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from the editor

E. Gary Hill

THEY SAY YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST. No matter what it is. But then again, having always been a dedicated stats wonk, I'm shocked to say—in an issue where we're celebrating the sub-4:00 mile—that I can't remember what the first such race was I saw in person.

What I do remember is the only mile race that ever made me cry, which was when my best college friend, Washington State teammate Rick Riley, became the 32nd American ever to break 4:00, scoring a shocking 1970 Pac-8 win at UCLA (see p. 13 for picture). In looking back at results from the era, though, I was surprised to find that that same race was indeed my first.

Stats got trumped by friendship.

Speaking of miles generating emotion, I think the loudest roar I've ever heard drawn

from a crowd (non-bowl stadium division) was that for Alan Webb chasing down Jim Ryun's High School Record at the Pre Classic in '01.

There's just no end to the memories that the classic mile distance can dredge up for the longtime fan, as we prove in this every-10-years celebration of sub-fouring in our pages.

It's no coincidence, I think, that the country's most popular indoor (Millrose Games) and outdoor (Pre) meets have the mile as their big finale. You've got to love the hush that comes over the crowd just before the Wanamaker Mile and the Bowerman Mile are introduced. It's great spine-tingly stuff.

Of course, the rest of the world basically doesn't speak mile (that's OK, we don't speak their metric measure well either). We at *T&FN* are a little stuck in the linguistic past perhaps, but I don't think we're the only ones who tend to call 1500 runners "milers," 800 runners "halfmilers" and 400 runners "quartermilers." Just rolls off the tongue more easily somehow.

There are, of course, still lots of anachronisms that hang about. Virtually nobody uses "broad jump" and "hop, step & jump" for the long jump and triple jump anymore. But talk of runners "lunging at the tape" are still common in an era where any significant meet has auto-timing, so there is no tape. And there are many references to "stopped the watch," when of course a modern timing system isn't what one would think of as a watch.

Among the formerly popular terms that have disappeared from the lexicon are "thinclads" as a generic term for track & field athletes and "timber toppers" for hurdlers.

And how about references to old-time non-synthetic tracks? The most common phrase used is "dirt," when in reality most were either clay and/or cinders. Conversely, there are certainly many people of a certain age who refer to modern tracks as "tartan," because in the early days of synthetic, the brand name Tartan was the leader in the field.

Here's another interesting locution: more often than not, if there are heats in a race (or a qualifying round in a field event), you'll hear people say that the successful athletes qualified for the "finals." Not final, singular, but the plural. Why is that?

Similarly, why is it that so many people call the list of entries with lane assignments "heat sheets," when the more proper term would be "start lists," since there are no heats in the field events. I plead guilty to many most of these sins.

... Well, that was quite a digression, wasn't it?

10 years ago in this spot I discussed whether or not the mile or the 100 was America's favorite event, and came to the conclusion that it was probably the latter, and noted that through the years I had grown to become a huge fan of the sprint, mainly because in big meets it's so much fun to watch all the rounds, get a clue of what's going to happen in the final.

As I said then, "Now if they'd only go 4 rounds in the mile."