

by Dave Johnson

DON PAIGE

The complete indoor runner, Don Paige has parlayed his miler's strength, exceptional acceleration and tactical savvy into a winning combination indoors.

For the fifth consecutive year, he rates No. 1 in our 1000y/1000m rankings and in 1982 lowered the 1000y record for the second time.

Oft hindered by injuries, Paige has at times managed to exhibit his samewinning characteristics on the outdoor oval. An NCAA 800/1500 double in 1979 (the first in more than 20 years) and a No. 1 World Ranking at 800m in 1980 are the best examples. He can also lay claim to being the last person to beat Sebastian Coe on the track.

We spoke with him shortly after his return from Japan, his first trip to the Orient. While there, he defeated James Robinson over 800m indoors to nail down a No. 1 ranking at that distance too.

The archetypal Jumbo Elliott disciple, the short-haired, ruddy-cheeked Paige bears the strong imprint of his former coach. Now married and living in the Philadelphia suburbs with his wife of 6 months, Carolyn, he has become an assistant coach at his alma mater:

T&FN: After your NCAA double in 1979 you said that one of the great things about being with Jumbo Elliott was that you always had somebody to say when you'd done enough work. Who tells you that now?

Paige: I tell myself; I coach myself. That's a big thing, learning something like that: knowing when you've done enough, not overtraining.

It's something that we learned from Jumbo through the system. And it's not just myself. You look at all the alumni after they graduated: Dick Buerkle, Marty Liquori, Mark Belger, Eamonn Coghlan.

As we graduated we became our own coaches and our own runners. We took care of ourselves. It's just where we've come from, the Jumbo Elliott system. It's not a very complicated system. Anybody can learn it, but I think you had to go to Villanova to learn it.

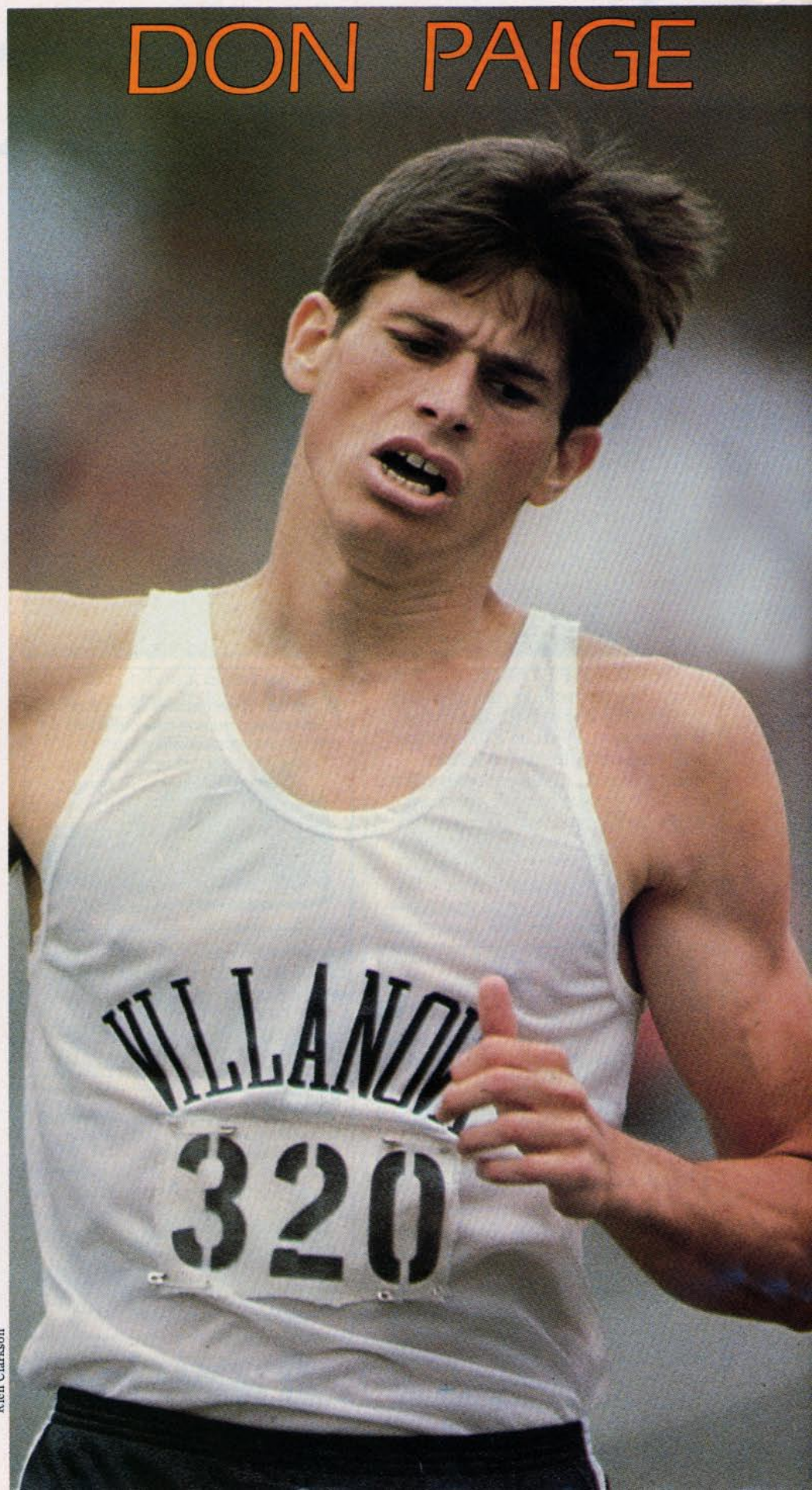
T&FN: Do you listen as attentively to yourself as you did to Jumbo?

