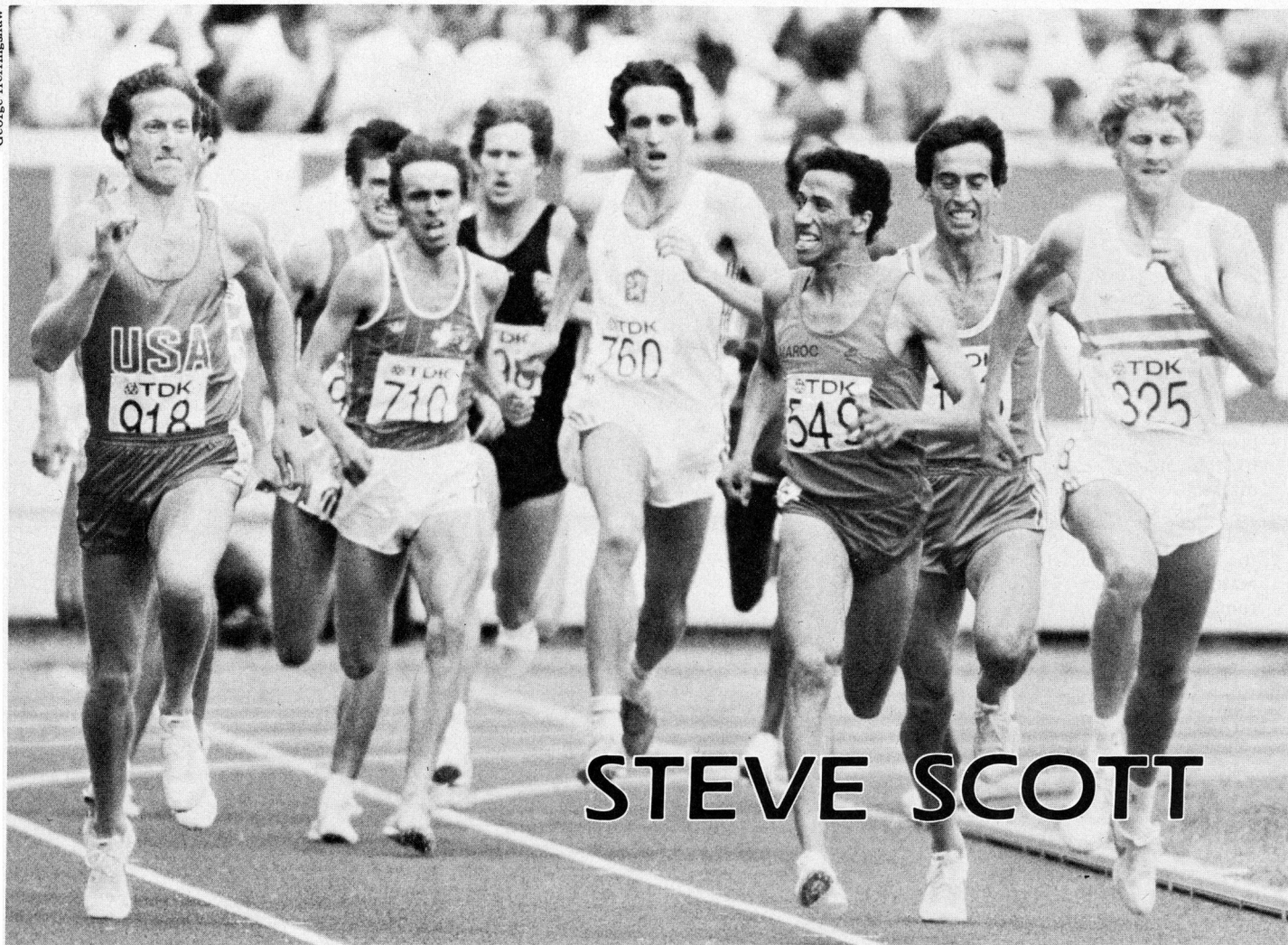


T & F N I N T E R V I E W

George Herringshaw



Scott (918) is very proud of this race—the World Championships 1500—in which he won the silver behind Steve Cram (325).

