

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

acting mature about some of these things, Bill, money aside and exposure aside.

Rodgers: I'm not interested in the exposure. My chances of getting any good exposure are fairly limited, really. If I bomb out, I don't think that'll help me too much. But I do like the idea of it being nationally televised.

T&FN: *That makes some sense.*

Rodgers: I think it's a good thing. You have to look at this as the first time in a way for our sport, for road running. Track & field's been out for decades. But this is something new and it's a little bit frustrating to me to be missing that.

T&FN: *You could always do 15 and grab your hamstring.*

Rodgers: No, I don't do that sort of thing, really.

T&FN: *This would be an interesting thing to find out: How valuable is a slow Bill Rodgers?*

Rodgers: It's hard to tell, really. If I drop out—which I don't think would happen, I think I'd finish—but let's say I finished in 2:28 or something, or another 2:17; what good does it do me?

If I could be at least in the ball park I think it would help me to run the race. I like the idea of it being on national TV. I wanted to be there. For years I've said marathoning, road racing should be there and it finally is and now I'm not running. It's crazy.

T&FN: *You once said that there are so many sports that are so overrated as sports, "I could never be a baseball player, there's not enough to it." New York City is virtually the country's only televised race and some days this month there were 3 baseball games on TV.*

Rodgers: What a crazy thing that is. It's true, it's a fantastic thing. It's going to boom like crazy. The ratings for the Fifth Avenue Mile were very high from what I understand. That was a road racing event, it was not a track race. Road racing was higher than any track event short of the Olympics.

T&FN: *Lebow says you have no respect for the New York City Marathon and never have.*

Rodgers: Well, Fred was obviously very frustrated or something when he did that interview [*The Runner*, November]. But, of course, I do and I did in the past. I always have. I think it's a great race. I don't have respect, though, for the way Fred has negotiated, not just with me, but with a lot of runners. I think he's done a lot of good for the race.

T&FN: *What fascinated me about that article is Fred's inability to perceive the ethical bankruptcy of the system that he's trying to perpetuate.*

Rodgers: I agree with you, Jack, and other people say that, too. A lot of people, even another running magazine—the publisher tells me the same thing and he's a supporter of the race. I think it became an ego thing; Fred found himself against me

*The Bible of the Sport*

and the top runners and felt that he has the power to crush us, and he doesn't.

T&FN: *How honest and credible are you?*

Rodgers: How honest am I? I'm not the world's most honest person. I have made mistakes and everything. But I think that most of my statements to the press are true. This is true. For example, the statements in the interview with Fred—he said I got \$30,000 at Stockholm, that is not true.

T&FN: *Lebow talking about the Fifth Avenue Mile: "This is an amateur event abiding by all the rules of The Athletics Congress."*

Rodgers: Fred is simply following the great European tradition.

T&FN: *Deny everything?*

Rodgers: Yeah, and actually do the opposite. He's just doing that, I guess. It's worked. He's got the '84 World Cross-Country—I just read that in *T&FN* today. It's working for him in that sense. But, I think even though right now I'm not running in the ARRA races for money and stuff, there's going to be more and more people that are going to be pushing for that, for having it open up more and more. Fred will ultimately have to go that way himself.

T&FN: *Ollan's working very hard. This trust fund will give him enough power. The TAC can regulate your prize money, it can regulate your ability to compete overseas—two kinds of powerful weapons.*

Rodgers: I don't think that's going to happen really. Ways have to be found to fight against that as much as possible, even by those people, such as myself, who are not yet committed to taking money over the table.

T&FN: *Sometimes the TAC can intimidate a race director, then you have things like Bobby Crim or Falmouth, two rather significant races.*

Rodgers: Both races were affected by the politics of it. The most amazing thing of all is that certain race directors—and the officials—don't really care about the political effect on the races. They don't really give a damn about the competition—let it drop.

But that's been historically true, I think, for TAC. I don't know if they really feel they are following the rules exactly or if it's a combination with keeping their positions, or what. It's really very—as you, I'm sure, feel the same way—extremely boring. It's the most boring subject in the world to have to keep talking about amateurism. Even to say the word leaves a sick taste in my throat... nauseating...

T&FN: *It's an historical accident created by the English in 1896 to keep red-necks and low-lives out of the sport. And now, it's this side of the left hand of God, or something.*

Rodgers: It's amazing. I think it's going to fall apart sooner or later. We have to have a system of athletics that lets you

live just like the rest of your countrymen and according to the laws of that country's economic and social system. It can't be governed by some false set of rules made 90 years ago. It has to deal with where you live right now.

