

T&FN INTERVIEW

by Sieg Lindstrom

Lynn Jennings says her opponents played to her strong suit in the TAC 10,000 by accepting a pace tailored to her explosive kick. The Princeton grad knows, though, that her race will likely unfold differently in Tokyo and is dedicating 1991 to being ready for anything at the Worlds.

After winning World Cross Country titles by leading from the gun in 1990 and with a sprint finish in '91 the 31-year-old will prepare for Tokyo at home in Newmarket, New Hampshire.

She will train—with no fatiguing trips to race in Europe—coached by John Babington and emotionally supported by her fiancé, Dave Hill.

Hill first entered Jennings' life as the UPS driver who delivered her shipments of Nike shoes. He sat by her side in the stands at TAC as we watched the meet's final day and talked.

T&FN: Thursday night you had cool weather, some wind. Do you think it might have been a good time to go for a fast time?

Jennings: No, not really. I figure the fast times come in the important venues. Certainly this is an important meet and I was fit enough maybe. . . I don't even want to get into the if, if, if. I don't play that game. But mostly I just figure I'll run fast when it counts, and that's in Tokyo. I ran a 63-second last quarter and I had plenty of gas and I felt very, very relaxed the whole way. That's nice to know.

It's sort of a new event for me. I haven't run it since Seoul.

T&FN: You finished 6th at 10K in both Rome and Seoul yet you call it a new event?

Jennings: That's the way I look at it. I have a coach, I'm a different athlete than I was in '88 in a lot of ways: more confident and just I have more tools than I did in '88.

T&FN: After Seoul, PattiSue Plumer said training at the Chiba training center felt like working out in a fishbowl. Did that experience affect you?

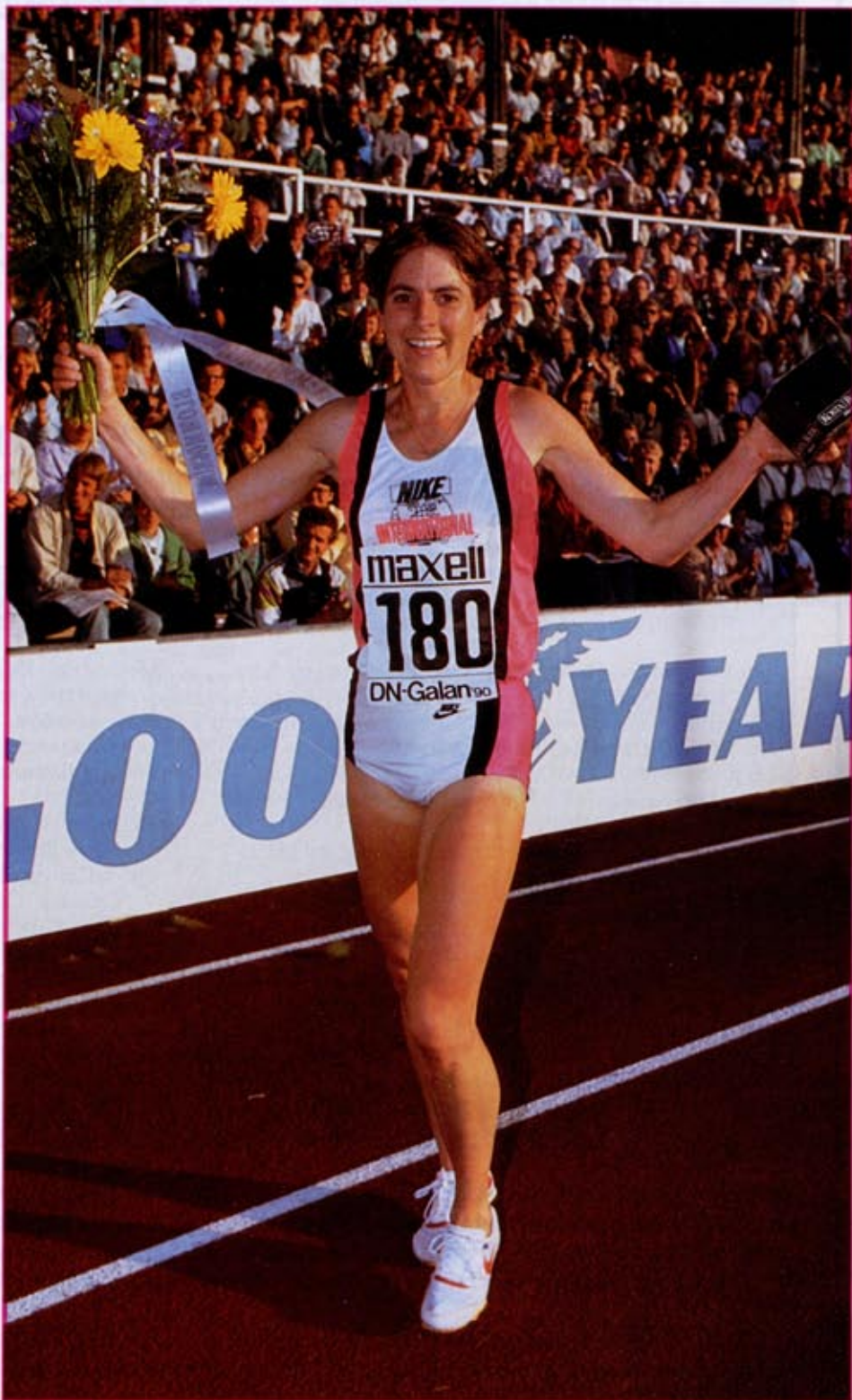
Jennings: That track was kind of neat because there were trees on the infield but then there was a building nearby that was glass-enclosed on the top and there was a health club up there. You could perch up there behind the glass with a watch if you wanted to and time what other people were doing.

