

VALERIE BRISCO-HOOKS

In 1979, Valerie Brisco was one year out of high school and finished 2nd in the TAC 200. She ranked No. 10 in the world.

But she met Alvin Hooks that year, followed him to Philadelphia where he played professional football, and had a son, Alvin, Jr. The circumstances produced several subsequent track seasons that one would hesitate to call a career.

But in the spring of '83, she began a comeback under the direction of Bobby Kersee. The "comeback" was more than that, however, taking her far beyond any of her previous accomplishments and culminating in 3 gold medals in L.A.

Despite the sudden burst of fame and attention, she is most concerned about her family life and specifically with raising Little Al. Family members note that she does like apple pie, and motherhood seems to become Valerie Brisco-Hooks exceedingly well: enough so that Little Al got in his two-cents worth frequently during this early-March conversation:

T&FN: Is Alvin Junior old enough to know how famous his mommy is?

Brisco-Hooks: Well, he's three. But he recognizes me on TV. And he knows the fact that I'm running and he knows that I'm winning. Other than that, I don't think he really knows how much significance it holds.

But I know he knows that I'm winning because he imitates everything that I do. Like when we show the video of the Olympics, he'll run. He'll get down in the blocks and he'll stretch his legs, do everything that we do, and then he'll run the race around the house.

Then he'll come back and when I go across the finish line, I stick my hand up and he'll do the waving and then he'll go to when I get down on my knees and pray and then he'll get up and kiss to the fans. Then he goes and waves to the crowd. He does everything.

T&FN: What do you remember most about all of last year?

Brisco-Hooks: Probably the workouts. Cause we worked out hard. And how different they are from this year. We're doing nothing compared to what we did last year.

And once me and Bobby had a run-in and he almost kicked me off the team, because I was coming to practice late a lot. That was around December '83. And Bobby said, "There's standard time and then there's Valerie's time. So if you say come at 12 o'clock, Valerie normally comes at 12:30."

T&FN: At what point did Bobby become a major force in your career?

Brisco-Hooks: I guess in '83. Because that's when he was really talking to me more. I was like, "I don't know if I want to go through this." Because I was just training. I didn't go to any meets. I didn't run at all. It seems to me that I was just there. And you can't really feel happy about just being somewhere and not being able to show your talent.

So he kept trying to convince and tell me to be patient. I think that was the hardest for me and I think that's where it really made a turning where he told me he'd take me to Europe if I'd just be patient with him.

T&FN: What's changed for you since last August?

Brisco-Hooks: As far as personally, nothing. I still train hard, I still do about the same things I was last year preparing for each season.

But I can take vacations. I can go wherever I want to go. And people are talking to me and look to me for interviews. And I do a lot of appearances.

T&FN: What do those medals mean to you?

Brisco-Hooks: I think they mean a better life to me. Because now things are a lot easier for me and a lot of things have opened up for me. I think they mean that I'll be noted in the record book that I was the second [woman to win 3 gold medals in one Olympics].

And my little boy can look at that one day when he gets older and be proud of his mother and see that life is not bad, that you can have something to achieve or strive for to make his life notable. I think it's more for my baby.

T&FN: What does your mother think about all that's happened?

Brisco-Hooks: My mother is ecstatic. Where normally me and my brothers used to rattle, it's like she'll say, "Don't be grabbing her legs. She uses those legs to run with. Don't be touching her like that. Don't be fighting with her."

If my brother pinches me or something, it's, "Don't be doing that to that girl." It's like, "Protect Valerie, don't let her legs get hurt." It's even to the point where she'll massage me. And my mother neevver massaged me: "My finger's hurt, girl." She used to say that all the time, but

now it's like these legs are valuable. She's really proud.

T&FN: And what about the rest of the family?

Brisco-Hooks: I think their reaction is somewhat similar. They're happy for me, they're really proud of what I did. But my sister Sandra, if we're in the store and we're walking she'll say to people, "Do you know who that is? That's Valerie Brisco-Hooks!" She'll try to make them remember. That kind of stuff isn't fair and she does it all the time.

T&FN: Stories this winter indicated you were disappointed by not receiving more media attention or business opportunities after the Olympics. Were those stories true?

Brisco-Hooks: No, because I'm not disappointed. Because I understood why I wasn't really received then. Because if you notice all the athletes that are receiving the publicity are consistent athletes that have been in a certain sport for some years. And I'm not a consistent athlete; people didn't know who I was.

T&FN: The strong public image of you is that you are a very happy person, that you're a warm, friendly person. Do you ever get just mean and nasty?