Paige: I try to. Sometimes it's very hard, because a lot of times your mind plays tricks on you. You say, "Well, geez, I'm really not in the mood to run a workout today." But then I would always catch myself saying, "Geez, I know Jumbo would have me out there doing this today," or "I know I should be out there doing those hills even though I don't want to."

T&FN: Your remembrances of the mile go back to what—Jim Ryun?

Paige: Probably just Ryun, and that was just through reading *The Jim Ryun Story*. I didn't follow sports much as a kid.

T&FN: There are some physical resemblances between you and Ryun.



Rich Clarkson

Paige: Yeah [laughing], we're both white.

T&FN: *Let's just say the press has drawn the comparison.*

Paige: Well, when I was a sophomore at Villanova, people were always comparing me like that in articles and stuff. I never paid much attention to them because at that time, and still to this time, I haven't come close to achieving the things that Jim Ryan did.

He's run faster over 800m, over a mile, over 1500m, and he was such a far superior athlete than what I've achieved so far. He did this years and years ago, running so fast on cinder tracks. He was a great athlete.

T&FN: *What's coaching like?*

Paige: I really enjoy it. The guys on the team are personal friends. It's a two-way street though. It's very easy for me because it's not me just coaching them and helping them. In return they're helping me greatly also. I need people to train with.

And I enjoy it. You learn more about yourself, you learn more about the sport. It's a good feeling when you see the guys run very well, like they did at the NCAA.

When they win, you know, I had nothing to do with them winning. It's all their own because they're the ones that put in all the work and they're the ones that deserve all the credit.

T&FN: *What about when they lose?*

Paige: Oh, when they lose it's my fault. I coached them wrong. I'll be the first to admit it. Either that or I may have overtrained them or I could have undertrained them, or they might not have been prepared right, mentally or physically. That's my fault then. That's the true position of a coach.

T&FN: *Do you want to continue in coaching or is this just a stopover through the end of your own career?*

Paige: I really haven't given the long term much thought. I took on the position when Dr. Jenkins came aboard and he asked if I would help out and coach.

It's new for both Dr. Jenkins and myself in coaching, but I personally feel I know a lot about middle distance running. I don't think it's just because I've been successful at the sport. I've had a lot of injuries; I've had a lot of glory; I've had a lot of defeats.

I tried to learn as much as I could through the sport, and I tried to learn as much as I could through Jumbo Elliott. He was a very complicated and meticulous man, and I thought I picked up quite a bit while I was at Villanova.

T&FN: *You mentioned working with Doctor Jenkins. While you were an undergrad your coach was Mister Elliott. Did Mr. Elliott ever become Jumbo to you?*

Paige: Well, no, not face to face. I held such a high regard for the man. I never called him coach, 'cause I never viewed him as a coach. I viewed Jumbo more as an adviser. He was there to advise you when

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ever you needed help. That was on and off the track.

He left a lot up to you. Only his very close and dear friends called him Jumbo to his face.

T&FN: *How do you feel about the gradual wave of professionalism coming in?*

Paige: It will keep improving over the years. With the Grand Prix circuit changing and hopefully getting bigger dollars somebody like myself doesn't have to get a full-time job to support his wife or family.

