

They said he was too small to be a vaulter. At 5-9/150, he surely didn't have the imposing physical build that would set the world on fire. But Joe Dial had a fire burning deep inside him, and the winds that carried the unsupportive opinions about his ability only added fuel to the flames.

Every year of his vaulting career, he got better. By the time he was a prep senior he was one of the 10 best open vaulters in the country. Nobody worried about him getting better because he was "too small." Joe and his dad, Dean (a 12-4 vaulter on a bamboo pole as a prep senior in 1950), learned and worked the event like they never had before.

The results kept showing that Joe was improving. Last year, for the first time, he was ranked among the world's top 10. In mid-May of this year he set two American Records (ultimately 19-2¼) and in one of those meets became the first American to jump 19 feet twice in the same day.

Joe Dial laughs and smiles a lot, and he has good reason to these days. He has won his fourth NCAA title and his first TAC crown. He gripped at 15-11 for his 19-2¼ AR, giving him a 47¼" push-off that puts him in a very select class.

In his quest to become a great vaulter, Dial has tried many things. He once poured buckshot into the pole, hoping it would bend more. It didn't. He pumped helium into it, hoping to lighten it. "The tip blew off that sucker," he says. He iced his pole to keep the grip cool in the hot Austin sun while winning the NCAA. And, most recently he has been successful at "Volzing," the technique named after Dave Volz whereby the vaulter delicately helps the bar stay on the pegs with his hands.

For sure, Dial has proved something: an "I'll show 'em" attitude that just won't quit. Observes the 22-year-old Oklahoman, "Here I am just 3 inches off the World Record. I never thought I'd get up there. But, you know, slowly but surely . . . I don't know where it stops."

We talked with Joe after his 18-4½ victory at Berkeley's Foot Locker Summer Games, the final domestic stop before he jumped into the European vault battles:

T&FN: How have you been able to handle your new fame?

Dial: I try not to pay much attention to it. I just try to go out and jump. I've been wondering how it's going to affect my jumping. You know, I haven't been thinking about the pole vault all week and then I get out there and think, "Hey, I better get my head on."

T&FN: If you go a whole week without thinking about the pole vault, sounds like you're giving the fame more attention than you want to.

Dial: Well, interviews and TV stuff—that takes up a lot of your time. Like for

JOE DIAL



Dave Peterson, Des Moines Register

this meet here, a couple weeks ago I flew out here and back home. All in one day. Just to do some interview stuff—met a bunch of reporters and TV cameras. I was thinking all I'd done that week—I had press conferences; must've had 5 or 6 either talking on the phone or actually there. And these banquets. Last night I drove 7 hours to Kansas City for a banquet and then when the banquet was over I drove 7 hours back. Got home at 4 a.m. and had to get up at 6 to come out here.

T&FN: *That's crazy!*

Dial: I know; you don't have time to think about the pole vault. And suddenly it's the day of the meet and you've got to get your head squared on straight.

T&FN: *When you go to Europe you're going to be jumping in meets sometimes that are only 2-3 days apart. How do you do it?*

Dial: Last year, my PR was 18-7 and I went over there and jumped 18-4½ 8 times. I love jumping over there—this is my eighth time over there. I think I jump better over there, so I'm curious to see what happens when I go over.

T&FN: *What do you do there when you're not in a meet?*

Dial: I just stay in the hotel and rest. Everybody else is out messin' around or sightseeing. I just get ready for the next meet. It's important to me to jump good every time I step on the runway. I don't see how some guys can go out there and say, "Oh well, let's just play today." You know, I try to go out there every time to win.

T&FN: *But you don't seem to be a person so preoccupied with winning that no one can approach you.*

Dial: But if I get beat, it just kills me. Like when I went over to the World Indoor Games. I had made 18-10 in practice—and before the season even started I thought I was going to go over there and set a new World Record. Got over there and those guys killed me. It made me so mad. I just said, "Oh man, I gotta get this together."

T&FN: *You think you jump better in Europe than here. Why? They don't have really great winds.*

Dial: No, but the meets are at night. It's cool. The fans are great. The winds kind of swirl, but it's not enough to really affect you—you can really concentrate on your technique. And, for me, jumping so often really implants in my brain what I have to do. You know, I think about it all the time because that's all I'm doing over there—just vaulting. My technique gets a lot better.

T&FN: *So do you think you jump better with winds or without?*

Dial: It really depends. I think at the beginning of the year I jump better with the wind. But at the end of the year, . . . well, I guess you jump better with the wind

than without it. But after May, you don't really get a wind. Even if you do get a wind it's so hot that you can't vault anyway.

I really like indoors. You know, they used to rip Jeff Buckingham and say, "He can only jump in a tailwind." But he was the only American who jumped the bar in Helsinki. Everyone else no-heighted. There he had a smokin' headwind and he went over. It was only 17-8, but at least he made the bar.

