

by Jon Hendershott

STEVE SCOTT

Even a year ago, Steve Scott was the fastest American to ever run 1500 or a mile. His ARs of 3:31.96 and 3:49.68 also put him among the fastest ever to run those glamorous distances.

But he still felt something was missing in his running: he just didn't feel like he "belonged." He was one of the world's best, but he wasn't quite convinced of it.

The 1982 season has seen the emergence of a whole new Steve Scott, thanks primarily to the dawning of a new, tougher attitude on the part of this 26-year-old Arizona State distance coach.

Suddenly, he was running with a new power, speed and confidence. He even *looked* like he believed he belonged with the very best.

Scott spoke about this evolutionary change in himself on a late-July morning, talking of his stronger new mental outlook in the same relaxed, friendly manner which characterizes the man off the track. He was happy to talk for a couple of hours, before excusing himself to indulge one of his favorite vices, a daily dose of the TV soap *All My Children*.

For Scott, the personal revelations of 1982 have translated to the finest miling of his life:

T&FN: *You have said in the past that successful racing is 90% mental and 10% physical. What has been the mental change that has helped make you the best miler in the world this year?*

Scott: Well, to emphasize the point, I feel it has been nearly all mental. I haven't changed the physical things around that much. I train hard every year and I haven't added anything new or extraordinary to my training, so I have to attribute the success to the mental aspect.

It's just been a progression of good races. Winning the TAC against Sydney, pretty easily really, was the start. Then the first Oslo race, the 3:48, felt basically like a kicker's race. It came that easily.

That race put me on a new plateau in terms of my confidence. On the same plateau, really, as a Coe or Ovetts—believing in myself, that I have the same ability they have. It kept going from there.

The 800 in Byrkjelo and then coming back with the 3:47 and feeling quite good about it. I was just 0.36 off the record and I didn't go near the bottom of the well. Then running 3:32.33 in Lausanne in not optimum conditions and being within a second of that record.

It's been a progression of confidence. In the past, I *thought* it was possible to attempt a record. Now I *know* it's possible. That's a big difference.

T&FN: *It must be exciting to know that World Records aren't that intimidating now.*

Scott: It is. Last year, I honestly thought the mile record was out of my



Bill Killian

reach. Even at the beginning of this year. Not until I raced in Europe did I find it is within reach. I would have been happy to run 3:48 this year, because it would have been faster than I ran last year. But I just thought 3:47 was out of my reach. Now I know it's not.

T&FN: *Last year you said you were trying to develop more of a "killer instinct," a more aggressive attitude. Have you?*

Scott: I don't think I really accomplished that. Well... I guess you might associate the two, the idea of a "killer instinct" and at least with me of not wanting to lose. With me, I made it more of a priority to win the races. I didn't want to lose anymore.

T&FN: *Was that your main goal for 1982, not to lose?*

Scott: Starting out, it was. I had a poor indoor season and I hated it. It hurt me to do so badly indoors. I just told myself I didn't want to lose outdoors. I didn't care if my times were all that fast; I just wanted to win.

That was my main goal, but it changed as the season progressed because I did start running for time—but only because I became confident in myself that I was going to win, along with running the fast times. You know, if someone is going to beat you and they have to run in the low 3:47s to do it, then they deserve it!

T&FN: *Or if someone else runs 3:47, what might push you to 3:46.*

Scott: Most of those fast times were run because I was pushed. Walker and Flynn were right with me in the 3:47 up to the last 100. In the 3:32, Sydney was right there. So I know I was being pushed. I would say there are a half-dozen people capable of running 3:47 right now.

I think other runners used to be in awe of Coe, thinking he was superhuman and he had put the mile record out of sight of everybody else but him. But now that they have seen that I can run that fast, they probably think, "Hell, if Scott can run that fast, so can I!"

T&FN: *How do you feel the "absence" of Coe and Ovett has affected milers this year? Can they run more uninhibited in the big races without the intimidating presence of Coe or Ovett being there?*

Scott: I think so. It's such a psych game that goes on when they're running. All the media focuses on one or the other of them and everybody else is forgotten. Psychologically, that can be really detrimental to the other runners because they can feel like they are just added baggage in the race, supporting players.

So it hurts the confidence of the others. I know it hurt me, because I felt like a second-class citizen, especially in a place like Brussels. There was so much hoopla about Coe—"Coe! Coe! Coe!"—they don't care if you're there or not.

The Bible of the Sport

You get angry about it, yet it puts you at a disadvantage because I think that deep down, you do believe what is being said about Coe or Ovett. Without them, everything has been wide open. Anyone could jump in and do what I did. It so happens I was in the right places at the right times.

T&FN: *Can you say that right now you feel less intimidated—or not intimidated at all—by Coe and Ovett?*

Scott: At this point, I think they would be intimidated by me. The shoe is on the other foot—and I like it. I know Ovett is quite worried. And Coe may put on his debonair exterior personality, but he's got to be a little scared inside.

