

MIKE TULLY

ery few pole vaulters have been jumping as high, and for as long, as Mike Tully. The Southern California native made his first impact internationally a decade ago.

Yet, despite the physical punishment the event can dish out, Tully produced his finest jumping in 1984, raising the American Record finally to 19-1 and winning the Olympic silver medal in Los Angeles.

Yes, Tully has had—dare we say it?—ups and downs in his career, but his consistently top-level jumping has helped rank him among the top half-dozen Americans in 9 of the past 10 years (No. 1 four times). And he has been among the world's leading 10 on six occasions.

Tully has always gone about his craft with quiet diligence, contrary to the public image he had in his younger days: that of a flaky beach-bum surfer. That view came from the imaginations of writers who never got to know Tully, for he is a quiet, private man by choice.

But he likes to talk about pole vaulting. Our talk with Tully came on a late-March afternoon soon after he had returned from a trip to Australia—and before he could force himself to get back to redoing a bathroom:

T&FN: *At least one thing you do when aren't vaulting is acting.*

Tully: Well, I did some things before the Olympics and I've done a few things since. I costarred in an episode of *Hardcastle and McCormick*; I played Brian Keith as a young man when he flashed back to his days in World War II. That was a neat experience because if the writers decide to have him flash back to his past in other episodes, it probably will be me playing him. So it might be a recurring role.

I costarred in an episode of *Matt Houston*, and I had a role in *A Bunny's Tale*, a TV movie about Gloria Steinem that was shown this winter. I've also done an *A-Team* show recently. They're all speaking roles.

I'm not looking at acting as a lifetime career thing, but I never would know what it was like unless I tried it. So I'm just giving it a go and we'll see what happens.

T&FN: *Something you have done for a long time is pole vault. You set a World Junior Record back in 1975 and yet did your best vaulting ever last year. What has contributed to your longevity in such a physically demanding event?*

Tully: Probably the main thing is that I'm just a big-boned human. My parents are big and I'm big. I have an older brother who is 6-5/260. I'm able to bear the physical load it takes to be a vaulter that long. Earl Bell has had physical problems; so has Billy Olson.

The hardest thing for me to do in this sport is keep my weight down. I have to diet every day if I want to be a world-class pole vaulter—and that's no fun at all.

I got up to around 220 a couple of years ago. That was in the off-season when you sit around and have a few beers. But keeping my weight down where I wanted it was a big thing last year. I wanted to get down to 188 and I was 189 at the Trials and 191 at the Olympics. I think I got some of the good results I did because I kept my weight down.

T&FN: *What does that do specifically for you in the vault?*

Tully: For me, everything. I'm able to lift my body better with my arms, and I'm able to run that much faster because I'm not carrying that much weight. I might lose a little muscle, but I can make up for that with better technique.

Actually, I honestly felt I was the best vaulter in the world between 1977 and 1980. Kozakiewicz was doing well then, too, but I won both World Cups, I had two indoor records in '78 and a supposed outdoor record.

In 1980, it really wasn't fair to rank the Americans because we just cut the jets off back in April. I know I did because I felt like the season was over. After the Trials, I didn't jump for 18 months.

But I was close to jumping 19 feet back in 1979 or even '78. It was just a matter of changing a couple of technical things, which I had to do anyway when I started vaulting again. That was one of the reasons for all my improvement last year.

I really worked last year; I sacrificed a lot of track meets in '82 and '83 and even in '84. The main thing I had to relearn was how to run. In the late '70s, I used a real short stride with a quick turnover of my legs. I had to learn to lengthen out my stride, to open it up so I could carry more velocity on the runway. Speed is the essential thing in the vault and if you don't have it, you won't jump high.

T&FN: *You have been described as having one of the strongest minds in the event. What causes that mental strength?*

Tully: Well, it's funny because I can kiss off a meet or a whole season if I want. But when I really want something, I will work so hard for it. The meet might be 8 months down the road, but I'll figure out on paper and in my head what I feel I'll have to do to be really ready for that one meet.

There is a book in the desk where I'm sitting that has the records of what I was doing in training 12 years ago. So I can pull out my book at any time and find a reference to what I was doing at any meet in the past 12 years. Or my hand grip or the length of my run. I can just pull it out and look it up.

I do feel I'm better technically than anyone in the world, especially for a big man. On the other hand, I'm big but I'm not that strong. My legs are stronger basically than my upper body.

I think I've got a general good "everything"



about the vault. I'm strong enough. I'm fast, but not real fast. I plant very well and that's probably the key to my vaulting; running and planting properly. I'm consistent in everything.

Thierry Vigneron is that same way. He's not real clean in any one area so that you can tell where he is really good. I'm like Bruce Jenner in the decathlon; he didn't have a real weak event and I'm consistently good throughout my technique.

T&FN: *How did losing the 18-8¼ record vault in 1978 affect you?*

Tully: It seems like something always comes up with me. When I was in junior high school, I was always getting in trouble. I was a smartass who used to open his mouth and say something that got him into trouble.

