

# Bill Tancred: An Ordinary Olympian But What a Life

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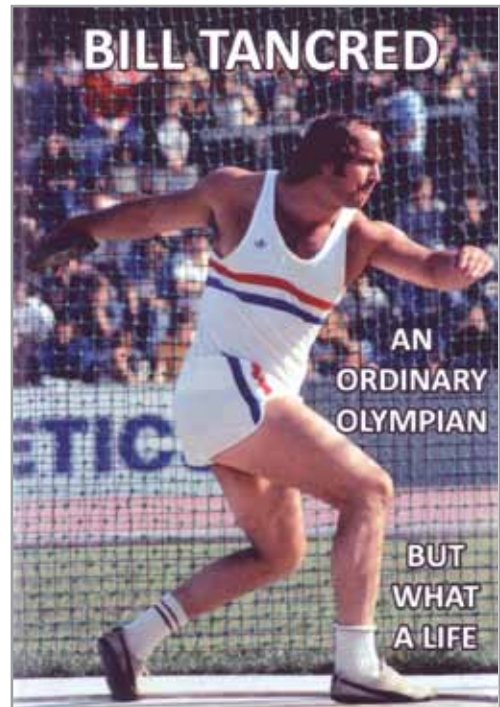
by Bill Tancred

Leiston, Suffolk: Leiston Press, 2016, 336 pp., ISBN: 978-1-911311-13-3

**W**illiam Raymond “Bill” Tancred was born in Quetta, Balochistan, British India (later Pakistan), on August 6, 1942. His father, having abundant confidence in him, often said that “failure was not in the family motto.” With an approach to life that exemplifies in spades the strength of character, determination and discipline that sport can bring to the table, Bill has lived up to this expectation throughout his life.

A top athlete, coach, academic and sport administrator, Bill has had what he himself calls a “wonderful life.” In his entertaining autobiography, *An Ordinary Olympian: But What a Life*, he describes many fascinating experiences from his childhood in India, growing into a man in England, serving in the British army, extensive studies at home and abroad, becoming university professor and, as the title implies, competing twice for Great Britain in the Olympic Games. He also evokes the “years of sporting innocence” in the 1960s and 70s, when most international track-and-field athletes were still amateurs as measured by today’s standards and when doping cases were only an occasional occurrence.

When he was seven years old, Bill’s family relocated back to England and he spent the rest of his youth in Felixstowe and Ipswich, where, coached by his father, he started in athletics. As a schoolboy, the javelin was his main event but after trouble with his elbow he took up the discus. He joined Ipswich Harriers and, realising his talent, rose quickly to domestic prominence. He was the national discus



champion on seven occasions, set 19 British records and his 1974 personal best of 64.32m stood as the British record for 23 years. Gaining his first international vest for Great Britain in 1964, he would represent his country a total of 55 times. Athletics Weekly ranked him as the greatest British discus thrower of all-time. He also competed in the shot put and his best of 19.43m remains one of the top ten British performances in that event as well.

From the outset of his career, it was clear to Bill that the pinnacle of athletics was to

compete at the Olympic Games and he first achieved this goal in 1968 by making the British team for Mexico City. His performance in Mexico was, however, unsatisfactory. He suffered from a combination of overtraining and lack of experience in such high level competition and he found it difficult to reconcile the long waiting periods between throws with the more explosive approach that he employed. In the end, he missed qualifying for the final. He would be frustrated again four years later in Munich, where he also failed to make the final, but he did enjoy success at the Commonwealth Games, where he won a bronze medal in 1970 and a silver medal in 1974. He also competed in three European Athletics Championships.

Bill describes how he was awestruck at his first Olympics. He saw Bob Beamon shatter the long jump world record, watched Dick Fosbury pioneering a new technique of high jumping, witnessed the Black Power salute of the Tommy Smith and John Carlos and found himself competing against his idol, Al Oerter, who was to win his fourth consecutive gold medal in the discus. Undoubtedly, these experiences instilled to deeper interest in all aspects of sport and laid the foundation of commitment for successes in later life.

After serving in the army, first with the 1<sup>st</sup> East Anglian Regiment and then with the Army Physical Training Corps, he attended Loughborough College for teacher training before going on to Loughborough University, renowned for its sporting reputation, to take a Master's degree in human biology. He then obtained another Master's degree in physical education. Continuing his education he received a NATO fellowship to study for a PhD in sports management at West Virginia University in the United States.

As an academic, Bill taught in schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities. Among his many positions, he was for a long time the Director of Physical Education and Sport at Sheffield University as well as the Professor of Sports Studies at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College. He also wrote a number of books (e.g. *Weight Training for Sport* together with his brother Geoff), articles and scientific papers on

subjects relating to human sports performance, health-related fitness and coaching.

After his retirement from competition, Bill remained actively involved in sport administration and coaching. He served as Chairman of the International Athletes Club and President of Sheffield University's World Student Games Directorate. He later became the National event coach for the British Amateur Athletics Board (BAAB) and taught courses for the IAAF. In 2007 he joined the board of the British Olympic Association. In 1992 he was awarded an MBE for his services to athletics

Having been resident in Sheffield for 25 years, Bill moved back to Felixstowe in 2014 after his retirement from his academic work.

Summing up his life on the last page of his book, Bill says "there have been lows ... but there have been fantastic highs as well." His hope is that his story has "actually encouraged young people to take up sport and be physically active throughout their lives."

People willing to accompany Bill Tancred through his eventful life, expounded in much detail and with many anecdotes though his perceptive eyes, will certainly have an entertaining and inspiring read!

As a footnote for *NSA* readers, it should be mentioned that on p. 239 Tancred explicitly points out what a privilege it was for him to have two papers published in *New Studies in Athletics*. His high appraisal of the quality of *NSA* implicit in this statement is very much appreciated!

*Reviewed by Jürgen Schiffer*



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