T&FN: Did you do that?

Jennings: Never. I never did it. I stayed away from the glass area.

It was a little intimidating. Someone would come down to the meal room and say, "Ohmigod, I saw Liz McColgan on the track doing this, this, this and this."

LYNN JENNINGS



ALLSPORT/Mike Powell

I was like, "Don't talk to me." I was a self-coached athlete and it was pretty darn stressful doing that whole thing solo. I wouldn't want to do that again.

T&FN: *How did you make your decision to run the 10K in Tokyo and Barcelona?*

Jennings: We contemplated running the 3 but, having not run the 10K since Seoul, I didn't want to show up in '92 at the Trials with only one 10K under my belt since '88. It's an event that maybe some people can waltz into, but I can't. I need to get a few under my belt.

T&FN: *Some distance runners consider 25 laps to be a near-eternity. How do you break it up in your mind?*

Jennings: I don't really break it up. To me it's just an exercise in complete concentration and willpower and determination. You can't fall asleep. That was my fatal flaw in '87 and '88. I let races get away from me and I wasn't a completely put-together athlete mentally.

Even look at the way the times were. There was always a big gap between the top three or four and where I placed. That's because in a distance race you have to make a decision whether you're going to go when everybody else goes, or if you're going to make a move, or if you're going to sit back.

And both times, '87 and '88, I didn't make that decision; I just sat there. I've got a great finish but it's ridiculous trying to make up for something you should have made up for 8 or 10 laps earlier. And that doesn't happen to me anymore.

T&FN: *At 17, you told Bob Sevene over pizza that you would be the best distance runner in the world when you were 30. Why did you pick a date so far into your future?*

Jennings: Somehow, subconsciously, I think I realized that my Princeton years would be difficult. I don't know exactly why, but I came from this sheltered, quiet background and was thrust into this competitive, cosmopolitan Ivy League experience and had a lot of other things to figure out about myself before I could even put all the running things together, and that's what happened.

T&FN: *Marion Jones nearly made the team today in the 200 at age 15. When you were about that age you too were running against the best in the country. Do you have any advice for track prodigies?*

Jennings: I could write a book on it probably. Mostly I think you have to proceed, you have to go to college, you have to grow up as an individual and hope that the track development follows.

There may be years when the track

development lags behind—that certainly was my experience—but I have a very strong family and my parents were very instrumental. They kept their faith in me and I think mostly you just have to grow up as a person.

