

Luciano Gigliotti and Stefano Baldini

Coaching is largely a private pursuit. There are very few coaches whose fame goes beyond the boundaries of their local school, stadium, county, state or country. But one coach whose name should be better known everywhere is Luciano Gigliotti. The 72-year-old Italian has done something no other distance coach has ever achieved – guided two different marathoners to the ultimate prize, an Olympic gold medal.

Gigliotti, known better as Lucio, first did the trick with Gelindo Bordin, who won the Olympic title in Seoul 1988. He did it again with Stefano Baldini, who set course record of 2:10:55 on the historic Marathon to Athens route to take gold in 2004.

On behalf of NSA, Pat Butcher, normally the athletics correspondent for the Financial Times of London, caught up with Gigliotti recently, both before and after the 2007 London Marathon, and, as it happened, he got the chance to speak with Baldini as well. The pair talked about the Italian tradition in the distance races, their approach to training and the training itself. They also gave some insight to their competitive philosophy, particularly how to deal with the tidal wave of African talent in long-distance running, latest manifestation of which was revealed in the extraordinary statistic that in 2006 over 500 Kenyans (compared to 21 Italians) ran sub-2hr 20min for the marathon.

NSA Twenty years ago, Italian distance running was very strong, particularly the men, with people like Alberto Cova, Stefano Mei, Gelindo Bordin, Francesco Panetta, Orlando Pizzolato, Gianni Poli. All were

major championship gold medalists or big city marathon winners and many others finished in the top three of big races. Apart from Baldini, what has happened?

Gigliotti: The Africans changed everything, but we have changed too. When I say 'we', I don't just mean Italians, but Europeans generally. Stefano (Baldini) has run 27:43 for 10,000 metres. With that ability, he is very different to Gelindo (Bordin), whose success was based on lots of kilometres. But some of the Africans, like (Paul) Tergat and (Haile) Gebrselassie can run under 27 minutes (10k), and so can many others. That has changed everything. Nowadays is very different to the time of De Castella, Moneghetti and Salah. When we go to the London Marathon today, over 20 people have run under 2:07, some under 2:06. Ten, twenty years ago, we had good guys who could run the distance, now our marathon school after Beijing is probably finished. We have no young guys that can run distance, neither on the track, at 5,000 and 10,000 metres, nor in the marathon. After Gelindo in 1988, we had a good situation in Italy, but now the youngest is 34. Stefano is 36.

NSA What is the difference with the Africans and particularly the Kenyans?

Gigliotti: I think it is in the lifestyle. The Kenyans have a natural preparation, walking, running to school, it's a very active and mobile population. They become naturally strong. If I get an Italian guy of 19, 20, I have to work a lot for strength, that's the big difference to twenty years ago. Our guys are sedentary - computers, video games, play sta-



Stefano Baldini

tion, cellphones, cars. We don't have good juniors any more. In the 2006 European Cross Country Championships in San Giorgio sul Legnano, it was not so bad for Italians, but it is the same situation everywhere in Europe. Lots of people run on roads, but they are 35, 40 years old. Maybe 30,000 run on roads every weekend, but they are not youngsters.

NSA How, when the Africans are so strong, did you prepare Stefano so successfully, to win the Olympic Games?

Gigliotti: We worked a lot on Athens. There is a big difference between a city marathon, and a championship race like the Europeans, Worlds or Olympic Games. In city marathons like London, Chicago, New York, Berlin, etc, there are pacemakers, people want records, best performances. In the championships, there are no pacemakers. You have to read the race and you have to control the other guys. People don't run for the time, they run for the victory. Also the climatic conditions in August

are different: it's hot, like it will be in Osaka this year. We are ready to run in 32C and 70-80% humidity. As for the Kenyans, they run fast, but they cannot use energy wisely. It is a matter of pace. They are strong when they have to run 2:59 (per kilometre), but when they run 3:10-3:15, it's different. They spend the same energy to run 3:15 as 2:59. When Tergat was at 30-32k in Athens he was finished. Stefano said to him, 'Come on Paul, go in front!' Paul went in front for maybe 500 metres. Stefano told me that Tergat was going slowly, so Stefano understood that he was tired, and then went together with Keflizighi instead. Tergat runs the same effort for 3:15 as for 2:58, he pushes, he is not able to run slower. Another factor was the Athens course. It is hard - uphill, then downhill. We trained a lot in St Moritz, up and down, up and down, the same as on the Athens course. Finally there is the focus of training. The Kenyans run a lot for the money and they are strong in spring and autumn. But in the Olympic Games things are different. The Kenyans are not able to prepare for this race but the other people are strong.