It is definitely very strange to hear Steve Scott talk about “reestablishing” himself. After all, we’re talking about the No. 1-ranked U.S. miler who extended that streak to eight consecutive years in 1984. Only one American athlete has a longer string of U.S. Rankings—Hal Connolly was the top American hammer thrower for nine seasons (1958-66).

But Scott gauges himself against the best milers in the world, and because of that his No. 8 world ranking last year—and 10th-place Olympic finish—is grounds enough for him to talk about reestablishment. “I still want to be the best in the world,” he affirms.

His LA performance was considered a “failure” by many, and even Scott told us last fall, “I started to think that maybe I was past my prime; that I was on a downhill slide.”

A 2nd-place finish in a loaded Zurich 1500, though, told him he was thankfully wrong. “I

proved to myself that I was better than I showed in the Games because I was able to beat practically all the guys who were in the Olympic final.”

Proud of his family (“I wouldn’t have traded my family for a ton of gold medals”), he was also proud of one aspect of his running which was a trademark from when he graduated until this year: competing for Sub-4. He now competes for Tiger, as his affiliation with Sub-4 ended because of the deemphasizing of his former club—an entity that he created (even designing the uniforms) in 1979.

We talked with Steve a few hours before he recorded his 98th sub-4:00 mile, in Modesto, preparing for this summer’s racing after experiencing on-and-off illnesses for nearly two months last fall:

T&FN: One thing I’ve always wanted to ask someone who’s been on a bunch of national teams is what do you do with all the uniforms—sell them, trade them?

Scott: No, I just give them away mostly. I’m not really into the trading. Even at the Olympics—the pins and all those goings-on—I really don’t get into that too much.

I do have my Olympic uniform and my World Championships uniform just in a bag sitting in a closet somewhere. But all the other ones I’ve received I’ve given either to my brother, my brother-in-law, my sister, my sister-in-law or friends.

T&FN: What do you do in your “free time”—your non-running time when you’re away from your family?

Scott: Read. That’s about it. When you’ve been at it as long as me or some of these other athletes in their late 20s and early 30s, most of the cities we’re going to we’ve been to already 10 or 12 or 15 times

before. Oslo, Zurich, London—those may sound like glamorous cities, but we've all been there a number of times and we've seen all the sights there are to see. Plus, when you're traveling and competing, the last thing you want to do is be walking around, spending a lot of excess energy.

I'd say any time spent between meets is spent either reading, eating or sleeping. Like when I go over to Europe, I'll take 4-5 books over with me and do a lot of reading.

T&FN: *What type of books?*

Scott: Usually suspense thrillers, spy thrillers, some medical-type books—not textbooks, but books on a coma or a fever. Mostly suspense or adventure type.

T&FN: *So you go through a few during a summer.*

Scott: Last summer, I read 6 books, I think. All of them averaging over 300 pages. Oh, I like Louis L'Amour books too.

T&FN: *OK, how about if we talk about the mile and Steve Scott the runner now?*

Scott: Oh, the boring stuff!

T&FN: *Thirty years ago, running 4:00 in the mile was considered very good. Twenty years ago, it was 3:55. Ten years ago, it was 3:52. Now it's 3:49. What do you think the comparable time will be in 10 years and why?*

Scott: Well, the time span that you've used—30 years, 20 years, 10 years—has shown the drop in time to be less and less over an equal number of years. I would think that in 10 years, it may only be a second or two faster than now. I'd say under 3:47.

T&FN: *Refined training and equipment have been no small help to the development of every event. Do you feel that's a major explanation for improvement?*

Scott: Well, that and the idea of goal-setting. You have a barrier which is something to shoot for. I mean, who would have ever thought that anyone could approach 29 feet in the long jump? But that's a barrier that people now shoot for. And as long as you have that barrier to shoot for, someone will always come along and break it.

