

# Conversation with America's Only High School Sub-4:00 Milers

12/12/03 - San Diego - Foot Locker Nationals Dinner Q&A  
(Retrieved from Dystat.Com)



**Jim Ryun (65), Tim Danielson (66), Marty Liquori (67), Alan Webb (01)**  
(John Dye photo)

## **A conversation with America's Sub-4 minute prep milers. The Fab 4 - Prep History's Sub 4-minute milers talk in San Diego at Foot Locker National Championships**

Jim Ryun (East HS, Wichita, Ks) ran a 3:59.1 mile in 1964 and followed it up with a **3:55.3** mark his senior year of 1965 for a prep record that stood until Alan Webb broke it two years back.

Tim Danielson (Chula Vista, Ca) ran a **3:59.4** in an open race in San Diego during the 1966 season.

Marty Liquori (Essex Catholic, Newark, NJ) ran a **3:59.8** mile in an AAU level meet in 1967.

Alan Webb (South Lakes, Reston, Va) ran a national indoor prep best of 3:59.86 in 2001 and followed that up with a **3:53.43** in the Prefontaine Meet in Eugene, Oregon that May of 2001.

The foursome gathered after Friday evening dinner in San Diego in front of the 2003 Foot Locker Finalists and their supporters for some question and answer, summarized below.

Below, the answers are for Jim Ryun (JR), Marty Liquori (ML), Tim Danielson (TD), and Alan Webb (AW)

1. What have you done after your running career ended:

JR - After my running ended I went into sports marketing and the organization of different events, such as special races for the handicapped, and the like. In 1996 we had a changeover in politics in Kansas and my wife and I decided to toss my hat into the ring for a primary for Congress representation. I was elected and have served four terms in congress for the State of Kansas. My wife, who I have been with for 35 years, and myself have four children, and three grandchildren.

ML - Interestingly, in 1972 before the Olympics I hurt my leg, and did some commentating for television at that time. That developed into a 25 year career where I had the chance to follow the Olympic level track and field world as a commentator around the world. Also, I helped start the "Athletic Attic" chain of athletic footwear stores, which I sold out five years ago. With some time lately I have picked up playing the guitar a couple of times a week, something I did not have time for a very long time.

TD - I am from San Diego originally. Sitting here in the Hotel del Coronado brings back memories of many of my workouts, since I would do a 14-miler on the sand that led up to this hotel outside. It was seven miles each way, and one of my favorite workouts. I did not run for a long time after high school. I went one year to BYU, then I was married at a very young age, and had a son. This was in the late 1960's and one was not allowed to make any money from running, and so, later attending San Diego State, and supporting a family, other things took priority over running. I was taking challenging science classes in school, and worked a job also. I work as a scientist in El Cajon, near San Diego, with a company that helps make jet engine parts. I am involved with making engine casings, and have been at the company since 1971, for 32 years. I have two children 35 years old and 9 years of age.

AW - I made the decision soon after high school to turn professional. I have no regrets in that decision. I feel that in every bad thing that happens to someone there can be something good that comes from it. After I left high school it was really kind of crazy for a time. I did not have the typical college experience. There was a whole new world of attention after the 3:53 mile. At the University of Michigan I had a good first cross-country season. After that I was hurt and it affected my training for three months. It really got me off-rhythm, and I did not have the greatest first track season there. There were huge expectations. I was fourth in the NCAA's in the 1500m, but it seemed like nothing. I was burnt out, and when I got back to school after that I packed my car and drove home. I was tired mentally. Things did not go as I had wished. I did not know what to do. I was supposed to go to the US Junior Nationals, as I wanted to qualify for the World Junior Championships. I trained for one or two weeks, and my old high school coach watched a couple of my workouts. I never really recovered from the injury correctly, and I felt that I needed help to get back to the things that helped me to get to 3:53. I decided to go back to Virginia and to my old coach.

I still do go to college. The last year of running was a rough one. I had an emergency appendectomy on top of it all that put me out for the month of July. Since that time things have gone great, and I just won the Fall Cross-Country National Championships.

