

**I**s there an easier athlete to interview in all of track & field than Dwight Stones? Maybe there is somewhere, but that athlete would have to be both a consummate athlete and orator to better Stones, at 31 the dean of world-class high jumpers.

Stones certainly has plenty to talk about: a top-level career now in its 14th season; the event's most World Ranking points ever; 10 World Records (3 outdoors, 7 indoors); two Olympic bronze medals; his highest jumping ever last year, including an American Record 7-8 and a 4th in the Los Angeles Olympics.

And Stones never hesitates to state his opinion. Some may label him a loudmouth, but Stones is simply never afraid to say exactly what is on his mind—about anything.

Not only does he have opinions, Stones has facts to back them up. A casual question in this conversation prompted him to compile the exact answer: from his first-ever clearance of 7 feet, as a high school senior on March 21, 1971, through this April 21, he had cleared 7-0 or higher on 1194 occasions in 440 meets (including 14 qualifying rounds). He had 495 jumps at 2.20 (7-2½) or better in 286 meets (6 qualifiers). "I would say the error factor is plus or minus 1%," he says frankly. "I might have slipped on a mark here and there, but not many."

As if any further proof is needed of both the longevity and quality of Stones's career, one need only to note that his lowest place ever on the U.S. yearly list is 8th—in 1971.

Stones says he now is scaling down his jumping to concentrate on work as a television broadcaster. Wife Lynda and son Jason will be joined by a new addition to the family late this spring, and Stones feels it is time to look to a new career. But no, he is not giving up jumping:

**T&FN:** You are doing quite a bit of television work these days.

**Stones:** I'm working for the ABC affiliate in Los Angeles, plus I'm staying available on a freelance basis for all three networks. I'm working hard, that's for sure—you don't want to fail at this level.

**T&FN:** You always have been very intense about the high jump. Is there anything else in your life you are as intense about?

**Stones:** I feel that once I develop the correct method, the proper game plan, for success in television, I will become intense about that too.

It's difficult to be intense about anything if you don't really know the method of getting from point A to point Z. I know it isn't just going from A to C; it is A to Z. There are a multitude of paths and methods to get from where I am now to where I want to be. But I'm starting out at a much higher level than most people new in broadcasting. Most start out as interns, statisticians and things like that. I've been

## DWIGHT STONES



Bill Kilham

able to work right away; I'm in front of the public three times a week or more.

What I'm trying to do now is establish credibility in a sport other than track. So I do football interviews, basketball stories, auto racing. But it's nice to have the one sport in which I have a tremendous amount of confidence in my knowledge and feel I can do justice to that sport because I love it. I'm as big a track fan as I am into preparing and competing in my event, and I hope I can transfer that to other sports.

**T&FN:** *Besides intense, you always have appeared to be a perfectionist in the high jump. Does that carry over to other aspects of your life?*

**Stones:** Yes, it does. I am the consummate perfectionist in my event, but there are a number of reasons why. First—and I'm sure some people may think this is a self-serving comment—but of all the high jumpers out there, world class or potentially world class, in terms of pure physical talent, I'm quite a bit below most everyone.

I make up for what I lack in certain areas by knowing my event better than anyone else in the world. I learned that a long time ago, and that is why I continue to have success at my age.

Coupled with that, I really listen to my body. I know when I am asking too much of it. I feel when something is done correctly, you can expect things out of your body if you are channeling your efforts through the correct technical method.

I'm not crazy about getting over a height in a sloppy way. I know there aren't any style points in the high jump, but I operate as if there were. I feel if you make it look easy—if the average fan watching says, "That looks so easy even I could jump that high"—that's when you're doing it right. And doing things correctly means you are best serving your body in the long run to expect much longevity.

Very rarely do I expect more out of my body than it is capable of giving, because I know at what level I'm training or competing at that time. That's why it's been easy for me to peak properly, because I know what's important to me.

I decided a lot of years ago—after setting 10 World Records—that titles and championships are most important in the long run. Knowing that enabled me to peak for the Trials last year, and the World Championships in '83 and the nationals every year. Whenever I want to be on a national team, those meets become important to me and therefore I train for them.

It may be a cliché, but my training time now is quality time, not quantity. I find that working in television and still trying to be an active athlete, my time with my family has to be quality time, too.

It's fine with me to be more time conscious now, because I don't want to build a wide base for 45-50 meets a year.

Training is now a hell of a lot of fun because I'm rarely beating myself up doing it.

