

## T&FN Interview

# FRANKLIN JACOBS

by Jon  
Hendershott

**R**andy Newman, meet Franklin Jacobs. While he may have taken exception to your song Short People, along with millions of others, Jacobs is definitely not a short person you have to lift up in order to say hello.

Most likely Jacobs could jump far over the head of anyone who tried to do that. True, Franklin is 5-8 tall, but the 20-year-old sophomore at New Jersey's Fairleigh Dickinson University is a giant in the art of high jumping.

He took up the event only as a senior at Eastside High in Paterson, N.J., in 1976. He cleared 6-8. As a freshman at FDU, he exploded on the world scene in '77, clearing 7-5 for 2nd in the NCAA, 7-5½ for 2nd in the AAU and 7-4¼ for 3rd against the USSR. In his first serious year in the high jump, Jacobs ranked 8th in the world—and every other jumper rated in the world's top 15 for the last season was more than 6 feet tall.

But during this past indoor season, Jacobs really took off and soared: 7-6 at CYO and then a world indoor record 7-7¼ at Millrose, equal to the highest leap ever by an American and a stunning 23¼" over his own head. He won the NCAA and U.S.-Europe match and ended the season as the No. 1-rated high jumper in the country.

All of which is fine by Jacobs, because it means just another facet of his life-long dream is coming true: the dream of being a world-class athlete. And now that he is one, he is enjoying it thoroughly.

He is a smiling, outgoing young man, who loves the interaction with the fans who crowd around to watch him jump. He autographs anything and everything thrust in front of him, he raps good-naturedly with people and mugs for pictures.

He loves the high jump, and what it has brought him. And he knows that there are even greater achievements to be claimed, no longer mere boyhood dreams but realistic goals to be attained through his immense talent for jumping over a bar nearly 2 feet above his head.

**T&FN:** So much has happened to you in really just the last 6 months, what would you say all the success and acclaim has meant to you?

**Jacobs:** It's been a dream for so long. It means I'm on my way to being a success as an athlete. I've always wanted to be a great, superb athlete. I've watched many on television and I've had many idols.

But I always wanted to be there myself and the last few months I have been. I've accomplished that. I've been living my dream, and it's beautiful.

**T&FN:** You had a great year outdoors

last year in the high jump, so what did you anticipate you might do during the '78 indoor season?

**Jacobs:** Well, my goal was to break the world record. I was right at it in Maryland, but I wasn't ready to hold the world record just then. That's one reason I didn't go any higher after I did 7-6.

But I did set my goal at owning that record. I wanted to go 7-8 during the winter, but after I did break the record who couldn't be satisfied with that? After I got the record, I felt I should wait and go for the outdoor record.

**T&FN:** Since you wanted the record, why did you develop the tactic of stopping after you had won?

**Jacobs:** Well, I had the world record at the time so I was satisfied. If somebody wanted me to jump for a record, then they would have to be beating me in the competition, but nobody was doing that.

**T&FN:** What did you mean that you weren't ready to hold the world record at the CYO meet?

**Jacobs:** My plans were to break the world record at one of the big meets in New York City. I wanted to do it there.

**T&FN:** Why, because it's close to home?

**Jacobs:** As a kid, I always wanted to compete in Madison Square Garden. That was another dream. After CYO, I was very confident that I could get the record, so I felt "Franklin, wait a while." Plus I wondered if I really wanted to hold the record right then and I decided I could wait for it. Before I go to a meet, I make out a plan and holding the world record was not part of my plan for the CYO meet.

In fact, I planned to win the CYO meet at 7-4. But it went up to 7-6 and I thought for sure it was won there, but it went up again. It was very tempting, but I decided I should wait.

**T&FN:** Were you satisfied with that decision, even though Greg Joy did clear a record 7-7?

**Jacobs:** Yes. Actually, it was

afterwards that I was satisfied with the decision. At the time, I told myself, "Hey, if he makes it, I'm going up too." I was thinking positively.

But after he made it, I decided I would wait for him up in the Garden. I planned it and it worked out; the three Olympic medalists would be there and everything worked out perfectly.

**T&FN:** That was a real storybook victory then—you planned on winning, on beating all the Olympic medalists and setting a world record, and that's how it worked out.

