

THE JENNERS

When Bruce Jenner broke the world decathlon record the first person to reach his side, shortly past the finish of the 1500, was his tearful wife Chrystie. His first words, after closing in for two days on his cherished goal, were indicative of their relationship. And of the teamwork that exists between many, if not most, married athletes and their wives.

The Jenners met as freshmen at Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa but didn't take each other seriously until their senior year. Married before Munich (where Bruce placed 10th), they have followed the decathlon trail together. Chrystie's job as a stewardess for United Airlines helps. It gives them a steady income while Bruce works part-time selling insurance. And passes from the airline allow Chrystie to attend most of the meets, including affairs in Germany, the Soviet Union, France and New Zealand.

Their home base is San Jose, Calif., simply because Bruce considers it the best place for that which is uppermost in their minds and around which their lives revolve—the decathlon.

This is a unique interview, the first ever in T&FN of a man and woman; and by T&FN's first man-and-woman team:

T&FN: What did you mean when you told Chrystie, "We did it. Not I, but we [see p. 5]"?

Bruce: We did it together. It takes two of us. Chrystie is very important to my success. We talk about it, work on the problems, plan it. She works at a job she doesn't really like that much so that I don't have to work full time. I have time to train.

Chrystie: You have to create a positive atmosphere. I build him up emotionally and psychologically. I have to be sure that he loves himself. If I'm depressed, I hold it inside. You're careful about what you say, you never want to suggest limits. You want him reaching for the skies.

T&FN: Does it ever get to you, putting yourself in second place?

Chrystie: It certainly does. It's hard. I've thought a lot about it. Been through counseling and all that. I want to be my own person. I don't particularly like being a stewardess. But the fringe benefits are so great. I'd like a job that is intellectually challenging, that has some real meaning to me.

T&FN: What do you want from life Bruce?

Bruce: Right now, the gold is No. 1. This year I wanted the record. Now it's behind me. I don't care if I win at Montreal with 7000 or 9000. I just want to win.

Chrystie: Earlier this year he had some doubts about getting the record this year. I had to chew him out.

Bruce: I realized I was trying to concentrate on too many things, so now



Bruce, Chrystie & friend celebrate record.

I'm sacrificing everything for the Olympics. We're sacrificing. Then we can go on to other things.

T&FN: Like what? What do you want?

Bruce: I think the answer is that I need to be challenged. I've always been that way. I need the challenge of being the best in the decathlon, or the best insurance salesman, or the best husband, or the best person.

T&FN: Speaking of challenges, what do you see in the Olympics, as competition?

Bruce: I really think the top three will be [Fred] Dixon, [Nikolay] Avilov and myself. [Yves] Le Roy could be a sleeper but the 1500 kills him. He says he is going to put a lot of distance in this winter. You know, a couple of miles a week.

T&FN: Who has the most physical talent?

Bruce: Dixon, by far.

Chrystie: He's a bigger threat than Avilov.

Bruce: I think he is. He's got more talent than Avilov. He's got everything but the vault and 1500 and he can do better in them. But he's not quite that mentally tough. I see a weakness there.

T&FN: Can you get mentally tough?

Bruce: To an extent. But take a guy like [Jeff] Bennett. He was tough from day one. I was basically the same way. When I started out I was mentally trying to be very tough. Dixon wasn't that way. He's always been a little weak in that area. I can see him getting tougher to a point by getting confidence in his running. Like he started getting a lot tougher when he started running the quarter real well. When he started doing it in the 47s he started thinking he could score 8300 points. Then he started doing it. But I don't believe he thinks he can win the Olympic championship.

Chrystie: You know, it's interesting, the difference in the decathlon between those two avid Christians, Bennett and Dixon. Bennett puts more faith in the decathlon in himself and Dixon puts more faith in Christ, in God. It's almost like Dixon is casting his faith to the heavens.

T&FN: The decathlon is a very Christian event right now—Dixon, Bennett, Steve Gough, John Warkentin, Chris Adsit...

Bruce: Adsit seems to be the leader. He works for Athletes in Action. Seems to know exactly where he's going. He's put a lot into it.

Chrystie: He had a little bible, in red binding, in Russian, that he gave to the Russians. They can't get the bible in Russia.

T&FN: What about Avilov? Was he really trying at Eugene?

Bruce: Of course he was. But you remember how he was at Munich. He doesn't look it, but he's a very intense competitor. There's no way he was going to come here and not try.

T&FN: Are you intense?

Bruce: Definitely. In everything I do. I can concentrate so hard, even in the 1500, that I don't even see Chrystie.

