



Dave Taylor with girlfriend Mary Mooney T.D.

DAVE TAYLOR BACK AT THE TOP

Just over four years ago, I interviewed Dave Taylor in the middle of the cross country season. Recently, prior to the National Cross Country Championships, which he won, I interviewed him again. The circumstances were similar. In both cases he was in the middle of a cross country, full of success that looked certain to be the prelude to further success. Yet between the two interviews there had been a downward curve and his every word bore witness to it.

Like Eamonn Coghlan, Dave Taylor is exactly the type of guy that every young athlete would like to grow up to be. Except that he has yet to develop Eamon's astute methods of grabbing headlines. He is modest and courteous, treats the most mediocre athlete as his equal, and is full of rich comment and insight into the everyday lot of the top class athlete.

He was never nor is he now in the remotest sense boastful but his speech has ever been full of the sheer excitement, enjoyment and adventure of the sport. Now though, another element has been added. Last year while jogging around Belfield I remarked to a colleague that all this business of running, bringing the inner peace was a cod. Instead, I asserted it hyped you up to the point where you were prepared to run yourself into a breakdown for nothing. "Yes Jim" replied my sage colleague, "But it is after the breakdown that the inner peace comes". So has it been with Dave Taylor. Like all athletes great and not so great, he fell into the trap of overtraining. He has survived to regain his stature as an athlete of the highest class. The excitement, enjoyment and adventure are still there but now there is present a philosophical attitude to failure, a restraint towards success and contentment with limited goals. In short he now takes his running one race day at a time. The thing he fears most is not a bad run, but making the mistake of overtraining again.

Let us go back to the pre '82 days first. Dave now aged twenty seven is a native of Harold's Cross and the second of three children with an older sister Vivienne and a younger brother Victor. He took up running to improve his footballing skills as he is a nephew of Alec McDermott who played soccer with Shelbourne. His early career as a junior would be an encouragement to the non-winners. He finished twelfth in the '77 Dublin Junior Cross Country Championship, fifth in the Junior Inter Counties, quite an improvement and fifth to Brendan Quinn in the '78 National Junior at Ballyfin. This got him to Bellahouston Park, Glasgow, where on the occasion of John Treacy's first World Championship win he finished third junior for Ireland, and twenty sixth overall. He won the '78 National Junior 1500m title in 3 mins. 52 secs. A scholarship to Arkansas University was the reward and the coaching of John McDonnell.

The "Arkansas" years saw the flowering of Dave Taylor's talents as an athlete. Guided by McDonnell in the 'States and Eddie McDonagh of his home club Dundrum A.C., Dave made constant progress. In '79 he ran 3 mins. 44 secs. for 1500m., and finished a fine fourth in the A.A.A. Junior 3,000m to Steve Cram, Steve Binns and Colin Reitz. He was four seconds behind Cram. In the Olympic year of 1980, he ran 3 mins. 42 secs. for 1500m, 4 mins. 2 secs. for a Mile Indoor and enjoyed his first sub four mile outdoor at the Cork City Sports.

He was certainly kept busy in the 'States where between January and May, he ran thirty two races. At the end of 1980, he finished second to Gerry Deegan in the Inter Counties Cross Country Championship at Kilbarry, to gain selection for the World Championships in Madrid in March, 1981. There he finished first for Ireland and 60th overall. Great success followed in 1981. The Harp Lager Mile in Cork became the first mile in which four Irishmen broke four minutes when Dave joined Coghlan, Flynn and O'Mara under the four minute barrier.

At what proved to be the last top class International meeting at Santry, he took third behind Steve Scott and Sydney Maree, and followed this by finishing runner-up to Eamonn Coghlan in the National 1500m at the same venue. He then won the Sony Mile in 4 mins. 3 secs. from home based opposition. He began '82 with a victory on the Oman Cup. He ran 8 mins. 35 secs. for two miles indoor in the 'States and then decided to qualify for the European Championships at 5,000m. This proved a somewhat thorny patch. A high temperature saw him finish only fourth to Mike McLeod over the distance in Cork. He then oscillated between the 1500m and the 5,000m with the Europeans on his mind, winning the National 1500m and the Sony 1500m specially shortened for him.

Still the qualifying time would not come and eventually he made the European standard in a 1500m at a

graded meeting after Brian McManus and Brian Roche of D.C.H. had acted as pacemakers. His debut in the Europeans is adequately summed up by the comment "With 300m to go I was almost thrown off the track". So to the winter of 82/83 which ended in him winning the National Cross Country Championships at Rathkeale.

That season had many similarities with the current one. He preceded it with an easy win in Tullamore, a great deal more clear cut than last November, and then ran away with the Dublin Cross Country Championships. Who was the athlete that made a bold early bid to outstay the dynamic Dave. An up and coming Blackrock athlete called Gerry Curtis.