T&FN: *It seems that you have reverted back to the "sit-and-kick" Steve Scott.*

Scott: In looking at how these other guys run races, Coe or Ovett will go out at a hellacious pace and try to hang on when they are attempting a record. I don't think that's the best way. Maybe it's the right way for them, but for me it's better to be more conservative in the beginning. They really blast the last lap or so.

I know people will disagree with putting yourself so far in the hole, and then have to try to play catchup on the last lap. But that's just the way I would rather run.

T&FN: *An impressive facet of your running this year is how strong and fast you are over that last lap. Have you done specific training to improve that last-lap speed?*

Scott: Well, every runner has a certain amount of natural speed. But on the last lap of a mile race, it doesn't matter if you can run a 45-second flat quarter, or a 49-second quarter. In a race, you aren't going to run much faster than 51 or 52.

Your basic speed really doesn't come into play. I think it's more a matter of your strength. Each year, I've just progressively added to the strength I have; plus natural maturity is involved and then basic speed. I can run a 47-second quarter. And the confidence factor comes in: to be able to run a 52-second last quarter gives me a lot of confidence because I know I can gun people down in the last lap.

I know I have said in the past that I like races that are mentally stimulating, as well as physical. To sit and kick isn't that at all; you go into a race with only one race plan. But right now, it's the best race plan for me. I'm running the strongest at that point.

T&FN: *In looking over your season, it has been really a pretty long one, yet you are running your best in Europe.*

Scott: I feel I was worse off last year. I put more pressure on myself last year because I wanted to break the American Record in the States. So I ran some races that I peaked for and that had more pressure than they would have.

But I think I like the schedule I have

had this year. I don't feel I ran any race that I really peaked for clear up until the TAC meet. All the other meets were just for fun, no pressure, no peaking.

So I feel like I've really run only about six races this year. All the others, I was just training through. So I went into the European season really fresh, mentally and physically.

[He chuckles.] I know I've said that you can't try to break the World Record or American Record in every race—and, yes, my two ARs came within 12 days. The 3:48 was more of a race; I had to run that fast to win the race. It wasn't a record attempt, but just a bunch of guys trying to win a race that ended up being fast.

The second race was more of a record attempt and I was lucky because the conditions were good and I felt pretty good. But I still feel that it's bad to chase records. You can become so hung up on that, you can feel like you didn't achieve anything if you don't get the record. Even if you win every race but don't break the record, then you might consider yourself a failure.

T&FN: *You said last year that you weren't close to being satisfied with your career yet. Have your latest successes helped you become more satisfied?*

Scott: I'm a little bit closer to being satisfied. About 0.37 faster and I would have been real satisfied!

But nothing really has changed with me. I come home and I still have to take out the garbage or feed the dogs or babysit. And in running, too, just because you are faster, things don't change. I mean it's great to be at this new level, but you constantly have to keep proving it, both to yourself and everybody else. Everybody starts on the same level and goes from there. You can't rely on what you did the year before. It's just a process of continually having to reestablish yourself. The only time it ends is when you retire—but I won't be retiring for a long time, so I've learned to live with it. □

Steven Michael Scott was born May 5, 1956 in Upland, California, and is 6-1/160. He now resides in Tempe, Arizona, with his wife (Kim) and year-old son (Corey). Graduated from Upland High School in 1974 and UC Irvine in 1978. Now competes for the Sub 4 Track Club. Has set 5 ARs outdoors (3 in the mile, 1 each in the 1500 and 3000) and 6 ARs indoors (3 in the mile and 1 each in the 1500, 2000 [also a WR] and 3000). He has won the TAC 1500 4 times ('77, '78, '79, '82) and was the 1978 NCAA 1500 champ. PRs: 800, 1:45.05 ('82); 1000, 2:16.40 ('81); 1500, 3:31.96 ('81); mile, 3:47.69 ('82); 2000, 4:58.61 ('81); 3000, 7:36.69 ('81); 2M, 8:22.21 ('80); 5000, 13:38.4 ('79). His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	800	1500	Mile
1973	16/17	1:58.0y		4:25.0
1974	17/18	1:51.1y	3:56.8	4:15.0
1975	18/19	1:50.0	3:47.5	4:08.0
1976	19/20	1:50.2	3:40.43 (x, 7)	4:05.5
1977	20/21	1:48.1	3:36.13 (9, 1)	3:55.21
1978	21/22	1:47.6	3:36.0 (7, 1)	3:52.93
1979	22/23	1:45.91 (x, 3)	3:34.6 (3, 1)	3:51.11
1980	23/24	1:46.79 (x, 9)	3:33.33 (4, 1)	3:52.7
1981	24/25	1:47.05	3:31.96 (4, 1)	3:49.68
1982	25/26	1:45.05	3:32.33	3:47.69