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RACQUETBALL'S URBAN COWBOY

It was the merciless J.R. who taught *Dallas*' Steve Kanaly how to play the game.

By Edward I. Placidi

Donning his black cowboy hat while lights were being adjusted for the next photo, Steve Kanaly fell right into character as if on cue. With a "Howdy Pardner" grin on his face, he called out in his best Texas drawl for a can of beer, drew his racquetball racquet as if it were a six-shooter, and then burst out laughing.

Kanally, tan and trim and with prematurely silver-gray locks, may believe he "should have been born in the days of the old West" but these days are just fine, thank you, due to the success of CBS' top-rated series, *Dallas*.

"The character (ranch foreman Ray Krebbs) I play on *Dallas* is my fantasy," says Kanally. "As a kid I grew up loving western characters like Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy and Roy Rogers."

Even though Kanally was raised in Los Angeles, when he appears in public, people automatically think he is a cowboy. His accent, in fact, is more convincing than some homespun Texans.

"People think of me as a cowboy character. I'm sort of misplaced," he says. "I should have been born in another century. Maybe I'm 100

years too late."

Kanally comes across as down-to-earth. He is a family man in his mid-thirties, a Vietnam veteran and an actor who has paid his dues. Yet one gets glimpses of another Kanally: the clowning cowboy of the photo session; the boyishly-excited athlete who wanted to hold up the interview for a half hour while he got in a quick match with a racquetball buddy, fellow actor Tim Culbertson.

Kanally even makes his racquetball playing part of his fantasy cowboy world. "I see myself a crafty old codger taking on a young buck, putting that kill shot in the corner every time," says Kanally.

It was Larry Hagman (J.R.) who first introduced Kanally to racquetball during the first year of filming *Dallas* in Texas. "The son of a gun," Kanally recalls. "The first six times I went out and played with Larry, he beat me ruthlessly, and without any mercy."

Kanally stuck with it, practicing with another friend who gave him pointers to improve his game. But he plays the game for personal satisfaction. "To tell the truth I would really rather lose," so he says. "Winning is not so important as getting better."

He readily admits to having lost to 70-year-

old men. "They don't run after every shot but they sure have some shots. They get you out of position. They conserve their energy. It's a strategy thing," says Kanally.

"Anybody can go out and play on a certain level but it's really amazing to see the technique and strategy involved when you start watching the top players. I have a lot of respect for those guys."

Since that first *Dallas* season, Kanally has played a lot of racquetball—usually with Hagman, and another *Dallas* star, Patrick Duffy.

"One day Patrick forgot his goggles and as he was taking one off the back wall it hit him square in the eye," recalls Kanally. "Well, we both had to go back to work on a scene afterwards and we were real worried his eye was going to puff up and be black and blue. Luckily, it didn't get too bad and they covered it up with make-up. But we never played again without our goggles during filming."

Kanally says he is serious about keeping in condition. He skis, plays tennis and runs in 10K races. He also sets aside time for racquetball. "It's an hour's worth of intense exercise," he says. "And in my life today, time is everything. I drop three pounds if I play hard for an hour. Of course, I gain it right back with the first two beers."

During his growing-up days he found time to play varsity football, run track, compete in junior ski races, and play the piano with the high school orchestra. He also enjoyed art and, following a tour of combat duty in Vietnam, he struck out to make a name for himself as a painter.

"I had to get my feet on the ground and find out who I was and what I was going to do with my life," recalls Kanally. "I look back at the canvases. I was a different person back then. Some of my paintings were violent and energetic. But I didn't need any explanation for what I was doing. The fact that I was doing it was all I cared about. It was all rather exploratory."

