

Steve Scott

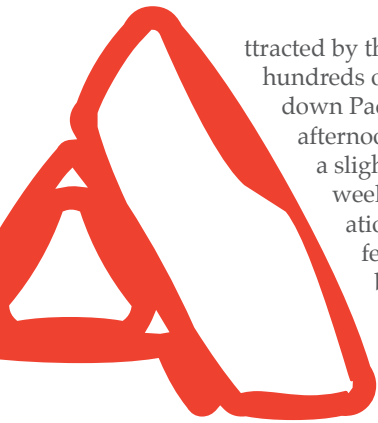
and the Sub 4-Minute Mile

Regarded as one of the best milers in history, Carlsbad resident Steve Scott is focused on coaching the running talent of today.



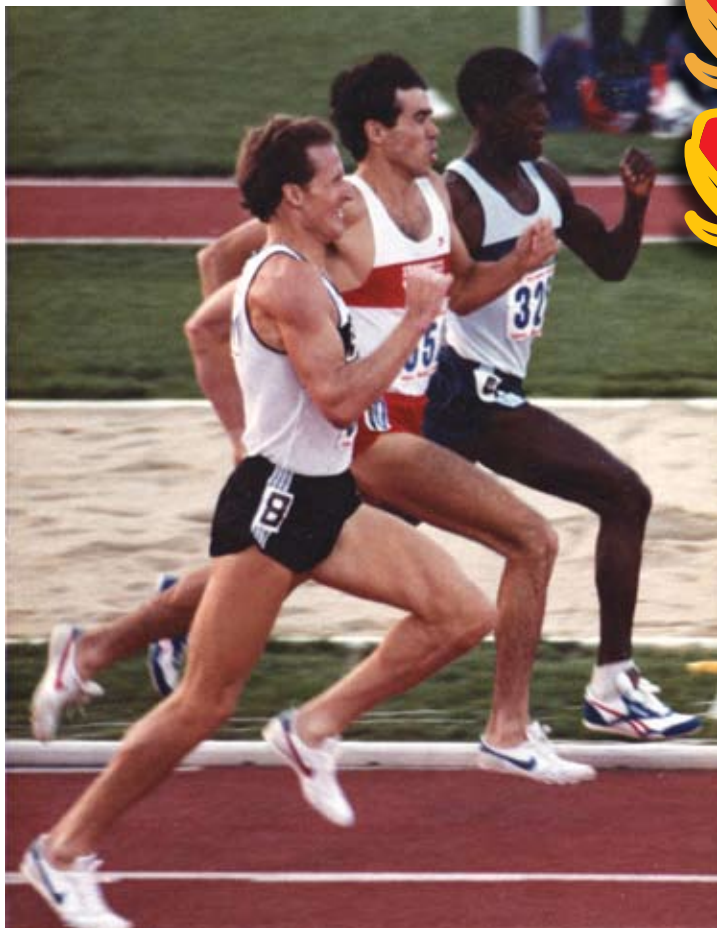
By Roy
Robertson





tracted by the sun-splashed Carlsbad coastline, hundreds of runners make their way up and down Pacific Coast Highway every Saturday afternoon. One regular, however, has traveled a slightly different path than the rest of the weekend warriors out for a recreational run, or trying to shave a few seconds off their mile times before the Carlsbad 5000. This runner, in fact, set the world record at 5000 meters on the Carlsbad course. Twice.

And though he is merely comfortably cruising on this day, enjoying the scenery of his adopted hometown, his compact stride suggests he may be able to pick up the pace if he chose to do so. In his competitive prime, this runner broke the 4-minute mile mark. 136 times.



Steve Scott, Chuck Aragon and Sydney Maree running in the Olympic Trials Finals in 1984, L.A. Coliseum.

The runner that edged past you near Tamarack last weekend is Carlsbad resident Steve Scott. He has broken the once mythical 4-minute mile barrier more times than anyone in history. In the anonymity and solitude of a weekend run, you may not be aware that the jogger next to you held the American record in the mile for an astonishing 25 years. In an event where records are measured in thousandths of a second, Scott's record endured for a quarter of a century. But asked to comment on the achievement, he's more

inclined to talk about what he's trying to accomplish now.

