

T&FN INTERVIEW

FRANK SHORTER

by JON HENDERSHOTT

Running has been a way of life to Frank Shorter for a long time. Even before he made his first national impact—winning the '69 NCAA 6M as a Yale senior—logging daily miles was an integral part of his life.

In that regard, little has changed for Shorter, now 42. He still trains, as in the past—it's the reasons for training which have changed. Where the driving force once was preparing for Olympic-level marathoning, Shorter now trains for Masters competition and general fitness.

Another aspect which hasn't changed about the Boulder resident is his love for running in all its facets. He enjoys his television stints—which have included such majors as the '87 World Championships and '88 Olympics—because they keep him close to the sport.

He acknowledges the profound effect his '72 Olympic marathon victory had on U. S. distance running. The American attitude toward the sport—whether for pleasure or profit—would never be the same again.

And he realizes that U. S. marathoning fortunes haven't approached the heights reached in

his halcyon days of the '70s. He remains the only American to win an Olympic marathon medal since 1908.

Sharing a breakfast table in a San Francisco hotel, Shorter spoke to the past glories of American marathoning—and to the hope of renewed honors in the future:

T&FN: Why do you think the U.S. hasn't been more successful in producing top-level marathoners? Only you, Kenny Moore, Bill Rodgers and Alberto Salazar have World Ranked in the past two decades.

Shorter: One big reason, I feel, is that we got away from the concept that so many successful countries have: training together. Italy has it; the Moroccans do it; the Kenyans now have specific times for all their top people to get together to train.

But the U. S. has nothing like that. My home in Boulder is a good example: the best cyclists and triathletes in the country live and train there. And some of the finest runners in the world train

there—but none of them are Americans.

Where else can you have Arturo Barrios and Rob de Castella running together on a morning workout? Or have Steve Cram visit regularly? Or have Ingrid Kristiansen live there half the year? Yet there aren't any top Americans.

T&FN: It was different in your heyday, wasn't it?

Shorter: Yes, all the best guys got together to train whenever possible. But there also were what I call "enclaves": the Stanford group with Don Kardong and Duncan Macdonald; the Eugene enclave with Steve Prefontaine and the other great Oregon runners; the Florida enclave with myself, Jack Bachelier, Jeff Galloway and others.

T&FN: And now?

Shorter: There seems to be a kind of group today around Provo, and it's no coincidence that Doug Padilla, Henry Marsh and Paul Cummings all made the '84 Olympic team, with Farley Gerber just missing. Then Padilla, Marsh and Ed Eyestone made it in '88.

T&FN: How about the effects of road racing? With so many opportunities now to make money on the roads, do runners over-race?

Shorter: I used to think over-racing did have an effect, but I feel that's had a chance to settle out. The guys who really want to go to the Olympics know how much they should race.

But when you get on the track by yourself to run intervals, you can only guess where your opposition might be. It's much easier when you see Barrios 10m up the track as you're doing repeat 1000s. You know where you are.

So, if I were a leading American distance runner today, I'd be training in Boulder with Barrios. Or at least be around him as much as I could and watch everything he does.

T&FN: And that's what you did?

Shorter: I said, "Who's the best guy in the country? Bachelier. Where is he? In Florida." So that's where I went—and so did others, like Marty Liquori, Barry Brown, Galloway. A guy like John Parker might really have been only a 4:12 miler, but just by being around that group, he improved to 4:05 and won the SEC.

Most people just can't do it on their own. So that's the biggest thing missing from the American scene.

Munich Changed Everything

Frank Shorter's life—and the face of American distance running—changed forever on September 10, 1972. On that day, the 24-year-old Yale graduate became the first American in 64 years to win the Olympic marathon.

His triumph thrust the 26-miler squarely into America's running consciousness. Shorter acknowledges the effect of his win and the resulting image of him it fostered in the sport.

"I was very lucky because the image which evolved came out of a situation that wasn't contrived in any way," explains the broadcaster/businessman/Masters competitor.

