

RUNNER'S PROFILE

by Joe Howell

In Santa Barbara, we are blessed with a number of things that combine to produce one of the greatest places to run in the world: great weather almost year round, wonderful scenery and interesting topography, challenging races and endurance events with a great deal of variety, and a talented, high quality group of medical/health care professionals who support our running community. Past Profiles have featured two of those professionals: Mark Brisby, a chiropractor/sports doctor and Bob Huhn, a physical therapist and founder of Human Performance Center. Any list of running-related health care professionals would be incomplete without mentioning Jean DeBettignies--a physical therapist who is the director and owner of Precision Biomechanics.

From my personal experience and the experiences of friends, family and acquaintances, I can attest to Jean's remarkable skills in diagnosing, treating and ultimately curing a broad range of running-related injuries. You name the injury--shin splints, plantar fasciitis, knee, leg or back problems; each has been diagnosed and successfully treated by Jean and her staff.

While I knew Jean was a dedicated runner, I had no idea of her early athletic success or her more recent medical problems that prevented her enjoyment of running. Fortunately, Jean is now healthy, as happy as ever, and devoting a great deal of energy to solving the problems of all of us who refuse to let injuries get in the way.

Basic Information

Name: Jean DeBettignies

Age: 40

Employment: Director/Owner Precision Biomechanics

Other Sports/Interests: Hiking, backpacking and biking

Running Highlights

Best Race and Why: Santa Barbara Triathlon (the running portion) because it was my debut.

Average Weekly Mileage (last 12 months): 12 - 15 miles

Favorite Local Race: Santa Barbara Triathlon

Goals (Realistic) for 1997: Train for marathon - improving strength and endurance.

Goals (Wildly Optimistic) before Year 2000: Marathon in 1998

Additional Information

Why I Run: For the sense of balance it adds to my life physically, mentally and emotionally.

My Runner Hero & Why: Jim Howley because he dares to go where others haven't and inspires us to come too.

Personal Training Tips: Heart rate monitors have been an invaluable aid - definitely worth the investment.

Quote: "I may be slow, but I am REALLY happy to be able to run again!"

SBAA Member since 1996



Additional Thoughts from Jean

When I was growing up, I much preferred being outside playing games and riding my bike rather than being indoors. I remember when I was in grade school, the pastor of the Catholic school that I attended stopped me and said, "You shouldn't play so many sports, you'll never be able to have a family," implying that women shouldn't be physically active. I didn't believe him.

My freshman year in high school I made the varsity basketball team. Members of the team called me "Jean the Machine" because I never seemed to get tired while playing. Sometimes I wasn't very popular because the coach would set the number of wind sprints that the team did on the number that I could do, not the number that they could do.

It was in high school that I discovered running. My family lived in a small town in Connecticut, and my favorite runs were on moonlit forest roads in the back country. At the time, running wasn't very popular, especially for girls. My mom was embarrassed that I would go running and thought the neighbors might be staring. "When are you going to stop that running, Jean," my mother would ask. I would just yell, "Not today, mom," as the back door slammed behind me. I never went out for track because it overlapped with the high school tennis season.

My freshman year in college I was lucky enough to make both the intercollegiate basketball and tennis teams. I remember at the end of the tennis season, our third singles player dropped out. The coach decided to put me in the state tournament at third singles rather than change the whole team alignment. I realized I was in trouble because I was very young, inexperienced, and would be playing against professionally coached players. I decided the only way I had a chance in this tournament was to run a great deal and to get into great shape, which I did. During the tournament, I became the human backboard, returning shot after shot as I was not capable of winning any shots myself. The strategy worked pretty well--I finished second in the state tournament at the third singles level.

Then during my sophomore year of college came the big change. I came down with chronic fatigue syndrome. I remember being so tired that I couldn't carry any of my books to class. I did finish college and graduate school. For the next ten years, my health situation was pretty poor. I was able to keep a job but was not able to do much else. Most of my time in the evenings and on weekends was spent in my room lying on my bed looking at the ceiling. It was boring. I didn't mind giving up tennis and basketball, but I really missed running. Working with many athletes at work, I was expected to know a lot about running shoes. But, I avoided going into running shoe stores as being surrounded by running was just too much for me, and I always ended up leaving the store in tears. People would comment to me that they thought my work was very successful. In the back of my mind I thought, how can I be a success, I still can't run. Gradually, over an extended period of time, with a lot of help from acupuncture treatments, I gradually got better, but the setbacks were frequent.

Last year one of my patients, Shirley Mueller, asked me to team up with her to do the running leg of the Santa Barbara Triathlon. I felt getting in shape to run ten miles would be an extremely huge task, but I wanted to try. So I trained all summer. On the morning of the triathlon, as I parked my car and headed towards the starting area of the race, I realized that this year I was actually going to be in the triathlon and not just watching. I was overwhelmed with the realization and tears filled my eyes. I thought, you don't have time to cry, you have a ten-mile race to run! It was really a highlight to be able to do that. Shirley and I were lucky enough to get third place in the women's team category.

For allowing me to live vicariously through both their injuries and their victories, I would like to thank all my patients. If you want to find me in a race, look in the back with the slower runners. I may be slow, but I am very, very grateful that I am not at home lying on the bed staring at the ceiling.