Scott, 51, is the head track and cross country coach at California State University San Marcos. He is living in the moment, rather than reliving the moments of his world-class track career. "At this point, I measure myself by how good of a coach I am," he says,

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deflecting discussion away from talk of the record. "In that regard, I'm back to where I was the first year in college. I'm just an 'Average Joe'."

Steve Scott, Average Joe, is a member of the USA Track & Field Hall of Fame, and a 2008 inductee into the San Diego Hall of Champions. He is widely regarded to be one America's greatest middle distance runners. But rather than dwell on his track record, his energy and his emphasis is on building a winning track program.

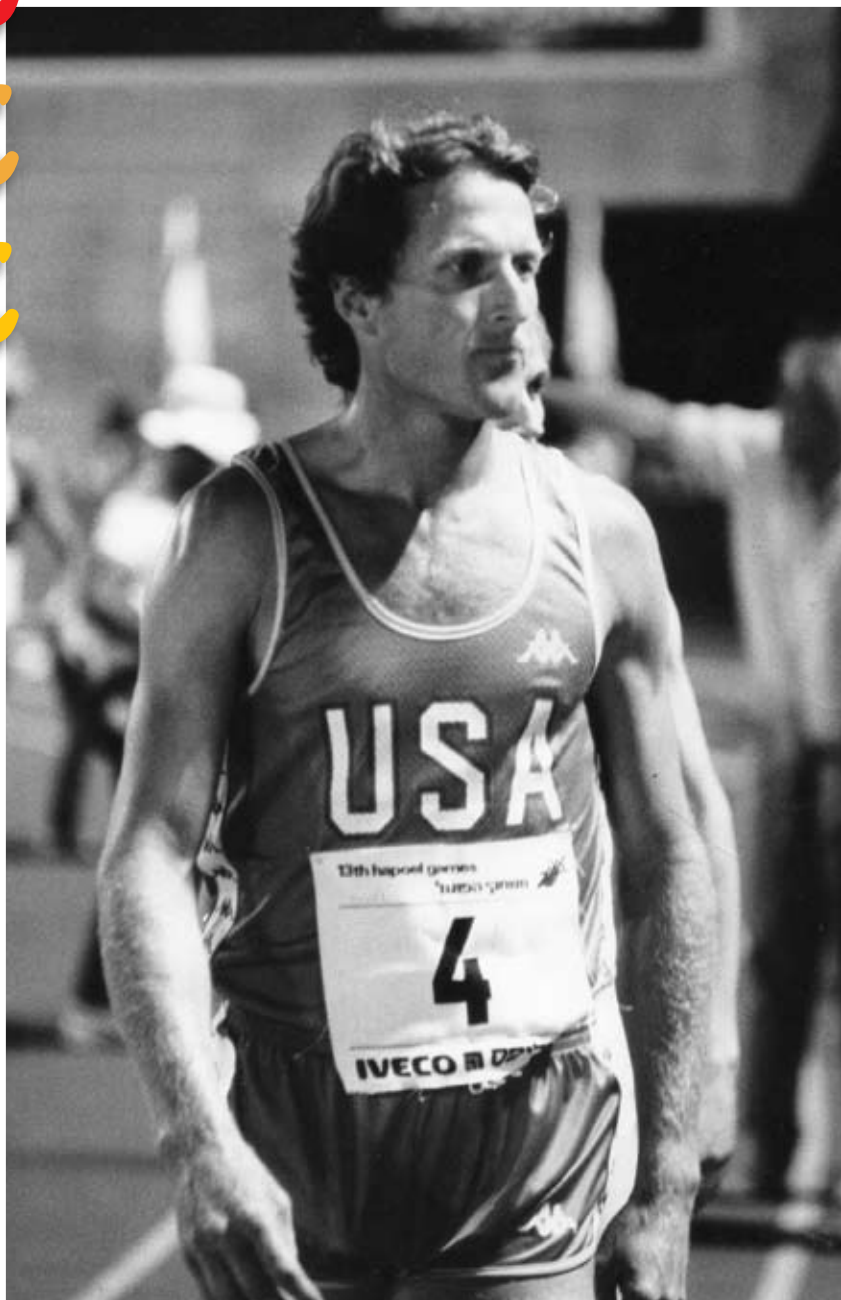
He takes great pride in the transformation in the university he's witnessed during his tenure. "The school has developed tremendously in the nine years that I've been here," he says from his office in the campus's Clarke Field House. A decade ago, he says, "Everyone thought it was a glorified JC, but now, it's people's college of choice. It's not hard at all to get kids to come here."