T&FN: *That makes a lot of sense. Because what they're trying to do is regulate you according to English rules as personified by Eastern Europeans.*

Rodgers: And then when you talk to Ollan Cassell or someone else about it they say we don't have the power to fight the East Germans or something; but I say that's all baloney. The world of track & field doesn't exist too well without the U.S.; we are one of the major competitors in the world in that sport. So they would come to an agreement, I'm sure.

T&FN: *What are your feelings about the World Rankings? I've seen some quotes where you spoke about disappointment about your ranking last year and hopes for your future rankings.*

Rodgers: First of all, in '80 I felt I was definitely one of the top 10 marathoners in the world. I would point out that it seems to me that *T&FN's* policy is to score you on the quality of the competition and I guess if you beat another competitor—for example, I beat Kirk Pfeffer at the Boston Marathon on a hot day by a good margin, the fastest time ever on a hot day in the Boston Marathon.

I beat Kirk head-to-head, then Kirk takes 7th place at the Fukuoka, his only quality race of the year. Then I went on and won Toronto—two victories—and then a 5th place at New York in 2:15:20...

T&FN: *After a fall.*

Rodgers: After a fall, yeah. Obviously I was not in the first 5 in the world or something, but I would've thought something like 8th or 9th or 10th. It bothered me when I beat Kirk, for example, that he was ranked ahead of me. Not that I don't give credit for a great race at Fukuoka. It's a motivating factor, I admit, to do well in terms of the rankings. For some reason I'm the type of person that's motivated by that.

T&FN: *What keeps you going? It's kind of hard for people to believe that it's simply money.*

Rodgers: There's been some change in my attitude towards the sport and the way that I prepare for races and everything that is related to the business of the sport. But, all in all, I'm no different from when I ran my first races in high school or college or on the road racing scene in the early '70s or middle '70s. It's something that I'm good at and I like to do. I like to hammer it out; I like the competition.

And, that I can make money at it is better than ever. I still think that we're not getting what we should get as athletes; it's going much, much higher. This is just the beginning. What I get on the roads is

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## RODGERS INTERVIEW—continued

some day going to be considered laughable by the top athletes.

T&FN: *Some of the people think it's laughable now. Like \$30,000, that's before you perform, right?*

Rodgers: Actually, I've never received that much in my life. The most I've ever gotten is \$20,000.

T&FN: *Hey, I don't mean to bring up a name, but Fred Lebow is quoted...*

Rodgers: Oh yeah, quotable Fred. Well, that's absurd. I was offered \$30,000 for one race and the race fell apart. But, I didn't compete. The most I've ever received in conjunction with any race is \$20,000. That's the tops for me. Which isn't even as much as the top milers of the world get nowadays. I think I should be getting about 10 times more than what they get considering how much more work I have to do.

T&FN: *Yeah, but Alice Cooper makes more than the president.*

Rodgers: I'm just keeping it in perspective with road racing. Presidents don't get very good pay at all. Heck, I made more than the president made last year... or did I?

T&FN: *You had a better year than the president. Isn't that what Babe Ruth said? Everyone made such a big deal of the fact that you said you made \$250,000 last year from running and running-related businesses.*

Rodgers: The problem is that there was really quite an underestimation there. I'm serious; it was a serious underestimation of how much I made on the road.

T&FN: *Any chance of exceeding \$250,000 in '81?*

Rodgers: It was much higher than that last year and it's higher than that this year, yes.

T&FN: *How does it feel not to be the absolute King Of The Roads as you were a few years ago?*

Rodgers: I'm very well adjusted to that. Obviously that has been changed for quite a while. But I still feel, regardless of whether Herb Lindsay gets ranked as No. 1 in the world again this year, I still feel that my position may be behind him in the rankings but I feel that the rankings should include the marathon. When you judge somebody overall for their ability on the roads he should be judged 10,000m up to the marathon. That's one criticism I have of the rankings then. I think road racing is generally considered to include the marathon and I think many other marathoners feel the same way about that.

This is nothing against Herb. He's a great runner and he'd probably run a hell of a marathon, too. I don't know if I ever want to see him in a marathon. But I think he should be there. I do believe he deserves No. 1 world ranking, though.

T&FN: *How about future goals?*

Rodgers: In '82, I'll probably race a

lot, just like I did this year. Eighty-three, I'm not sure what the arrangement will be for the World Track & Field Championships but I'd like to compete there in the marathon, since it's an historical occasion, first time ever for World Championships. Then in '84 I'll try for the marathon team. I'll probably run Boston a few times and some of the other races that I've raced in like the Stockholm Marathon and Houston, maybe Bank One or New York.

Also, I see a lot of new marathons popping up—this is my third new marathon of the year—and I suspect I'll be running a number of those. Maybe the London Marathon. I'd like to run London...

