

Track & Field, Open

First American to Run a Sub-4 Minute Mile ...and the Most Recent

by Cynci Calvin

The Pacific Association has bragging rights to a unique pair of members. Forty years ago, in the late spring of 1957, Pacific Association athlete Don Bowden became the first American to break the 4-minute barrier in the mile. In the late spring of 1997, Pacific Association athlete Jamey Harris became the most recent American to accomplish this feat. A review of the backgrounds, the races, and the post-event lives of these two men reveals some interesting parallels.

Don Bowden

Background

Youth: Don Bowden grew up in San Jose. As a youngster he would run around "the Rose Garden" a half-mile loop in downtown San Jose, near his father's office.

High School: Lincoln HS, San Jose. Don really wanted to play football but at 6'3" and 160 lbs. his coach, Lee Cox, who coached both track and football, talked him into track. As a senior, he set a national high school record of 1:53.3 for the half-mile in 1954. He never ran the mile competitively in high school.

College: Track scholarship to UC Berkeley where he majored in Economics and ran track under Coach Brutus Hamilton. Although the 800 Meter event was his specialty, he qualified for the Olympic 1500 meter Team in 1956 in Melbourne Australia. Due to an untimely bout of mononucleosis, he didn't make it past the first heat. In 1957, he set an NCAA half-mile record.

Number of previous competitive miles run: 4; he ran an unofficial mile time in a relay of 4:01.6 in the spring of 1957, causing him and Coach Hamilton to agree he should try for the sub-4 mile at a PA-AAU meet in Stockton on June 1st.

Race Day

Age: 20

Date: June 1st, 1957

Location: Pacific Association AAU Meet, Stockton, CA

Before the race: Don was in the midst of finals and had to finish an Economics final in the early afternoon, before driving the 75 miles to Stockton. He arrived just an hour before the starting gun.

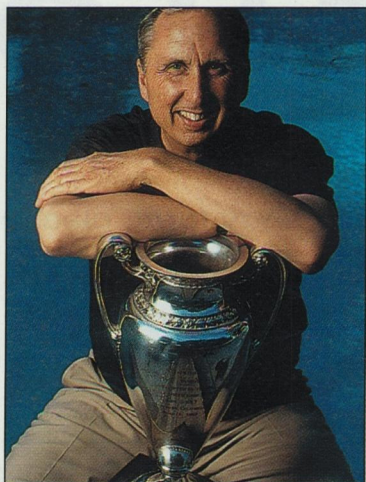
Pre-race nutrition: "Things were different in those days. We were advised to eat steak. I don't really remember what I ate that day. I was just trying to get to the meet. But whatever it was, it didn't slow me down."

Mental state before the race: "Lousy. I didn't feel much like running; I hadn't been sleeping."

The competitors: no rabbit, no competition to push him among the 5 other entrants.

The splits: 1/4 mi. - 59.7; 1/2 mi. - 2:00.8; 3/4 mi. - 3:00.6 and coach Hamilton yelled to him to "You're right on there-go!" final quarter in 58.1 seconds.

The finish: Bowden admits there was "not a very big crowd" present but the few who were there went wild as the announcer counted down the last seconds of his race.



Don Bowden today, shown with the Hans Lagerhoef trophy he received in 1956.

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Jamey Harris

Background

Youth: Jamey's early years were spent in Eugene, Oregon, where Jamey occasionally competed in an all-comers meet.

High School: Beaverton High School, Beaverton, Oregon. In his senior year, Jamey was the state cross country champion. In the spring, his 2-mile relay team set the state high school record.

College: Track scholarship to Fresno State where he trained with Coach Red Estes and majored in Exercise Science.

Number of previous competitive miles run: Jamey's emphasis was on the 1500, but he ran one mile in high school, and 8 to 10 in both college and post-college years. He came close in 1994 when he ran a 4:00.4.

Race Day

Age: 26

Date of race: May 27, 1997

Location: Angell Field at Stanford

Before the race: The 1997 indoor and outdoor season attempts had not produced a sub-4 and he had written it off for the year, planning to concentrate on training. On May 26th, he arrived at the track for a hard workout totally fatigued and his coach, Jeff Johnson, allowed him to postpone the workout until the next day. On May 27th, after working a 6-hour shift waiting tables and driving in rush hour traffic to Stanford's Angell Field, he discovered a small all-comers meet in progress. Rather than do his workout on the old, less user-friendly Stanford Stadium track, he got the OK from coach Johnson to use the mile event in the all-comers meet for his workout.

Pre-race nutrition: one Power Bar

Mental state before the race: Jamey figured running the mile was simply a good way to get his workout in without running on the older less user-friendly Stadium track. "I figure the worst that could happen is that I come through the 1000 in 2:28 and I'm halfway done with the workout." So he stripped down to his shorts and Reebok spikes. Then he grabbed a pen and wrote "Reebok Aggies" across his bare chest so, just in case, he would be an official team competitor.

The competitors: PA prep star now Stanford Freshman Michael Stember (who had rabbit Jason Lunn pacing him for a sub-4 attempt) and Kipp Ortenburger

The splits: 1/4 - 60; 1/2 mi. in 1:59; 3/4 mi. - 3:00; final quarter in 59.19; Jamey took the lead with 500 meters to go, and with 200 meters left, Dominican miler Steve Agar yelled out a 3:29 time.



Jamey Harris

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The purpose of the PA Track & Field Grand Prix is to give motivation to our Pacific Association athletes of national and international caliber, and to increase their participation in events close to home.

