



## Byrne, as in blazing

*Top high school runner Kevin Byrne is fast closing in on a four-minute mile*

**H**is legs are short, with knobby muscles like those of a soccer player, not those of a miler—or so they say. But 17-year-old, redheaded Kevin Byrne is the best high school miler in the country, an excellent two-miler, a very good half-miler, a good quarter-miler and a fair high jumper. This past indoor season he won all five of the individual races he entered, and his team won all four of the relay

races he anchored. In January, at the Philadelphia Track Classic, he won the prep mile in 4:08.0. One week later he took the Millrose Games' high school mile in the same time. According to the *Track & Field News* rankings, the next best high school miler in the country is Dirk Lakeman of Eugene, Ore., who has run a 4:09.4 outdoors. In February, Byrne ran an 8:59.7 indoor two-mile, which was the fastest in the country until Brett Hoffman of St. Petersburg, Fla. did 8:54.9 last month, also outdoors.

Kevin is a master of pace. Anchoring his Paramus (N.J.) Catholic High team in the distance medley relay at the Eastern States Championship on Princeton's 220-yard indoor track last March, he got the baton 80 yards behind the leader. He won by 10 and his split was 4:07.4, the best high school mile leg of the season. He did not panic and rush off foolishly

when he got the baton, as a lot of runners would, seeing themselves so far behind. "I figure out what shape I'm in," Kevin says, "and how fast I'm capable of going. I plan the first three quarters, perhaps a 62, a 2:04 and 3:06, and I take it from there. They'll all die for me." Kevin was still 25 yards behind the leader with a quarter mile to go, and did not go ahead until 150 yards out. "I waited for seven laps," he says. "If I had gone out too fast, I would have died."

Kevin runs anchor on three relay teams for Paramus, the distance medley, the two-mile and the mile. And even though he is usually far behind when he gets the baton, he likes to compete in relays. He likes to come from behind, he likes to give half a dozen runners a huge lead and then reel them all in. He likes hearing the crowd cheering for him, not the leader. "I probably wouldn't know what to do if I got the stick with a lead," he says.

Hugh Monahan, also a redhead, who hands off to Kevin in the distance medley and in the two-mile relay, says, "We run as fast as we can. If we give him the baton nine seconds behind, we know we can win." And quarter-miler Phil Scialabba says, "Knowing that he can pull it out takes the pressure off us."

There are times, naturally, when Kevin does not pull it out. Then he does not blame the team, he blames himself. "Sure, if I come back from eighth to second," he says, "they tell me, 'great race,' but I feel disappointed with myself. I have failed."

Such was the case three weeks ago at the Penn Relays. Because of Kevin, Paramus was the prerace favorite in the distance medley, in which the legs are 800, 400, 1,200 and 1,600 meters. He had tried and failed to pull out this race for his team on two previous occasions, and this would be his last chance to do it as a high school runner. Hugh Monahan was supposed to hand off to Kevin with a 6:01 time for the team after 2,400 meters. From there Kevin planned to run splits of 60, 2:03 and 3:05. But Hugh, who was suffering from the flu, ran his leg in 3:13 instead of his expected 3:11 and Paramus was in 11th place when Kevin got the baton. This time he did not heed the clock in his head and simply took off. He finished in 4:04.1, the equivalent of a 4:05.5 standing-start mile. Still, he was third, some 10 yards behind

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Vince Mutarelli, a junior from Mount St. Michael of New York, who was caught in 4:11.

Mike Glynn, 32, who has coached track at Paramus Catholic since the school opened 11 years ago, calls Kevin "the best high school runner this country has ever had. He had a better indoor season than even Jim Ryun [the high school record-holder with a 3:55.3] had in 1965; he went under 4:10 four times. Sure, he hasn't run a sub-four-minute mile, but I think he has a great future, and I'm not going to jeopardize it just so I can say I had a kid who went under four."

Kevin spent his first two high school years at Bergen Catholic, a fierce rival of Paramus. As a sophomore at Bergen, he had run a 4:15.6 mile at the Millrose Games, finishing second in a photo finish with Marty Ludwikowski of Cherry Hill, N.J. "Before that race," Kevin says, "I had no pressure on me. Then suddenly, everybody was asking, 'What's he going to do next week?' I had a real letdown. For a while I didn't run any 4:15s. I ran three races a meet each week. In my sophomore year I ran a total of 65 races."

Kevin transferred to Paramus because, he says, "There was a lack of communication between me and the coach. I was a 15-year-old kid thrown into stardom and there was nobody to talk to. I had met Coach Glynn at meets and I could talk to him. Besides, there are *girls* at Paramus."

When Kevin came to Paramus, the first thing Glynn did was cut him down to 40 races. Then he taught him to hold his elbows lower so that he would not tie up in his neck and shoulders. But most of all, Glynn worked on rebuilding Kevin's confidence.