**Jacobs:** Well, I figured that while I was ahead in the prediction game I should give up predicting. I just felt really good. I was thinking positive, which is another strong part of my jumping, so I was really influenced by that.

**T&FN:** Can you remember your thoughts when you were going over that bar and actually achieving your dreams?

**Jacobs:** Well, it all really hit me after. During it I was concentrating on winning that meet like I had planned. So when I went over, I was telling myself that the meet wasn't over and I might have to go another height. I was concentrating on 7-8 and I knew there was a strong possibility that Dwight Stones could clear 7-7¼. So I really didn't consider 7-7¼ as enough until he missed for the final time.

After that was when everything started going in my mind—beating those guys, the dream coming true, being the best high jumper indoors ever in the world.

**T&FN:** Has there been one major change in your jumping between '77 and '78 to cause not only the improvement but also your consistency at high heights?

**Jacobs:** Well, I've had more experience, which is a big factor. I competed internationally last summer, which helped a lot.

But I think it is more concerned with thinking positively and concentrating on that. I told myself that I could do these things and I really believed I could. That was a big factor in getting up there.

**T&FN:** You talked yourself into it.

**Jacobs:** Exactly. Even when I cleared 7-5 last year, I knew I had a couple of inches left. Those extra inches were building my confidence. They were saying

to me, "Franklin, we're waiting for you up here." It's just a matter of timing in my style and one day it was going to pop and it did.

**T&FN:** *It sounds like this whole thing—whether it's jumping a world record or clearing 7 feet repeatedly in practice—comes from just a stronger mental set.*

**Jacobs:** That's it. You might clear a great height in a meet, but you can't work at that height in practice. Last year at this time, I would put the bar at 6-6 in practice and have problems clearing it. Now I can work at 7 feet with no problems at all. I think that's a good sign—for outdoors, too.

**T&FN:** *So what was your reaction to Yashchenko taking away your world record?*

**Jacobs:** Sure it's really nice to be "the world record holder," but he did go out there and give 100% and get a good jump. It wasn't exactly a disappointment, but it encouraged me that, "Franklin, you've got to jump. You've got to jump higher."

In some ways I'm glad he did go over 7-8½, because 7-8 has been the unrealistic dream of high jumpers for a long time and nobody has been even near that height. It was the impossible dream. But now, even though I felt earlier in the year that I could clear 7-8, he has built up my mind even better. Now I realize that not only should 7-8 be a goal, but that 7-9 and even 7-10 is not impossible.

**T&FN:** *With all the acclaim, have you ever felt expectations to do more, that 7-7¼ isn't enough?*

**Jacobs:** Well, I know that if I cleared 7-8 one night, there would be people who would buy tickets for my next meet right in the front row by the high jump and expect to see me go 7-9. They always want you to go higher; because you jump a world record, people want you to go that high every night.

**T&FN:** *So how do you try to deal with that?*

**Jacobs:** That's part of the reason I developed the strategy of winning, then stopping. Otherwise, I would be trying every night to break the record and eventually I would jump myself out of this world. So that's why I just jump to win.

**T&FN:** *You talk a lot about the mental aspects of jumping. That must be Bible of the Sport*

*very important to you.*

**Jacobs:** All my life I have competed with big guys and that has been a challenge. By "big guys" I mean older guys, and when you're younger you have to be better than the average guy to be accepted.

So I had to really put on a good show. I love basketball, but I couldn't just play basketball and just make a shot. Maybe I had to do a beautiful move on a guy to get open for that shot. I've always participated with the big guys, I've always thought



Steve Sutton/Duomo

I'm up there, it's a long way up. I really explode off the floor. That always was a very positive thing to me, because I knew the guys who were bigger than me had to do so much more because of their bigger bodies.

**T&FN:** *You have said that tallness is just a state of mind. So you have had to put up with the fact of your height all your life?*

**Jacobs:** You could say that, but for most of my life, I wasn't a superstar in athletics. There were many guys like me around: they thought positively, they competed, but when they came to college they let the big guys... no, I guess it was just anybody with no facts, demolish their beautiful thoughts and ideals.

