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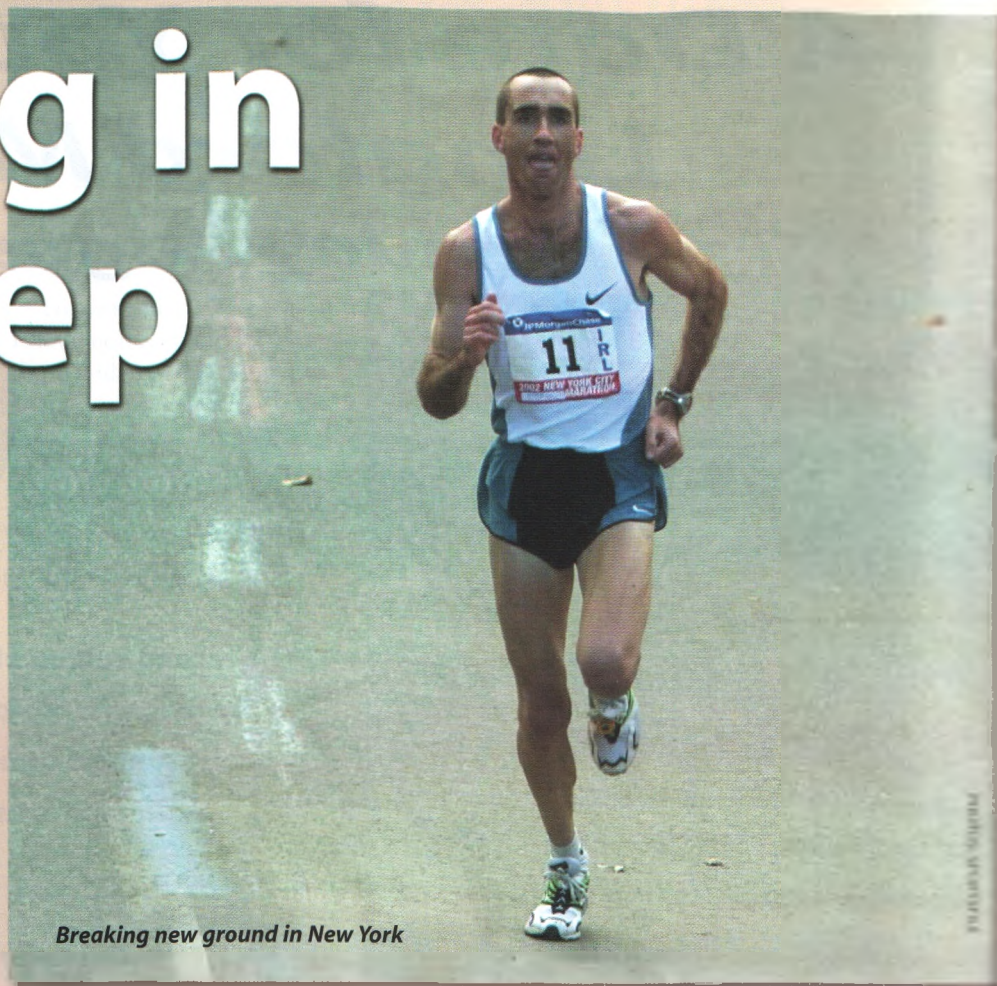


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Spring in his step

After a sensational marathon debut in New York, Mark Carroll is understandably excited about his next effort at the classic distance



Breaking new ground in New York

Just minutes after crossing the New York finish line in sixth place in 2:10:54, marathon first-timer Mark Carroll was already confidently talking about breaking 2:08 for the distance in spring 2003.

"I know that my New York City time is worth at least a few minutes on a flat European course and if David Bedford is generous to me, I would like to attempt a really fast time in London next April," Carroll said.

Clearly delighted with his first outing over the classic distance — and looking every inch the shaven-headed warrior — Carroll was quick to point out that he is not about to abandon the track and become a marathon specialist.

"I have still some unfinished business to attend to on the track, but my days of running fast 1500m and mile races across Europe are probably at an end," he admitted.

"Nevertheless, I still have goals to achieve at both 5,000m and 10,000m and it's important to keep that track speed because you do need it for today's marathon challenges."

At 30, Carroll seems to have perfectly timed his transition from world-class track runner to marathoner and looks certain to

command attention from promoters of big events like London, Boston, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Berlin and Chicago — and to add substantially to the \$18,000 he won in New York (\$10,000 for finishing sixth and \$8,000 for breaking 2:11).

And yet earlier this year he was in the doldrums as a knee injury threatened his career.

"We need to look at the whole socio-economic situation and take some steps to encourage kids back to our sport. We need to dress the sport up and make it attractive to young people."

"Once I had arthroscopic surgery on my knee last January, things started to come together and I was always confident I could make the successful transition from the track to the marathon — although I do realise a number of people thought otherwise."

The major change to training made by Carroll and coach Jimmy Harvey in the build-up to New York was the weekly long run.

"For the most part I ran a 20-mile run with the first ten in around 55 minutes — 5:30 pace — and the second ten miles in 50 minutes. These long runs were over hilly terrain — nothing crazy, just rolling hills similar to what New York was going to throw at us in the second half of the race.