The events are:

Men

110 Meter Hurdles
1500 Meter Race
Hammer
Long or Triple Jump

Women

100 Meter Hurdles
1500 Meter Race
Javelin
Long or Triple Jump

There will be three placers in each event, with the overall winner receiving \$500, second \$300, and the third, \$100. Three or more meets (specified below) from within the Pacific Association can score points, and a maximum of two meets (specified below) from outside the Association can score points. Points will be doubled in value at the Pacific Association USATF Championships. A total of five meets will be used to score. The International Scoring Table will be used for calculations and to determine the prize winners.

From within the Pacific Association the following meets will score:

Sat., Mar. 21	Panther/Stam Wright Invitational
Sat.-Sun., Mar. 28-29	Stanford Invitational
Fri., May 8	Cardinal Invitational
Sat., April 16	Woody Wilson Invitational
Sat., May 9	Modesto Relays

From outside the Pacific Association, two of the following meets can be scored:

Fri.-Sat., Apr. 3-4	Bob Mathias Fresno Relays
Fri.-Sun., April 17-19	Mt. SAC Relays
Sat., May 16	adidas Oregon Invitational

1998 Open Track & Field Schedule is on page 34 & 35.

All athletes who wish to participate in the '98 Pacific Association Track & Field Grand Prix must register with Jerry Colman, Open Track & Field Chair, and must be registered as a member of the Pacific Association of USATF before participating in any of the above events in order to earn points. For more information, contact Track & Field Chair Jerry Colman, (916) 487-3175 or the Pacific Association office (916) 983-4622 FAX (916) 983-4624. Details will be FAXed or mailed to you. Be sure to leave a FAX number or address.

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Time: 3:58.7

Sub-4 min. miles run before Don's: 11, by 7 different runners

Post Race

At the time the US was suffering self-doubt thanks to Russia's launching of Sputnik. Eleven sub-4 minute miles had been run since 1954, none by an American. Don Bowden's achievement provided the nation with a surge of pride and he received instant national acclaim. He was interviewed on the Today Show. He was sent to New York to receive the Hans Lagerhoef Trophy, a trophy locked in a vault and saved specifically for the first American to break the 4 minute barrier.

Stats: 3rd fastest sub-4, the youngest sub-4, the first American sub-4.

Post sub-4 goals: to break the world record in the mile (3:58.00 held by Australian John Landy) and to compete successfully in the Olympics. Don did not achieve either, due to a torn Achilles tendon.

Post sub-4 life: After graduating from Berkeley and serving a 2-year stint in the Army, Don has worked with outdoor sports surfacing products. His first job was with the 3M Corp., where he worked with Gold medal shot putter Bill Neider to market its first synthetic track surfaces. He continues to run recreationally, and joins the West Valley Joggers & Striders for their workouts.

Giving back to the sport: Don is active with the CIF/Score program, a non-profit foundation formed by the California Interscholastic Federation to support high school athletics. He is also raising funds for a weight room at Lincoln High School, open to all students not just athletes, in memory of Coach Cox.

For information on contributing to either program or volunteering with the CIF/Score Foundation, contact Don at Tech-Tone Products, 4250 Williams Rd., San Jose, CA 95129 (408) 446-2138; fax (408) 446-1981.

Don Bowden, with his breakthrough achievement in 1957 and his ongoing support and enjoyment of the sport, and Jamey Harris, with his improving talent and fresh, youthful spirit, are fine examples of the quality of the volunteers working for the Pacific Association of USATF. People like them are helping to ensure that Track & Field sports will grow and thrive well into the 21st century.

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In Jamey's words: "With 100 to go, I can't believe I haven't tied up yet. I can't believe it's going to happen. I can't believe it's going to be this easy."

Time: 3:59.19

Sub-4 min. miles run before Jamey's: Jamey is the 217th American to run a sub-4 minute mile.

Post Race

Jamey had a night on the town driving around with sub-4 minute milers Steve Agar, Jim Howarth and Doug Consiglio in a car with a license plate reading "SUB4." The event was written up in the October, 1997 *Track & Field News* report on American sub-4 minute milers. Jamey understands that although he has not broken new ground with his sub-4, it is still "a huge lifetime achievement."

Stats: the first sub-4 minute mile on Stanford's Angell Field; the first sub-4 minute mile run by a 26-year old Beaverton High School-Fresno State grad, coached by Jeff Johnson, and now a Reebok Aggie, who ate a Power Bar before the race in an all-comers meet he entered for a workout; the first bare-chested sub-4 minute mile (tentative—the RRIC is checking on this).

Post sub-4 goals: Jamey will continue to train with aspirations to qualify for Olympic and World game competitions. He has already PR'ed in both the 800 meters (1:48.38) and the 1500 meters (3:40.11) during the '97 summer circuit in Europe. This fall he has continued to train, but less intensely, in order to be fresh for strong indoor and outdoor track seasons.

Post sub-4 life: Jamey has used his college to degree in Exercise Science to become a Certified Massage Therapist. He is currently working and training with well-respected CMT Len DeBenedictus.

Giving back to the sport: Jamey is the Chair of the Pacific Association's Athlete Committee, which represents elite and sub-elite athletes within the Pacific Association. He has been a prime force in the development of the new Pacific Association Track & Field Grand Prix, slated to begin with the Stan Wright/Panther Invitational at Sacramento City College's Hughes Stadium Track on March 21.

All athletes interested in participating more actively on the Athlete's Committee or in helping with the Grand Prix, contact Jamey at 650-299-9853, e-mail jameyh@charles.stanford.edu. He is planning a meeting on Wednesday, February 11th, location and time to be determined by the attendees.