

MARTY LIQUORI

by Tom Jordan

As he lounged in his cousin's livingroom in Fremont, California, before the Examiner Games, a sheaf of television "homework" in front of him, Marty Liquori looked more like a rising young businessman than one of the world's best milers. In fact, the serious, softspoken Liquori is a businessman with interests in six Florida shoe stores in addition to his job with ABC as a color-and anchorman—a long way from the "brash young kid" of newspaper legend who was billed as the wunderkind successor to Jim Ryun.

Liquori's "first" career was indeed phenomenal: Second prep to break four minutes in the mile, Olympian at 18, NCAA and AAU champion for Villanova, victor over Ryun in the "Dream Mile" matchup in '71, and a strong favorite for a medal in Munich.

Then came a debilitating foot injury and the painful decision to forego an Olympic shot and let the foot heal. After fading briefly into the background, Liquori made a strong comeback indoors in '74, with several sub-four mile performances, but found himself losing to people going even faster. Outdoors, Marty took to the longer distances, recording personal best times in the 5000 (13:40.6) and 3M (13:19.0), as well as a respectable non-winning 3:56.6 mile.

This year, Marty has changed his racing philosophy a bit and coincidentally started the '75 season off with his best-ever indoor mark (3:57.7) in the CYO meet.

T&FN: How about your 3:57.7; were you going all out?

Liquori: Well, you don't go out in the first race of the year and try and run your best time of the year, so I was kind of easing up because I wasn't in real good shape yet. My hamstrings were getting a little tight; that always happens to me in the first race of the year, and I'd worked out hard all week, so I eased up maybe the last half-lap. The circumstances were right.

Like, I look at those lists in *T&FN* and wonder why I'd never run a fast race indoors. . . I'd just never been in a race where the 1320 went by faster than 3:03. This was the first race where somebody went out and really set a nice even pace, and I ran well.

T&FN: Was it frustrating last year, running good times and still getting beaten?

Liquori: Yeah, it was indoors, because I was running times which were far superior to anything I had done any other year, but I was losing. That was another thing this year, I decided not to go after the record, not get infatuated with four-minute miles.

In both the races I lost to Waldrop, [last year], I set the race up. I went out and set the pace, because I wanted to break four minutes and I didn't know who Waldrop was. The only time you go out and set the pace is when you're pretty sure you're going to win the race. This year, like in LA, I didn't care whether I ran 4:10 or 4:05. I just wanted to win.

For years I was a racer and I ran against people, and then last year I tried to run against the clock and I'm not that kind of guy.

T&FN: What do you think of the current crop of milers, Cummings, Waldrop and so on?

Liquori: Well, I like Cummings, and not just because of what happened in LA [both timed in 4:05.0]. I thought last year at the NCAA that he was the toughest young miler in the country and probably the most consistent.

I think Byers has a lot of talent. I think that Len Hilton is overlooked by a lot of people. I don't even want to think what's it's going to be like at the Trials, because we've got so many good guys that could be good. . . And like Rick Wohlhuter could decide to run the 1500 and change the complexion of everything.

T&FN: Then you're pointing towards Montreal?

Liquori: Well, yeah, I'm starting to get serious and I'm training with thoughts of Montreal now. But I don't really rule out the possibility of turning pro. It's not a real big thing with me anymore.

T&FN: Stores, working for ABC, running 15 miles a day. . . how much sleep do you get?

Liquori: I've been sleeping about 10-11 hours a night. None of my jobs are 9-5 and I make my own hours. The problem is that when I do have to work, I'll have to work 24 hours straight.

T&FN: What does your wife think of all this?

Liquori: She enjoys the stores. The only thing she really dislikes is all the traveling, which is one of the reasons I'm not working with ITA anymore, because of all the traveling. Like one year there, I wasn't home one weekend between June and September. So I've cut down and was home almost the whole fall this year.

T&FN: What kind of training are you doing now?

Liquori: My training this year has been a lot easier than in the past couple of years, down to around 90 to 100 miles per week.

For the past two years, I've been training for the longer distances. I was bored with the mile, I was living in the distance capital of the country [Gainesville], and I was doing 18-20 miles a day. This year I decided to come back and run the mile. More track training and less distance, and I'm starting to get some of the speed back.

I don't regret running the distances. I had an 8:25 two mile and my best 5000 in '74 and that was my goal. But this year and next year, I want to start running the 1500 again, because I honestly don't think that I could win a medal in the 5000 in Montreal. To beat Foster and those kind of guys you have to train three times a day and go to altitude and that's not sport.

T&FN: Did you start running distance because you couldn't do as much speed work after your heel operation in '72?

Liquori: Well, I never had it operated on. I rested it and had a few other things done to it, but never had it opened up. I still have the calcium deposits. But you're right, I couldn't go on the track more than once or twice a week and that's one of the reasons I started to do more distance.

Yeah, I think everyone thinks I had it operated on because so many doctors told me to and that was the story in the papers. But I fortunately found a doctor who didn't feel that was the way and I didn't want to go through any operation. So many people I've talked to have never come back. The scar tissue and stuff from an operation could be worse than the original problem.

T&FN: You were a senior at Villanova when you raced Ryun in Philadelphia and ran 3:54.6. Was that your biggest thrill?

Liquori: I think so. It'd be hard to top that, because we had a situation which doesn't come along very often. The whole US sporting scene was really focused on track and field on that one day. It hasn't happened since then certainly, and I'm not too sure it's going to happen too often.