**T&FN:** *Your very precise approach puts you way ahead in terms of knowing what to expect from yourself and a particular competition. Younger jumpers might do things haphazardly, without any real analysis of why something works or doesn't work for them.*

**Stones:** My program works only for me and it's a program that has grown out of a lot of mistakes, a lot of people I have seen and talked with, out of trying many different things. My system is now so perfect for me and me only that nobody else could do it.

Another cliché: "Youth is wasted on the young." It is a damn shame because the young don't appreciate what they have—and that you have to grow old to gain experience.

And, "If only I knew then what I know now." For me, it has been learning not only from competitions but also the mistakes I made like being so hell-bent on competing in the Superstars and keeping the money.

I learned a tremendous number of very hard lessons, between not winning in Montreal and my behavior that affected that whole situation, to my driving obsession with the Superstars because I saw it as a way to prove to everyone—and myself—that I was a good athlete.

**T&FN:** *But even if you somehow knew all that you know today back in '73 before you set your first World Record, wouldn't you have needed to experience just what you did in order for that knowledge to mean something?*

**Stones:** Absolutely. Like now, I have a cousin who high jumps [Olympic 5th-placer Doug Nordquist] and I know a lot of young jumpers around here. I see them going to make a mistake and I want to tell them, "Trust me, you don't want to do that."

But listening to me isn't going to help them unless they experience something as well. As painful as it is to watch someone make a mistake—and know that the outcome won't be what they want—I have to keep my mouth shut. I wouldn't be doing them any service by giving them all of my experience, rather than have them live it themselves.

It's tough for me, because I've been there. Sometimes I feel like I have experienced just about everything there is to experience in the event—and about that time I get taught a lesson.

A competition like the LA Olympics comes along that is a totally new experience: a short competition, hardly anybody in it, suddenly the bar is going up and up and within 90 minutes we're jumping at 7-6, and there are victory ceremonies at the same end of the field.

It was a whole set of circumstances I never had to deal with before. There I was in the Olympics for the third time and I realized, "This is totally new!"

**T&FN:** *That must have been exciting, knowing it wasn't pat, that it wasn't just another competition.*

**Stones:** It really was. I enjoyed it all, actually going back to the '83 nationals. I got my two best performances of the year in the two most important meets. The '83 TAC and Worlds convinced me 100% that I could make the '84 Olympic team. Not until after Helsinki was I certain I wanted to take on the task of trying to make another Olympic team at age 30, even for an Olympics at home.

Once I made that decision, I had basically a year to prepare for the Trials—yet there is no way you can compare, or duplicate the intensity of those 12 months toward making the team, and then six weeks later try to be just as prepared for the Games themselves.

I was physically ready, but the intensity wasn't the same. Maybe it was only 1% less than what I had for the Trials, but it was different enough that I could feel it. I couldn't force myself to be more intense—I just needed more time.

Based on all of that, I couldn't be more pleased with the way everything turned out. If Dennis Lewis or Jimmy Howard or someone else breaks the American Record, they still can't take away the circumstances that led to the Trials and the record.

**T&FN:** *Was that 7-8 your best jump ever? You sure reacted like it was.*

**Stones:** Technically, it wasn't. But with all the surrounding circumstances, it was. Probably the single most important jump of my career was my 7-7 AR at Nice in 1981 because I was two weeks away from retiring.

That 7-7 proved to me that since I was stronger and faster and the drills were going better, therefore I should jump higher. I hadn't been jumping high since I came back two years earlier and I couldn't fit that piece into the whole puzzle.

At Nice, I finally just got pissed off and let the emotional side of my brain—which usually gets very little stimulation—take over and I just jumped. I went from being two weeks away from retiring to the American Record within half an hour.

But the circumstances of the 7-8 jump made it special. I had already made the team, which was my main goal, so I could have let down. But I had prepared precisely to jump 7-8 in that meet and then to achieve that peak and improve a record I hadn't improved upon in eight years was the most exciting and satisfying moment of my career.

Actually, from the time I cleared 2.28 [7-5½] on my first attempt to ensure

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## STONES INTERVIEW—continued

making the team, until I walked out after signing all the papers and getting fitted for all the clothes and all that—those five or six hours were the most satisfying period of time in my high jump life.

**T&FN:** *How do you feel about never having won that one big gold medal, which really is all you haven't done in the event?*

**Stones:** I've said before that you have to be more than a bit lucky to win an Olympic gold medal. Obviously I never was destined to win a gold medal. I accepted that nine years ago, but that's also why making the '84 team was so important to me. Also, I wanted to be the first American; the only major title meet where I wasn't the first American was the '83 Worlds.