Brisco-Hooks (laughing): I'm nasty when I run. [Little Al interjects a loud cry.] I don't talk to others on the track. I'm not really friends. I'm somewhat like Evelyn [Ashford] on race days. I can talk to you after, but when I'm running or racing, don't talk to me.

I get a "don't talk to me" attitude. So a lot of people interpret that as me being mean or that I think I'm bad. But I'm not really like that after. It's just that before a race I like to get within myself and concentrate on what I have to do.

I don't even talk to Bobby. Bobby knows not to talk to me when I'm getting ready to run.

T&FN: Which race do you think is your best?

Brisco-Hooks: The 400. But I think the 2 and the 4 might be equal. I'd rather have the 400 be the best because I've worked so hard for that.

T&FN: Which of the 3 World Records right now is the toughest?

Brisco-Hooks: The 400.

T&FN: Which is the easiest?

Brisco-Hooks: The 2. Because I ran



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run it fast and run it right, I get the same effect as in the 200.

T&FN: *Was there a time when you learned how to run fast and what it should feel like?*

Brisco-Hooks: I always had it, but I had lost it. Last year I learned more how to run a race. I understand each phase of the quarter more so. When I first started running quarters in high school in eleventh grade, it was like just run it. You didn't care, you were just praying you'd get to the finish line without being dizzy.

And the first time when Fred Jones told me how to run a quarter, that was the first time that I started appreciating races and started analyzing things and seeing how my body can take this.

And then when I met Bobby, he really was into pinpointing parts of a race. So each year I was learning, but then the years I was off I really wasn't thinking about track and wasn't doing much running.

T&FN: *What do you enjoy about running fast?*

Brisco-Hooks: When I run the 200, I get this effect where it feels like it's whipping me when I run my curve fast. I don't like any hundreds. I like to think in a race. In a 100 if you think, you're gone. If you make one error, it's over and you can't regroup.

In the 200, you can do things. In the quarter you can really mess around and come back. But not in the 100. So I like the effect of the whip, and in the quarter I like the backstraight. Because there I can relax.

T&FN: *Then those are the parts of races that you enjoy most, when you maybe feel fastest?*

Brisco-Hooks: I like ending; when it's over. □

the 2 and I was two-tenths off. I ran in the Games with a muscle spasm in my back. If I was in a one-race situation and I wasn't tired mentally or physically and nothing was hurt I think the record would have fallen.

I don't think it's because Ashford and Gohr and Koch aren't giving the 200 an equal shot. I know they are. But to me they're not faster than me.

T&FN: *Do you ever see moving up to*

the 800 like Kratochvilova?

Brisco-Hooks: No. No way. No, no.

T&FN: *Would Bobby want you to try it?*

Brisco-Hooks: No. The 800 is a hard race. Bobby would get his feelings hurt. He knows I won't run an 800.

T&FN: *Do you have a favorite event?*

Brisco-Hooks: I think I like them equally, because the 400, if you run it right, you don't feel any pain. Whenever I

Valerie Ann Brisco was born July 6, 1960, in Greenwood, Mississippi, and is 5-7/135. Married Alvin Hooks in April '81 and has one child (Alvin, Jr., 3). Graduated from Locke High School (Los Angeles) in 1978; competed for Cal State Northridge in 1979 and Long Beach City College in 1981. Coached by Bob Kersee, she's a member of the World Class TC. Holds the American Record at 200 (21.81) and 400 (48.83), and is 3rd and 4th on the respective all-time world lists. Her 100 PR (11.08) puts her at =No. 4 on the all-time U.S. list, Indoor PRs (with all-time world and U.S. list position in parentheses): 50m, 6.34 '85 (x, =7); 60y, 6.92 '84; 200m, 22.95y AR '85 (5, 1); 400m, 52.63 '85 (x, 2); 500y, 1:02.3 WR '85 (1, 1). Major meet finishes: 200--'78 3)AAU Indoor, '79 4)Pan-Am 2)AAU 1)AIAW, '84 1)OG 1)OT 1)TAC Indoor, '85 1)TAC Indoor; 400--'81 dq)TAC, '84 1)OG 2)OT 1)TAC. Her progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	100	200	400
1977	16-17	11.00y	24.4	54.19
1978	17-18	11.57	23.77	53.70
1979	18-19	11.69	23.16 (10,2)	52.08 (x,8)
1980	19-20			56.56i
1981	20-21	11.56	23.49 (x, 9)	52.62
1982	21-22	did not compete (maternity)		
1983	22-23	11.39	23.10	53.61
1984	23-24	11.08 (9,3)	21.81 (4, 1)	48.83 (4, 1)
1985	24-25		22.82+i	52.63i