Chrystie: You even missed me once when I was right on the track.

Bruce: That's right. And you remember Eugene? I came into the stands and a boy asked me for an autograph. His last name was Young. I remember it because I couldn't remember how to make a Y. I just couldn't do it. I had to ask my brother. That's intense.

T&FN: Back to Avilov. How do you compare your record with his?

Bruce: In a way, his record is better because he had automatic timing. But in another way, mine is better. He had to have eight personal bests to get his record. I did mine with half that many. If I could get eight personal bests I'd go 8700 or more.

T&FN: Aside from pure physical talent, what's the most important factor in being a good decathlete?

Bruce: You've got to be a decathlon man. You've got to go after the decathlon. You can't be a good runner or jumper who wants to try the decathlon. You have to be a decathlon man.

T&FN: What else does it take?

Bruce: You've got to be mentally tough. You need technique. And you have to be smart. Decathlon smart. It takes brains to run one well. And it takes more brains to train for one. Then there's one more thing. You have to look at yourself, be aware of yourself. For instance, I'm harder on myself than anyone. I'm such a perfectionist.

Chrystie: And you have to scare yourself.

Bruce: That's right.

Chrystie: You'll be 100 or 200 points behind at the end of the first day. You know you can make it up and win. But you always wonder if you can do it. You tell me how tough they are. How far behind you are. You're just scaring yourself.

T&FN: So it takes brains to train for a decathlon. How exactly do you go about preparing yourself mentally, getting psyched?

Bruce: I visualize each of the 10 events. I think about exactly what I have to do. Not just timewise, but what technique I have to use. I picture myself in every event. Let's say the 100. I always picture myself getting in the blocks, looking down the runway. Trying to block out everything 'cause I have a terrible tendency of watching every guy in the race, trying to run their race.

I see myself looking down the lane, the two lines coming to a V. I tell myself there is nothing else happening outside those lines. I visualize myself anticipating the gun, trying to be one step out by the time the gun goes.

T&FN: You're saying that you try to beat the gun?

Bruce: Sometimes I do. You have an extra one there, you might as well try to use it.

T&FN: When do you visualize?

Bruce: All the time. Even when my wife is talking to me. I feel it's so important. How can your body do something when your mind doesn't know how to do it in the first place? Once you get into a meet it's about 75% mental and 25% physical. Most of the errors you'll see are mental errors.

Chrystie: He even visualizes the events in his dreams. He runs in his sleep. He falls asleep in 20 or 30 seconds and then I can see his legs moving. They'll go one at a time, just like running, for about 10 seconds. I know he's doing the 100. I know. Or he'll give a big grunt and move his arm and shoulder. He's putting the shot.

Bruce: But I seldom remember my dreams.

Chrystie: It's good. If you're going to Bible of the Sport

do it you have to think about it. You've got to dream it. Sleep it. Think about it, constantly.

T&FN: How can you tell when you're really ready?

Chrystie: He gets edgy. The tension builds up. At Eugene, the night before the meet, it was so thick you could cut it. Neither of us could get along. We fought.

T&FN: But you still feel a supportive wife is essential?

Bruce: Absolutely. It is for me. I couldn't do it alone.

Chrystie: I don't know about that. I do know Bruce has to be independent, despite what I mean to him. He can't depend on me. He has to draw only from himself in competition. If he looked to me

to draw from, he wouldn't be a champion.

T&FN: Now that you're truly champion of the world, what's next?

Bruce: I took two weeks off after Eugene but. . .

Chrystie: But you didn't. You were out running a couple of days later.

Bruce: Now I've started the preparation for Montreal. That decathlon is going to be won in the next six months.

T&FN: What about meets?

Bruce: Just four more. The Pan-Am Games. Then nothing until next May. I'd like to get one in in San Jose. The conditions are good, I'll be at home, and I can get in a good score. Then the Trials, where all that counts is making the team. And then Montreal. □

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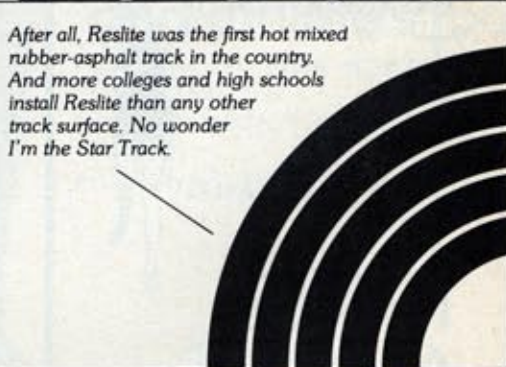
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