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Reggie Jones Gives Vols Class Instead of Points



JONES

SHED NO TEARS for Reggie Jones. The grand old man of Tennessee track hasn't run very fast in the last couple of years. He's had a few problems. But, he's still chugging. His head is up. He'll answer the starting gun tonight at Tom Black Track.

Reggie was the outstanding performer in the 1974 NCAA meet. He won the 100, was second in the 200 and anchored the Vols to third in the 440 relay. That was the year Tennessee took the national title. Jones was a freshman.

He was tough enough the next year, a tenth off his previous best, first in the NCAA 200, third in the 100. By his junior season, Reggie was running on one wheel. Nobody knew it at the time. But, it showed on the curves . . . and, at the finish line, Reggie lost a race now and then. That was new.

I remember thinking Reggie was running out of gas. I thought the change in the false-start rule had psyched him out. Because Jones was such a natural leader, I even had the bad feeling he was letting down the whole Tennessee team.

It was some kind of miracle that Reggie just missed the Olympics. His body seemed even with the winners in the picture of the blanket finish from the trials in Eugene, Ore. His lead foot was still up when Harvey Glance's was down. It was close.

FOR ALL practical purposes, that was the end of Reggie Jones' speed career. He had knee surgery. Doctors found serious damage, probably made worse by running when he should have been on the shelf. I got the message. What I had mistaken for erosion or loss of enthusiasm was a one-legged man running with all his heart.

Last season Reggie was red-shirted. He toiled at rehabilitation. This spring he was going to be back in top form. It was to be a riches-to-rags-to-riches story.

IT DIDN'T happen. Reggie has run 100 meters in 10.55 this spring. Jason Grimes, Lamar Preyor and Ricci Gardner rank ahead of him on the UT team.

"It's not over yet," said Reggie Thursday, "this isn't the last stop."

Jones was on his way then to the privacy of Stokely Center to practice starts. He was putting new spikes on his shoes. He had a positive attitude.

He chuckled about his good position for tonight's races. "There's no pressure on me this time. I don't guess anybody in the SEC expects much from me. My name hasn't been mentioned."

"I'm relaxed. If I do well, everybody will be surprised. If I don't, we'll get it together some other time."

REGGIE JONES' faith in his track future is based on a deeper faith.

"I've been praying to God, real hard," said Reggie. "I'm not fooling myself. God doesn't play games."

Jones says there may have been a time when he felt sorry for himself, when he missed the spotlight, the cheers that go to winners.

"Now, I feel good about starting over, at the bottom and working my way up. I've had to do it just like people with no talent. I'm better for the experience."

"It would have been easier to quit. I could have said 'I can't run any more,'

and that would have been it. I have my records. Those good times are on the books. What happened in '74 is mine forever. Tennessee people won't forget that. I know they won't. I don't brag about it, but I did a good job that freshman year."

He ran well longer than the doctors can explain.

"Not knowing how bad my knee was helped," says Reggie. "I thought it was just hurting. I didn't want it to be an alibi. So, I tried harder."

"I remember those races in the Olympic trials. I came from behind to win the semifinal heat. I prayed that day for guidance, for help in setting my blocks right so I could do my best."

"In the excitement of winning, I forgot that prayer. For the finals, I went back to doing it my way. I looked at Houston McTear and set my blocks the way he had his."

Reggie counts that as just one of a hundred lessons learned.

IN PLACE of points, Reggie Jones this spring has given the Volunteers class. He has offered to share his religion. Some have accepted. He has spoken to the team about clean language and manners.

"I'd never say I'm perfect or that I don't make mistakes but I have strong feelings about right and wrong and treating other people as I'd have them treat me . . . and treating 'em good even when they don't respond."

Reggie has talked about teamwork, that the Vols are in this fight together, that no one man can carry the load, that there isn't a Reggie to lean on and that everybody must share the strain.

"We'll win it . . . you count on that. We've had some bad breaks on the way to this weekend but good can come from bad. Some with better times coming in won't run as well when they get on this track. This is Tennessee. Before that championship leaves this school, there's going to be some necks straining and eyes bulging. I just know we'll compete."

Shed no tears for Reggie Jones. But, it would be nice if somebody would strike him a small medal for courage.

By See 'n Air

FRIDAY
7:30—Cable 17: Braves vs. Montreal.
11:30—TV 10: Seattle vs. Denver.

SATURDAY
1—TV 6: Minnesota vs. Red Sox.
2—TV 10: Wrestling.
3—Cable 17: Braves vs. Montreal.
3:30—TV 26: Let's Talk Sports.
4—TV 10: NCAA Basketball.
5—TV 10: Howard Davis Jr. vs. Larry Stollen, lightweight boxing. (Possibly John Tate vs. Rod Garcia).
5—TV 26: Wide World of Sports.
6:30—FM 94.3: Indianapolis time trials.

**LMS Action Set
Tonight at KR**

Racing resumes tonight at Knoxville Raceway.

Late model sportsman and bomber division cars are to be featured at the dirt facility. Time trials start at 7:30, racing at 8:30.

Saturday night competition is on tap at Atomic Speedway, 411 Dragway and Newport Raceway.

At Atomic, qualifying is scheduled for 7:30.

The Spring Bonanza, a \$2500 event, is scheduled for 411 Dragway.