Dave then went to Mallusk where he defeated John Treacy. Thus it was that when for the one and only time, the twice

The 1983 track season was a good one for Dave. He ran 3 mins. 54.8 secs for a mile, and 3 mins. 34.4 secs for 1500m, and took second to John Treacy in the National 5,000m. The race which was the race that first indicated that Treacy was on the way out of the doldrums. However, if Treacy was on the way out Taylor was on the way in.

Having failed to qualify for the First World Track Championships, he took three weeks off. He then got back into training and won the Dublin Cross Country Championships before going to live in Los Angeles for twelve weeks. There things seemed to go well. He placed second in a few indoor miles and just missed beating four minutes. He returned in March and immediately the trouble started. He did not readjust properly and fell behind in fitness. Then he started to do too many miles working

the sport, and we are still friends. I just wanted to stand on my feet, and be my own man" he says. He is now self coached. "If I don't know what to do now, I never will". However he still seeks advice from others notably an American Noel Montuccio who coached at Oregon when Steve Prefontaine was there and Jim Kilty. Just before he left for San Diego, (home of Monica Joyce) Dave transferred from Dundrum to Clonliffe Harriers.

Things went well in San Diego. His working hours were 10.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., much the same as his former clubmate Carey May who now works in Canada. The intensity was gone from his training, so he eased back to eighty five miles per week, and ran to enjoy himself on the roads in San Diego.

Dave Taylor's comeback to Ireland in 1985 began with a victory that pleased him greatly when he won the 3,000m at the Dale Farm Games. "They played into my hands with the slow pace and the sprint finish", he says. "That win was like all my Christmases as a child come at once. It gave me a boost and I went on to win at the Catalonia-Scotland v. Ireland match, and ran 4 mins. 57 secs. when seventh in a great mile in Cork.

Dave finished the season taking third over 3,000m at Meadowbank and taking fourth to Ray Flynn, Frank O'Mara and Paul O'Donovan in the National 1500m. "I was enjoying it", he says. "I knew I hadn't got the training done, and I was pleased with the season. I knew after that that I was on the way back. When John Treacy was down I used to tell him that once you have had the good form you will always get it back. I have learned to look at negative things in a positive way. I know what it is like to be at your lowest ebb. My periods of bad form helped build up my character, not only in running, but in life in general".

Dave thought about staying at home in the winter of '85/'86, but went back to San Diego and only returned for the National Cross Country Championships at Santry.

"Frank White was anxious for me to come home, and help Clonliffe win the championships in their centenary year, and when he died I felt I owed it to him to come back". Dave finished fifth after a three man pile-up in the first half of the race. How much difference did it make?

"It made a helluva difference. It completely winded me, and I got up and made up the lost ground too fast. It just threw me completely, mentally". It's like the Grand National. The athlete who wins is he who survives the course. I didn't survive the course. That was it".

Dave then returned to San Diego with mixed fortune. He won a mile race by over ten seconds, at a low key meeting and two 1500m races, but then strained a calf muscle which plagued him during last year's track season. It came at him prior to the A.A.A. 1500m in which he was fifth, but came right in time for him to win the National 5,000m in Tullamore. He



'86 B.L.E. National 5000m. Championship: Dave Taylor races to victory from Richard Mulligan.

World Champion contested his own National Cross Country Championships, that John Treacy was regarded as the underdog to Dave Taylor. So it proved. Rathkeale was a marvellous course but the big Irish bank just after the start added a freak element to the proceedings. On the first circuit both Jerry Kiernan and John lost a shoe crossing it. They both then disputed the lead ahead of Dave before Kiernan fell away. Treacy and Taylor went on together. Taylor shot clear with over a mile to go to defeat Treacy, with Kiernan third in what must rate as the best National Championship of the eighties so far.

Dave then went to the World Championships at Gateshead with great expectations, but after holding fifth place early on, faded to forty first. Only Jerry Kiernan finished in front of him for Ireland while a dispirited Treacy dropped out. Dave regards this as a good performance in what he calls "A marathon man's race".

up to 120 miles every week. He found it impossible to mix quantity and quality, and his legs became continuously sore and tired. The end result was a disastrous run in the Harp Lager Mile in Cork where he finished tailed off in 4 mins. 6 secs.

"I was far too ambitious about getting the best out of myself he says. When you overtrain it really does affect you. John McDonnell says that the thing about being fit is to get as light as possible and keep your strength. You get to a stage where even the loss of one pound can be disastrous. I lose five pounds and it made a huge difference". After Cork he did not run the Nationals and that was the end of the season.