T&FN: *Does it bug you at all when you hear people say that you're too small?*

Dial: Well, I think there's no way they're going to be thinking that now. There's no way they can think I'm too small. I mean, what do I have to do? I've jumped higher than any American has ever jumped. Any way you want to look at it—consistency, height-wise, I beat the big guys in the big meets, beat 'em in the small ones. You know, I've got to be coming along!

T&FN: *Has anybody ever told you that you're too small to your face?*

Dial: No, I'd just hear it through the grapevine.

T&FN: *That must have given you a pretty good amount of incentive.*

Dial: You know, it's probably good that all that started about my sophomore year.

T&FN: *In college?*

Dial: In high school. I was too little. What I don't understand is guys will jump 19 feet one year and the next year they can't even make anything. I can't see me doing that. Next year indoors. . . I think 18-8 is going to be a joke. I don't know, but. . .

What I like is every year my next year indoors I jump higher than I did outdoors the year before, and if I do that next year it's a new World Record. So that's why I'm ready to just pack it up and start training for next year. I want to just quit right now and train and come back next year and just kill 'em. Next year indoors they'd say, "Where in the heck did this guy come from?" But going to October, that's not going to give me much time.

T&FN: *Why did you ever take up the vault? Were you really just 5 years old?*

Dial: Yep, I can remember it right now. I don't know why I started. I had a couple of sticks in the ground with nails in the back of them. And I'd get one of these. . . I don't know—they'd grow in Oklahoma by the water, and you take all the leaves off and everything and you put it up for a crossbar. Just go over and start jumping and I thought it was great.

T&FN: *What did you jump with?*

Dial: A broken-off pole. It was pretty big around, probably bigger than the poles I use now.

I really didn't start vaulting until the 5th grade. We lived in Marlow then and my dad had me a bunch of mattresses in the front yard, and he made some standards

that went like 10 feet. And I'd just practice, practice, practice. I made 8-feet one day and I was excited. When I really started practicing was in the 8th grade—that's when I first started bending the pole. We'd go out three times a day—no exaggeration—I would spend literally 6 hours a day vaulting. Me and my friends would go out and pole vault in the rain just because it was raining, because we'd never vaulted in the rain.

But I loved it. I'd go in and watch films of Buckingham and those other guys, and I couldn't understand how they could push off the pole like that. You know, get over their grip. I'd get 2" [over my grip] and I thought that was unbelievable.

T&FN: *It looks like you're "Volzing" the bar a lot now.*

Dial: That's so terrible. You know what's so contradictory about what they said? They said there was a smokin' tailwind and I put the bar back up there. Now you know as well as I do that if there's a smokin' tailwind and you hit that bar, very hard or not, it's just going to fall to that pit. There's no way both of them was right.

There's no doubt that I touched the bar with my hand—you can see it in that picture you ran. But that bar is not bent one bit, and I have films on it.

T&FN: *Do you work on that technique?*

Dial: Last year I did. This year—that was one of the first times I put my hand on the bar. On my 19-2, my left hand was way up in the air—I was making sure I didn't touch it on that jump!

T&FN: *Isn't it strange how when one person breaks a "barrier," then it just seems like everybody can slip on by?*

Dial: Well, I know when everybody hears about me. . . I bet the Europeans are just going, "What the hell—that little popcorn fart! What's he doing jumping that high?" I don't think any of them will believe it. That's why I can't wait to jump against them. □

Daniel Joe Dial was born October 26, 1962, in Marlow, Oklahoma, and is 5-9/150. A 4-time NCAA vault champ (2 indoors, 2 outdoors), he graduated from Oklahoma State ('85) and Marlow (Ok) High School ('81). Has set two ARs this year (5.83/19-1½ and 5.85/19-2¼) and 3 CRs (5.79/19-0 in addition to the two ARs). Still holds the HSR at 5.52/18-1¼. His Senior and Junior PRs, with placings on pertinent all-time lists: Senior 5.85/19-2¼ (=3, =5 W; 1, 1 A; 1, 1 C); High School & Junior 5.52/18-1¼ (6, x WJ; 2, 4 AJ; 1, 1 HS). His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	Affil	PV	Major Meets
'74	11	Ok Elem	7-6	
'75	12	"	8-4	
'76	13	Ok JHS	9-1	
'77	14	"	12-7	
'78	15	Ok HS	14-8	
'79	16	"	16-2¼	
'80	17	"	17-5¼	4t)TAC Jr
'81	18	"	18-1¼ (x, 8)	6t)TAC 2)TAC Jr
'82	19	Ok St	18-4¼ (x, 10)	9t)TAC nh)NCAA
'83	20	"	18-5¼i (x, 8)	dnq)TAC 2)NCAA
'84	21	"	18-7 (10, 3)	4t)OT 1)NCAA
'85	22	"	19-2¼	1)TAC 1)NCAA