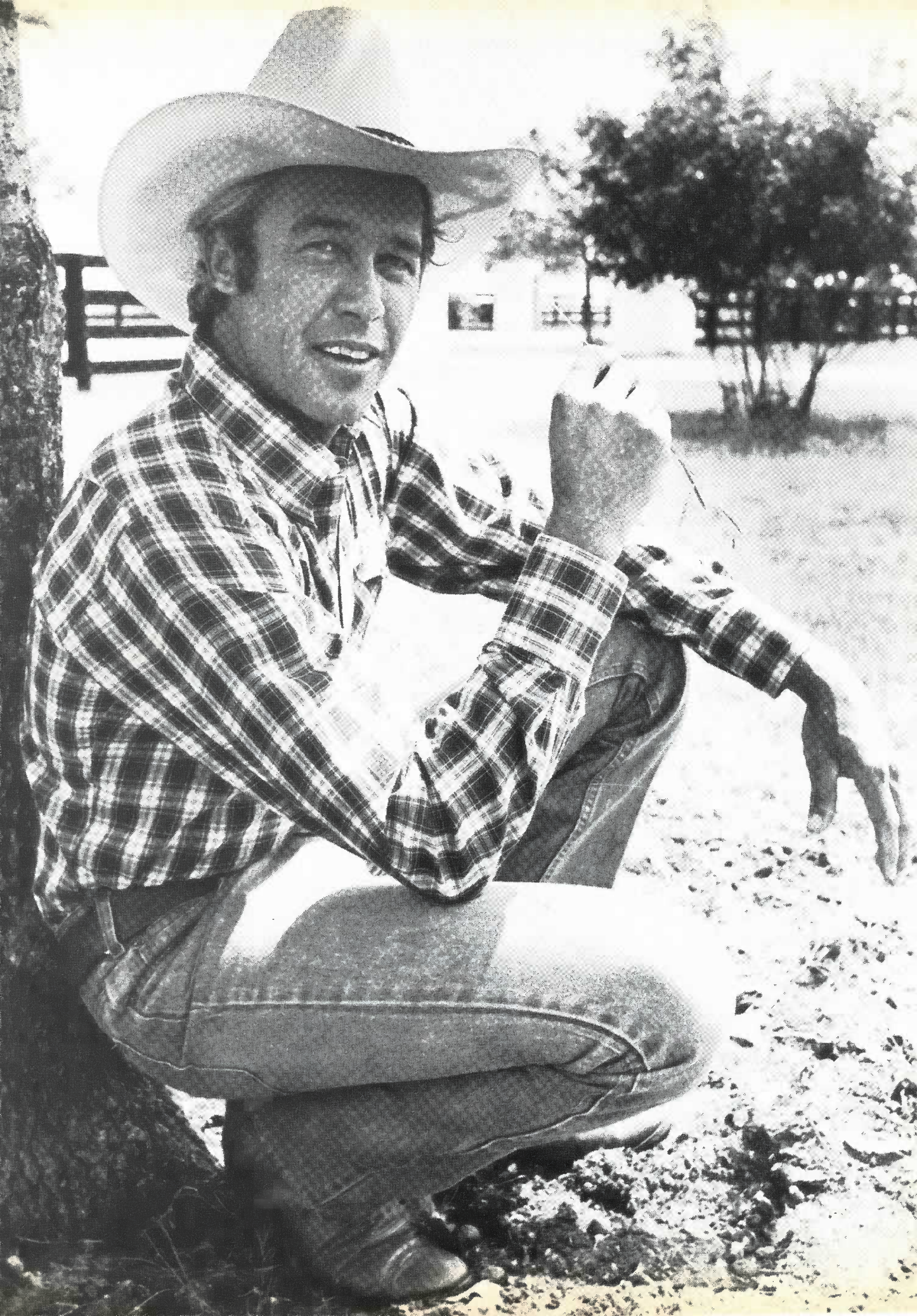
After studying under watercolorist John Courbet, a descendant of the famous 19th-century French Realist master Gustave Courbet, Kanally put on a one-man show at his alma mater, California State University at Northridge, and made a number of sales. He garnered some success and publicity as a young painter, but to make ends meet he worked as an instructor at a shooting range.

Having been taught by his father how to use a gun, Kanally became an avid skeet and trap shooter, a "pro" at the sport. His stint in



Photos by David M. King and Lorimar Productions

Steve Kanally, who plays the part of ranch foreman Ray Krebbs in the *Dallas* television series, gets in a game with actor friend Tim Culbertson at Racquet Centre in Universal City, Calif.



URBAN COWBOY



Last season's *Dallas* cast: Back row (left to right)—Larry Hagman, Linda Gray, the late Jim Davis, Patrick Duffy, Victoria Principal, Steve Kanaly. Front row—Barbara Bel Geddes, Charlene Tilton. Duffy and Tilton were former *Racquetball Illustrated* cover subjects.

Vietnam also added greatly to his prowess.