He says it wasn't always so, and thinks back to when he first became aware of the school. "I'd never heard of Cal State San Marcos. I didn't know there was a school here," he says. His first glimpse of the campus was memorable, albeit unfavorable. "I thought that this was a prison," he says, laughing now, but perhaps serious at the time. Fronted by a bleak architectural facade, the campus offered no



On the cover of Sports Illustrated, July 7, 1980

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Goodwill Games, 1982

Steve Scott

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student housing, an inadequate library and insufficient athletic facilities. There wasn't a field house, no showers on campus, no weight rooms or meeting rooms, among other shortcomings. "For the first five or six years, my office was like a dungeon," he jokes. A prison and a dungeon. Welcome to Cal State San Marcos, circa 1998. Clearly, the institution faced as much of a challenge recruiting a track coach as they did enticing student athletes.

Rather than having misgivings about the school's shortcomings, Scott saw the potential and welcomed the opportunity to leave the corporate world. "I hated what I was doing. I was in sales. Even though I'm in sales now, selling the university to the students that come. I'm actually selling myself."

But the Upland native, who settled full time in Carlsbad in 1997, couldn't sell himself on uprooting his family and moving away from Southern California for a coaching position. "It was going to have to be local. I wasn't going to move my family. I had no experience, and I wasn't going to go to Iowa to get experience."

Enter the opportunity Scott had been waiting for. But administrators and one of the school's primary benefactors didn't think he would have any interest in taking the position. Bob Mangrum,

longtime Escondido businessman and financial supporter of the university met Scott as plans were being made to build the track—and the track program at the school. Scott recalls the conversation in which Mangrum asked about any candidates Scott might know to be interested in coaching track at Cal State San Marcos. "He thought that I was this big businessman that wouldn't be interested in coaching this little program at an NAIA school," says Scott. "I always had interest." Within a few weeks, Scott was hired to coach the team that would run on the newly constructed Mangrum Track.

Despite the new facilities and coach, attracting athletes to the school was still a challenge. The primary appeal of enrolling was the chance to compete under one of the icons of their sport. "They would come and meet me and get my autograph. Then they'd go to Fullerton," he jokes.

Nine years later, he looks back and takes any early recruiting hurdles in stride, knowing that the job he accepted was a perfect fit for him and his family, allowing them to stay close to home. Scott and his wife, JoAnn, have a son, Shawn, 15, attending La Costa Canyon High School and playing club soccer, but not running track. Scott's eldest son, Corey, 26, and daughter, Megan, 24, both still live and work in the area.

Today, the freshmen coming to campus were born after Scott's competitive prime and the coach says it's not important that they know of his accomplishments. "I don't really care if they know my history.



Talking to his athletes before track practice, Scott has built a cross country and track team in which he takes great pride.

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It's got to be the right fit academically and then a good relationship between the coach and the athlete. Don't be impressed by my reputation," he advises his recruits. "Try to find out a little bit more about what I'm about and see if that's going to be the right fit for you."

The metamorphosis that the university has undergone in the time Scott has taught, with the addition of on campus student housing, a new library, field house and athletic fields, has allowed Scott to build the program through the years. Annually, he fields a cross country and track team he takes great pride in. "We're always going to nationals with a team that can place. What more can you ask for? If they run the way that they should, then we can place every year." Scott pauses for a split second, with the timing of a stand-up comic, then follows, "Unfortunately, they haven't run the way that they should." When asked teasingly if such success doesn't usually begin with great coaching, he says "Yes, that's my next point!" as he lets out a hearty self-deprecating laugh.

One young runner whom Scott hopes will attract a lot of attention this year is Alan Webb. He is the man who, last July, ran a mile in 3:46.91, to finally take Scott's title as the fastest American miler, besting the 25-year-old record by three-quarters of a second.