My goal in LA was just to medal. I knew it would be between Sjoberg, Zhu and me. I happened to end up the odd man out. If I had won the silver, I would have been ecstatic—I would have been ecstatic to share the bronze with Zhu. But I had that ticky-tack miss at 7-7 when my elbow hit it and the bar wavered before it fell off.

Sure, I wish it hadn't fallen. It would have been great to stand on the same platform with Zhu and his dour, long face and me with my smiling, beaming face. But it just wasn't in the cards.

**T&FN:** *Something that has always been great about you is that you never hold back from saying your piece. Have you ever thought twice about that?*

**Stones:** Oh sure. I've sounded off a number of times when I shouldn't have and that was due to immaturity and believing I was indestructible. Yet, I knew what you were going to ask before you said it and I know that I never regretted stating what I believed.

**T&FN:** *That being the case, what does jumping your highest ever at age 30 tell you about how much longer you will compete?*

**Stones:** Not much, again because of circumstances. I had all the pieces fall together perfectly last year; it will never be possible for me to create anything that perfect again.

So I don't fool myself into thinking I can jump higher under conditions which are much less stimulating. So try to achieve records for age, remain competitive at a level where I can still be ranked among the world's top 10 and the top three Americans. Use those as goals.

But as I said, I've had to learn to juggle my time between training and work—and I have told the television people that I won't allow training or competition to interfere with the job. Television is the priority and it has taken me months to learn how to train around work.

So I got a late start training for indoors this winter, as much because of the adrenaline drain—the letdown in emotional

intensity. But I found at the end of the indoor season that my jumps were coming around because my body wasn't beat all to hell. I was on a peak physically, but with no meets to use the peak in.

I'm in fantastic shape for the middle of April, so I want to try to hold this level; maintain it but don't load on any more either.

So if I can continue in this mode, I'm thinking seriously about being the first to break the American Record—and I fully realize Jimmy Howard is recycling right now. I know I'm peaking for TAC this year and Jimmy knows me well enough to take it for granted he will have to be really ready.

But I know that '85 and '86 will be transitional years for me: I will fade out the intensity in the high jump regarding a multitude of competitions and slowly phase in the intensity and learn the game plan for television.

Then I'll see where I am. The '87 World Championships are sort of an outside goal for me. I'd like to make that team if what I do in the next two years warrants me taking a shot at it. Then if I make that team, I can't honestly say I won't think about jumping in 1988.

**T&FN:** *You mean we will have to put up with you for a while longer?*

**Stones:** I don't ever expect to retire completely. I may quit jumping at certain levels; quit going to the nationals and just jump in master's competition and go for the record that stands for a certain age. Maybe I will gauge things by when my name doesn't appear at least once in each issue of the magazine.

But don't ever expect me to have a big retirement party. This is just too much fun. □

Dwight Edwin Stones was born December 6, 1953, in Los Angeles and is 6-5/180. Attended UCLA ('72) and Cal State Long Beach ('76) after graduating from Glendale High School ('71). Now competes for Tiger International. Olympic bronze medalist in the 1972 and '76 Games, he was 4th in '84. Has set 3 outdoor World Records: 2.30/7-6% '73, 2.31/7-7 '76, 2.32/7-7% '76 to go with 7 alterations to the indoor World Record during '75-'76. Also cleared American Record 2.34/7-8 to win last year's Olympic Trials. The all-time points leader in the T&FN high jump rankings with 90. NCAA champion in '76. His progression, including positions in the World and U.S. Rankings and Lists and places in major meets:

Year	Age	HJ	WR	AR	WL	AL	Major Meets
1969	15	6-3%					
1970	16	6-7					
1971	17	7-1%			=28	8	10)TAC
1972	18	7-3	3	1	=10	=3	3)OG 1)OT 3)NCAA
1973	19	7-6%	1	1	1	1	1)TAC
1974	20	7-5%	1	1	1	1	1)TAC
1975	21	7-5%	1	1	1	1	3)TAC
1976	22	7-7%	1	1	1	1	3)OG 2)OT 1)TAC
1977	23	7-6%	3	1	=3	1	2)WCup 1)TAC
1978	24	7-6%	3	1	=5	2	1)TAC
1979	25	did not compete—AAU suspension					
1980	26	7-5	—	3	=20	6	10)OT 3)TAC
1981	27	7-7	4	2	=3	2	9)TAC
1982	28	7-7	3	1	=8	=2	4)TAC
1983	29	7-6	7	2	=26	=7	6)WCup 1)TAC
1984	30	7-8	5	1	=7	1	4)OG 1)OT
1985	31	7-4%					

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