"We made mistakes at first," says Glynn. "We made a lot of predictions, and when Kevin didn't deliver, he was all upset. He kept a log, and if he missed a day of training, he would panic. There was so much pressure that I woke up mornings thinking about him instead of my own son. Last summer I decided we had to change that. I made him throw his log away. We stopped making predictions. He was to have *fun* running. This winter Kevin competed in nine indoor races, when he could have run in 30. It was a drastic change from what people have done with superstars in the past. The old theory was to run them as much as possible."

Last November may have been a turn-

ing point in Kevin's running career. At the state cross-country championship, Bobby Siehl, a two-miler from Morris Hills, set a very fast early pace. "It was 2:04 at the half on the way to a three-mile," says Kevin. "I couldn't handle that. I thought, 'I'm going to lose this race.' I stayed with Bobby for another quarter and dropped out. I told Coach Glynn that I had pulled a muscle."

"Bull! I don't believe you," is what Glynn said. "Tell me the truth. Think about it on the way home. If you have the courage to tell me what really happened, you can become the greatest runner in the country."

When they got to Glynn's home, Kevin had tears in his eyes. He said, "Coach, I'm in trouble." Glynn put his arms around the boy and said, "Your troubles are over." Kevin says, "He made me understand that I'm not a robot. That I'm going to lose sometimes, no matter how good I am."

Glynn would like to see his 5'9", 145-pound runner about five pounds lighter, but given Kevin's proclivity for cookies and cakes he bakes himself, Glynn may be hoping in vain. Kevin often spends an evening baby-sitting for the Glynn's two children, and rummaging through the refrigerator. "I tell him where the oranges and the apples are," says Glynn, "but my wife Lorraine stocks up with ice cream and RingDings." Glynn points out that it is no wonder he has to augment his salary by tending bar on weekends.

Kevin's family lives in Montvale, about 10 miles from Paramus Catholic. He is the second of four sons, three of whom inherited their father's vivid red hair. James Byrne is a vice-president of Burns and Row, Inc., an engineering company in Oradell, N.J. As a student at St. John's University in 1950, he won the freshman division of the IC4A cross-country championship. "I always bring my stopwatch when I watch Kevin run," says his father. "I call him splits during the race and give him instructions. But others call him splits, too, and once in a while he'll just get fed up and say to me, 'Stay home. I'll call you.'"

When Kevin was in grammar school he seemed destined to become a baseball player. He was selected by the Englewood, N.J. Little League team to pitch against a team from Syracuse, N.Y. He was All-State New Jersey at 14. But one day, when he was in the eighth grade,

his older brother Brian, a 4:19 high school miler, took him along for a run. Soon afterward, Brian managed to enter Kevin in a dual meet at his brother's high school where he beat all the ninth-graders in a 2:16 half mile. When Kevin enrolled at Bergen, he still wanted to concentrate on baseball, but he ran cross-country that fall. He also ran indoors, clocking a 2:04 half in a relay. When spring came, Kevin signed up for baseball. "Then, one Monday morning," he says, "I woke up with the decision that I would go out for track instead. I don't know why."

There was never any doubt in Kevin's mind that he would become a miler, even though he was successful in four distances and also as a high jumper, flopping six feet in his freshman year. "He feels the mile is the class event," says Glynn. "The mile gets all the ink. He likes that."

"Marty Liquori was my hero," says Kevin. "He's from Jersey. I've been compared to him a lot. People say, 'Kevin ran a 4:08 indoors; Marty only did 4:13.5.'" Kevin graduates on June 3. His first big outdoor mile will come in the Golden West Invitational in Sacramento on June 11, which traditionally features the top high school runners of the country. "Liquori did 4:08 in that race as a senior," says Byrne, "and a couple of weeks later he ran a 3:59.8 in the AAU senior championship."

A B+ student in English and economics, Kevin will enter Georgetown University this fall, choosing the school from among 70 that offered him scholarships, because it has a good economics curriculum as well as a good track program. "I'm not going to be running my whole life," he says. "Besides, it will be exciting to live in Washington, D.C., where I can have a nice social life."

There are some 140 medals, 25 trophies and six watches in Kevin's bedroom, and the walls are decorated with track pictures and clippings. A magazine cover shows Filbert Bayi running his 3:51 world-record mile at Kingston, Jamaica in 1975, and there is a cluster of clippings about John Walker, the Olympic 1,500-meter champion and current mile world-record holder. "I figured Liquori was over the hill," Kevin says, "so I had to find someone else to emulate." Over Kevin's bed, however, hangs an enlarged photograph of himself falling at the tape in the 1975 Millrose photo finish. "To remind myself that no one wins all the time," he says.

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