

JESUIT'S BIG BROTHER

Walt Lange Blends Experience With Temperance

BY Randell Sturgeon

Every weekday afternoon of the school year, at about 3:00 p.m., a gathering occurs at Jesuit High School in Carmichael, California. Just outside the gym or on the football field, runners dressed in anything from \$120 Adidas sweats to traditional tattered greys and wearing t-shirts advertising races and various brands of liquid refreshment, group up for an afternoon's workout. A young looking, tanned man, states that a steady run is in order. Nominations for the length and direction are voiced, a consensus is found and the run is on. Out on the road runners split into different groups at various paces. The conversations vary from class problems, to girls, politics and even running.

What sounds like an afternoon fun run is in reality a typical training session of Nor-Cal distance power Jesuit High under the young looking, tanned gentleman, Walt Lange. Despite fostering school records that would be the envy of many colleges, ranging from a 4:06.1 mile to a 2:24 marathon, Walt is known as much for a program that creates an enjoyable running and learning environment, as he is for producing winners. His stated aims as a coach are one, to teach the athlete all the basic concepts of training and racing, and secondly to use that imparted knowledge to develop an independent, self motivated runner. Racing success is considered a by-product of putting the right things together. Yet success in distance running is synonymous with the name Jesuit.

So how does he do it? Some coaches do it with charisma and inspiration. Others do it with special training techniques or a whip and a chair. However, Walt does it with an honest, sincere, low-key approach that makes him both a friend and a respected mentor. While he definitely believes in his methods, he does not push them to other coaches or athletes as "the way." In fact he will not talk about them unless asked and will preface his statements with, "Well, this is how we do it, but it's not the only way." Yet when he talks of his methods and his teams there is a definite sound of pride in his voice.

Since Walt took over the program in the spring of '71, the Marauders have consistently been at or near the top of the San Joaquin Section in distance running. With the talent Lange inherited in '71, Jesuit was able to build and improve to the point where they won their first harrier section title in '74. In '75 and '76 Walt's team finished second to powerful Mira Loma, losing by just one and two points. This past cross country season his squad was again number one in the section and number two in the Nor-Cal finals (1979). Jesuit runners hold all-time section bests in the mile, six mile, twenty mile, the marathon and the four mile relay. Also, to date, Lange is the only prep coach to have two runners break 30 minutes for six miles in the same race in the same year.

However, the thing that makes Walt Lange special is that he is not a coach who is a runner, but a runner who coaches. Everything that he does with his runners has been tested on his own body. He does not ask his runners to do anything he has not or will not do himself. He runs daily with his charges and still competes in local road races.

Walt began running in 1958 as a sophomore at St. Plus High in Southern California. He was then a half-miler and broke two minutes for that event by his senior year. From there it was to Loyola University in L.A. where he studied business and ran on his own because the school did not have a track program. After a brief stint with Mihaly Iglol's Los Angeles Track Club in the winner of '62, an experience Walt still talks about with mixed emotions, he continued to run on his own and eventually broke 4:30 for the mile before graduating from Loyola.

His coaching career began during his senior year in college when he volunteered to help with the track team at St. Bernard High in Playa Del Rey. After graduation he took a teaching job there and began to develop the methods he uses today. At first he was mainly into Iglol type training with the emphasis on interval running. However, he began to read about Lydiard and his methods. He was also influenced by local coaches Jack Hedges of Westminster High and Dick Scully of South Torrance. Both of these coaches, like Lydiard, emphasized mileage and an endurance base. Lange's program today is an outgrowth of what he learned from these three men. He developed a solid foundation at St. Bernards and one year after he left, the team, still using his methods and under his influence, captured the section cross country title. One young runner, Chris Hoffman, set a

national three-mile record for sophomores using his ex-coaches methods and frequently called him for advice.

After leaving St. Bernards in '69 Lange and his family moved to Carmichael where he became a stockbroker. However the stock market was on a downward swing, and he ended up teaching at Jesuit. Right away he had success. In his first full year, '71-'72, he had one runner, Mike Tulley, clock 9:15 for two miles along with a 2:32 marathon, and a sophomore who was destined to become one of the greatest prep runners of all time, by the name of Rich Kimball, run 4:28 for the mile. The program has been building ever since. It has grown to the point where it has become self-perpetuating, and this past spring Jesuit had more distance runners than many school have football players.

The success of Lange's runners has not been confined to just track and cross country. He was one of the first coaches to not only let, but encourage, his kids to run road races. The list of Marauder road marks is just as impressive as its track list. Seven Jesuit runners have bettered 32 minutes for six miles, six have beaten 55 for 10, seven have gotten under 1:54 for twenty and four have bettered 2:40 in the marathon. In fact, Tom O'Neil, who now runs for Stanford, heads the list at 2:24, the fourth best prep mark in history. It's not unusual for a Jesuit runner to run in a road race even during the track or cross country season for the simple reason the kid may have a chance to do well in one. A further demonstration of Walt's loose structure and development of independence.

However, if you listen to the coach he says he has little to do with Jesuit's success. To quote Walt, "It's the kids who make the program." He adds, "Great athletes make a great coach." There is some truth to that. Walt has had some very talented, intelligent young men to work with. But he has also had his miracle cases. A few years ago he had a freshman who literally could not break 13 minutes for two miles at the end of the year. However, he stuck with it and Walt stuck with him and by his senior year Pete McCarry, now a top runner for American River College, ran that two-mile event in 9:19.

The most talented runner Lange has coached was Pedro Reyes. This past track season, Pedro was the fastest miler in the state of California and third in the nation at 4:06.1. Lange readily admits that maybe he did not get the most out of Pedro. Walt, if he has a coaching fault, has often been accused for being underly optimistic and doesn't shoot high enough. Yet, Pedro, like any Jesuit runner you might talk to, gives all the credit to the coach for his success and speaks of Lange with reverence.

The bottom line is that the Jesuit mentor believes in self-motivation. He leads by example. At age 37, he is still running and training daily with his team. He feels this gives credibility to his program. He also says, "It gives the runners something to shoot for, beating the 'old man.'" Walt states, "The athletes that I get have always been told they need a coach to perform. They need a coach to play basketball, they can't swim without a coach, they can't play football without a coach. I want my runners to feel that they do not need a coach hanging over them in order for them to run well." Says Walt, "I work with little boys who are young men, and they need room to grow."

Coach Lange insists that his success is the result of good athletes implementing a physiologically sound program that accounts for Jesuit's winning ways. Walt is right. It is the program and how the athletes use it. However, even if Walt Lange won't admit it, the program is his and the runners reflect the philosophies and ideals that he instills in them. The personality of the Jesuit distance program is definitely Walt Lange's, a runner's coach.