But I think the major improvement has been in the way athletes train. First of all, they now can afford to train full-time. That's all they have to worry about, whereas 30 years ago you trained for track the same way I train for golf. [Laughs.] You know, you go out and play twice a week and that's it, and that's what they did back then—it wasn't exclusively what they're doing.

T&FN: *Do you think in 20 years people will look back on some of today's techniques and consider them "primitive"?*

Scott: Without a doubt. Just look at these little gimmicks—well, they're not gimmicks; they're actually devices, but I consider them like cheating—these muscle-stimulator machines and just the advance-

ment in medical technology. Now, someone can have arthroscopic surgery and possibly be running in a couple of days whereas in the past that same operation might have put you out for six weeks. And

"I Changed My Race Strategy To Suit The Journalists. . . I Should Have Stuck To My Guns."

injury is the one thing that has really plagued the athlete.

Like I said before, the muscle-stimulator machine. It's not something you're actually doing for yourself. It's just an outside force which is building upon you. In a way, it's like taking a foreign substance, because you're not really doing anything—the machine is doing it to you. So it's these types of things that are going to make advancements in the future.

T&FN: *I had always noticed that you and John Walker were close friends, but after this business about reaching 100 sub-4:00 miles it appeared that you two had become bitter enemies. Is that true?*

Scott: Not really. At the time, I felt a little anger to him for not holding off and, you know, racing me for the 100th. It wasn't serious enough to break off our relationship, but I guess the press made a lot more out of it than there really was.

You know, when I went down to New Zealand, I couldn't be seen training with John or being around John because that would spoil the whole effect of us being angry with each other.

T&FN: *You mean you actually played that up?*

Scott: Yeah, a little bit. The basics of it were true. I was angry with John, and I felt it was selfish what he did but it didn't spoil our friendship.

In fact after the race we had was over, we got together. I went on a run with him, I went over to his house and we played tennis; I visited with his family. So I think any of the problems are pretty much behind us. At the time, there was a little bit of tension, but as time goes on it'll all be forgotten.

T&FN: *What race do you feel most proud of?*

Scott: It seems like every time I'm asked this question I give a different answer. As time goes on, you have different values of what's most important to you.

Like if you had asked me this question in '80, I would have told you winning the NCAA Championships in '78 was most important. Later on, I would have said winning the Olympic Trials in '80. Early in '83, I probably would have said running 3:47.69.

But at this point, after being through major championship meets, I would have to say—even though I took a lot of crap for it—the World Championships silver medal.

T&FN: *It's absolutely amazing to me how many people either have forgotten it or undervalue it.*

Scott: I let a lot of people talk me into their belief that I ran like crap or I should have used different tactics. But a championship meet is a tactical race. And I was second-best, but I beat a helluva lot of good people, and everybody was there.

T&FN: *How strange does it feel to be judged by people—the press, I mean—who have absolutely no conception of what you go through? Some of these press types sit in a chair, maybe smoke or drink, and then report to the public that you blew it in Helsinki.*

Scott: You know what the saddest thing, though, about all of this is? Listening to them had something to do with my strategy in the Olympic Games.

T&FN: *Are you serious?*

Scott: Yeah. I was so upset, so pissed off, that I changed my race strategy to suit, you know, these journalists. [He says "journalists" with a noticeable amount of hesitation.] I just let them influence me when I shouldn't have. You know, I should have just stuck to my guns, stuck to my own race plan that I had been doing for years, and see what that got me.

T&FN: *Were the writers' reactions to your performances in Helsinki and LA just a reflection of the general public's feelings?*

Scott: Yeah, I'd say it was. A lot of people I knew—my wife, even—were pissed off. They thought I'd run a dumb race. My parents thought it was not a smart race plan.

T&FN: *How did you live with these reactions?*

Scott: Now you see why I changed my race tactics for LA! I was getting it from all sides—I was getting it from the press, from friends, from family. But I knew that I had prepared myself the best I could and I did the best I could.

