

# Stanford's Mile Duo

by Sieg Lindstrom

Stanford milers Gabe Jennings and Michael Stember are on a roll. Not a drum roll nor a sushi roll for the pair who hope to replay their mile 1-2 from the NCAA Indoor in the outdoor 1500, but a racing roll. For Stember and Jennings, however, raw fish and "banging pots and pans" have brought lessons that enrich their lives both off the track and on.

Should they—or perhaps some combination of them with the school's other sub-4:00 miler, Jonathan Riley—grab the two top spots in the Durham 1500, Stanford will be just the third school, after Oregon in '55 and Mt. St. Mary's in '89, to turn the feat.

T&FN spoke with the two milers not long after Jennings' 13:44.60 PR in the Stanford Invitational 5K, impressive top-end range for the redshirt soph who clocked 1:46.99 in the '98 USATF 800 final.

The list of Americans with times at that level of extremes in both the 2- and 12<sup>1/2</sup>-lappers is short, and limited to names like Jim Ryun, Steve Scott, Jim Spivey and Steve Holman.

Having dipped under 3:40 in the 1500 last summer (Stember 3:39.05, Jennings 3:39.85), they are optimistic faster times lie ahead:

**T&FN:** Your team gave Arkansas a fight at the NCAA Indoor in the Razorbacks' house.

**Jennings:** I think we were all just buzzing off the vibe and the energy in that palace that they built.

**T&FN:** Nice, especially after some of the down moments of the past. Michael, you had knee surgery almost as soon as you got to Stanford, and for you Gabe, the '98 cross country season was a bust due to injury.

**Jennings:** I think tearing yourself down like that and having to build back up really makes you stronger. I changed as a person, not just as a runner.

I think freshman year I was pretty successful, but when I won or I ran well, I was running scared. It's hard to explain this, maybe Michael can help me.

**Stember:** I just think it's a lot of carryover from high school. You know? It's tough coming in a big gun in a program where everyone is big. The list of high school All-Americans on this team is umpteen. It's amazing.

**T&FN:** Was your initial reaction to try too hard to prove yourself?

**Jennings:** Definitely. Whatever coach said, I'd go home and write in my running log 10M more or 20 seconds faster. And it just got me in a world of trouble, man.

I think I was capable of doing those hard

workouts, but you try doing them every day and you get worn down. I had to test myself, and what ended up happening was, I don't think I'm prone to injury, but throw like 5 weeks at 100 [miles], one week at 130 and one day at 45, which is my legendary run to the top of Mammoth Mountain at 3:00 in the morning.

I was definitely a different person back then. That was the summer after my freshman year when my ego was higher than the scoreboard, after the USATF 800. I come off that race and I think, "I'm going to just dominate, like Goucher isn't nothing." I've got this mentality,

right.

**T&FN:** Coach Lananna must have been pulling his hair out.

**Jennings:** We definitely have to bring coach into this equation because he's gone through it all with us. I feel like he's seen my weakest spots and my strongest ego. He's had to balance it.

**Stember:** I think when I first came in here, like Gabe, it was to shake things up, just throw so much energy and passion into workouts and trying to be the best. So much carryover from high school and you think it's the same

KEITH McMAKIN



**Fresh from the first 1-2 in the NCAA Indoor mile, Jennings (r) and Stember can now point towards becoming only the third duo to turn the trick outdoors.**

and of course I'm so overtrained I'm like fifth guy on our team at the Fresno Cross Country Invitational, and it just got worse from there. Talk about a blow to the ego, a blow to the bone. Ouch!

Then you do the opposite: OK, I'll go from 130M a week to 30. But it was too late. I'm in the pool with a stress fracture, an IT band injury, and I'm on that elliptical bike, doing it with my arms because that's all I can use.

I hadn't learned. You'd think a guy would have learned after getting busted like that. Then my arms, I gained like 20lb in the weight room and on the elliptical bike. The trainers were just disgusted: you can't do anything

kind of game but it's not. Coach, I'm very grateful for him to have showed me lots of things and taken the time to say, "Hey, it's a whole new game and you need to relax and you need to trust me."

**T&FN:** Michael, Gabe says you're quite the sushi chef. Is it true?

**Stember:** I love food. I love all sorts of food. Not just sushi. That's my other passion. It's not a big deal. I want to open a restaurant some day. That's a goal of mine. Gabe does his music and I cook.

**T&FN:** I remember interviewing you as a high schooler at a Denny's, which you chose. What are your food interests now?

**Stember:** My passion right now is Japanese food. That's my favorite thing, and it's so healthy. It makes you feel so good when you eat it. I love that. You can't go eat 7 plates of pasta, but you can eat 18 rolls if you want and you'll still feel pretty good when you get up.

We have a little sushi club and it's kind of a ritual of ours before races. Actually, once a week we get together at the Hausers' house, about 12 guys. A couple of girls come over once in a while, whoever might bring a date.

Brad and Brent Hauser and I started making it a couple of years ago; it must have been my freshman year. We went to the market and we realized we could save 40 or 50 bucks by doing it ourselves. Then when we started bringing in other people and other people started saying, "Wow, this is amazing," we started pushing the limit, making new rolls and making rainbow rolls, *unagi maki*, barbecuing eel, having shrimp tempura, miso soups.

**Jennings:** To give you an idea, it takes us about two-and-a-half hours to make it and five minutes to eat it.

**Stember:** The competition is small but it's intense: Who can make the fattest roll?

**T&FN:** And Gabe, your passion outside of running is music?

**Jennings:** When I was like 4 years old, that's when my parents first found out I have rhythm. I took all the pots and pans out of the pantry and started banging them, and they were like, "Man, that kid can hold a beat."

My dad played a little *Eight Days A Week* on the piano, singing along, and I'd jam with him. Then pretty soon I got a trap set and started banging away with these classic rockers in the community, making 20 bucks a gig, thinking I was big time.

That was my beginning as a rock star. I'd make sure I'd take one break and slow-dance with the cutest girl in the school then get back on the set.

**T&FN:** Now you obviously take it more seriously. You're a music major—one who just two years ago couldn't read music, which must have been a challenge all its own. Is there a connection to track? After the mile in Fayetteville, you said, "My legs are my drums. I'm just playing music. Instead of focusing on the prize, I'm just enjoying the competition."

**Jennings:** Definitely that's a tool I use lately to keep positive. I find that just by singing rhythms, singing, smiling and dancing, as corny as that might sound, just keeping that vibe, keeping that energy going, it helps me focus and it helps me keep it light. So I don't over-think things, I don't get into that perfectionist state of mind again or that overtraining state of mind.

In terms of racing, it's huge. You want to talk about getting in the window? Like ga-gi-ga-UN-chaka-unka, just start singing or rapping and you start feeling like you can really break on through.

I go to the line after singing like that and I don't want to beat my competitors; I want to raise the energy level with them almost like a rock concert. □

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