Unfortunately, we Americans push ourselves more than anywhere else because unlike the track athletes we don't have "on" and "off" seasons. We can't be like the hurdlers or the milers and say, "Well, my season's over, I'm going to go home now." I mean, I guess we could do that but our sport isn't structured that way. We can race all year long and it's up to the individual to make the decision and determine where their limits are.

T&FN: *You once said that there's no way that the TAC deserves any part of your money.*

Rodgers: Well, the way I feel is the TAC has basically made a lot of mistakes, primarily in road racing. They've created a lot of hostility. TAC and the public have to understand that to them maybe it's just their little job or their volunteer work or their interest, but to an athlete, it's his life and he's only got a few years there.

I understand a lot of the people involved in TAC, many of them, are volunteers and I think it's great that they're helping out. I guess the underlying criticism of athletes is that they're not professional enough at times.

T&FN: *The athletes themselves?*

Rodgers: No, the people at TAC. They're not always professional. They don't have enough people. When you call up trying to find out some information, not too many people can be easily reached. It's tough to reach Cassell. There seems to be poor communication between the hierarchy at TAC and the athletes.

One of the things I'm curious about: ARRA has been formed and we've heard a lot about them lately. I'm curious about what's happened with the track athletes association. Are they all comfortable with TAC and with the present system of amateurism? Do they expect the rules to change? And they think it's going to grow open and get better. Some don't care. I suppose that's what it is. There's less unity because there's so many different things going on in track.

With this multimillion-dollar Olympic event coming up I think the track athletes really ought to sit back and get their organization going. They ought to demand

Track & Field News

a slice of that money. I think the American athlete should have a percentage of the profits that come out of this Olympic Games.

If you get gold, silver, or bronze, I think you should have a percentage, according to how you do. Even if you make the Olympic team you should get a percentage of it. Is this an Olympics only for the businessmen?

**T&FN:** *What's going on in your personal life?*

**Rodgers:** Very complicated situation there. It's definitely been a difficult year, for sure. Maybe the most difficult year. . . It's true, a very interesting thing. Most people. . . the public. . . people who read *T&FN*, view athletes simply as statistics. What do they produce?

**T&FN:** *Particularly T&FN.*

**Rodgers:** Yeah. There are many things that surround an athlete's performance. It's interesting to know these a lot of times. For me, basically, there's some light at the end of the tunnel. But the divorce thing was definitely a difficult thing for me, as it is for most people.

**T&FN:** *I don't know what the marital situation is, but you have to leave the woman or you have to leave the relationship; you don't want to leave the memories, you don't want to leave the family.*

**Rodgers:** That's very true. I found myself looking at all these old photos, very strange thing. But, I suppose it's very normal routine, as many people are getting divorced nowadays.

**T&FN:** *Are you in shape?*

**Rodgers:** You want to know the real way I feel? My competitive year is basically over and I'm kind of going through the motions. That's just the facts. Unfortunately, I ran out of gas in the middle of the summer.

**T&FN:** *It's bound to happen. You can't do it year round.*

**Rodgers:** You can't, not at the number of races that I was trying for. It just caught up to me.

I came back from Stockholm and I got sick; I got a cold for 2 weeks. I've never in my life had a cold in the summer. Not only the effects physically of the marathon but my cold; I couldn't do any speed work. That carried me through to September and then I had a race every weekend in September. I could never do enough speed work. I had to keep going.

I guess 2:17 was the end result. It was my first 2:17; it was kind of fun to run and see that time on the thing. I always wonder what these different times feel like. I always wonder what a 2:17 felt like. I've never run a 2:15 or a 2:16. I've run a 2:19, that was back in '74.

**T&FN:** *That's your slowest?*

**Rodgers:** No, my slowest was a 2:36 at New York City! '74. I almost quit running the marathon then.

**T&FN:** *You should've. Obviously you*

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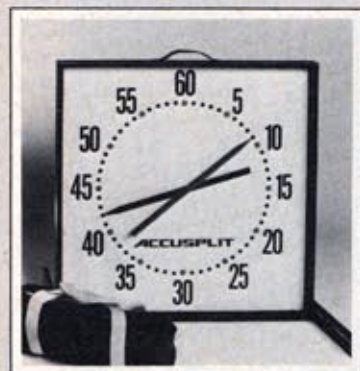
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## RODGERS INTERVIEW—continued

had no talent.

Rodgers: But I would've made no money.

T&FN: Yeah. Is that why you run so many races?

Rodgers: Alberto runs for the glory and I'm just a mercenary.

T&FN: How long do you plan on competing?

