

# Joggler's Jottings

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## The world's fastest juggler

The world's fastest juggler, Owen Morse, was running about 20 miles per hour when he fell headfirst into the asphalt track. Having just crossed the finish line in a new world's record time for the 100-meter joggle, he noticed too late that a crowd blocked his deceleration lane. He tried to swerve, but his 1/4" spikes caught in the track.

You can tell almost instinctively when an athlete falls if it's a serious case. The crowd knew immediately Morse was hurt. People gathered quickly around and ministered to him on the track for about five minutes. Friends then helped him off the Akron University track to apply ice and further first aid. They tried to ease his pain with the news that his 12.12 second time was a record. But Morse only knew that he wouldn't be back for the finals.

How ironic! He had just broken the world record in a preliminary heat, yet it appeared he would not even place in the final standings!

Morse took on hero status as the rest of the finalists lined up for the final heat 20 minutes later. He hobbled down the track toward the starting line. His shoulder, hand and knee were badly scraped. "How are you?" someone asked. "Not good," he said painfully as he approached. "I think I'll just walk it."

Someone called out, "Come on, Owen, forget the pain and go for it!"

He said later that word of encouragement changed his whole attitude. Morse did go for it. When the gun sounded, he forgot his pain and remembered all the techniques he developed in countless hours of juggling practice during the previous year. He pulled into the lead and won the IJA 100-meter juggling world championships for the second year in a row.

If juggling could use a hero, Morse qualifies. The story of his world record run, fall to the asphalt and comeback to win the race follows the outline of many classic hero legends. The character of the man and his dedication to juggling amply support the conclusion to the story.

The world's fastest juggler is a serious athlete. He accumulated a cabinet full of medals in his high school track career and was voted MVP by his teammates. Now he's a dean's list student running track for the University of California - Irvine, training for the 1992 Olympic decathlon. He's also handsome, articulate, humorous, juggles like a demon and performs at one of America's premier theme park, Disneyland.

In hero fashion, even as Morse wrote the conclusion to one story, he was opening the chapter on others. After he won the 100-meter three ball event in Akron, he anchored a four-man relay team that set a Guinness record 4:31 time for the juggled mile. Then he ran a 15.25 second hundred meters with five balls to establish another Guinness record. At 2 a.m. the next morning he was on the balcony in the gym working on his own to figure out seven ball juggling!

"Maybe seven for the future..." he said. "It would be tough for anything longer than 100 meters, though. The pattern would have to be very high, or you'd have to take midget steps."

He tried five club juggling but found them unwieldy in the turbulence of running. Five balls, though, conform nicely to fast speeds.

Morse spent a lot of time in the last year studying juggling and working with his track coach to shave hundredths of seconds from his time. "I practiced a lot on the start of the race, where I thought it would be won or lost," he said. "I must have gone through those first ten acceleration steps 500 times trying to move

my legs as fast as possible. I developed a method of clawing the balls for the first few steps to get out of the blocks quicker, then worked on making a smooth transition from the claw to the cascade.

"I also concentrated on the use of my arms. I wanted to see how much swing I could get in them and still juggle. The number one rule in running is that any motion from side to side is wasted, so I worked in front of a mirror for a long time to make sure my arms were moving forward and back in catching the balls rather than side to side."

Late at night he would leave his Tustin, Calif., home for moonlight joggles. Over time his rhythm became so steady he didn't need moonlight. He found he could juggle with his eyes closed. "It has become second nature," he said.

Morse and others who take their sport seriously are building a strong case for juggling as a mainstream sport. It has now also caught the attention of one of the leading administrators in the world of running, Fred Lebow, president of the New York Road Runners Club and director of the New York Marathon.

Lebow first heard of juggling from Billy Gillen, a Brooklyn resident now well known for his five-ball joggles around Central Park. However, Lebow only took it seriously after watching Albert Lucas juggle the Los Angeles Marathon last spring.

Lebow immediately recognized a combination of beauty and athletic benefit. "The normal person can't believe someone can juggle and run that fast at the same time," he said. "I figured if Lucas could do a marathon juggling, I should be able to do it standing still."

So Lebow set out to learn, and found it surprisingly easy to master the cascade. He began using one-pound Exerballs to build upper body strength. And now that he can juggle standing still, Lebow wants to begin juggling.

Bigger than his personal discovery of juggling, however, is his decision to allow Lucas and Gillen to juggle in the upcoming New York Marathon. "I see juggling as only positive," Lebow said. "Normally I might not allow it in a race because some people might think it interferes with runners. However, these two people are experienced.

"We'll play it by ear and see how it develops. We don't have a juggling division yet, but you never know what can happen."

Indeed! Marathons are attracting more jugglers all the time. Besides the long-distance efforts of Lucas and Michel Lauziere previously reported in this column, it appears that others have tried it as well. Reliable reports indicate Sean Thomas Minnock has juggled two marathons in Hawaii in 1985 and 1986 (the second one in a fastest reported time of 3:38). Colin Francome of London did the London marathon juggling clubs!

The evidence mounting and the jugglers multiply. With administrative support like that from Lebow, Morse's sprint speed and the marathon strength of several jugglers behind the movement, juggling may be on a fast track for the headlines!