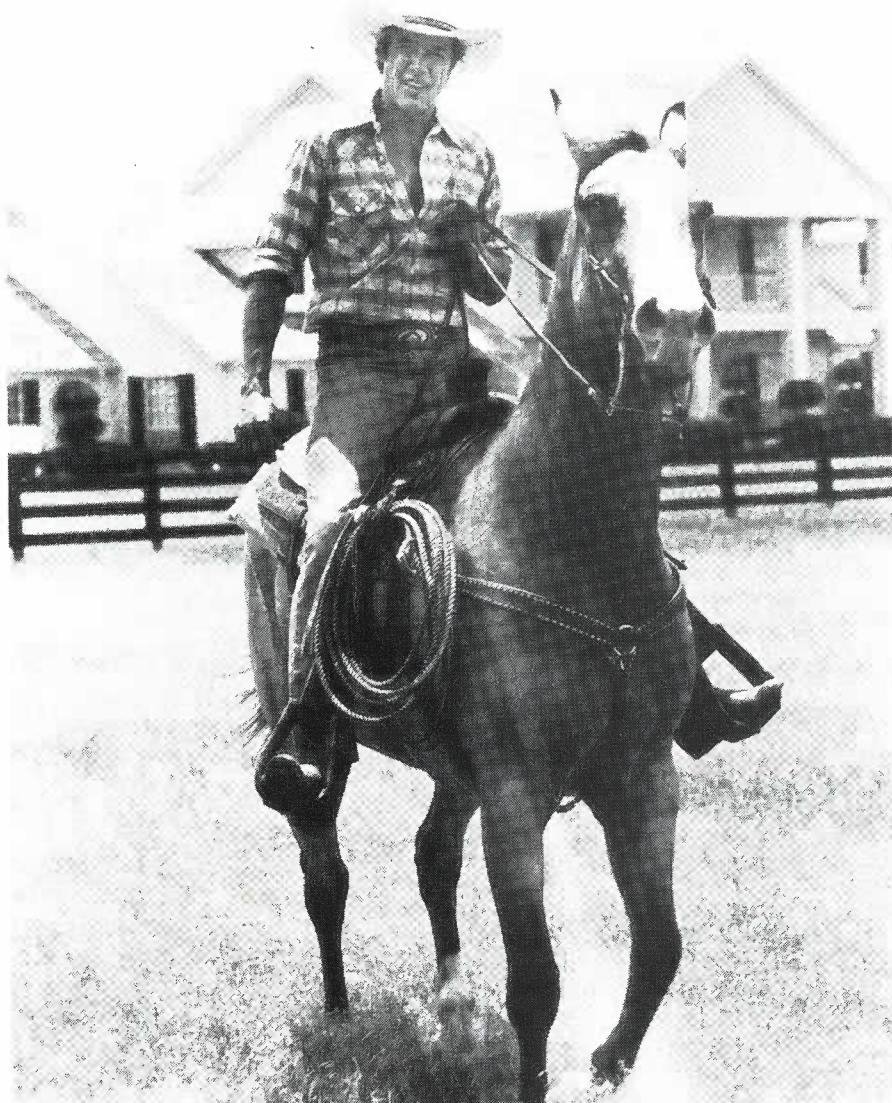
It was at the shooting range that he met John Milius, also an avid skeet and trap shooter, who offered Kanaly a job as technical advisor on a war film he had written. It never came to fruition, however, nor did the next film Milius helped him get involved with.

The third time was the charm. Milius brought director John Huston, an expert marksman himself, out to the range one day. Impressed by Steve's shooting, Huston offered him a small role, sans an audition, in *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* with Paul Newman.

Skeptical after two previous letdowns, Kanaly arrived on the set in Arizona with a briefcase full of silver jewelry he had made in hopes of selling a few pieces to make bus fare if things went sour again. Things, however, went sweet. Not only did his acting career get off the ground but he sold lots of jewelry.



"Winning is not so important as getting better," says Kanaly.



"Every cowboy I ever met thinks I'm from Texas," says Kanaly.



From there he stuck with acting, and acting stuck with him. He appeared in such movies as *Pretty Boy Floyd*, *Dillinger*, *Sugarland Express* and *Young Joe*, *The Forgotten Kennedy*, but he also kept his case full of jewelry in the closet "just in case."

Outside his acting, most of Kanaly's time goes to his family these days. Three-year-old Quinn "is a wonderful little girl who demands a lot of attention which I'm glad I've had the time to give her. These first two formative years are very important."

Steve and his wife Brent (they met at the shooting range) are expecting a second child soon. And he has recently bought a new house.

Dallas is responsible for Kanaly's attention these days, including commercials for Justin boots and Michelob beer. Ironically, he was close to giving up acting when *Dallas* came along.

The year prior to *Dallas*, Kanaly had been up for numerous projects competing with other actors. He was trying to make the transition to a leading role or at least a second lead, but he kept losing the big part. He had begun looking into other career avenues, and was seriously considering a public relations position, when one day his agent sent him on what appeared to be just another typical casting call.

He arrived knowing nothing about the show, but after reading the part of Ray Krebbs, the roguish ranch foreman, he told himself, "This is exactly what I need in television right now. This is some kind of character. This guy's not only a cowboy, he's a scoundrel, he's got a sense of humor, and he's an action man. This is perfect for me." He told the casting people the part was perfect for him—and they agreed.

"I take a lot of pride in the way I portray the character. He's very authentic. I'm not a cowboy, but everybody out there believes it 100 percent. Every cowboy I ever met thinks I'm from Texas. I hate to tell them I'm not," says Kanaly.

Kanally's character expanded this past season. He got married, and became heir to part of the Ewing family fortune ("My share is estimated at \$30 million.").

The shooting of J.R. at the end of the 1980 season created a media furor that helped set the stage for *Dallas*' enormous ratings. The last episode this season in which one of the women has drowned in the Ewing pool should be just enough to create another press blitz. Kanaly was not in the final scene but he happened to be on the set when it was shot. He says he has no idea which character is dead.

"They shot scenes with Kristin (Mary Crosby), Pam (Victoria Principal) and Sue Ellen (Linda Gray) that evening in the pool," says Kanaly. "None of us really knows who it will finally be."

Although television shows have a relatively short life span, Kanaly predicts *Dallas* will be on for, perhaps, another eight years. If so, it looks as if Kanaly, Hagman and Duffy can look forward to many more years of their merciless cutthroat racquetball matches