

## AN INTERVIEW WITH BILL KROHN (PART II)

By DON SIKORSKI  
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Distance running tradition runs deep at Norwich Free Academy. Names like Clem McGrath, Bill Marshall, Tim Smith, Jim Euell, Alden Miner, Chad Johnson, Mark Akus, and Chris Andrew have all played strong roles in building that tradition. With a handful of State Open team and individual champions over the years, the Norwich running community has provided loyal support for their teams and the runners who have competed for the Wildcats. Bill Krohn, class of 1976, has established the strongest post-scholastic running resume of the bunch.

Former NFA distance running standout Clem McGrath, who had won the 1956 CIAC State Open in cross-country while competing for the Wildcats and still a familiar face on the local running scene, recalls a young Bill Krohn and knowing even back then that there was something special. "I first saw Bill run and handily win an age group mile on the NFA track as a grade schooler," recalls McGrath. His potential was there and showed in his success as a high schooler at NFA. I always felt he was a smooth runner with outstanding form and mechanics. I recall his great duels with Doug Padilla on the National Indoor Track Circuit." Padilla, one of the country's best distance runners at the time, was one of many national class competitors that Krohn would race against in his prime. Krohn's picture-perfect form and efficient stride made him appear that he was running effortlessly, and with a 4:00.6 personal best for the mile, he possessed the leg speed to be a threat against the best track runners in the world. Gene McGrath, Clem's brother who coached Krohn during his high school years, recalls that efficient form that Krohn displayed. "I feel Bill was one of the most technically smooth running individual that I've ever had the pleasure to coach," said McGrath. "Every time I look at the old films of him, running like a deer comes to mind." McGrath realized Krohn had national class potential despite bouts of bad luck. "He seemed to be snake-bit," said McGrath of Krohn. "There were always nagging injuries when the big meets came around." McGrath and company recall being at Madison Square Garden for the Millrose Games and watching Krohn race against the world's best at 3,000 meters. "My proudest moment with Bill was when he signed a Millrose Games poster for me," said McGrath. "He was pictured running the 3,000 meters on that poster".

Gerry Chester, who coached state champions Matt Papuga, Gavin Coombs, and Tradelle Ward at Griswold High School and also a former NFA runner, recalled Krohn's gift for running. "Of all the runners that I've ever seen in person, Bill had the most perfect form," said Chester. "He was truly effortless when he ran. There was never any wasted motion. He always looked like he was jogging, even when he was racing." Chester also acknowledged Krohn's world class accomplishments. "He rubbed elbows with some of the biggest names that you and I only read about," said Chester. "What great experiences he had because of running."

I recently tracked Bill down via e-mail from his home in Stockholm, Sweden, his residence since 1995, to catch up with him on his current running and racing efforts and to find out what the sport of running has meant to the Norwich native.

**DON SIKORSKI: Many people don't realize how competitive you were on a national and world level. How did you feel that you stacked up against the world's best completion? Was there anyone in particular that stood out as a rival?**

BILL KROHN: I never broke into the top elite, but I was always in the pack fighting for a top spot. I don't have a long list of big wins, but I did end up with a decent list of PR's. I also had the experience of competing with some of the best runners from that era like Said Aouita, Sydney Maree, Sebastian Coe, Steve Scott, John Walker, Eamonn Coughlan, Doug Padilla, etc. One big win which got a lot of publicity in New York was beating favorite Bill Rogers in a 5K on Long Island. The headlines in the paper the next day read "The Wrong Bill Won!"

**DS: Did you struggle with any injuries?**

BK: My biggest advantage was that I was always very consistent and avoided injuries most of my career. I never over trained, and the focus of my training was always to achieve the best possible race results. I loved to race and, when I was well prepared, I never got nervous as I knew that the results would come.

**DS: What was a typical training week for you during that time?**

BK: A typical training week would be about 55-60 miles and two track sessions. I ran all of my personal bests in my late 20's and I attributed this longevity to moderate training, running mostly on grass and dirt and focusing on racing and not over training. I was a full time teacher during these years as well, so running even at this level, was more of a hobby and not an obsession.

**DS: Tell me about Masters Competition and the success that you have had running after age 40. Do you**

### still run and race today?

BK: I spent a lot of time in Sweden during the summers training and racing and eventually met my wife Gunnel in 1991. My running career started to wind down and I retired from serious competition. We lived in the New York for 4 years and decided to move to Stockholm in 1995. I started to get restless in 1998 and made a little comeback at the Master's level at age 40. After a year of training, I finished 2nd in the 1,500 meter race at the World Masters Championships in Gateshead, England. I later ran the fastest time in the world that year for 1,500 meters (3:52) and for 3,000 meters (8:18) (Krohn's 1,500 meter time still ranks 16th on the all-time list). I also won the Masters 5th Avenue Mile in New York the same year in 4:16. Then came my two children; Kevin, 9 and Kajsa, 4, and competitive running was put aside again.

### DS: Do you have any long term running goals?

BK: I recently turned 50 and after joining a local club in Stockholm with my son, they convinced me to start training and racing again. This summer, I raced a variety of distances and had pretty good success. I plan on running the World Masters Championships in Finland this summer and then take another long break from competition.

### DS: What factors would you attribute your success as a distance runner to? How much of competitive running do you feel is talent and how much is hard work?

BK: I have been given a good set of lungs and some talent, but running fast, even at this level, requires a lot of hard work and a little luck staying healthy and injury free. I also feel that talent isn't always enough to insure top performances. Mental toughness in races can be the difference between being good and being great.

### DS: What accomplishments in your running career are you the most proud of? What kept you motivated to train and race at that level for so long?

BK: Winning a race every now and then was a great motivator, but running my fastest was more of a priority, even if it meant finishing in the middle of the pack in a big race. I ran my fastest 5,000m in Oslo, Norway and finished 10<sup>th</sup> in a world record race (behind Said Aouita's 13:00 clocking) in 1985 and got more satisfaction from that than many of my wins.

### DS: What advice would you offer a beginning runner or a high school runner hoping to run at the national class level someday?

BK: Everything is relative, and I would suggest to those looking for motivation that are just starting out to have fun and find new personal incentives and goals to keep things interesting. It takes many years to develop as an athlete, and this is a sport that has something for everyone. Try to find a distance or event that suits you and train smart. There are no shortcuts in endurance events and training smart over time will produce results.

### DS: What has running meant to you?

BK: Running for me has been rewarding in terms of personal accomplishment but more importantly it has open doors to things I would have never experienced otherwise. A road race in Rio de Janeiro, a track meet in Tahiti, a mountain run on Borneo, training in Morocco, moving to and living in Sweden, I would have never thought in my wildest dreams that running would someday take me to these places while running circles on NFA's cinder track in the 70's! I can honestly say that running has shaped me as a person and has influenced me when making some of my most important decisions. The best I could hope for now is that could help motivate others to take a similar path and let running open doors for them also.

Bill Krohn's Personal Bests:	ALL-TIME	40+	50+
400m	-----	55.3	59.5
800m	-----	1:57.5	2:05.9
1,000 Meters	-----	-----	2:43.0
1,500 Meters	3:41.1	3:52	4:17.4
Mile	4:00.6	4:10	-----
3,000 Meters	7:50.2	8:18	9:10.1
Two Miles	8:29	-----	-----
Three Miles	13:06	-----	-----
5,000 Meters	13:25.4	14:43	-----
10K Road	28:50	-----	34:50

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