The next few months saw many changes. Dave spoke to Tom Steiner of Sub-4, who offered him a job in San Diego. Before going to the 'States, Dave broke with Dundrum A.C. (now Team Puma) and his long time mentor Eddie McDonagh. "There was no animosity. Eddie is the man who brought me into



Rathkeale '83, Taylor Kiernan and Treacy.

then went on to run a great race in the sony 1500m at the Dundrum sports where he came from fifth at halfway to just fail to catch Marcus O'Sullivan with Ray Flynn and Eamonn Coghlan behind him. This got him the qualifying time for the European Championships, but he was eliminated in the heats, and admits that first he went stale in training and then sustained a tendon injury. However, he was not downhearted by his performance. "I wasn't really thinking in terms of Europe. I really wanted to build myself up for this year".

The season up to the time of our interview had been on a par with that of four years ago. After the usual rest and "ten days jogging" he won the Claremorris 10km from Shay Faulkner and Danny McDair who set a world record at the distance for his age. He then won one of the best ever races for the Quinlan Cup in Tullamore. Despite only taking the lead from Gerry Curtis inside the last 100m he claims he was always in control. It certainly looked that way on the day, Curtis's great effort notwithstanding. He appeared to be out for an easy Sunday run by himself when he absolutely spreadeagled the field in the Dublin Cross Country Championships. He went to run a great second to Tim Hutchings in Cardiff. "The pace was fierce and I just could not get to Hutchings".

However that run was a great boost to his confidence and in minus fifteen degrees he went on to defeat a "hot field" as he puts it, in Nuremburg. Like most of his best races he was able to wait for a spring, and he seems favoured by a race in which the pace lulls and then develops into a fast finish. He would have been a great asset to Clonliffe in the European Clubs Championships, but

was injured, and prior to his great run in the Liffey Valley Relays, he was forced to cut his training to once a day. These hiccups of the muscles aside, his training has gone well throughout the winter. He does only two fast sessions per week in a total mileage that has risen from eighty to ninety miles per week. He does his fast work on the hills behind Scoil Eanna and his session 8x 1000m has improved from 2 mins. 55 secs. to 2 mins. 40 secs., and he has added a session of 5 x 2000m.

"If I can transfer this strength to the track this year, I will be good from 800m to 1000m", he says confidently. "I will run a few halves, that's definite. I am to run well from a mile to 5,000m. A fit athlete can run any distance well. As far as the track is concerned, it is important that I go to the World Championships, but it will not be a major crisis for me if I cannot go. The long term aim is the Olympics, and I am taking it one step at a time".

Lastly, to deal with two major questions in the public mind — is there an important woman in his life these days? "I have to thank my mother Peggy Taylor for all her fine home cooking, and that is as much as I am saying at the moment".

How likely is he to run in the World Cross Country Championships? "It's very likely".

After four years, Dave Taylor is now once more poised on the threshold of a major breakthrough in his career. Whether or not he makes that breakthrough, and there is no mistaking that the class, strength and determination are there, will be one of the most important and exciting stories in Irish athletics for this year and next year. We wish him luck.

Jim Dowling

Community Games

The Community Games National A.G.M. was held on Friday / Saturday / Sunday, 30th/31st January and 1st. February last at the Holyrood Hotel, Bundoran, Co. Donegal.

Delegates from all over Ireland had gathered and the A.G.M. of the Community Games Company was held on the Friday evening.

The meeting heard the Annual Report and disclosed the Financial Statement before re-electing Jack Coleman of Westmeath as National Chairman. Long time General Secretary, Joseph Connolly was confirmed as General Secretary of the Movement.

The Sixteenth Annual General Meeting of the Movement followed and an address of welcome was read by National President, Willie Walsh. Reports from Officers and Sub-Committees were adopted and delegates also elected the full Officer Board for the new year which are as follows:

President:	Willie Walsh, Dublin
Vice-President:	Gabriel Donohoe, Laois
Chairman:	Jack Coleman, Westmeath
Vice-Chairman:	Leo Carolan, Monaghan
General Secretary:	Joseph Connolly, Dublin
Asst. General Secretary:	Rose Mary O'Reilly, Cavan
General Treasurer:	Marie Walters, Laois
Games Director:	Conal Duffy, Galway
P.R.O.:	Charles O'Connor, Dublin
Development Officer:	Josephine Glennon, Westmeath

A special formal session on Saturday was addressed by John Kelly, Chairman of Donegal Community Games; Harry Blaney, Chairman of Dublin County Council and Peter McNiff, Chairman of Bundoran U.D.C. A special guest speaker was Ronnie Delaney, Chairman of Cospoir who delivered the address on behalf of Seán Barrett T.D., the Minister for State with responsibility for Sport.

The former Olympic Gold Medalist also paid personal tribute to Community Games and the General Secretary, Joe Connolly, who is also a member of the National Sports Council.

The Annual General Meeting also debated a large number of motions which had been received from counties and which dealt with competitions and future policy of the countrywide movement.

Tributes were paid at the end of the weekend to the Donegal organisers of the A.G.M. and the movement now looks forward to a busy and demanding year followed by the 1988 A.G.M. which will be held in Munster.