

Marcus O'Sullivan has been the scourge of the indoor mile for three years now. But it's not enough. Not when there are worlds to conquer outdoors; not as long as there remain critics: fans and athletes who pass off the 1987 World Indoor Champion at 1500 as just another indoor runner.

Various circumstances have diminished the quality of O'Sullivan's outdoor racing for two years. In 1986, it was an emotional letdown after reaching the top of the indoor heap for the first time. Last year, it was stomach ailments brought about by medication he was taking for a sciatic nerve condition in his left leg.

But a new attitude is emerging now—one with greater confidence, both in his abilities on the track and in understanding what he must do on the way to the track. A relaxed 3:50.94 mile in this winter's Olympic Invitational showed him that indeed he can run with the fast guys.

Marcus lives with Mary, his wife of two years, who is expecting their first child in mid-June. Villanova alumni both, they own a modest house on the Philadelphia Main Line, where we talked—with the accompaniment of tea and cakes—about things past and things to come:

T & FN: What does an amateur athlete tell the bank on a mortgage application?

O'Sullivan: Good question. I had a lot of trouble getting this house. It's very hard to convince a mortgage company that you're a full-fledged professional athlete because you're really not. Basically I'm very fortunate that my wife had a fairly good income. And a substantial deposit in the bank—combined with my wife having babysat for two or three years for the mortgage company owner—that helped a lot.

T & FN: Last year you won the first World Indoor Championship in the 1500 and this year you ran 3:50.94. What's the most significant race you've ever run?

O'Sullivan: It's a race that sticks out in my mind, but to other people it wouldn't—the Penn Relays 4 x 1500 of 1984. There were a lot of other variables involved that summer because the Olympic team was a priority. That was very important in terms of getting my contract with New Balance. Keeping everything in perspective, I think I'd

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suffered a tremendous humiliation the year before where we had lost everything. It was just a complete disaster. And that was a massive turning point for me.

From there I trained so hard that year. I gave up a lot of things. It's like you chip away at a rock and if you chip away long enough a big chunk of the rock comes off. And that's the way I look at that year. You can't do things half-heartedly.

T&FN: Now that your career is on a steady upswing, what's been the biggest race since?

O'Sullivan: I guess in terms of reputation it had to have been the Meadowlands of this year. It's another turning point in terms of respectability from other athletes, I think. I've been running 3:56s indoors for three years now and I managed to win a lot of races with that type of time. I'm not the type that takes the race by the scruff of the neck and works at it. So I guess there were a lot of people who believed, "Well, he's winning, but 3:56. There's nobody around that can run any faster than that at the moment." And I think what I probably ended up proving is that all the time I probably could have run 3:51-3:52 had I had to do it.

T&FN: Do you think perhaps it was more a matter of gaining your own self-respect than gaining other athletes' respect?

O'Sullivan: There is. I got to the stage where, "I don't think I can run 3:50." And Tom Donnelly, who I'm very close with in terms of training, would say, "I know you can run 3:50, I know you can run faster. I don't know why you don't think that." I guess that's only one part of it, gaining a little more self-respect from the other athletes, but also the self-confidence that I had been lacking.

It's something that you don't want to make public because you don't want to tell anyone that you're lacking in self-confidence, not when it comes to the race. You have to show the other athletes that you are confident, but at the same time you have to be wary. Always beware no matter how good you are because there's always somebody there.

T&FN: How do you reign yourself in and avoid overracing on the European circuit this year when there's all that money at stake?

O'Sullivan: This is one of those years when the circuit is like fool's gold.

I have no interest in money this summer. I'm not greedy in that regard. I want to pick the races that are going to be more beneficial to me for the Olympics.

T&FN: What do you feel you have to be able to run in an ideal 1500 in order to medal in Seoul?

O'Sullivan: It's not so much the time. A reasonable time is good enough: the low 3:50s for a mile. It just comes down to how good you feel when you do it. In the 3:50 mile at the Olympic meet, I felt so comfortable, it was mind-boggling.

If I had been all out from the very beginning, I probably would have considered, "Well, 3:50. I've never run as hard as I have tonight and that's probably that." But I walked away wondering how much more was there.

T&FN: Going into the Olympics, do you want to know how much more is there?

O'Sullivan: I want to know there's a little more that I haven't explored. At the same time--and it goes hand in hand--I want to know that I haven't shown everything yet to everybody else.

T&FN: But when you don't know how much more is there, how do you gauge how hard to go and how soon?

O'Sullivan: That's the difference between winning and losing. It's almost like a game of poker. You don't know what everyone else has got, either. You ride it along and you wait for the cards to unfold. And everyone, sooner or later, will show all their cards.

I think I have to wait as long as I can. I think if they go with 500 left, everyone else will follow. And it's a matter of holding on comfortably and then having a little bit left at the end.

But it may not go like that. It's dangerous to predict what the race is going to be like because then what happens is, you're not ready for the unexpected. It could be some guy in the field saying, "To hell with you. I'm going from the beginning. You either come or you don't come."

T&FN: Do you plan to finish your career as a 1500 runner, or will you move up?

O'Sullivan: I have no reservations about saying I'm going to move up. I'll see how the Olympics go this year in the 1500. But I'm considering moving up in the next two years. I'm 26 now and I'll be 28 then, and I want to have a couple

of good years left for the 1500.

So the World Championships in '91 looks like a 5000 meet. I mean, when you move up you don't cut your ties with running miles. I'll run just as many miles. It's just that I'll prepare a little differently.

T&FN: What was the most significant thing you learned at Villanova?

O'Sullivan: When we trained for the indoor season of 1981--and that was the only time Jumbo Elliott was alive for me--we'd run our quarters and then we'd jog. And we had a tendency not to jog with the Don Paiges and Sydney Marees and any of the upperclassmen who were considered quality milers. And I always remember Jumbo made the point, "How the hell are you ever going to become great if you're not going to associate yourself with great milers?"

It actually became a discussion one time when he was bawling me out because I wasn't jogging with them. And he said, "You know, I don't care what you do in the quarters with them or how far you stay out behind. But the least you can do--and I know you can do it--is jog with them. And that's a step in the right direction."

Jumbo had this philosophy that if you're not going to think great, you're not going to become great. And I guess I haven't learned it fully yet. But I'm learning it. I learned a lot in that six-month time I had with him. Jumbo gave me the insight into myself that I still have.

He said I would be a great miler--of some sort.

Marcus O'Sullivan was born December 22, 1961, in Cork, Ireland, and is 5-9/134. He graduated from Colaiste Christ High School in Cork in 1980, and from Villanova University in 1984, where he earned a degree in accounting. He now competes for the New Balance Track Club.

O'Sullivan stands at No. 2 on the all-time indoor mile list with his 3:50.94 from the Vitalis Olympic Invitational. His 3:35.4 split from that race is superior to the World Indoor Record for 1500m, but is not acceptable for record purposes. His other PRs: 800--1:45.87 '85; 1000--2:19.15 '87; 3000--7:50.09 '86; 5000--13:29.21 '86.

His progression (as yet, has not World Ranked):

Year	Age	1500	Mile	Major Meets
'80	18	3:47.7	—	
'81f	19	3:48.5	4:03.0i	
'82s	20	3:42.7	4:00.1	8)NC
'83j	21	3:43.2	3:56.65	11)NC
'84S	22	3:37.40	3:55.82	2)NC, 9s)OG
'85	23	3:37.20	3:52.65	
'86	24	3:35.76	3:53.55	6)EuroCh.
'87	25	3:36.7	3:52.76	1)WIC; 7s)WC
'88	26	3:35.4i	3:50.94i	