Rodgers: At least to '84. I don't think in terms of a gold medal or anything; I mean, it's a nice fantasy. I would love to just make the team. What my goal would be—if I ever had a sort of a goal—if I could make the top 10 in the Olympics I'd be overjoyed.

I think I could produce a pretty good effort still by that time. What I'm going to do is, this year and next year I'll run hard. This year the only marathon I really trained for was Boston; that I really aimed for.

T&FN: Do you envision any major masters competition in the future? As the post-war baby boom grows older? I have this image of Shorter, Rodgers, Kardong, Anderson, Burfoot, Viren, Puttemans all running around Central Park or something.

Rodgers: It could be, but it's so different. Muscle has been grinding, sinew against bone—that's not like golf.

T&FN: What's your thinking about the current state of the running economy, as a store owner and clothing-line manufacturer?

Rodgers: It's good. Business has gone well for our stores here and for the clothing line this past year, and it's doing well right now. I've been told by various shoe manufacturers and running publications that the market is stale. It's steady; it hasn't grown.

T&FN: Why do you still run for the Greater Boston Track Club instead of some more promotional outfit like "Billy's Bad Dudes" or something?

Rodgers: No reason for me to run for anyone else. For one thing, there was no financial incentive. But, I've been with Greater Boston for a long time; some of the people in the club are close friends of mine. There's no reason for me to leave.

T&FN: I think it's—I know this isn't your motivation—it's very good for your image, too. With everybody jumping from one club to another or forming their own club.

Rodgers: I think the idea of forming your own club... I can understand it. In some ways it's very good. Like Tom Fleming has his own club. Tom does a good job of that.

I think it wasn't a great idea, for example, with Frank. For me—not that I'm not egotistical, because I am—it reeked a little bit too much of that. I'll put my name on a product, but I think it's hilarious and ridiculous to think of something like a Bill Rodgers Running Team. I want runners to wear my gear, and I'll

work out deals like that for them, but I'm not going to... I think that's ridiculous. Particularly when the other runner might be someone who's better than I am now, in certain events at least.

T&FN: You once described TAC as "a bunch of bloodsuckers and parasites." Do you still feel the same way?

Rodgers: A lot of it, yes, I do. I don't want to stereotype; there's no such thing as everyone's this, everyone's that. There's a certain element there which caused me to say that; when they're unwilling to negotiate; when they do what they did at the Olympic Trials when they refused to let people like Oldfield back in; when they ban Patti Catalano or suspend her; when they want to take money and not even negotiate the possibility of an athlete having something left over when he retires. That's when I get really mad and that's the way I feel and all the athletes feel that way.

Is TAC oblivious to the fact that most Americans feel that we should have a system that helps American athletes instead of hurting them—and helping East Germans?

T&FN: Somebody once said, "Would you go to work if you didn't get paid?" That's all you guys are asking—to get paid.

Rodgers: That's exactly it. It's a funny thing. I tell that to somebody: How would you feel if you had a certain cut of your paycheck each week and when you retired you didn't get it, it went to your employer?

T&FN: Yeah, or if they got to decide when you could get it.

Rodgers: You'd feel nauseous. It's just totally crazy. But I do think we need a national federation.

T&FN: A road running federation?

Rodgers: So far they [TAC] haven't shown that they're going to work for the interests of road running. If they would, if they'd get more people, some more control over the athletes, then it would be okay.

T&FN: Well, what was it Aldo Scandurra said? "Athletes should run, not think."?

Rodgers: That's true. If we could only trust officials to think the right way for us. □

William Henry Rodgers was born December 23, 1947, in Hartford, Connecticut and now measures 5-9/132. Graduated from Newington, Connecticut HS in 1966 with PRs of 4:28.8 and 9:36.1 and Wesleyan College in 1970 with an 8:58.8. After a 3-year hiatus from running he turned to the marathon, where he has the best 10-race average ever, 2:10:47. Placed 40th in the 1976 Olympics. Stands No. 7 on the all-time world list in the marathon. Other PRs: 13:42.0 ('78), 28:04.42 ('76). His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses), including placement on the yearly lists and placings in the Boston, NYC and Fukuoka Marathons.

Year	Age	Club	Marathon	List	B	N	F
1974	26	GBT	2:19:34'	140, 15	14	—	—
1975	27	"	2:09:55' (1, 1)	1, 1	1	—	3
1976	28	"	2:10:10' (6, 3)	2, 1	—	1	—
1977	29	"	2:10:56' (1, 1)	1, 1	dnf	1	1
1978	30	"	2:10:13' (2, 1)	2, 1	1	1	6
1979	31	"	2:09:27' (1, 1)	1, 1	1	1	—
1980	32	"	2:12:11' (x, 5)	37, 13	1	5	—
1981	33	"	2:10:34'		3	—	—