I feel bad that we never had any rematches. If we could have had one a month later and run another decent race like that, we could have both become very famous and won a lot of fans for track. We could have maybe brought track to the days like when Glenn Cunningham was running. I feel bad that we didn't live up to the potential that was there for the sport.

T&FN: When someone says "Jim Ryun" what pops into your head?

Liquori: He's definitely a nice guy. I think he's put a lot into track and I feel he's gotten a lot out of it. He's making a comfortable living and seems very happy now, so no, I don't feel sorry for him.

T&FN: Does the fame bother you?

Liquori: Well, I don't think there has ever been a track athlete in this country who has had so much fame that it would bother him. I mean how can you get mad at a little kid coming up to you to ask for your autograph. There are plenty of times when I say no, like before a race.

In fact, I was warming up for a race



Don Chadez

the other day, it was *right* before the race and this kid comes up and I had to say no. And I really felt bad and I was jogging around and, finally, I had to come back and sign it, because I felt bad about it. But having people recognize me, no, that sure doesn't bother me.

T&FN: *You're self-coached; do you ever miss one?*

Liquori: No; hmm, I guess maybe I do. Most people need a coach to make them work hard; I need a coach to tell me to ease up. My problem over the past two years is that I've overworked. Sometimes I wish I had a coach to tell me, "Okay, stop working, you've done enough," because if you tell yourself that, you'll feel guilty and guilt is what keeps a lot of guys going after they should stop.

But as far as what workouts to do, it's mostly my own ideas now, ideas I've gotten from the two coaches I had. Jumbo [Elliott] gave me a lot of freedom to do my own workouts and his theory was that by the time you were a senior, you should be more or less coaching yourself.

T&FN: *Do you ever finish a workout where you're just beat?*

Liquori: About once or twice a year. Years ago, I'd be dead quite often, but now... I think Pekka Vasala made the observation that when you're in really good shape, you *can't* get beat in a workout. You'd have to be out there for 4 or 5 hours.

Jumbo's theory and my theory is that you should come off the track feeling that

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you could have done a little more, and only a couple of times a year would I push myself to do that really hard workout.

T&FN: *How was Mexico in '68?*

Liquori: I didn't really have a good time. I was really serious and worried about the competition. I had a hip problem and then in the semifinal, a fatigue fracture, so I spent most of my time under the icepacks and worrying instead of going around to the shoe companies and getting money like I should have if I was an older guy.

T&FN: *If you make the team this time, what kind of attitude will you have?*

Liquori: I'd really like to fly into the city the day before the race. I don't want to take part in the shaking hands with the Russians and all that kind of stuff, because I don't feel you can really do that and still win the 1500. You waste too much energy on that stuff. It's not fun and games and anyone who thinks it is will come back without a medal.

T&FN: *Racing now, do you have to get angry at somebody?*

Liquori: I used to, but not so much anymore. It's almost like yoga; my mind is kind of trained now. I know when it's going to start to hurt and I know exactly what the pain is going to feel like and what it's going to be like psychologically—the little battle you've got going on in your mind—and my response is sort of conditioned now. If I'm in any kind of decent shape, I'll be fairly competitive most of the time. For most races now, I don't start psyching up until I start warming up just before the race.

T&FN: *If you were up against Bayi in the Olympics, how would you run?*

Liquori: Well, I wouldn't go with him. I would just try to key off his pace and run maybe a little faster than I normally do, and then hope to catch him at the end.

No matter how far ahead he is, you can watch his back and key off it and see whether he starts to come back. If a guy has got 40 yards on me in the first half of the race, I figure I've got the same amount of distance to make up the 40 yards on him in the second half. Now if a guy starts making up on you in the second half, then you're really in trouble.

T&FN: *How about some of these other fast milers who have emerged in the last year?*

Liquori: Well, I was looking at the 1500 list for the first time in several years, and I noticed that the guys who ran all these fast times really did it in that one race; except for Walker, they all ran it at the Commonwealth Games.

Like Graham Crouch, a good friend of mine, never came close to me last year when I was in terrible shape, yet he has run 3:34.

When a guy runs 3:49 in fourth, even if I ran only 3:57 in a race that I won a continent away, I'd be confident going into a race against him... there's just so much to the game.

T&FN: *Here's a loaded question. Are you still physically capable of being the*



Mark Ferrell

No. 1 miler in the world?

Liquori: There are two parts to that: Physically, I have the potential to be better than I was, no doubt about that... especially in the longer distances. Whether John Walker or Filbert Bayi can run 3:47—I can't run 3:47; I'll *never* run 3:47—I don't know. I don't think anybody is going to run the equivalent of 3:47 at the Olympics. There's a lot of pressure there and all that, so the winning time at the Olympics I'm sure won't be out of my range, timewise.

T&FN: *What effect did not going to Munich have on you?*

Liquori: Tremendous. It's changed my life, and I wouldn't change a bit of it if I could. I don't know who is up there watching me but because of my injury, I ended up being a commentator, which was on my mind for a long time.

After I saw what the job was like, I changed my mind about going to Villanova Law School and went down to Florida instead. And just for something to do and because the town needed a store so bad that catered to the track and field people, I opened one up with Jimmy [Carnes] as a partner.

If I'd run at Munich and won, I probably would have gone on to Law School and would be living in Pennsylvania. Things would be a lot different.

It'll be 10 or 15 years before I know whether it was a good break or a bad break, but right now I'm happy with it. I don't regret not getting the gold medal. □