My basic feeling is, why can't you receive money and still run in the Olympic Games? What does money have to do with the Olympic Games? I mean, I'm just trying to earn a living, that's all.

T&FN: *Who's providing the paychecks in the family now?*

Paige: I do. My wife is currently looking for employment. She just finished her MBA and she's going through the job market right now, so I earn the money.

T&FN: *How is marriage affecting things?*

Paige: Well, we dated for 4½ years throughout college and after college, so we know each other very well and she knew what she was getting into; that I travel a lot. And she knows how much I love the sport of running and what it means to me.

And I also knew what she wanted out of life. So marriage hasn't really put a strain on us at all. It hasn't changed my running, it hasn't changed anything about either one of us.

T&FN: *You're still "living like a clock"?*

Paige: Oh yeah, you don't forget something like that. That's one of the deep-down things that Jumbo taught us. You ask any of the guys that are out there training right now that are Villanova alumni, and they'll tell you "Sure, I still live like a clock."

I get up mornings and run, same time every day. I run practice in the afternoon at the same time. I eat my meals at the same time every day. I watch M*A*S*H every night at 7:00; can't change that. You try to go to bed at the same time. That clock's still there.

T&FN: *Do you still enjoy tennis, golf, hunting, water skiing?*

Paige: I still enjoy them; I don't get the chance to do them as often. I'll probably pick up the hunting season a few years down the road when I finish competing. I still enjoy playing tennis.

T&FN: *The fact that you're willing to go out and play tennis or go water skiing means you're not overly worried about the risk of injury?*

Paige: I am and I'm not. I feel I have a greater chance of getting injured by overtraining than I do by playing another sport. I've only twisted my ankle once playing tennis and that was minor. I'm very cautious when I begin water skiing each summer. I don't just jump onto the slalom

ski and take off, 'cause I know I'll kill myself.

T&FN: *Jumbo was upset any time any of the guys would pick up a football and throw it around.*

Paige: He was worried about that, because you pick it up and you start throwing it back leisurely. Before you know it you've got a fullscale ballgame going. And you're dealing with such highstrung athletes, very competitive athletes, that they forget that they're runners and now they think they're football players. And sure enough they're going to get hurt, because they're not football players.

T&FN: *And it doesn't happen on the tennis court?*

Paige: Yes, it does. I become very involved and I'm competitive, and I don't like to lose, and it does happen. But I think the chance of injury is much less in tennis. I play a lot of racquetball also. And I have a written understanding with my partners that if the ball comes anywhere near me and you're about to swing and you think you might come close to hitting me with that racket, I'll give you the point.

I get in there and play with my brother—who's a very avid player—and he is just brutal. He's wiped me out a couple times. I'll pick myself up off the floor and say, "Hey, you can have the point, I really don't care about it."

T&FN: *Are you tailoring your training this year?*

Paige: Hopefully I'll be training more for the mile this year if my training goes well; my feet and legs stay healthy. I'm trying to think as a miler. And if things don't go well I can always drop back down to the half.

T&FN: *How do you explain your spotty success in the mile since the '79 NCAA?*

Paige: I think I started feeling more the half-miler and I think Jumbo sensed that. That's why we decided to go in the half. It's an easy race compared to the mile.

This year I'm going to try to go back up to that mile because it's more demanding. I think it's a bigger challenge to the human body. And it's something that I really want to pursue. That's the big event and I want to be the best miler there is. □

Donald James Paige was born October 31, 1956, in Syracuse, New York, and is 6-1/150. Graduated from Baldwinsville (N.Y.) High in 1975, Villanova University in 1980 and briefly attended graduate school at Drexel. Major titles: NCAA Indoor 1000 ('78, '79, '80), TAC Indoor 1000 ('82), NCAA Outdoor 800 ('79, '80), NCAA Outdoor 1500 ('79), Pan-Am Games 1500 ('79), Olympic Trials 800 ('80). His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Affil	800	1000yi	1500
1974	NY HS	1:56.6y	2:16.7	4:11.4y
1975	"	1:51.8y	2:12.4	4:11.1y
1976	Vill inj	1:49.6r		4:01.6yir
1977	"	1:50.1r	2:08.3	4:06.1y
1978	"	1:47.6	2:07.9	3:38.7 (x,4)
1979	"	1:45.6 (7,2)	2:05.3	3:37.4 (7,2)
1980	"	1:44.53 (1,1)	2:05.8	3:38.96 (x,6)
1981	AA inj	dnc	2:04.9	dnc
1982	"	1:48.6yi	2:04.7	4:06.52yio

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