

TRACK & FIELD

50 cents

NEWS

December 1973



OLDFIELD:

ITA in the Off-Season

BRIAN OLDFIELD

Jim Ryun, Randy Matson, Bob Seagren, Lee Evans: ITA started its career on a high note with the signing of four big world record holders. And the addition of super-talent Kip Keino a few months later seemingly filled out the cast of stars. Yet, through a tumultuous first season, the No. 1 performer was one of the "lesser-lights," Olympic shot putter Brian Oldfield.

Captivating crowds with his flashy garb (a variety of tight swimming trunks and flowered tops), eye-catching warmup tosses (underhand, overhand, two-hands, backwards, etc.) and surprising speed in trouncing female sprinters, the Brodingtonian Oldfield was a clear stand-out. And he forged a competitive record to back up his ostentatious presence, becoming the first man to reach 70 feet indoors, raising the undercover standard three times, finally to 70-10½. Only once in 16 meets did he lose.

Those familiar with the Oldfield legend will recall that he was a so-so putter for Middle Tennessee State in the mid '60's. His 6-5 presence was first really felt on the scene when he was ranked 10th in the world for '69. He just as quickly disappeared before wowing the crowds with his now-familiar antics at the Olympic Trials in Eugene. He grabbed third spot on the team, eliminating world record holder Randy Matson and went on to capture sixth at Munich.

Now 28, Oldfield is recovering from an interesting summer which included such earthy pursuits as taking a fling in the Highland Games in Scotland. When interviewed in mid-December, he had just returned to his Chicago-area home after training at Western Kentucky for several weeks. Oldfield is an interviewer's dream—just turn him on and away he goes:

T&FN: You're well-known as a buffoon and a wildman, at least this is the impression left with most people. How close to the real you is this extroverted self?

Oldfield: Well, you see, I've got this party hat. I've got a party hat, and when I'm traveling—and I really love track—I put it on. You know, we're going here and there, bunch of guys saying, "hey-hey-hey," and it carries over, even into the competition. My training and stuff is pretty serious, and people who really know me know my serious side.

I tried to be serious but I never really got any press. People just used to report what I did. Then at Eugene, wow! People

by GARRY HILL

started asking questions, like, "What kind of person are you?" I answered the questions and I tried to be really sincere, but they just twisted everything. So I quit telling the press what I think, unless it is a group of people I trust. They'll print your bull, or they'll take something that is close to you or means something to you and turn that into bull. So I just don't tell them anything that means anything close to serious because they'll distort it.

You don't go around telling people how your wife makes love to you. Shot putting to me is that serious and I have many theories about it. But somewhere along the line that cigarette made everything I say not credible. So I just play it up the other way. I figure if they write bad press about me it's because I gave them some gooky stuff to write about it. But at least they're going to write about it, so it doesn't make any difference.

T&FN: What about the famous cigarettes? At one time you said that they had a good therapeutic effect, sort of a tranquilizer, or was it just a gimmick?

Oldfield: Yeah, it has a bit of a therapeutic effect all right. I quit smoking for two months this summer. I quit right after the Scottish Games in Santa Monica and continued until I got to Europe. I just couldn't hack it. I was a bundle of energy all the time. I found myself out at bars longer and later. I don't know if I was getting nose hits off other people's cigarettes or what. I just couldn't relax or settle down.

T&FN: I've never seen you smoking since you joined ITA. Did they tell you this would have a detrimental effect on the audience?

Oldfield: No, I just don't have the time. The way ITA is set up, you got to be there to take your throws. I don't really smoke in the middle of competition anyway.

I never blantly smoked out in the middle of things. At Eugene, I was finished with my qualifying and was watching the next flight. I went over with a bunch of the other guys and we were just sitting around. Richard Marks, a bunch of them. Hell, Jesse Stuart had a cigarette with me—we all smoked. But they got the picture of Oldfield. Some little wise-ass cameraman came around and thought that was really neat.

Click-click-click-click. It got on AP and they went crazy with it.

T&FN: Well, you have to admit it was sort of beneficial to your whole career.

Oldfield: Well, it made a personality out of me—which is good or bad.

T&FN: Do you have any regrets about leaving the amateur scene, other than previously voiced ones about not being able to go head-to-head with guys like Al Feuerbach?

Oldfield: The amateur scene I saw I never got much of. I never got any attention. That's what hurt me before the Olympics. The AAU had all this stuff going in Europe but we didn't get to go to any of the meets they promised. I threw the discus more than the shot and didn't get the experience I needed.

Last year, during the indoor season, I'd write to the promoters—maybe I didn't have enough experience, didn't get hold of them early enough—but I ended up spending money to go to these meets everybody else was ripping money off for. Everybody else was getting so much money under the table that there wasn't enough left to even bring me to the meet. So I pulled out.

T&FN: After you started throwing so well last spring, the rumors began to fly about the light shot.

Oldfield: I think that everybody that really knows me is making a big joke out of this. I'd never use a light shot. What brought this around was the LA meet. Some guy came up to me and gave me a 14- and a 15-pounder. I think he wanted me to endorse them. After that, I went throwing with Feuerbach. I threw about 74 with the 15 and about 78 with the 15. So Al told everybody how well I could throw with light shots.

Then, all of a sudden I start throwing well in competition. So everyone started joking around—but when things reach the press a lot of people just don't understand the joking. But anybody who knows would realize that I wouldn't use a light shot.

We had the shots weighed carefully. In fact, at one meet they wouldn't let DeBo [Fred DeBernardi] use his shot because it was exactly 16 lb. They wanted them all to be at least a fraction heavy to stop any rumors.