When I got into high school, I decided that if you don't say anything, you don't get into trouble. So that's what I did and I have kept that same philosophy as I have gotten older.

Personality-wise, I feel I'm really a nice guy and once people get to know me, I feel they would agree. But I won't say anything to anybody.

What was your question? Oh, yeah, about the 18-8 vault—what happens with me I feel is that when something happens it's either good or bad. There is no middle ground. Like I was at a meet in Sweden in 1975 and I was sitting in this chair and, all of a sudden, it just fell apart. I have no idea why.

My point is, you just have to take the good with the bad. There is no other way to do it.

T&FN: *You were stung by the 1980 boycott and you didn't jump for 18 months after the '80 Trials. Were you remotivated by the fact that the Games would be held in your hometown?*

Tully: After the '80 Trials, I knew I wouldn't be jumping for a while, but I also knew I would jump again. I never told anybody I would retire; when I say "I am going to retire," that's when I will do just that. But not before.

Because of the boycott and taking the 18 months off, I became addicted to tennis. I got to be a pretty good tennis player. But I also thought that with the Games being held in Los Angeles, there was no reason for me to sit here at home and watch them on TV. I knew I would try for the Games in Los Angeles; it was just a matter of mapping it all out and then giving it my best shot.

But I never said I would quit and having the 18 months off has helped me even now as a vaulter. There could be vaulters in this country or other countries who are getting burned out, but as far as I'm concerned, I'm jumping through 1988. I feel that 18 months I did take off have helped my motivation.

T&FN: *What were your feelings going into the Games—we rated you the favorite—and what were your reactions to winning the silver medal?*

Tully: I'm really happy with the silver because I could have just as easily come up emptyhanded. Five days before in training I made 19-1 easily; in fact, I feel if there had been a meet that day, I would have jumped a World Record.

I still felt I would win the meet, but I got a cramp in my right calf on the run of my second jump at the winning height. Once your calf cramps, it's like trying to drive a car with a flat tire. I've had cramping problems for a long time and it could have happened

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TULLY INTERVIEW—continued

on the day's first jump just as easily.

T&FN: *Once you do retire, do you have any idea what thing, what activity, you can devote as much mental and physical energy as you do to the vault?*

Tully: It's going to be a tough time. One thing is, I know I *don't* want to coach. The thing is, I've got so much knowledge accumulated, so I will want that to go to somebody. I'm not sure who or how but it would be a waste not to share it with someone, somehow. I've worked with Brandon Richards a little, so who knows?

There are other things I can do. I've been messing around with the stock market for several years. Some friends and I are involved in oil and gas deals. Those keep me busy. The acting is a possibility, but I'm not counting firmly on that.

I think I could probably play in masters level tennis or golf. There are celebrity tournaments in both, too—in fact, a couple of months ago, I won the Steve Garvey Celebrity Golf Tournament.

T&FN: *Is the pole vault a reflection at all of Mike Tully the person?*

Tully: I don't know if you can relate it that way. I do feel vaulting is one of the best single events in all of sport, any sport. It's fun and unique and people always like to watch the vault.

I don't know if you can compare it to a person. I'm just lucky I got into the sport because it has taken me virtually everywhere in the world. I'm doing okay financially now. It's been good for me.

I suspect that if I wasn't vaulting I would be playing either professional baseball or football, providing I didn't get hurt on the way up. It has to do with my hand-eye coordination; I can just *do* it, so if I wasn't vaulting I would be doing one of those other sports that involves that skill.

But I have been very happy with the decision I made to pursue vaulting. I can't complain because vaulting has been wonderful for me. □

Michael Scott Tully was born October 21, 1956, in Long Beach, California, and is 6-3/190. Started vaulting at Millikan High School of Long Beach (graduate 1974). While a senior at UCLA in '78, broke the WR with a jump of 18-8½ (5.71) which was disallowed on a technicality. Now competes for the New York AC and set 3 ARs in '84: 18-11 (5.77), 19-¾ (5.81) and 19-1 (5.82). Set indoor WRs of 18-4 (5.59) and 18-5½ (5.62), both in '78. His progression, including World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses and finishes in major meets:

Year	Age	PV	Major Meets
1972	15	11-6	
1973	16	14-1½	
1974	17	16-8¾	
1975	18	17-10 (9, 4)	nq)TAC nq)NCAA
1976	19	17-10½ (x, 4)	nh)OT 2)TAC 4)NCAA
1977	20	18-4 (2, 1)	1)WCup 1)TAC 2)NCAA
1978	21	18-8½ (3, 1)	2)TAC 1)NCAA
1979	22	18-3 (2, 1)	1)WCup 1)TAC
1980	23	18-6½ (10, 3)	2)OT nh)TAC
1981	24	did not compete	
1982	25	18-4½ (x, 6)	4)TAC
1983	26	18-0 (x, 6)	nq)WCup 1)Pan-Am 3)TAC
1984	27	19-1 (4, 1)	2)OG 1)OT
1985	28	18-8	