"Another aspect was that my success appealed to a very basic side of many Americans. Here was a guy from a standard East Coast, Puritan-ethic schooling and professional background.

"I was a fairly 'normal,' high-aspiring member of our society, yet I won the Olympic marathon—which was supposed to be reserved for barefoot Africans.

"Most Americans could identify with that scenario to a degree. I wasn't so re-

mote. The idea was, 'If he can do it, so can I.' Maybe not to the same level, but the belief was reinforced in the average American that he could rise to a higher level.

"I had no trouble letting that image go on; it's not a hard image to live up to. Basically, I just continued to be what I had always been. I wasn't anyone different when I won the gold medal, or the silver in '76. I just kept being myself and people seemed satisfied with that.

"Another thing I'd like to believe is that I was able to project the idea that the running, and the competition, for me was part of my daily routine. To a great degree, it was what I did to relieve stress and have fun.

"And it wasn't that I was so tightly focused. In fact, I had to have other things to do while I was training. I went to law school fulltime while I was training for the '72 Games. Before Montreal, I was studying for the bar exam.

"And I believe many other people also found that that diversion was a main reason they liked to run. The very act of running could become a lifestyle—and it became self-sustaining." //H/



Don Chadez

The '76-vintage Shorter followed his Trials Marathon win with a 10K triumph.

T&FN: *Why is it missing?*

Shorter: I think a lot of it has to do with the money out there to be made. Nobody wants to show what they've got because money has become too important. The idea has settled in of doing well on an ongoing basis, which is antithetical to being able to peak.

Winning as much money as you can tends to develop into a situation where you'd rather have ten 3rd-place finishes in major road races than win one or two.

Another thing is, you have to have started on the track, period. You really can't be the best road racer without running on the track. Eyestone did that. John Ngugi is a great cross country runner, but he is a track racer first.

T&FN: *Why is the track so important?*

Shorter: It's basic training theory: you have to make your legs go faster in training than they will go in a race. The wider you can have that variance, the more comfortable you'll be in the race. Simple.

I mean, the 1-4-9 finish in '72 by myself, Kenny and Jack wasn't a coincidence: for the two months leading up to Munich, I ran with Jack almost every day. And I did most of my long runs with Kenny.

T&FN: *What might change the American attitude?*

Shorter: Personality. Someone will come along who says, "I don't care

about money—I want to win the Olympics." A guy with the mentality of a Prefontaine will say, "That's my goal."

That outlook opposes one I feel has developed among American distance runners in the past 56 years: the attitude of, "I acknowledge I'm not the best and never can be. So my goal is to be average and make as much money as I can. I'll abdicate and accept mediocrity—and the reasonable living that goes along with it."

T&FN: *How might we go about changing the outlook?*

Shorter: I feel a possible solution is something akin to the British system of rewarding peaking, even though such an idea is squarely opposed to the American sense of free choice.

Athletes might say, "If I want to over-race by my own choice, I will." But it also makes sense to set up a system which rewards them for acting in a certain way. The attitude is, "We're won't try to control the races you run. But if you will peak for a certain race, it really will be worth your while."

Sure we all want and need money. But can't priorities be adjusted so that if the money is important, it's still just a little bit behind, in this case, the drive to win in the Olympics?

T&FN: *Somewhat related is the theory that there are only so many top-level marathons a runner's legs can handle. What do you think?*

Shorter: Five, maybe six. Also, I feel you can blood dope only three or four times and that's all your body will allow. I name no names and infer none. That's purely my personal opinion.

A similar question is, how many times can you really give 100%? And even if you know how to regulate that, why squander them by racing too much?

T&FN: *What were instances when you knew you had given 100%?*

Shorter: I'd say there were four races when I felt I went 100%: one was the '72 Games. Another was '76.

One was the 3M against Prefontaine in '74 when I ran 12:52 and he ran 12:51. The last was an indoor 2M in '77 against Rod Dixon when I ran 1:57 for my last half-mile and beat him.

Those four times I know I was mentally and physically peaked, I was ready, I had trained right for the particular race and I got everything out of myself that I could have gotten. □