

Johnny Gray has finished feeding his 10-day-old second son, Jared. Outside his Los Angeles apartment, a warm sun has perked the temperature into the 80s. After this interview, he's planning to take a short drive in his brand-new jeep.

In a small town, a trip on the streets would most likely yield numerous hands waving at him, mouths yelling, "Hi Johnny" and eyes looking in wonder. But in LA he'll probably be able to count those occurrences on one hand's fingers.

Johnny loves the spotlight, but he doesn't mind when "fame" isn't in close attendance. "Living where I live, so close to Hollywood, there's so much that people have and see out here that an American Record holder at 800m doesn't excite them that much."

To the track world, however, Johnny Gray is very exciting. He has broken or tied the 800m AR more times—5—than anyone else this century. His fifth-fastest time is still faster than any other American has ever run.

He never thought he'd get anywhere near as fast—1:42.60—as he is now. Back in 1978, he says, he never thought he'd break 1:50. His teammate at Crenshaw High was Jeff West, a High School Record setter-to-be. Every day of school, the two would meet at Winchell's and walk to school together.

At a nearby high school David Mack was whizzing around ovals on his way to winning two California State 880 crowns. Gray, a year older than those two, had only one year of running under his belt. But in late May of '78 he scored a shocking upset by beating Mack and West for the LA City title.

He was on his way. With the exception of a hernia in 1981, he has been relatively injury free during his impressive progression. A graceful runner, he is also a thoughtful friend and foe. "I consider myself fortunate," he explains, "so I like to teach people and share things with people, even my competitors."

He happily reflected on his career as he prepared for the upcoming World Cup:

T&FN: I understand that you paid the way for your coach, Merle McGee, and his wife to go over to Europe for the second half of the season so they could watch you.

Gray: You know, that's really not enough, though. Because if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be where I am in track & field. I mean, he's dedicated a lot of his time to me. And I feel I owe him something—I know he doesn't feel that way, but I do.

He went with me the first half and without his wife it's a little rough. You know, you don't want to sit in a hotel room all day, and you don't want to go sightsee by yourself. It's a little nicer when

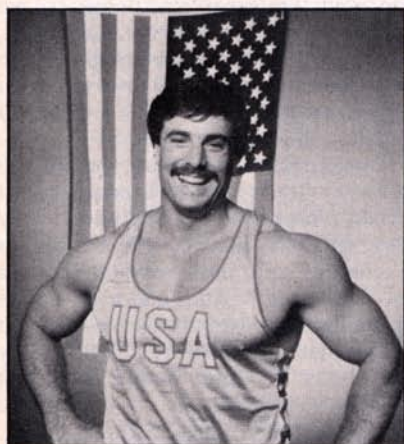
JOHNNY GRAY



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GRAY INTERVIEW—continued:

so much. You have to be quick in thinking.

T&FN: *Is there a difference in tactics between races in Europe and the U.S.? Is there more contact in Europe?*

Gray: In Europe there's definitely more contact. In the U.S., a runner of my status doesn't have to worry as much because you find that the U.S. athletes are pretty much going to follow you anyway.

In the U.S. there's bumping on the first break, but then people will tend to back off and get into position. Overseas, there's no backing off—no one is going to give you position. You have to elbow or kick or push a little bit to get your position. And you're really not comfortable in your position until after the 500, and that's a long way to fight.

T&FN: *Do you have any hobbies?*

Gray: I like doing a lot of things. Like fishing. I'm an outdoors person. I have a little "country man" in me because my father is from Shreveport, Louisiana, and he's into all the ducks and rabbits. I don't have that here, because I can't really live that type of lifestyle. I like it, but I can't live it all the time. But I can take a two-week vacation. I like fishing. I could fish every day.

Last year, during the three-week break I take after each season, David Mack and I went fishing every day. We'd go down to Cabrillo Beach, off the rocks. There's this spot we got and we walk out there and kick back all day. We'd take off at like 5:00 in the morning and wouldn't get home until about midnight sometimes.

T&FN: *That sounds very relaxing.*

Gray: We have a good time. One time we walked out on the rocks and the tide was down. We crossed the rocks OK, but on the way back the tide had come up and the rocks were covered, so we had to swim across to get back to shore.

I don't really like cleaning and eating the fish, but I love catching them. Especially when a big one gives you a good fight. □

Johnny Lee Gray, Jr., was born in Los Angeles on June 19, 1960, and is 6-3 $\frac{3}{4}$ /167. Coached from the beginning by Merle McGee, his coach at Crenshaw High School in Los Angeles.

Altered the AR 4 times last year, once this year: 1:43.74 =AR; 1:43.28 AR; 1:43.28 =AR; 1:42.96 AR; 1:42.60 AR. His current AR is 4, 9 W; 1000 PR of 2:17.27 ('84) is 8, 9 A. His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	Affiliation	800	Major Meets
1977	16/17	Crenshaw HS	2:06.0y	
1978	17/18	"	1:51.1	7)State HS
1979	18/19	SWLA CC	1:49.39	4)TAC Jr
1980	19/20	SMCC	1:47.06 (x, 10)	8)OT
1981	20/21	SMTCC	injured	
1982	21/22	"	1:45.41 (x, 3)	2)TAC
1983	22/23	"	1:45.50 (x, 7)	5sf)TAC
1984	23/24	"	1:42.96 (5, 2)	2)OT 7)OG
1985	24/25	"	1:42.60	1)TAC

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