

## He's got a new wife and a new job, swapping his vest and shorts for a smart suit. So can Roger Black's performance on TV match his success on the track?

**ATHLETICS FOCUS**  
**BBC1 GRANDSTAND/SATURDAY**

**T**he day Roger Black retired from athletics was the day he stopped training. 'That was it for me, I don't miss it at all,' he laughs. Lightly tanned, with a lean, muscular 6ft 3in body that earned him the tag Sex on Legs, he looks every inch the top international athlete he was for 14 years before he took his spikes off last August.

Since then he hasn't put them on again, but he still glows with vitality.

It soon becomes clear that this has little to do with the gym, which he's been neglecting lately, but an inner happiness and self-belief that took him to the top of his sport –

and which should serve him just as well as he makes the transition from track to television.

He began his new job for the BBC last week with *Athletics Focus*, a weekly spot on *Grandstand*, which is part of a two-year contract that takes in the 2000 Sydney Olympics. With the BBC having lost so many sporting events in recent years the importance of its athletics coverage can't be underestimated, but Roger's keeping this new challenge in perspective.

'I'm totally relaxed about it, what do I gain by being otherwise?' he says. 'I never go into anything half-hearted, I always prepare well and

do my best – but I'm not a perfectionist. One of the things I've learned is that you can't fail – even if you don't win, you can only learn.'

But he didn't always have such a positive outlook. 'For the first half of my career I under-achieved because fear was my main motivation. I was always thinking, "What happens if I mess up?" If you stand behind a line thinking that, you're never going to do your best,' he says.

His life changed when an ex-athlete told him to stop worrying about things he couldn't control and focus on himself. 'When I realised it didn't matter if I didn't win, all

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the worry went and I was able to focus on what I was doing.'

It was that mental strength, he says, that won him silver in the 400 metres at the 1996 Olympics. 'I could easily have come 5th or 6th,' he says modestly, 'but it was undoubtedly mental attitude that got me the medal.'

Athletic success didn't come easy to Roger, who quit medical school to follow his dream despite a leaky heart valve which means annual visits to a cardiology unit. He then had to struggle against a series of career-threatening injuries including a broken foot, a hip operation, two knee operations – even glandular fever. 'Everyone has their setbacks and mine definitely helped me. You have to try and draw the positive out of situations that might initially seem rather negative.'

So it's no surprise to discover that England football

coach Kevin Keegan, famed for his inspirational qualities as much as his foot-balling skills, is Roger's 'hero' and friend.

'We talk about the same theories, the same everything. Kevin had phenomenal talent as a player but worked equally hard on the other side of things and is the absolute example of someone reaching their full potential.'

Roger himself has never been happier, having recently married former runner Elsa. And his retirement means they can spend more time together at home in Surrey. 'There's no doubt Elsa would say that since I stopped running I'm a much more relaxed person to live with, but then try living with her!' he laughs, as he talks affectionately about their chalk and cheese personalities.

'Elsa's great, she stops me being too flat and I stop her being too up and down. But family and friends are the inchpins of both our lives and we hope to have children soon.'

While Roger looks forward to fulfilling his own dreams, he also gives talks to people on how to achieve theirs. 'It frustrates me to see people not challenging themselves simply because they're scared to get to a higher level.'

But if someone's happy not challenging themselves, there's no answer. You can't argue with happiness.

**Jane Diamond**

# HOT OFF THE BLOCKS



'We're like chalk and cheese,' says a jolly Roger about his new bride Elsa (above)



'I always do my best,' says Roger, who reached the peak of his athletics career with a silver medal in the 1996 Olympics (above)