T&FN: It seems as if a lot of people are eager to chop ITA and discredit what they do.

Oldfield: They just like to print anything controversial. You know, if ITA wanted, they could make all the events look really good. Chop a couple of inches



Don Chades

off the track, announce that the bar was higher than it actually was. . .

When ITA started, they said we could throw the shot any way we wanted. They wanted to fit into the athletes so badly. You know I can throw the shot anyway I want, discus—style, whatever. But I said no, we all said no, let's do it in the same style as the amateurs for credibility's sake, so we could establish ourselves. If we got a world record it would be the same thing.

T&FN: *You created quite a stir with your sprint sequences against the women. How did that come about?*

Oldfield: I've always known that I could do something as well as any woman in the world. As I got to know the women I started to humbug them a bit and say, "I can beat you." So they started out with a relay. That didn't work so well. DeBernardi and I don't hand off so well and we almost killed a couple of pole vaulters. So we nipped that in the bud. After DeBo pulled up at LA we quit.

Actually, I was talking about racing Bob Hayes. That's what I wanted to do. If he's only going to run a 4.5 or 4.6 there might be a chance for the kid to get in there for a little money. But they wouldn't let me do that. I can stay with him on the start, but he gets a little strong out there by the 40. I know I can run a consistent 4.6 or so out of the blocks. And I could run faster if I had a purpose, like I was behind or if I'm really scared. Like, with the girls I never had to run fast.

T&FN: *After a while last year, it seemed like you were winning a lot of your meets on the sixth throw, having to come from behind.*

Oldfield: That was because my strength was getting down. To compete two days in a row you have to have those workouts. Basically, on the second day I would get really paranoid towards the last throw: "I'm gonna lose, I'm gonna lose." Then the money would start ringing bells.

I'd have to get a superhuman effort on my last try and pray that I stayed in. One time I didn't—Baltimore I guess, and I lost.

But I was always strong on that first day. Nobody could touch me on the first day. On the second day I was everybody's game. All three of them [fellow ITA heavies Matson, DeBernardi and Karl Salb] were punching away at me and you never knew who was going to hit around 69.

T&FN: *You did voice some dissatisfaction about your PR work last spring and how it was hampering your workouts.*

Oldfield: It was interfering with my training. In mid-March I was stronger than I ever had been. I had to quit lifting then, so I just sort of finished off the season on the strength and vitality that I had gotten together.

T&FN: *After the season was over you competed in some Scottish Games.*

Oldfield: I competed in three Games over there. A lot of people come out to watch, just scads. The caber is the event that creates the most controversy, because most of the time people can't even turn it over. If you can turn it you're a real man. At Santa Monica I was second the first time and I won a big trophy in the championship round.

In Scotland the cabers weren't any bigger but I don't know what it was—but the highest I placed was second. I just couldn't do it. It's not that hard to do except for the balance. I really began to doubt myself in Scotland.

I'd just gone through the Superstars and by training for swimming and bicycling and all that stuff my strength just dissipated. I went from about 400 to 300 in the bench. I think this is what hurt me in the Superstars also. I just should have stayed with my weight training and I would have been stronger for all the events. All I ended up doing was breaking down muscle fiber.

T&FN: *What about rumors that you dropped down to 220lb.?*

Oldfield: No, after Scotland I visited [Olympic champ Wladyslaw] Komar in Poland for three weeks. When I got back I weighed 240 and was quite weak—very, very weak. At the ITA championships I was 270. And it was all strength I lost. First the Superstars, then running all over Europe.

T&FN: *What else did you try over there?*

Oldfield: The tug-of-war is a biggie, but it's mostly for the working class. You know, work together, pull together sort of thing. And I threw the stone 63-something. It only weighs 16 lb., but it's about like a volleyball in size. And it isn't round. You just kind of punch it.

In Scotland I wore a kilt while I was throwing—I don't like kilts. They got a lot of bees around there that time of year and a bumblebee went up under my kilt. God! It panicked me.

T&FN: *How do you feel about the upcoming season?*

Oldfield: Right now I'm a strong 260. Stronger than I was before at 270, and I'm going to be stronger yet. I haven't been doing very well on my throwing though. I

go out and have one day's good throwing then I have to lay off for three weeks. I hurt my hand in Poland—same injury I had in '71. It's kind of a hyperextension of my index and middle fingers.

T&FN: *Do you think lack of throwing is going to hurt your technique?*

Oldfield: Well, the problem isn't that. It's primarily that I can't use my strength in throwing because my hand can't take the pain. I've had a few practices around 67 but it always takes me a long time for my hand to get better.

It's hard for me to throw without tape. They've got a rule about tape [no fingers may be taped together], but I'm going to get them to change it. Every sport can tape except track and field's shot putters. I don't understand it. It restricts your motion. It doesn't give you strength or anything like that. It's basically a safety measure.

T&FN: *You were one of the bigger ITA critics among the athletes last year, mentioning that you thought prize money should be increased to make it more worthwhile.*

Oldfield: Not just the winner's while, but the guy who is placing fourth and fifth. He's not getting enough. Of course, the management has to look at it from more of a business standpoint.

T&FN: *What changes would you like to see in ITA?*

Oldfield: I'd like to see a lot of changes. Of course a lot of the changes might be happening, like getting better athletes in there. We've got Steve Smith now. Seagren's got to get up off his can and leave his Superstars alone. Just getting a few more athletes is going to be a big aid to the longevity of the program. You've got to get these new athletes every year. I think there's a lot of rookies out there who can really help. We've just got to get hold of them. □



Don Chades