2. Why the huge time gap in years from 1967 until 2001 where no other high scholars could break the 4:00 mile.

JR - I don't know. One gift I had was my Coach Bob Timmons. I had been cut from every team I went out for, baseball and basketball in junior high. Cross-Country was one sport that I had not done before, and I had some simple goals, to get a letterman's jacket and a girlfriend. That first season went okay in the fall, and in the spring track season (this was my tenth grade year) the longest distance we could run was a mile. After the fall cross-country season I did no running, but delivered my paper route, and the like. When track season started I went out and started training. I made the team and was second in my first race over the mile distance at 4:32. I was second on the team. Coach Timmons was a real visionary, and I think the input of someone like him is very important. After our fourth meet in Kansas City we had a 3 hour bus trip, and Coach Timmons would have athletes come up and sit with him for a few minutes and talk about their performance. I had run 4:21. Coach said that he thought I could get the school record of 4:08 by Archie San Romani, and added that he thought I could be the first high schooler to run the miler in four minutes. He was good at developing the work ethic with the huge amount of work we put in justified by the results we achieved. Coaches can really influence young runners. It took me one and a half years to believe what Coach Timmons was talking about. One thing that I want everyone to remember is that life does not end when one achieves that goal, but there are further steps beyond that.

ML - I am asked every year why 35 years went along. For a long time I thought it was coaching. My High School coach was a 4:00.8 miler, so right from the start that we were doing the right things. I always feel that the reporters want me to say that kids today are lazy. I feel it is much more complicated than that. Back in my time track was a bit more popular, as maybe you can tell by the packed stands in the videos we just watched, and the baby boom generation put more students into high schools at that time. Also, the cuts in scholarships at the college level, and the passing out of many of those to foreigners, has taken the opportunity way for some.

I did not want to run a 4 minute mile in high school. My coach came to me and my parents when I was a sophomore and said that I could be a scholarship if I continued to improve. That was what I worked so long and hard for. I think the lack of these scholarships is a factor in the lack of a prep 4 minute miler for so long.

TD - I also have been asked this question by a number of people—why the long drought. For me, my goal was not to break a 4 minute mile, my goal was to do my best, and not lose. I was very, very competitive. I would get very worked up even over a dual meet event where I knew I was better than everyone, I was just so competitive. I also think there is a lack of opportunity for high schoolers to run against people who can really push them to the times. My best against high school competition was 4:06. When I competed against the big guys (he ran his sub 4 in an open race) I dropped my time by seven seconds. There seem to be a good number of 4:04-4:05 type milers who just may not have the opportunity to run the correct race.

I also think the change of distances from a mile to 1600 meters may have given kids a different distance to focus times on.

AW - Jim mentioned good coaching, Marty mentioned scholarships, and Tim mentioned better competition. I think all three are valid, and I had all three. They played a part in me

breaking four minutes. I went out and ran four 440's under 60 seconds each without any rest, and if you wish to do a 4 minute mile you need to get ready to do the same.

### 3. Hobbies in high school

JR - I did not have any hobbies in high school. After my first year of running, Coach Timmons said that we would start twice a day training, and that plus academics took up all of my time.

ML - one time I was doing some TV commentating at the NCAA Cross-Country meet, and I heard an athlete say that they were going to do some skiing the next week after the meet. I was shocked. As I indicated earlier I used to play the guitar, but I gave it up for running. If you are a swimmer or a runner you have no time for hobbies. The first good miler that we ever had at the high school level in Florida we talked to moving his mileage up from 25 to 60 miles per week. He came back and said, "But I'm tired every evening by 9:00 p.m." I replied that if you were a top swimmer or runner you will always be tired by 9:00 pm each evening if you plan on competing with the best.