"All my marathon training was done in nine-day blocks. I trained for nine days straight — averaging about 115 miles — then took 48 hours complete rest to help my body absorb the workload.

"Other sessions were 6x2 kilometres and 4x3 kilometres — the 6x2ks in about 5:30 and the 4x3ks averaging 8:45.

"I would also do some 5k repeats in 14:25. The recovery would be short — 45 seconds to a minute's rest for a session of 12x1k.

"Also in every block there was a session of 20x400m in about 62 seconds, just to keep the pace in my legs.

"In every block there was the long run, which doubled as a tempo run, one long session like I have described, and a hard track workout. The training was very specific and every session was well planned in advance."

Every morning on rising Carroll took a hot bath to get the circulation flowing.



This would be followed by 30 or 40 minutes of stretching before running.

Then there was the real ordeal — several times a week after really hard sessions Carroll immersed himself for 15 to 20 minutes in a bath of ice.

“Mick Ahern of Patrick’s Pub in Providence kept me supplied with ice and I think these ice baths have been great for keeping injuries at bay,” he says.

He also did regular gym work to develop and maintain core strength and topped up religiously with iron supplements.

“I would eat a lot of complex carbohydrates as well as protein supplements and electrolyte concentrate drinks,” he reveals.

Carroll was assisted in much of his training — especially the interval sessions — by Providence-based Keith Kelly and the visiting Gareth Turnbull.

“They were both of great help to me in the build-up,” Carroll said. “They were so enthusiastic — they kept me feeling young.”

In New York on what he deemed a windy day, the Leevale man ran aggressively from the start.

“I felt brilliant up to 16 miles and it was at that point the Kenyans went a bit crazy,” he recalls.

“I just made a conscious decision not to chase them. I just needed to maintain my form to the finish and stay strong.

“I hadn’t set any time targets as I hadn’t come to New York chasing a very fast time — I just wanted to be competitive and to be in the lead pack from the start.

“I did everything that I said I was going to do right to the point where I said that I would not react on 1st Avenue if things got crazy.

And I’m glad that I stuck to my plan because I saw guys in the last two or three miles who were almost walking.

“It was a great feeling to finish so strong and to recover so quickly.”

Since he won the European Junior 5000m title back in 1991, Carroll has developed into a distance runner of world stature and in the process put up new Irish numbers for the 3000m (7:30.36), 5000m (13:03.93) and 10,000m (27:46.82).

And he still harbours ambitions to be the first Irishman to break 13 minutes for 5000m and go sub-27:10 for 10,000m. For now though he is looking at another intensive block of training geared toward a spring marathon.

“I would like to complete another 12-week block of training similar to what I did for New York, some of it at altitude,” he says.

“I really do not know where I’ll run in the spring. It could be London or Boston — or somewhere else. My manager, Ray Flynn, will negotiate that for me.

“I have always aimed high — that is just the way I am — and I do not say that to be cocky or boastful.

“When Jim Harvey started to coach me, he asked me what I thought I could run for 5000m and I told him I believed I could break 13 minutes. That was not an arrogant statement — it was the only way forward and I had to think like that if I was to

peted at and I’ve tried to better the Irish records for 3000m, 5,000m and 10,000m and take them into the turn of the century.

“Nowadays guys are running so fast at every distance across the board and I just ask why cannot an Irish guy be in there too.

“The last five years I feel I have done my part. I have taken three Irish records to world standard and I’d like to do the same in the marathon by the time I’m done — hopefully, by then some other kid will be coming through looking to better my records.”

Clearly, Carroll is conscious of the general decline in Irish distance standards.

“Maybe it’s time that the AAI, the Irish Sports Council and the Olympic Council of Ireland had a conference to examine why there has been such a big drop in standards,” he muses.

“I believe the talent is there — but the drop-off seems to be in interest. It’s the same in Britain — the depth is just not there.

“We need to look at the whole socio-economic situation and take some steps to encourage kids back to our sport. We need to dress the sport up and make it attractive to young people.

“That’s something I would like to help with and I’m sure Sonia O’Sullivan feels the same.

“I’ve always wanted to give something back to the sport — though living 3,000 miles away doesn’t make that easy. Still, over the next few years I would be prepared to sit down with people and help in any way I can to progress the sport in Ireland.”

Meanwhile Mark Carroll goes chasing 2:07 in the spring — and suddenly John Treacy’s Irish record of 2:09:18 looks in severe danger.

These past few weeks have been easy going for the Leevale man as he visited his parents in Cork City. But he will soon ease back into training, starting with 30 miles a week, quickly progressing to 50 or 60, then adding 10 a week until he passes the magic 100 — the watershed for all successful marathoners.

“I’ve had my break and enjoyed myself on a few nights out but it will soon be time to get serious again,” he says.

“You would never feel spring coming around.”



Carroll still has track ambitions

succeed. There are Kenyans and Ethiopians and Moroccans running fast all over the place and if you don’t think like that you have no place at the top of this game.

“I believe now that based on my track performances a 2:07 marathon is definitely possible.”

Carroll is mindful that in New York he revived a great Irish marathon tradition that — at least among the men — had been flagging over the past decade.

“It is good to be able to put Irish marathon running back on the map again,” he acknowledges.

“For the past five or six years I have done my best at every distance I have com-