Baldini: There are over two minutes between my best (2:07:22, London 2006) and Tergat's (WR 2:04.55, Berlin 2003). I know I cannot compete against him when there is a race with pacemakers. But when there are no pacemakers, like in the Olympics, and there are medals to be won, it is a different race. In Athens, it was hot and humid, which also makes it difficult for the Africans. In that kind of weather, the gap is smaller.

NSA What is the difference between coaching Bordin and Baldini?

Gigliotti: All marathon runners are different. The two have different typologies. Gelindo was more resistant, stronger in endurance, Stefano is faster, he has much more aerobic power than Gelindo had. As I said, Stefano ran 27:43 for 10,000 metres, Gelindo preferred to run lot of kilometres, he would run 280km/week in the last two months before a marathon. Stefano runs around 220-230km.



Gelindo Bordin

Baldini: I have been 15 years with Lucio. I changed because my first coach didn't have time to spend for my training, when I was looking at a marathon career. It's good because Lucio lives very close to me; there are only 10 kilometres between his home and mine (in Modena, north eastern Italy). He is one of the best coaches in the world for the marathon; he coached Bordin. He has always kept updated during the years. His training methods are not always the same for his athletes, but adapted to their different characteristics. For instance, I have never used the programme of Gelindo. This is the secret that explains Lucio's success.

NSA Describe a training period in the months leading up to a marathon?

Gigliotti: We will do four to five weeks training a lot in the gym, with weights, and running short distances, 20 x 660m uphill, to improve leg speed. After we work a lot on endurance, six to eight weeks training to improve aerobic power. Then we can start

with races, 10k on the track or road, or a half-marathon. Then after, for eight weeks we train specifically for the marathon, beginning with speed again, and then with endurance for aerobic power.

NSA How do you use altitude training?

Gigliotti: We have four periods at altitude, two during January, February, March, winter in Europe; and then two during the summer-time, in June, July, August.

Baldini: During the summer, we go to St Moritz, but in the winter we go to Namibia. The weather during January and March is hot and dry, and it's also at altitude, Windhoek is 1700m. What's better also is you don't have problems with malaria. Some guys go to Kenya, but we prefer to go to Namibia. Before we went a lot of times to South Africa, to Johannesburg, but now it's not a safe place. Namibia is safer.

Gigliotti: The two periods at altitude are for three weeks each, 23-24 days. When we arrive, we have two or three days quiet, easy, then two to three weeks improving the kilometres and the quality. In the first period, we train for aerobic power, to improve kilometres. The second period is specifically at near marathon pace, 2-3% easier than in the marathon. For example, Stefano runs 3:01 per kilometre in the marathon, so we train at 3:05-3:06/km. For 30 kilometres, he does 10 x 3:15, 10 x 3:10, and 10 x 3:05, raising the pace in long sessions of two hours to 2.20. Gelindo would run for three hours, and I would say to him, 'Gelindo, it is not useful for you to train for three hours'. And he would reply, 'I need to do it for my mind'. 'OK', I say, 'if it's for your mind, I agree'. Stefano is different. He is stronger in speed, like a Kenyan in his ability over 10,000 metres, while Gelindo could run more like 28:40-29 minutes. But Gelindo was more resistant, he could do more endurance work. For Stefano, 220km/wk is enough, with Gelindo it was 280km/wk. The psychology is different - resistance or speed.

NSA What do you do to regenerate after a big race?



Luciano Gigliotti

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Gigliotti: Stefano spends ten days in the pool. He runs only two weeks afterwards, to improve strength and speed in training,

NSA What about psychological preparation?

Gigliotti: It's better if the coach is his own psychologist for his athletes. You don't need other people, it's part of the coach's job. The coach has to know the guy, that's the most important thing. Gelindo and Stefano have the same quality: they are determined, very strong in the mind. Twenty-four hours before a race, Baldini, when he speaks to us, the coach, the physio', he says, 'Come on guys, quiet today, I am very strong, I'm going to compete fine'. You have to start with the mind. Sometimes we see runners who are very strong, with lots of talent, but no head. There is no psychologist who can work with runners

like that. I work with my guys like this: when I see that a guy has problems, I have to explain to him, 'There is no problem, there is no problem, you can run fast, go, you have to believe in your possibilities'. The problem nowadays is, lots of coaches train by email, by fax, when the coach needs to stay on the track, on the road with the guy. Every day, if possible two times a day. For example, when we go to St Moritz (Switzerland, for altitude training), we live together, we have a good group, we see each other twice a day, in the gym, stretching, eating, we speak a lot, about our job, so there is no problem. It's a similar situation, the Africans and Stefano. Sometimes I need to convince the other guys, they don't have the same quality of mind. A lot of guys do good in training during the week but when we go to compete against the Africans they're no good, this is the problem. They say to themselves, the Africans are the greatest talent in world, we can't beat them. It's the same with guys who train with Stefano, they know Stefano is number one in Italy. When we go to compete, they know they can't beat him, so they stay behind.