T&FN: *Do you think there's a runner out there who is so good that you couldn't beat him no matter how good you became?*

Scott: No. Not that I know of right now. In the LA Olympic final, I don't believe that anybody at any time in history could have beaten Sebastian Coe. Not Jim Ryun, not Steve Ovett at his best, not anybody. Not Keino. I don't think anybody could have beaten Coe in that final on that particular day. But as far as your question, I don't feel there's anyone who

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SCOTT INTERVIEW—continued

could consistently beat me. I feel that at any time I can beat anybody in the world.

T&FN: You then feel that Coe's win in LA was the ultimate display of a 1500 runner?

Scott: I'd say so, especially considering it was a championship race. It wasn't Oslo, where everybody sits at home and peaks for one race and it's a one-on situation where you can go for the World Record. This was the Olympic Games: Coe ran the 800, which was four races; had a day off, then he had to run the 1500 races. Things had not been going all that well for him up to the Games, and just to run that well and look that easy and move away still accelerating through the finish and running 3:32. I mean, he wasn't dying—he had another gear if someone challenged him.

T&FN: We've seen you dabble in the 5000, and you've talked about moving up, but you really haven't. What are your current thoughts about moving up?

Scott: It's just that I don't want to move up too early. I want to accomplish all I can in the 1500/mile before I move up. I just don't feel it's right yet. I think I'll know when it is time—something will happen, and I won't be able to compete the same at 1500.

T&FN: Why would you leave the mile? It's such a popular event and you're so good at it—why change events?

Scott: I'll only move up if I feel I've stagnated at the mile/1500. If I can't maintain my same level of consistency, if I can't continue winning races or if I can't, say, be ranked in the top 10 in the world in the 1500, then it's time to move on to something else. Because I'm competitive—I want to win, not just be an also-ran. So that would be the reason I'd move to the 5000. □

Steven Michael Scott was born May 5, 1956, in Upland, California, and is 6-1/160. Graduated from Upland High School in 1974 and UC Irvine in '78. Now competes for Team Tiger. Married (Kim), with two children (Corey 3½, Megan 16 months). Has set 8 ARs outdoors (1500—3:31.96 '81; Mile—3:51.11 tie '79, 3:49.68 '81, 3:48.53 '82, 3:47.69 '82; 2000—4:58.72 '82, 4:54.71 '82; 3000—7:36.69 '81). Has set 7 ARs indoors (1500—3:38.3 '79, 3:36.0 '81; Mile—3:54.1 '79, 3:53.0 '80, 3:51.8 '81; 2000—4:58.6 '81 [World indoor Record]; 3000—7:45.2 '80). Has won 5 TAC 1500 titles, NCAA champ in '78. PRs: 800 1:45.05 ('82); 1000 2:16.40 ('81); 1500 3:31.96 ('81); Mile 3:47.69 ('82); 2000 4:54.71 ('82); 3000 7:36.69 ('81); 2M 8:22.21 ('80); 5000 13:38.4 ('79); Marathon 2:32:32 ('77). His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	800	1500	Mile
1973	17	1:58.0y		4:25.0
1974	18	1:52.0y	3:56.8	4:15.0
1975	19	1:51.1y	3:47.5	4:08.0
1976	20	1:50.2	3:40.43 (x, 7)	4:05.5
1977	21	1:48.1	3:36.13 (9, 1)	3:55.21
1978	22	1:47.6	3:36.0 (7, 1)	3:52.9
1979	23	1:45.91 (x, 3)	3:34.6 (3, 1)	3:51.11
1980	24	1:46.79	3:33.33 (4, 1)	3:52.7
1981	25	1:47.05	3:31.96 (4, 1)	3:49.68
1982	26	1:45.05 (x, 2)	3:32.33 (2, 1)	3:47.69
1983	27	1:45.97 (x, 8)	3:32.71 (2, 1)	3:49.21
1984	28	1:46.73	3:33.46 (8, 1)	3:52.99
1985	29		3:37.99	3:53.74



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