

T&FN INTERVIEW

Regina Jacobs

by Sieg Lindstrom

Regina Jacobs has been on top of the U.S. women's mile scene before. She won national titles in '87 and '89 and the Olympic Trials in '92, but she has never run a full season at the top. Prior to this year, she'd never even really run a full season, period. When she reached the World Championships in '87 and the Olympics in '88 and '92, she made it past the first round just once (finishing 12th in her Barcelona semi), despite her readily apparent abilities as a kicker.

Running, certainly, was not always the Stanford grad's top priority. She worked long hours on an MBA project, for example, throughout the spring in which she was training for Barcelona. Jacobs' troubles ran deeper, though, and a phrase commonly used to describe her was "head case."

Few who had watched her run believed her world level failures could be physical, and even her coach, Tom Craig, was perplexed when he first began working with Jacobs in 1992. "After about four weeks, I realized I had the most talented middle distance runner in the country, by far," he says. "She had tools and skills I'd never seen." Still, he wondered why she so frequently couldn't even handle minimal training volumes and paces.

Jacobs finished dead last in the USATF final in '93, but even in no-pressure Berkeley all-comers meets, racing "43-year-old men," she sometimes fell apart. Only then did a hematologist discover her blood iron levels to be so chronically low it was as if she had "a Pac Man inside her gobbling up all the iron." With iron supplements, Jacobs turned the corner, hitting 100M weeks in training in '94, winning at USATF and putting together a 15-race summer season in which she hit some lows but always rebounded with good races afterwards.

We caught up to Jacobs and Craig over lunch and a beer when she returned to her Berkeley-area home after winning the 5th Avenue Mile.

T&FN: *After learning there was a physical reason for your inconsistency over the years, and correcting it, what did you want to accomplish this season?*

Jacobs: *I really wanted to get in a real European season, and I think I thought I could do a little bit more than was realistic. I asked for a lot of races, and then when I got over there and learned all that that entailed, it was kind of crazy.*

T&FN: *Was there any factor besides your improved health that suddenly turned Regina Jacobs, known for running maybe 5 races a year, to the '94 Regina who ran 21?*

Craig: *One thing Regina's manager had said was, "Don't back out of races because you haven't been on the circuit for a long time and you've never done a full circuit."*

Jacobs: *I had to kind of prove myself.*

Craig: *He told us, "Show them, show these guys that you're not just a U.S. racer, that you're a European racer." So that was a big goal, to say, "I'm tough, I can take the downs and the highs. Just because I get whipped one race doesn't mean I'm going to tuck my tail and go home."*

So we over-raced. She was a little tired, and the speedwork we were doing didn't show up until she could get a big clump of rest. She did that after Oslo.

T&FN: *It was after Oslo, in Monaco, that you ran your fastest 1500 since 1988, kicking 43.1 for the last 300 to go from 11th to 3rd. What was your reaction to that?*

Jacobs: *I watched the race on TV and I was not in the picture at all.*



ALLSPORT/Tony Duffy

Then with about 250m to go—whoop!—it was really funny. I kind of surprised myself. I was in the race and the pace was pretty good, even way back there in 11th place. I was sitting back there thinking, "Maybe I didn't rest enough in Oslo." Then I'd hear the splits and, God, they were flying up there. I had already decided at 300 I was going to kick. It was just like, I should have started at 400 because I felt great. There just wasn't enough. . .

Craig: *She ran out of real estate. The managers that called me said, "Why did you have her back so far?" I said, "I didn't say to go back that far. I just said to relax in the middle of the pack." But they said she just ran out of real estate, she wasn't dying the last 50, she was accelerating.*

T&FN: *Sounds like you may have learned something about racing from*

that?

Craig: It is so ironic, that at age 31 Regina is doing things that a talented 24-year-old should be doing in Europe, and that is experimenting with what the limits are. And we even had to do that this year in the training. This is the first time that she was physiologically, systemically correct so she could do proper training. She'd never properly trained.

Jacobs: Tom laughed when he looked at my training logs. He'd say, "You did this off of this?"

T&FN: What was this?

Craig: She did heavy intervals and then she'd rest. Can you imagine, resting for 4-5 months, iron levels build again, then the coaches say, "She'll never handle mileage, how can we get her ready? Intervals." So they'd go 3-4 months and that would get her her time.

Jacobs: So I'd never get a good base.

Craig: And her iron would tumble. Then everyone would go, "That Jacobs, what a head case. What a disappointment."

T&FN: It may not be entirely logical, but I think people say things like that partially out of frustration. If they've seen you looking like a million bucks in winning the Trials, they can't believe the same athlete wouldn't have it again a month or two later. How do you explain it?