### 4. Favorite Workouts

JR - I kind of had a benchmark workout that I did not see if I was ready for indoors or outdoor season. There is a two-man ten mile relay that people used to do. At the University of Kansas we had an NCAA Cross Country Champion that I used to team with, so I did not get much rest. You ran a quarter, handed off the baton, and your teammate ran their 440, and you rested only while they were running. I could measure from year to year how I did on these workouts and it would give me an idea if I had a good base.

ML - Do not have a favorite workout with specific times that you have to hit. I think the biggest mistake that runners make that I have observed over 35 years is that you have to force yourself to not work hard during certain periods of the year. Americans are not confident enough to drop their mileage and back off to rest before the biggest meets. If you have done 120 miles per week in the summer, 100 miles per week in the Fall, 80 in the spring, you can drop to 20 miles per week just before the biggest races. If you drop to 50 miles per week at the end you will not be properly rested. The key to running is to work hard September 5th a race that you are keying on some nine months later. It is the science of this sport that has kept me so interested for 35 years.

### 5. Mileage you ran?

AW - Senior year ran probably in the high 50's per week, with a couple of 60 mile per week efforts. Of course, I did a lot of quality running.

ML - that is a very hard question. Questions about straight mileage are hard to interpret. Tom Fleming was a top American runner who used to record his mileage in kilometers, so everyone he roomed with on trips thought he ran 150 miles (not kilometers) per week, and everyone thought he was doing this insane amount of work. I had a roommate at Villanova when I first went there who had run fast, and I asked him how many miles per week he ran. He said about 25, but all that he added up were the interval or hard running that he did during the week. He never added the warm-up, strides, or warm-down. Filbert Bayi broke Jim Ryun's mile record and was asked how many miles per week he ran. He said 40 per week. I noticed he did seven miles each morning, but he said that those did not count, because that was "God's intent."

JR - I did about 80-100 miles per week as a junior, and about 100 miles per week as a senior. I think the step by step gradual improvement of your running and mileage is more important than just some amount of miles. Mileage is really a bad representation of things. The question you should ask is, "What are you doing with those miles?"

TD - I did not do a lot miles, maybe 40-50 per week. But I did quality. We did a lot of intervals. My Coach was not sure what to do, and we worked on it together. We would read what Jim Ryun was doing, or the USC guys would come down and say they were running a lot of intervals. We did some very hard speed work and it helped me to lower my times. I would do 24 second 220's with short rest. I would jog a 110 or run across the field in between the dozen that I would do. The speed work I thought was one thing that brought my time down. That, and I did two a day workouts. My son was on a team, and I asked if they did two-a-days, and he replied that they did not. I think they could have run faster if they had.

6. At what point in your running career did you realize that on this day this is something I will be doing the rest of the time that my body allows me to do it?

ML - In 1968 I figured that was the last chance I would have to go to the Olympics. By 1972 I would be one year out of college, and we did not plan on our careers going that far, with the way that things were financially in the sport in those days. There was no real post-collegiate system set up. We ran each year like that was the last year of running for us, which is maybe one reason why we ran so fast. We ran hard, but we also had injuries. This is one of many topics brought up this evening that could take four hours to discuss fully.

JR - I did not really think about running after college. Coach Timmons was a good guide, but I was not a true believer in what running could possibly do for me until the day after my first 4 minute mile my junior year. The phone started ringing and that morning I began to realize that this could be very special for me.

TD - Running was my life in high school. It is all I thought about and did during my waking hours, what I would do for the workout and then I would do it. I would run and sleep. It was 100% of my focus my final two years of high school. I was thinking there might be a scholarship available, but back then there was not a lot of money associated with running.

ML - From high school I hoped to secure a scholarship to Harvard to become a lawyer. Later, I thought about what that quality of competition would be like to run against for four years. My Coach, who went to Villanova, said, "there are a lot of lawyers in the world, but you have a certain talent (for running)." I switched to Villanova.

The two toughest decisions you will make in your life are 1) who you will marry, and 2) where you will go to college.

