

June 28, 2017

Vin Lananna  
President  
USA Track & Field  
132 East Washington Street  
Suite 800 Indianapolis, IN 46204

Re: "Dream Day" at the 2017 Outdoor Nationals

Dear Vin:

Thank you so very much for the opportunity this past Sunday. It was a grand honor to run in the Masters 400-meter exhibition race.

For me, it was an absolutely wonderful experience, with V.I.P. treatment from start to finish. The efficiency, organization and professionalism of the event were all very impressive – and I sincerely thank you again for the privilege to race. That day was my personal dream come true.

But, very surprising to me, it was the post-race experience that I would like to tell you about.

As preface, I am a decent age-group runner. In the company of good colleagues, I've run a good time in the 400m at under 60 seconds at 60 years old, but I'm no national leader, or multiple gold medal winner, or record holder. In the exhibition race this weekend, I was the oldest, the slowest and I finished last, so what came after was a complete surprise.

The post-race reception I received was overwhelming. It's no exaggeration that fifty to sixty people literally left their seats to come talk to me. All offered their congratulations – "Good run," "Nice race," "You looked great" – that kind of thing. Some even wanted to take their picture with me.

But many wanted to know more. They asked me: What did I do for training? How exactly did I train? How often? How hard? What did I eat? How long had I done this? Was it hard work? Could they do this? How could they get started doing the same thing? Where could they find more Masters races? Was that my natural hair color? (Yes.) Did I use any product in my hair? (No.) And so on and so forth. (Strangely enough, there seemed to be as many questions about my hair as there were about my running!)

This went on for several hours, even after I'd changed into my street clothes. People came up to me on my way to the restrooms twice, and in the souvenir tent. This continued to happen way past the end of the meet, several times as I walked to my car. It even occurred hours later, in downtown Sacramento at dinner! One woman said she was currently coaching track, had some prior injuries, though she had had a life-long desire to do a heptathlon. She said after watching me run, she was inspired to now go do it. One man (and I hesitate to tell you this) said "...the crowd was cheering louder for the two Masters races than they were cheering for the well-known athletes..."! He wanted to see more Masters races featured. One man, more than slightly overweight, said he saw me and he wanted to start doing sit-ups right then during the race – such was the power of seeing people like me in a competition like that. One group of men (all in their mid-sixties) said that "I represented them" and they felt like I was "running for them." Believe me – I never entered the race with the intent of representing anyone, but I felt honored someone would feel that way. They, too, took several photos.

Now, remember I'd gone from finishing in last place to celebrity status in the span of minutes, so this was all very strange, all very new to me and also very euphoric at the same time. My jaws were tired from the ridiculous, non-stop, ear-to-ear grin, but I couldn't help it – I was really happy!

Later, after my ego had somewhat returned to normal, I realized, OK, I'm not a superstar. So I surmised the reason I got a lot of attention was because I am just a normal guy, albeit one who can run pretty fast. And because I'm normal, I'm approachable and my running abilities (I'm guessing) were viewed as attainable and desirable and therefore of keen interest to many in/near my age. Now that's something I would be really proud of – motivating others to exercise and get into this great sport.

In summary, I am very grateful to have been granted this experience by USATF. If asked, I would not hesitate to fly anywhere to do it again!

In Sport  
Brent Cottong

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CC: Mr. Rex Harvey, Masters President

PS: Many thanks and kudos, and maybe an award must be given to Joy Upshaw for her dedication and hard work for the sport we all love. Joy was so organized and motivating for the exhibition race. She also talked me into going to my first World Championships in Lyon, France – another fantastic (and patriotic) experience.