This August, Webb will be on the Olympic stage in Beijing, and Scott feels that his performance may resurrect American interest in track. "If he goes out and wins that gold medal, then he'll be this nationwide hero. He's going to spur on all these other young kids who want to be Alan Webbs, so running in America is going to hit a boom. Like Frank Shorter did back in '72."

Scott acknowledges the sport has recently been compromised in that U.S. runners have defected to Europe to chase endorsements and lucrative paydays. Medal-winning performances have been tainted by doping and drug scandals, notably the recent conviction of 2000 Olympic hero Marion Jones for lying under oath to federal investigators. Jones was stripped of the medals she won in Sydney after her admission she was taking steroids prior to the Olympics. Scott says the new American record holder in the mile can help overturn the suspicion that currently clouds the sport. "We need the heroes. We need Alan Webb to break the world record or win the gold medal, and not to turn out dirty six months later."

Scott is focused on restoring the integrity of track and field and is optimistic about the future of the sport, with the emergence of rising stars such as Webb. There is no remorse in Scott's voice as he talks about his long-standing American record finally falling. In



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Scott has coached track at Cal State San Marcos for the past nine years.

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Been there. Done that.
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fact, he seems reluctant to discuss it all. When he does talk about the day in 1982 when he ran 3:47.69 to set the American mark, he expresses a surprising reaction to his record time. "I was disappointed, because I wanted the world record and I was three-tenths of a second behind it. In fact, if you go back and watch the tape as I cross the finish line, you can see it in my face." He had set the bar so high, setting the American record left him feeling dissatisfied. "I wanted it all at that time, and physically I was capable. I think I was capable of running 3:45, but at that time, my mind had not caught up with my body. I just didn't have enough of a confidence level to think that was possible." In retrospect, he does marvel at the amount of time the record held up until Webb eclipsed it last summer. "A lot of people came along who should have broken it, but didn't. It was pretty amazing."

Scott ran during what could be considered the Golden Age of the Mile. He checks off a roster of the elite milers of the late '70s and early '80s that he competed against in every major meet he entered. "Sebastian Coe, Steve Cram, Steve Ovett, José Abascal, John Walker, Ray Flynn, Eamonn Coghlan, Wilson Waigwa, Sydney Maree... the list goes on and on." To the uninitiated or for anyone too young to remember, the names may not resonate, but the list is a Who's Who of middle distance running. "These guys had all run

Games from 1976 to 1984 that diluted the fields in Montreal, Moscow and Los Angeles. The World Championships in Helsinki, Finland, was one time the greats of the era all came together, with Great Britain's Steve Cram taking the gold. "I think there were eight or nine people in the field who had run 3:50 or better. Since I didn't win an Olympic medal, that's really my only major championship medal."

Scott couldn't compete in the 1980 Moscow Olympics because of the boycott imposed by President Carter in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He felt the action unfairly penalized the athletes who were restricted from competing. "At the time I was totally against it. I'm all for sacrifice, but let's have everyone make a sacrifice. You can't just pick the Olympics."

In his career as an athlete, Steve Scott had a world of success and the opportunity to run in marquee events around the globe. Oslo. Helsinki. Seoul. He may have missed his best chance for Olympic gold in Moscow, but it doesn't seem to be in Steve Scott's nature to look back regretfully. It doesn't seem to be in his nature to look back at all.

Instead, the coach is looking forward to his team's next meet, the upcoming Carlsbad 5000 on the course he de-



Scott addresses the young runners in the 2006 Junior Carlsbad 5000, an event in which he is actively involved.

3:50 or better for the mile," says Scott. "There were just so many great milers running so well at the same time."

In what is generally regarded as the best mile field ever assembled, Scott took the silver medal at the IAAF World Championships in 1983. "The quality of the field was unmatched, prior to that or since," Scott says, due to political boycotts of the Olympic

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veloped and his next Saturday afternoon jog down Pacific Coast Highway. He doesn't have to break a 4-minute mile anymore. Been there. Done that. 136 times. Now, he's just running for fun and enjoying the scenery. Just like the rest of us. ●