

Sports Interview

Marathon winner runs for fun

WALTER ZELMAN

Jacki Hansen likes to run. In fact, she likes to run so much that she does it two and a half or more hours a day. She does it pretty quickly, too, so quickly that a few weeks ago she ran 26 miles in just over three hours, to be the first woman across the finish line in the world's most famous race, the Boston Marathon.

We spoke with 24-year-old Jacki recently at Cal State Northridge, where she goes to school and, in short, she turned me on to running. Not running for money, or for glory, or even for winning, but running for fun, for rhythm, and even as a means of seeing what's around you. Here's how some of the conversation went.

Has running always been your favorite athletic activity?

Well, it's the only one I've ever been any good at. I started in high school but have only been doing it seriously for two years.

Why distance running?

Partly I guess because I have very little natural speed. But mostly I just enjoy the longer distances. I enjoy getting off the track and running cross country courses, or on the streets. It has a real aesthetic value.

Just Float

What do you think about when you run?

I tried to figure that out once, but nine out of ten times the thing that would be going on in my head would be the last song I played on the stereo. I just get into a rhythm I guess. I'm sure there's some correlation between yoga, meditation and things like that and long distance running. You just get into the things around you and float in it. It's very relaxing.

Do you think part of the relaxation comes from not thinking at all?

Yes, that may be it. I just love running. I enjoy the environment, watching the sun come up and watching it go down, being alone in a quiet world, the trees, the grass, the flowers.

Is there a psychological make-up to distance runners?

I don't know. But distance runners seem to have compassion for one another. They each know how much

work they've put in. In a certain sense everybody just wants to get to the end, to finish.

Is there less competitiveness, then, than in shorter runs?

Yes, I think so.

Training

How do you train?

I train seven days a week, and when I run long distances I usually run along the grass on San Vicente, by the beach, or around the Sepulveda basin. Those are probably the most common distance runs around. Getting ready for Boston I did about 20 miles a day.

Do you run at a steady speed?

No, I speed up and sprint sometimes and then slow down again. That's more valuable than running one continuous pace.

It sounds like jogging to you is like walking to the rest of us.

I guess it sort of is.

How long could you run at an easy pace?

Forever, I think. I'd probably get bored first.

You could go 30 or 40 miles?

Probably. Actually, it's very tiring sometimes, to go too slowly. You can get a side ache.

From going too slow?

Yes.

Boston

What was it like going to Boston?

The first day I got there I was ready to come home. I didn't know anybody. But the first morning I found a place to run along the Charles River, and it was so pretty, and I met another marathoner, and he was very friendly and showed me all their local runs. Then I spent the next day seeing the city.

Running?

Yes, we just ran around, it's a great way to see the town. People looked at us pretty weirdly sometimes, but it was great fun.

Did you run the course?

No there was no point in going out and getting scared by it. I'd heard so many stories about that horrible "heartbreak hill" — it comes near the

end, the 17th to the 21st mile — it isn't terribly steep, but it never ends.

What was your strategy in the race?

Because it was so hot, 80 degrees, and no shade, I tried to be conservative and start slowly. The start itself was incredible. We were all bunched up together spread over two blocks. There were something like 1,600 runners. The guns goes off and you rumble off. For people in the back it took a couple of minutes just to reach the starting line.

Did you start near the front?

Towards the front, but not the front. They tried to put the women, there were 14 of us officially, at the front, but we didn't want that. We would have gotten trampled.

Did you plan to run with anyone?

With about three guys, but they all faded here or there.

It was 80 degrees?

Yes, and no shade at all. For miles ahead you could tell if some shade was coming because everyone would veer off to one side to run under some trees, or somebody's water sprinkler. *Were you in front of the other women all the way?*

No. At first everyone was passing me, the women included, and I thought maybe I'm starting too slow. But after about 10 miles I began passing people.

What was the finish like?

Every little town we went through seemed like a finish. The people were so encouraging and cheered for the women so much that in each town I thought I could stop there and be satisfied. The real finish was just incredible. I had no idea exactly where it was. I kept thinking I was there because all I could see was people all over the place.

How far behind you was the next woman?

Well, I didn't know at the time, but only a minute.

What would have happened if she had caught up to you?

I wondered about that, if I would have enough left, and I thought sort of jokingly if she would settle for a dead heat.



Daily Sundial Photo

You mean you would have agreed with her to have a tie?

Yes, I thought about how discouraging it would be to run 26 miles and lose in the last 100 yards.

Olympic Politics

And what now? Do you want to run in the Olympics?

There isn't a marathon in the Olympics for women. I guess they don't think we can do it. But anyway, I used to think it would be great to make a national team, but not any more. I'd rather run for the sake of running. The Olympics, I think, may have outgrown itself. They're so political.

How long do you think you'll keep running?

I don't know. Distance runners don't usually reach their peak until their late twenties, and until after they've been training five years, so I have a way to go yet. Anyway, there's a man I run with sometimes, and he's 66 and runs the marathon in under three hours.

Indeed, who knows? Sixty-six? Maybe there's still time, brother. See you on San Vicente.

Sports Notes

For those of you who are tired of watching sports and want to participate, check with the Department of Parks and Recreation. The City and County programs offer a wide variety of opportunities to people of all ages and all levels of ability to participate via lessons, leagues or tournaments in basketball, softball, volleyball, track, tennis, and many other sports. Costs for all these activities are very nominal. If interested you can call 666-4644 or 749-6911, Ext. 563. In Santa Monica, call 393-9975, Ext. 276. Anyone in shape?

For the less active, check out the tennis match on Channel Two this Sunday between Margaret Court and Bobby Riggs. Tennis experts are in wide disagreement as to who will win, a great woman player, or a once-great 55-year-old man. □