**T&FN:** *Do you feel your height does limit you in any way athletically?*

**Jacobs:** No way. It's all in the mind—and I can talk about that because I've got the facts.

**T&FN:** *How do you actually regard your taller, more experienced opponents?*

**Jacobs:** I really don't have regard for them and that's not a put-down. They're just other high jumpers. I don't separate jumpers by height. I always go out to win, I think positive and I don't want to give those guys any boosts in confidence. There's one jumper who is very good for a big guy and that's Dwight.

**T&FN:** *How did you get interested in the high jump?*

**Jacobs:** When I was in high school I liked the idea of being a high jumper, of doing just what the name says. The high jump described me as a basketball player, but I like, track and high jumping because it is an individual thing. If I was to be a success, then I would have to do it. I always wanted to be recognized for what I accomplished myself, not along with four other guys.

**T&FN:** *What did you clear in high school?*

**Jacobs:** 6-8—and I went over the bar just like I was sitting in a chair. I was afraid to get hurt. I always used a flop-like style. My muscles were always too tight for me to do more with the straddle than play with it.

**T&FN:** *Did you name your style "the slope" because of the big arch in your back?*

**Jacobs:** Yes. It's just a lot more

positively and I've never, ever given them an advantage.

**T&FN:** *John Thomas was recently quoted [see p. 62] that he could see you improving another 2-3", but that 8 feet was impossible because there simply is a limit that a small man can go. How do you respond to that?*

**Jacobs:** I disagree with that totally, primarily because of the chauvinism of the big man. I've watched many big guys and they can't jump. They may have a longer torso or longer arms, so they are physically bigger than we are. I've watched their vertical lift from the floor to their feet—not too high. Like Kareem Jabbar—he can slam that ball so hard, you'd think he had just jumped to the moon, but I've watched his feet and he's not that high off the ground.

But I've seen myself in films and when

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effective style for me. There's always been an arch, but I'm always improving it. I always thought it would get me over the bar more comfortably. When the timing is right on the slope, I can go however high I want. I can really go.

The thing is, every athlete's style is unique, all his own. People say that since my style isn't the straddle, then it must be the flop. Well, I don't want any flop in it.

*T&FN:* What did you think about heights like even 7 feet back in high school?

*Jacobs:* Astronomic. It was the ultimate. I really admired the guys who could do it. It was very important—and it still is to many jumpers.

You know, even the way it is announced: *Seven* feet. The emphasis gets heavier the higher you go: *Seven-one*, *Seven-two*. *Seven-SEVEN! SEVEN-NINE!!*

But once you clear a height, you remove a barrier from your path. Then you can set new goals and look ahead.

*T&FN:* We have heard that you jumped over fences when you were a child and even now you'll jump over your girlfriend's car sometimes. Have you always been able to jump?

*Jacobs:* The thing was, as a kid I was always eager to try. I wasn't afraid to take a shot at something. I might bet a friend a lunch that I could do something. Again, it was that positive attitude. Even if I had never done something, I thought I could do it. Maybe part of it is the idea of the little guy proving he can do as much as the big guy. The guy who said I couldn't do something just made me all the more determined to do it.

*T&FN:* What would you like to jump eventually?

*Jacobs:* I would like to set the world record outdoors. I won't say how high I can jump, but I'm positive I can achieve that goal. Then I can set a new goal.

The reason I set goal after goal is because I don't feel there is a peak. If I continue to work and continue to think positive, then I'll continue to jump well.

It means a lot to me to have been the best in the *world*. I feel so much more positive after breaking the world record. It gave me such a lift. That's another reason I love the high jump so much—it has shown me things you can love in life. Because of it, so many things have opened up for me. High jumping is teaching me to value other things I hadn't considered before, like an education. It's made me think more.

The thing is, I love that term "world record holder." That sounds really good and means a great deal and I want it back again. It makes me think of the goals I set, the dreams that were finally realized. It makes me determined to do it again. □

Franklin Jacobs was born Dec. 30, 1957, in Mullins, S. C. 5-8/150. Progression:

Year	Age	Class	School	Height
'76	18	12	Eastside, Paterson, N.J.	6-8
'77	19	Fr	Fairleigh Dickinson	7-5¼
'78	20	So	" "	7-7¼ WIR