

Beatty's record mile: Race is still being run

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By STAN OLSON
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Thirty years ago tonight, Jim Beatty ran his way into history. It took less than four minutes.

On Feb. 10, 1962, in the Los Angeles Sports Arena, Beatty ran the first indoor sub-four minute mile. In the Los Angeles Times Indoor Games, he won the mile in three minutes, 58.9 seconds.

Today, Beatty is a successful businessman, with his own Charlotte executive placement firm. He's 57, and he traded running for tennis a few years ago. But now and then the race — *his race* — plays across his mind, in stereo and Technicolor. And again, there is Beatty's dogged stride and measured breathing, and the crowd sounding like thunder.

Like it was yesterday.

"The occasion was so imprinted on my mind, it was so emotional, that it almost seems as if it happened last night," Beatty said. "Every second and every tick of the clock are like it just happened, like I'm still experiencing it."

Beatty, a disciplined sort who starred in track at Char-

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lotte's Central High and UNC-Chapel Hill and eventually set 10 U.S. and five world running records, had targeted this since the previous October.

Then, following a workout, he had told his coach, Hungarian Mihaly Igloi, he wanted to be the first indoors, as Roger Bannister had been the first to run a mile in less than four minutes outdoors — eight years earlier. Could he do it? Igloi shut his eyes and considered.

"Ve haf time," he said in heavily accented English.

Beatty asked when. Igloi shut his eyes again, and told him Feb. 10, in the Los Angeles Times Games.

Everyone knew he would try, and the crowd had been waiting for hours when the runners took their marks after



BOB LEVERONE/Staff

Back on the path: Jim Beatty walks down Romany Road in Charlotte where he ran as a child. His running eventually led him to run the first indoor sub-four-minute mile 30 years ago.

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Record mile still being run 30 years later

Beatty

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Beatty had his "rabbits" ready, runners who would pace him through the various laps. The first quarter-mile disappeared in under a minute, and the two-lap time was 1:59.

Until then, Beatty was in control. The plan was to have Jim Grelle lead the third lap and he moved in front. But Grelle was struggling.

"He slowed the pace down; I could feel it slacking," Beatty said. "I was thinking, 'C'mon, Jim!' We had to be through three quarters in no less than three minutes. I was full of running, and started running up his ankles and legs."

Worse, the crowd's roar was now thunder, and Beatty was afraid he wouldn't be able to hear the timer at the end of the third lap. With perhaps 80 meters left in the quarter and a touch of panic, he took the lead from Grelle.

"Then the timer called the split and I couldn't hear him, and I was thinking, 'Oh my God,'" Beatty said. "But I figured I'd hear the public address announcer. The crowd drowned that out too. After that, absolute fear took over."

And Beatty just ran. Ran as hard and as fast as he could, the finish line tantalizing in the distance. He says his palms sweat today just thinking of it.

Almost as soon as he crossed the line, he doubled back to the timer, shouting, "Did I make it?"

"I heard the timer say 3:50-something," Beatty said. "I didn't need to hear anything else."

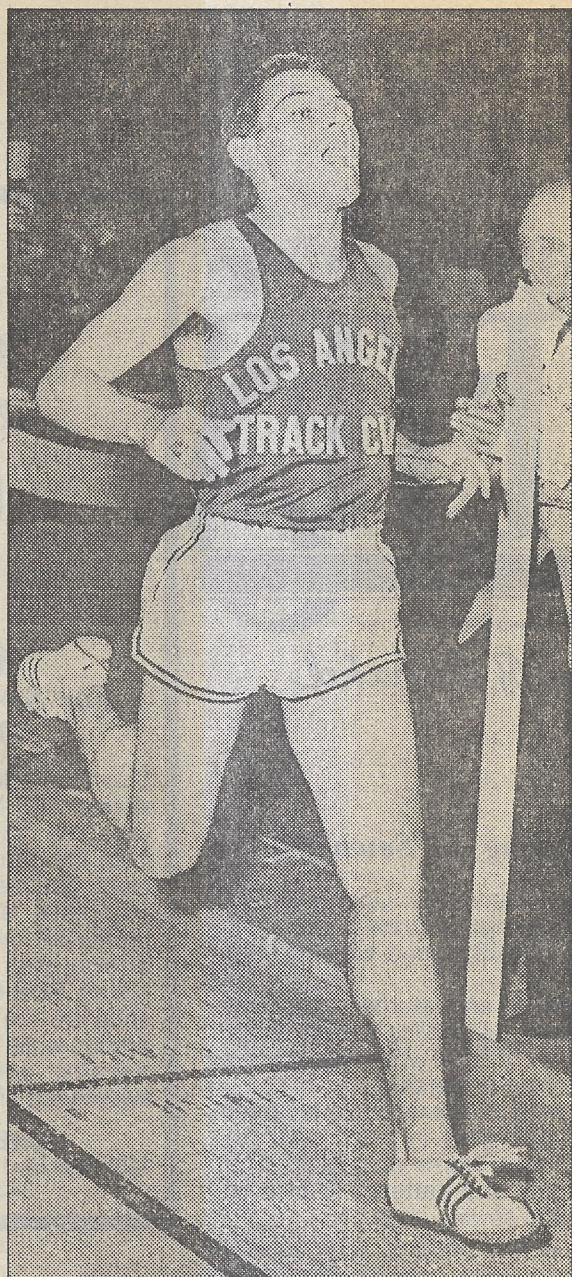
Suddenly, Beatty was a legend.

By the following afternoon, the entire country knew, as ABC's Wide World of Sports highlighted the race on its Sunday show. Beatty has a tape of it that he still watches now and then. And the goose bumps still come.

And the Charlotte native's planning and perseverance lifted him into the national track and field hall of fame. Beatty, though, still remembers Siegfried Herrmann.

"His mother and me are the only ones," said Beatty with a laugh. "He was an East German runner. Two weeks after my race, he ran a 3:59.9 indoor mile in a race in Europe."

Too late. Jim Beatty had done it first.



FILE

The finish: Jim Beatty crosses the finish line 30 years ago today to shatter the indoor mile record with a time of 3:58.9.



FILE

Jim Beatty

Born: Oct. 28, 1934.

Education: Charlotte's Central High School; UNC-Chapel Hill.

Occupation: Owner, Jim Beatty & Associates executive search firm.

Background: Starred in track at Charlotte's Central High and UNC-Chapel Hill. Set 10 U.S. and five world running records.

Welcome home: Jim Beatty is greeted by his mother on his return to Charlotte in February 1962, after setting the indoor mile record.