Jacobs: I was kind of like a match instead of a candle. Basically I would do a lot of interval stuff and I would get myself focused for that one race and I could handle that because I would be pretty rested, I'd be in really great speed shape, and I have natural endurance. I could go out and really finesse a 1500. But in terms of putting together a whole season, I couldn't do it.

T&FN: Hence the learning you're doing now. Have you had any help in this regard?

Craig: It's really fascinating to see how during the European season so many managers and athletes embraced Regina, and me, and really helped us. Because we're going over there without a road map.

As a matter of fact, any U.S. female middle distance runner wanting to go over and be a star over in Europe has no road map. Mary [Slaney] stole the map when she was young—this is not a putdown of Mary, but she stole the map.

T&FN: What do you mean by that?

Craig: Mary was running so fast. No kids really knew how to approach and touch her, find the magic, find the gold and run at that level and bring others up. So we had this huge vacuum. That's how I look at it.

T&FN: So how are you learning the map, as it were?

Jacobs: There's a real camaraderie between a lot of the women in Europe. I was, frankly, shocked, because in the U.S. there's not the same camaraderie, and I don't really know why. Like you see the mile guys hang

Hamilton Finds Her Map

If, as Regina Jacobs' coach, Tom Craig, says, "the map" to world class middle distance success was lost to American women when Mary Slaney rose as such a young runner to a level unapproachable by her domestic competition in the late '70s and early '80s, one man who certainly knows at least a good portion of the map is Dick Brown, Slaney's coach during some of her most successful years.

It is Brown, too, who is guiding the resurgence of 10-time NCAA champion Suzy Hamilton, who finished 2nd to Jacobs at the nationals then put together a string of nine strong European races including a PR 800 (1:59.02) in Zürich and a near-PR 1500 (4:04:57) to finish 2nd at the Great Britain-U.S. dual.

"After college I went through a lot of changes—getting married and moving and not really having a coach," says the 26-year-old Hamilton, who initially after college followed her law-school-bound husband, Mark, to Malibu, California. "For the last year, when I moved up to Oregon [to work with Brown in March, 1993], I decided this is what I really want to do, I want to give it everything I have."

out together and warm down together. There isn't that among the U.S. women.

What I've found going over to Europe is—with the exception of the Russians because their English isn't all that good—it definitely exists with all the women. I'll hang out with them before the race.

Once we get to the track, it's serious, we have our own thing to do. Then afterwards, a lot of us will warm down together. There's an opportunity to learn from each other and to really get in and have good races too, because there's sort of a kind of fun about it, like "I'm going to get you tonight, ha-ha-ha-ha." I think that's something that men learn more when they're younger because competition is play. I think that I'm learning that a lot more over in Europe.

T&FN: Is there any runner who has particularly helped you?

Craig: Hassiba Boulmerka helped her. Hassiba was saying, "No, no, Regina, only do 11 or 12 races, rest more, make a training camp."

Jacobs: I kind of feel like I have more of a camaraderie with her. There's a real connection there.

In Barcelona, after the semi, I was so disappointed, I was totally blown out. I was just sitting on the bench, Tom was sitting there with me, I was just stunned. And Hassiba came up—her English wasn't as good then as it is now—and she said, "Regina, are you OK, are you OK?"

I said, "Yeah, I'm OK," and she said, "OK, good," then she walked away. I didn't even know her that well.

Craig: She was the only athlete, and the

Hamilton's '94 indoor season was rocky—she stopped a lap too soon in a mile at the Mobil 1 Invitational and collided with another runner at the nationals only to end up unceremoniously potted in some track-side plants. Her aim was to run well outdoors, though, and Hamilton and Brown set up a European schedule early, in February.

"It was unusual," admits Brown, "but the meet promoters understood what we were trying to do, and they appreciated our approach. And we appreciated the fact that they were willing to have some faith in her."

Hamilton also rented an apartment in Germany so she could limit her racing and avoid jet-lagging trips back home. Her experience in doing so would seem to constitute the beginnings of "a map."

"If I want to get better and compete at the international level and be competitive," Hamilton says, "I need to be over there and tough it out and compete with those people. That's something that's made me a lot stronger now." /SL/

only person, that came up to Regina after the race. I thought, because I was watching more dispassionately, the concern was woman to woman and champion to champion. You know how talent recognizes talent? I think Hassiba expected her to be there in the race. She was really concerned, out of just fair competition and wanting to have good competition.

T&FN: Well, you certainly gave her that in beating her at the USA-Africa meet this summer.

Jacobs: That was a great race. I think it really typified both of our spirits. We're both real fighters and neither one of us was going to give up—two of the best kickers in the world. The race was kind of lulling and I felt like she was controlling it. I thought, "No way, this is not going to work," so I kicked at 450.

