



**DAVE
TAYLOR'S
HAPPY
RETURN**

BY FRANK GREALLY

On a biting cold January afternoon in a small park near Booterstown, Dave Taylor's thoughts are already focussed on the BLE National Interclub Cross Country Championships, then just one month distant.

The Clonliffe runner, whose personable and good-humoured approach to life makes him one of the most popular of Irish athletes, maintains a lively banter with the writer as photographer Ray McManus sets up locations for some special colour action shots.

The talk on this wintry afternoon centres on the previous Sunday's Eastern Region Cross Country Championships at Castlecomer, where Taylor galloped home well clear of the field in the men's senior race.

That victory was reminiscent of some of the Clonliffe man's past performances over the country and in particular his great Inter Club individual victories in '83, '87 and '88. For Taylor, the race served as another indicator of his rapid return to top racing form.

"You know", he says suddenly, as he patiently jogs up for yet another photo call, "I believe that I have a good chance of winning the Nationals. The Eastern Region win may not have been all that impressive, but what pleased me most was the way I locked into a particular rhythm and kept it going on my own all the way to the finish."

A few weeks previously Taylor had been more cautious as we spoke over lunch about his plans for racing in the nineties. "I am probably at my most vulnerable stage ever for racing a full Irish cross country season", he admitted on that occasion. His impressive victory in the BLE/Buckler National Inter Counties Championships in Dundalk on December 17th had been achieved after just three months of serious training and with just two previous races under his belt. He wondered if his self-imposed sabbatical from athletic competition would catch up with him before the season was completed.

Still, there is nothing to compensate for a good victory to restore the confidence, and Taylor's win in Castlecomer in atrocious weather conditions told him that his form had not deserted him. Now, looking back at '89 in perspective, he felt that his break from the sport might yet have been one of the most important decisions in his athletic career. "After finishing second to Gerry Curtis in the Jack Hartigan race in November '88 I just faded out of competition", he said. "Sure, I continued to run, but for months I just ran for pure enjoyment and not to a strict training schedule."

The spring and summer of '89 passed quickly for Taylor and he deliberately kept away from track and road events, not even attending as a spectator. "I knew deep down that my appetite for competition would return but I also knew that I needed to distance myself from the sport for a while", he reflected. Taylor had other areas too into which he needed to channel his considerable energy, in particular his job as a senior

sales executive with the Cantec company, national suppliers of the Canon range of office equipment. He joined Cantec in October 1988 after a year of working for Frank Fahey, Minister for Sport. He found the new job demanding, but stimulating and was determined to give it his best shot. One year later, as Taylor was making his return to competition, he received his reward for job dedication when he was promoted to the position of National Accounts Executive for copier products with Cantec. "I think that being settled in a job that I liked helped me refocus on the competitive element of athletics which I began to miss a lot," he said. "I wanted to test myself again over the country and so in October I started a steady build-up of training."



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Taylor opened his winter campaign with a winning effort in the Gerry Farnan Memorial Cross Country race at Santry on November 5th and followed this with a second place finish behind Gerry Curtis in the Jack Hartigan event in Naas. "I ran very hard in Naas," he said, "and it gave me a superb feeling to be back battling with Gerry Curtis over the country." The Naas race also gave him a true indication of the workload needed to maintain a successful cross country campaign; "The race certainly helped me put things in perspective," he said. "It told me just where I was at and strengthened my resolve to do better as the season progressed."

Memories of his great Nationals of '83, '87 and '88 come back strongly these winter evenings for Taylor as he logs the training miles, with Limerick '90 very much on his mind. "Winning the Nationals is very special," he said. "It's a great day to be on the top of your form and such success makes for nice memories."

The thoughts on those daily training runs sometimes focus on the early days of his running career over a decade ago when Eddie McDonagh first spotted Taylor's

athletic talent. "My main sport was football back then," he said, "but Eddie McDonagh soon had me full tilt at athletics where success came quickly for me." An American track scholarship was soon on offer and at 18 Taylor headed for university in Arkansas where former Clonliffe athlete John McDonnell was the coach in charge of the athletic programme.

McDonnell had a big influence on the young man from Kimmage who found himself desperately homesick in his first year away from home. "Frank O'Mara

and myself went out together and while I adapted quickly to the tough training regime, I was really pining for home. Frank on the other hand never suffered extremes of homesickness but found the early training difficult!"

Looking back on the Arkansas years, Taylor's only regret is that he did not savour the experience fully as it was happening. "I would still recommend a good U.S. scholarship to any good young athlete," he said, "but I would also urge young runners to get their priorities in the right order."

In Arkansas John McDonnell put the priority on academic excellence for his young Irish charges. "That is the way it should be," Taylor reckons. "Your education can never be taken away from you, and no matter how things go athletically, you can always be satisfied that you did not waste four years at school."

Back home in 1982 Taylor qualified at 1500m for the European Games in Athens and in 1983 he won his first National Cross Country title at Rathkeale. The Olympic year of '84 was disastrous for him as he went over the top from overtraining on binges of 110 miles a week. "Training should really be pretty straightforward and schedules should be structured on common sense," he said. However, he admits to seriously overdoing things in a determined bid to make the Seoul Olympics. "Common sense was replaced by mega mileage and I ended up crocked," he said.

TYPICAL WEEK'S WINTER TRAINING

Sun:	20 miles in about 2 hours
Mon:	10 miles steady
Tues:	Am 5 miles. PM 10 miles
Wed:	10 miles
Thurs:	AM 5 miles. PM 10 miles
Fri:	AM 5 miles. PM 10 miles
Sat:	6 x 1 mile intervals in average of 4.20.

