of justice, his candor about what's best for Billy; his conviction that hard work and extraordinary talent should be rightfully rewarded.

Bill engaged in a series of interview conversations from his hotel room in Columbus, Ohio, during his appearance for the Bank One Marathon (October 11).

He ran poorly there, finishing 7th in 2:17:38. It was his worst finishing-place in a marathon in this country since his 14th in the 1974 Boston race.

The big issue of the moment was whether or not he would run in New York City's big 26-miler 2 weeks later. At interview time, he and promoter Fred Lebow still hadn't settled their differences (a last-hour agreement was forged just 3 days before the race, then dissolved the night before):

Rodgers: I'm in Columbus, Ohio; had a long haul getting in here. I flew into Cincinnati and I had to drive for 2 hours to get here.

T&FN: Why is that?

Rodgers: I don't like to fly. I don't like landings and takeoffs. So, in order to get a direct, non-stop flight I had to go to Cincinnati and then 2 hours to here.

T&FN: I hear you got a call from Fred Lebow and there's something on the wires now saying that you may be participating in New York City?

Rodgers: It's not that intelligent for me to run the race from a number of viewpoints at this time. If it could be negotiated, then I might do it. I guess I sort of want to in the sense that I wish it had all been worked out before. And I kind of hate to miss the race because it's been a good race for me.

I think it's really a good setup for Fred, because here's rising young marathon newcomer Alberto Salazar getting a chance on nationwide TV to pulverize American Record holder, 4-time winner Bill Rodgers. It's really a sitting duck sort of thing and that doesn't appeal to me.

T&FN: It might be time to start



Dave Drennan