I knew she's not going to give up, this is going to be a fight. So it was kind of like I threw down the first handkerchief, "Let's get going." When she came up on me and passed me it was like, "OK, let's go." She threw down her handkerchief and then we were fighting.

T&FN: Is she still your friend after that?

Jacobs: She came up and gave me her hand and congratulated me; she's just a sweet person. And when she wins, she likes to kind of slap hands, so I go up and slap hands with her.

Craig: I think some people get turned off by her because she's so strong. Men think of it as aggressive and macho. What she is, I think, is the most competitive middle distance runner in the world, bar none.

Jacobs: I think she's competitive and emotionally expressive, and I think it's really

JACOBS — cont:

hard for people. People like their athletes humble. . . so they say.

T&FN: *Isn't there a gender bias, though? They particularly want women athletes to be humble.*

Jacobs: Yeah, and Hassiba's not that way. It's OK for men to celebrate their victories however they see fit. I know a lot of people were angry with her in Zürich when she turned around on the field and kind of went like that [Jacobs pantomimes a post-touchdown victory shimmy]. I thought it was great. If more people expressed how they felt after the race—the celebration—I think it really would pick the sport up.

T&FN: *So, any general conclusions after getting to know Boulmerka and the Europeans?*

Jacobs: I found out they are really training. I felt like a pretender out there. My God! I quit complaining. It was really scary. I'd have them tell me what they did, and I'd think, "I'm racing with them and they did what?!"

Craig: I kept telling Regina, "They really do that much volume,

they really work that intensity. Yes, you can handle it, trust it. If you're healthy, you can do this. It's about your mind handling it."

T&FN: *Do you reflect much on the past then as you look forward, having gained full health and at least part of "the map"?*

Jacobs: People ask me what about the World Championships in '87 and the Olympics in '88 and '92. I used to make a lot of excuses because I was young. I felt, "I have to explain myself."

I'm at the point now where it doesn't even really matter why that happened, how it happened. All I know is that right now I feel great.

I'm really excited about my running, I'm really having fun. I just hope that my performances in the next couple of years can bring U.S. women's middle distance running back to where it should be. Because, let's face it, it's not where it used to be.

I don't see any younger women coming up and kind of meeting this. I hope that people look forward to what I can do and to what it says they can do too.

JACOBS IN A NUTSHELL

Regina M. Jacobs was born August 28, 1963, in Los Angeles, and is 5-6/112. Graduated from Argyll Episcopal Academy in North Hollywood, California, in '81.

PRs (with all-time list positions in parentheses): 800—1:59.36 ('87); 1000—2:35.08 ('94) (3, 4 A); 1500—4:00.46 ('88) (3, x A); Mile—4:27.28 ('94); 2000—5:38.52 ('94) (3, 5 A); 3000—9:01.2 ('87).

Major Meets: 800—7)US Jr ('79); 5h)OT ('80); dq)US Jr ('81); 4)NCAA, 8)US ('82); 2h)NCAA ('83); 6h)NCAA ('84); 7s)US ('90).

1500—dq)US Jr ('81); 14)NCAA, 6)US ('83); 10h)NCAA, 10)OT ('84); 6)NCAA, 9h)US ('85); 12)US ('86); 1)US, 7h)WC ('87); 2)OT, 11h)OG ('88); 1)US, 9)WCp ('89); 1)OT, 12s)OG ('92); 11)US ('93); 1)US ('94).

Progression (U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Yr	Age	Affiliation	800	1500	3000
'77	13/14	CaJHS	2:13.2y	—	—
'78	14/15	CaHS Fr	2:10.0	—	—
'79	15/16	CaHS So	2:10.34	—	—
'80	16/17	CaHS Jr	2:07.7	4:32.6	9:52.5
'81	17/18	CaHS Sr	2:06.47	4:25.0	—
'82	18/19	Stanford Fr	2:04.38	—	—
'83	19/20	Stanford So	2:05.18	4:13.09	—
'84	20/21	Stanford Jr	2:07.08	4:11.33	—
'85	21/22	Stanford Sr	2:05.8	4:15.41	—
'86	22/23	Mizuno	2:02.05	4:02.6 (8)	9:12.5
'87	23/24	Mizuno	1:59.36	4:03.70 (3)	9:01.2
'88	24/25	Mizuno	2:01.13 (10)	4:00.46 (3)	9:14.63
'89	25/26	Mizuno	2:02.42	4:10.91 (4)	9:01.73 (6)
'90	26/27	Mizuno	2:06.83	—	—
'91	27/28	Mizuno	—	—	—
'92	28/29	Mizuno	2:01.88 (9)	4:03.72 (2)	—
'93	29/30	Mizuno	2:05.7	4:15.71	—
'94	30/31	Mizuno	1:59.98	4:02.15	—

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