NSA Is there an ideal age to specialise, for the marathon?

Gigliotti: It's different for Kenyans, they can start at 18, 19, 20 and 21, because they run when they are young. They start at 10, 11, 12, running to school, and everywhere else, there are no motor cars. It's better for Europeans to start with five and 10km races, and when they are stronger, when they improve, soon they can change to specific a programme for the marathon, at maybe 24, 25 years old. The Africans are stronger than our guys, they don't need to work in the gym, to improve strength or anaerobic power

NSA What about coach education, has that changed since you become a coach?

Gigliotti: Yes, it's changed. When I was 20, 25 years old, I had to go to Rome. That was

the only place where there was an Institute for Physical Education. I studied for three years in Rome and become a teacher of Physical Education. After starting a working, I was a teacher in school, and a coach on track. Then the Italian federation invited me to a first, second and third course, to specialise in middle-distance. Now it has changed, now every town has a university and institute, a Centro dello Sport. Now, when the guys finish they are Dottore, masters in athletics, basketball, etc. Every federation also organises courses, physiology, training method, etc. In theory, it's better, there are more coaches, but the problem is not with coaches, it's in the guys, the athletes. There are no guys who want to come to the track and train. The school is a big problem for us. It's not like in the United States or England. In our schools now there is no sport programme, no time to practice athletics. There are a few teachers, former athletes, who can bring athletics into their schools, but they are very few. There is no national programme, no races, no competition. In theory, the competition between the ages of 10 and 18 is in the school, but no! Gianpaolo Lenzi, Renato Canova, Enrico Arcelli, we were all starting in 1970s, we were studying a lot, it was a good background for marathon. Now we are finished, we have no possibility for the future.

NSA What would like to see?

Gigliotti: It's the politicians who don't see. *Mens Sana in Corpore Sano* (a healthy mind in a healthy body) - they only see Mens Sana! The problem is, we have to change the programme in schools, in the (national) Olympic Committee too. And we have to start in elementary school. Now there is no programme, no gym, only teachers - sometimes. A good sports education programme starts in elementary school, then moves on to 11 and 12 year-olds, beginning with organised sports. Then, at 19 years, they can move into the clubs in every town. The best can continue, but they need to start and improve in schools.

NSA What can Europeans, or rather non-Africans do to be more competitive?

Gigliotti: I think we have to change the rules, introduce better prize money for Europeans, or for Italians in Italy. For example, if you have a small road race in Italy, with 1000 euro for first, 800 second and 500 third, I am sure we would get 10 Africans competing. But if we put 300/200/100 for the race, and 1000/800/600 for the Italians, we can change a little. For the moment, the Italians cannot compete. In the USA, they introduced special prize money for the US runners, and they improved a lot. Look at Ryan Hall, Dathan Ritzenheim, there are lots of guys. The IAAF also needs to spend more money on Europeans. It has spent a lot of money for Africans, now they should spend money on Europeans. Twenty years ago, the Kenyans won 10, 12 races a year, now there are hundreds running 2:12, dozens under 2:07. There is not one road race in Italy where an Italian can finish in the top ten. No one runs long-distance in Italy anymore.

NSA How will Stefano prepare for Beijing?

Gigliotti: Stefano's problem in Beijing is that he'll be 37. He will lose a little power, so we need to train a lot faster, to improve aerobic power, and do more elastic strength work. He wants to run under 2:07 before then. That is impossible in Osaka (Baldini will not run), so maybe he will run Berlin or Chicago (in Autumn 2007), then London 2008.

NSA Carlos Lopes won the Olympic Marathon at 37 (in Los Angeles).

Baldini: I was young in 1984, but I remember Lopes winning. In Beijing, I will run the same as Athens, I think it is a good programme. I'm still hungry, the Olympics is a special atmosphere, it still motivates me. It will probably be my last race. I want to finish on top, and there is nothing better than finishing at the Olympics.