7. Did you use any mental games in your four minute miling or training?

ML - This could be another very long session of discussion. I will tell you one example. I kind of owned Madison Square Garden for a time, where I had won 13 straight mile races, all by taking off with four laps to go on the indoor track. One year I was out of shape, but had not raced too much, so people did not realize that. In the next race at Madison Square Garden I took off with four laps to go like always, and a rival finally figured out with a half lap to go that I was not in great shape, but it was too late. After the race he said that he should have caught me that night, but I replied that he had not.

JR - I tried to sleep a lot on the days of races so that I could not out think myself before the race.

8. With the dominance of foreign runners what do you see as the future for American distance runners?

AW - I feel great. It is just a matter of time before some of the people in this room really break out and we get back to leaving others behind.

ML - Foreigners who are born at altitude and in poverty are willing to work very hard. We have all the things in our country that you need to control, coaching, desire, opportunities (Alan's chance to turn pro) , and the like. I felt different about this ten years ago.

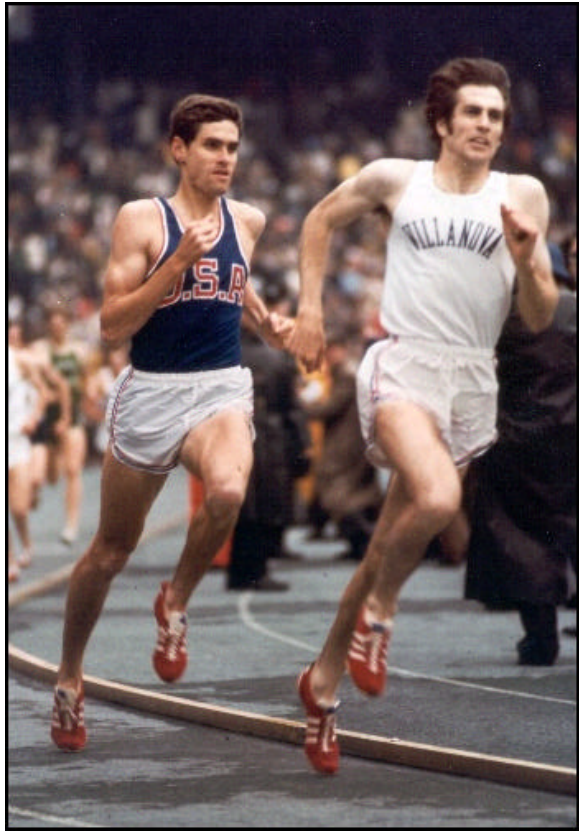
9. Importance of Education

JR - You cannot underestimate the importance of education, the values and work ethics that you also pick up. It is important to search out your talents, whatever they are, and work on them.

ML - The press does not understand sports. They expect you to win the Olympics and do not realize the importance of school and all. Getting an education can affect your life much more than any gold medal.

TD - The US has the best education system in the world. I have been at my job for a long time and have hired hundreds of employees. The ones with the education are the ones who get hired first. If you have an education you will be successful in life. Your running days will be over some day.

AW - I am still participating in securing an education. My parents have always preached the benefit of education. You may not directly need calculus in the job that you end up, with but the problem solving ability you develop there is very valuable. This problem solving that you go through during these first 20 years of life prepare you to be ready for what you have to do in real jobs later in life.



Jim Ryuan and Marty Liquori racing



Alan Webb

### All-time top ten high school outdoor milers

3:53.43	Alan Webb (Vir)	2001
3:55.3	Jim Ryun (Kansas)	1965
3:59.4	Tim Danielson (Calif.)	1966
3:59.8	Marty Liquori (N.J.)	1967
4:00.29	Don Sage (Ill.)	2000
4:01.5	Gerry Lindgren (Wash.)	1964
4:02.01	Sharif Karie (Va.)	1997
4:02.4	Rich Kimball (Calif.)	1974
4:02.7	Matt Centrowitz (N.Y.)	1973
4:02.7	Andy Powell (Mass.)	1999
4:02.81	Gabe Jennings (Wisc.)	1997