I mean I was a superstar as a young kid and so I grew up in. . . not in the

"We're doing things people have never done before."

public eye. That's more of a Mary Slaney type situation, but I certainly grew up with a lot of people saying, "Whatever happened to Lynn Jennings?"

I get a lot of people who write to me, or call me up, or even at a meet like this, say, "It's so good to see you running well." And that's a boost; it's a very nice feeling.

T&FN: *It's also pretty nice to see Francie Larrieu Smith running so well at 38.*

Jennings: Absolutely. Very inspirational. And when you think about the fact that the book is still being written on women's distance running—we're doing things that people have never done before—Francie's really being the leader.

I like the way she does it too. Not too many road races. Keeping touch with her leg speed on the track, the basics of all excellence comes from the track; I love that.

T&FN: *Attitudes toward women athletes have progressed but this winter I saw some high school guys get shocked when Plumer went flying by them on the last lap of an all-comers 800.*

Jennings: I think there are still a lot of people out there—I'm not going to say men or women, it's both—who maybe don't quite realize how fast women are running now. We're running pretty quick and we're getting faster. Even some of the people I've met the last couple of years don't quite understand I've run a 4:24 mile or how fast that is really. Or even how fast a 31:00 10K is. Not because they think women can't do it, but because they're just not plugged in.

In a way I hated to see in the 800 today all the women take a dive and fall on the track because it was so brutal out there. The cameras were right on them, and I hate that because it sort of

perpetuates this feeling that women fall down after races.

T&FN: *I just saw it as an awesome race.*

Jennings: It was an incredible race but then the cameras are right on top of these women lying prostrate on the track. I hate to see the wrong images being sent out. They should be focusing on this incredible duel, showing recaps of the last 50 meters.

T&FN: *Races don't get any better than that 800. If people see that negatively. . .*

Jennings: . . . That's their mindset.

T&FN: *This sport, not just for women, is quite different from when you started, no?*

Jennings: That's right. But not that different. Even though there's money to be earned in the sport and my position in the sport may be different, I still run for the same reason, which is quality of athletic performance, excellence.

A lot of people have come up to me at this meet and said, "Gee, you put on a pretty nice face after that Nike 8K race"—I missed a \$25,000 bonus by 2 seconds. Both Craig Masback and Marty Liquori said to me, "Really, how did you feel about that?"

I said, "Really, that's how I felt: I didn't really care." I ran a nice fast time, beat a lot of good people. Money always comes in the back door. You've got to run fast first and it comes. □

Lynn A. Jennings was born July 1, 1960, in Princeton, New Jersey, and is 5-5/110. A graduate of Bromfield High School ('78) in Harvard, Massachusetts, Jennings graduated in 1983 from Princeton University with a degree in history. As a high school senior, she set indoor prep records at 1500 and 2M. Currently represents Nike International.

PRs (with positions on all-time U.S. lists): 800—2:06.54 ('86); 1500—4:06.4 ('90) (=16); Mile—4:24.14 ('90) (4); 2000—5:49.81 ('90); 3000—8:40.45i ('90) (4); 5000—15:07.92 ('90) (4); 10,000—31:39.93 ('88) (3).

Placings in major 10,000s: 3)TAC ('85); 1)TAC, 6)WC ('87); 3)OT, 6)OG ('88); 1)TAC ('91).

Progression (World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Yr	1500	3000	10,000
'75	5:01.4y	—	—
'76	4:27.4	—	—
'77	4:18.06 (x, 8)	—	—
'78	4:18.9i	—	—
'79	—	9:51.2	—
'80-'81	injured—did not compete		
'82	4:51.9	9:35.6	—
'83	4:44.79y	9:01.44	—
'84	—	9:45.4	—
'85	4:16.81	8:49.86 (x, 5)	32:03.37 (9, 4)
'86	4:10.87 (x, 6)	9:08.59 (x, 6)	—
'87	4:12.51 (x, 10)	8:49.23 (x, 2)	31:45.43 (6, 1)
'88	—	8:48.19 (x, 5)	31:39.93 (7, 2)
'89	—	9:15.74 (x, 9)	—
'90	4:06.4 (x, 2)	8:40.45i (4, 2)	—
'91	4:15.31	—	32:16.25