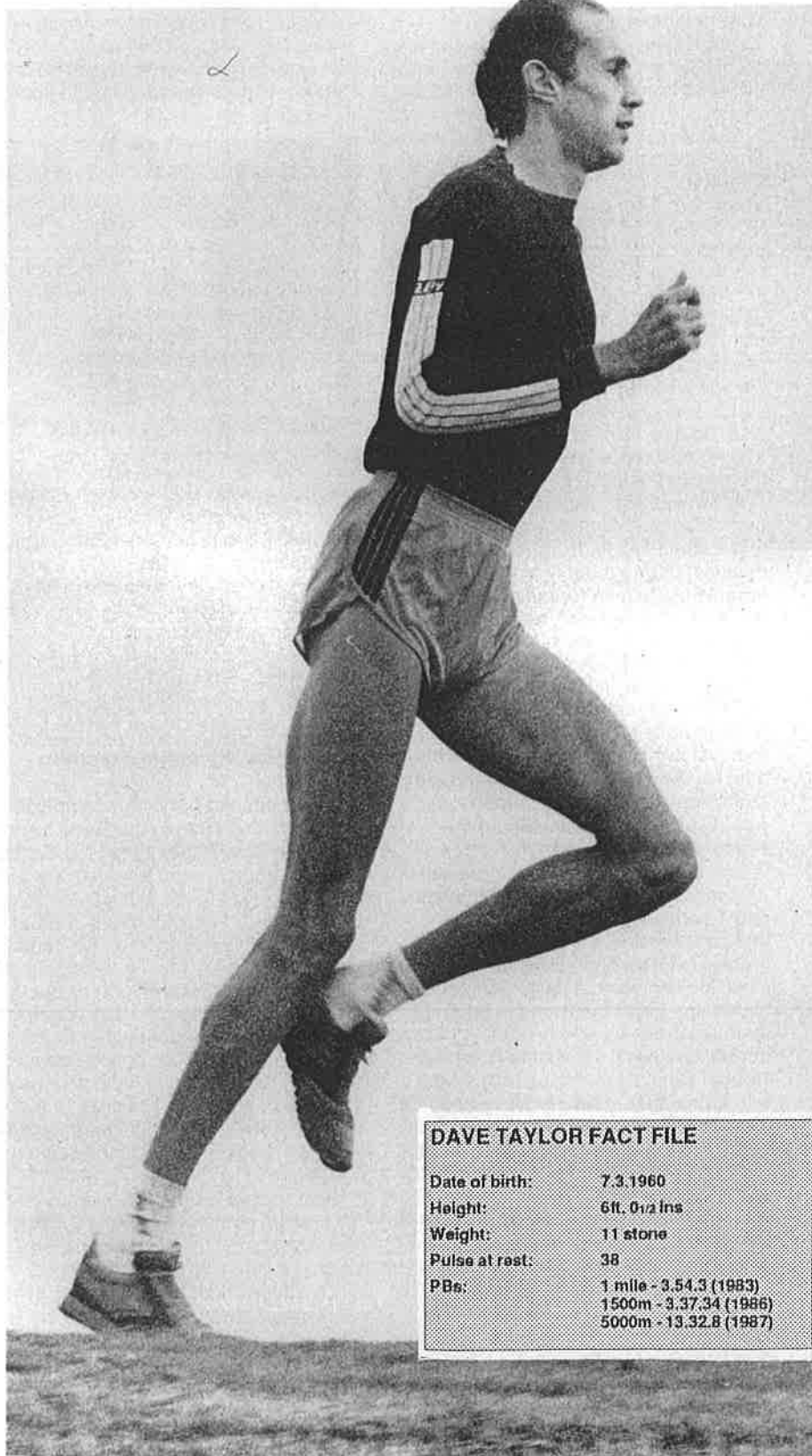
Towards the end of 1985, Taylor headed back to America and for several months worked for the Sub 4 company in California. The weather was brilliant and the training conditions were super but Dave still missed the family and friends from Lr. Kimmage Road. Soon he was back home, this time producing his best ever running on the track.

The Dundrum Sports of 1986 saw Taylor run a PB of 3.37.34 and in 1987 he finished second behind John Walker in the 5000m in the Cork City Sports in 13.32.8. The Olympic year of 1988 began well with another individual victory in the National Cross Country Championships but then for the second time Dave had his hopes of Olympic selection badly dashed, this time by a severe and lengthy dose of food poisoning picked up from eating an ice cream.

The Olympic Games still remain a strong target for Taylor and he is determined to be on the Irish team for Barcelona '92. "The main thing now is that I have got my full appetite back for competition."

There are many close to the sport who would contend that Taylor has not yet shown anything like his true potential on the track. Consider his best mile of 3.54.3 set in 1983 and his 13.32.8 5000m of 1987 and you are inclined to agree. Close your eyes too and picture the Clonliffe man in full flight on his way to victory in the Nationals at Ballyhaise in 1988, giving as fluid and powerful a performance as has ever been seen over the country in Ireland.

Dave knows better than most that he has still a lot of unfulfilled promise to achieve before he will be fully satisfied with his career in athletics. "Maybe at last I'm getting the formula right," he said with a grin.



DAVE TAYLOR FACT FILE

Date of birth:	7.3.1960
Height:	6ft. 0 1/2 ins
Weight:	11 stone
Pulse at rest:	38
PBs:	1 mile - 3.54.3 (1983) 1500m - 3.37.34 (1986) 5000m - 13.32.8 (1987)