

Pair wants more than victory

Kohrs, Smith hope for change

By PAUL McGRATH
Staff Sports Writer

If you should happen to be strolling along and suddenly two blurs flash by and say "excuse me" in a strange accent, have no fear. They're on our side.

The twin speedsters are sophomore Bruce Smith and freshman Manfred Kohrs, both from the Republic of South Africa. The pair now wear the Maroon and White of the Texas A&M track team coached by Charles Thomas.

The South Africans are as new to A&M as the blue water tower. Both are beginning their first semesters here but already they have made their presence known. Kohrs broke A&M's existing school record for the indoor mile by nine seconds while running a 4:12.1 mile at the LSU Invitational last weekend.

Smith comes to Aggieland by way of New Mexico Junior College and the Community College of Allegheny County. Allegheny was the

national cross country champs last year. Smith was in Pittsburgh when he was first contacted by Thomas. "Coach Thomas called me not once, not twice, not three times, not five but on numerous occasions," said Smith. At first, the thought of coming to A&M repulsed him. "I didn't want to go down there," he says. But finally he relented and decided to visit the campus.

Well, that was all it took. He came and saw the football game with Rice and suddenly "cold shivers began to run up and down my spine. And I'm usually not a very emotional person." Two days later he found himself enrolled at Texas A&M University.

While Smith was in the States, Kohrs was serving a stint in the air force. However the two kept in contact with each other and later Smith proved instrumental in bringing Kohrs to America. He phoned Kohrs several times as did Thomas. The phone bill that built up must

have made Ma Bell shiver. But as Kohrs performance showed earlier it must have been worth it.

The two lived some fifty miles apart in the Dark Continent and both of them started running in about the ninth grade. Smith ran on the average of 30 miles a week but no more than 10 miles at one time. Ninety percent of the time it was cross country running around golf courses and roads. Twice a month he would run on a track. He said he liked to run hard and did not like slow running. Kohrs on the other hand, started at a slow pace, about five miles a week and developed in many stages. He spent a good deal of his training running on the track and during the last two years became a distance runner.

The two first met at a meet in the province capitol of Peitermaritzburg. Both were in the 1500 meter event. "Don't ask who won," said Smith. They later met at most meets after that.

Smith and Kohrs are both distance runners. While Smith feels the 1500 meters is his best event, he also runs the 3000 meters, the two mile indoor, the three mile and the six mile. He's been trying the half mile in practice as of late. Kohrs was a half miler in high school but now concentrates on the 1500 meters.

Prior to a contest both men said they were "pretty nervous." But Smith added that he liked to joke around with the other racers and did a lot of laughing and singing. Kohrs on the other hand was usually quiet and used some pre-race jogging as an outlet for his nervousness.

Before last week, Kohrs had never run indoor before. He commented to Smith before going on his record-setting run that it all "looked

so small." Once he got it over with he thought it was "fun" and saw it as a "good experience."

One interesting thing about Kohrs new record is that he has done that much running in the last four months and has been in training for just the last ten days. "I'm very weak at the moment. I haven't done that much running lately and now I'm doing a lot. My legs are really weak but I'll still try to do my best."

They both agree that the competition in the States is much stronger than in South Africa. "Every meet is competitive," said Kohrs. "At home many times you finished ten seconds better than the second man. It's really great."

The older Smith says the Southwest Conference does not compare to other conferences as far as distance running goes. He feels schools like Penn State and Villanova would "wipe the SWC out."

Since arriving at A&M both have become impressed with the many traditions, the friendliness of the people and the sincerity of the coaches. "There's so much spirit you want to do your best," said Kohrs. The sincerity of the coaches has left an impression on Kohrs. "I'll be here four years and before I leave I'd want to run a sub-four minute mile just for the coaches sake." Of course, both enjoy the Cain Hall facilities along with the food served in the athletic cafeteria.

The two have some goals they would like to accomplish both athletically and politically. As does Kohrs, Smith wants an under four minute mile. He would also like to run in the Olympics which could someday be possible. Except for

one hitch, the Olympic Committee will not allow South Africans to compete. This is due to the South African government's policy toward the racial situation there. The black population outnumbers the whites over five to one. Yet, the all white government will not let black athletes compete as representatives of the country. Both Kohrs and Smith make it their ambition to get a black athlete from South Africa to come to A&M. "Under the government's policy blacks do not have a chance. They have no goals to set," Kohrs said. By obtaining a scholarship for a black, the two feel other blacks will get the incentive to set goals for themselves. They hope that if such a situation did come about it could be publicized enough in their country to cause some changes. "It would really mean something to me to run in USA colors," said Kohrs.

Never before had Smith and Kohrs associated with blacks but now they have several as teammates. Kohrs says he now sort of likes mixing with blacks and feels accepted on the team. "You have all this stuff pressed into your heads about blacks," said Smith. "I like seeing that its different." Some of the blacks, especially those from other African countries were at first leery of the two, but for the most part there are no hard feelings.

These two distance runners have come quite a long way to not only do well in athletics, but also at the same time attempt to do something good for their home country. Success deservedly should go to them in both categories. These two South Africans prove that there is after all, more to being an athlete than finishing first more times than the opponent.

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Dave Elmendorf returns home
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