

# T&FN Interview

by Jon  
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**R**ey Brown is getting to be like Ralph Boston used to be in the long jump—Brown has been high jumping seemingly for so long, jumping well, winning and meeting the challenges of new up-and-coming jumpers, he is almost taken for granted. He is almost an institution in US high jumping.

So it's difficult to remember that he is only 23 years old. But Reynaldo has been around a long time, he has been jumping well and winning and meeting the new challenges.

But Rey admits he thrives on challenges. He responds to them, too. Like 1968: the 17-year-old wunderkind cleared a still-standing prep record 7-3 to make the US Olympic team and later placed fifth at Mexico. It was his first international competition.

He has maintained a level of consistency few athletes in any event can claim, ranking second globally three times and in the top five Americans the past six years (first in '70). In the last four US-USSR meets, he has won three and finished second in the other. His most recent win came in Durham in July with his fourth clearance of a seasonal-best 7-2½. He is probably the only jumper ever to place second to consecutive world records (Pat Matzdorf and Dwight Stones)—a reverse consistency Brown probably would rather forget.

Brown appears stoic and unsmiling while competing and rarely shows any outward emotion. (His mother-in-law, Mrs. Vivian Brown says, "Sure he's calm. We all scream our heads off and go crazy for him.") But he is a talkative, friendly man with a baritone rumble of a laugh that seems to come from the depths of his 6-4/195 frame. And he smiles a lot, especially when he talks about winning the high jump.

**T&FN:** How did you feel about winning the Soviet meet, your third win of the last four?

**Brown:** Winning the Russian meet is important to me. I think the Russians feel they dominate the high jump and if they can't win anything else against the Americans, they can win the high jump. I like beating them because it makes them stop and realize they don't have anything guaranteed.

**T&FN:** It seems you were one of the premier US jumpers after Mexico until Matzdorf's record. Then you were overshadowed by him, then the three '72 Olympians, then Stones last year. But you have always been right up there.

**Brown:** After I finished second to Matzdorf, I thought about it and I think



records are often broken this way, quickly, suddenly, unexpectedly. It seems a jumper can get really psyched once and do something big, but then he has a hard time getting up that high again.

But since I'm pretty consistent, making a certain height doesn't excite me. So I have to keep pushing myself. But a guy like Dwight, who gets so excited about everything and goes around telling everybody what he's going to do, is pressuring himself. He's got to come through and back up his word. Everybody watches him everywhere he goes. He could burn himself out just trying to do what he says he will.

**T&FN:** You have ranked second in the world three times. Is ranking first important to you?

**Brown:** No, not to me. I like challenges. If I'm sitting on top or win every meet I jump in, I would be brought down because I wouldn't have the competition to push me. When you're on top, people pressure you to win all the time.

**T&FN:** When the other Americans were ranking ahead of you, did your attitude about yourself as a jumper ever waiver?

**Brown:** I would read that someone had jumped well; they were ahead of me and I told myself I had to work harder. Someone jumping higher than me makes me more determined. I know they have done something and now it's my turn.

**T&FN:** What do you consider are your strengths in the high jump that would contribute to your consistency over the years?

**Brown:** The main thing is that I

practice on my weak points. Most jumpers think just jumping every day will improve their technique. I think this wears them out. I do a lot of running and specific exercises for the high jump. I've never lifted weights in my life, but I do things like kick the crossbar of a football goal post. Things like that keep my timing together. I work on the basics in practice because I get most excited to jump in the meets.

**T&FN:** Your making of the Olympic team in '68 at age 17 was so unexpected, going from a 6-9¼ prep in '67 to fifth in the world championships in '68. How did it affect you?

**Brown:** To tell the truth, I was too young to know what it was all about. It was just something. I enjoyed it, but I wasn't excited because I didn't understand it. I liked placing fifth better than making the team because I had competed against the best jumpers in the Olympics and I like competition. Competition keeps me going.

**T&FN:** Might all of that success at age-17 been too much, too fast?

**Brown:** Maybe being naive was good because I didn't do a lot of thinking and worrying about it, so I didn't put any pressure on myself. Ever since I first started jumping in seventh grade, I've had the attitude that if someone else could do something, then I could too.

**T&FN:** Do you ever get excited for a meet, maybe inside, because you sure don't show it outside?

**Brown:** I can't recall a meet where I really got nervous. The thing that gets me going and keeps me going is knowing I'll be jumping against good competition.

**T&FN:** You were one of the favorites for the '72 Olympic team.

**Brown:** I had a bad indoor season that year because I rested too much after my long '71 year. I didn't work on my arm movements and the things I should have. I worked with Tom Tellez of UCLA and Willie Williams of Arizona, my high school coach, before the trials and worked out some things. I felt good at the Trials but my timing wasn't like I wanted it. It really didn't bother me not to make the team because I had been there once already.

**T&FN:** Will you continue to Montreal?

**Brown:** I'm going to try. If something else good comes up, like basketball, I'll consider that, but I'm looking at '76.

**T&FN:** What would you like to achieve as an ultimate height?

**Brown:** I don't try for any certain height. I just try to do better than the year before. Even a quarter-inch higher means I've done better than last year.

**T&FN:** Do you know what motivates you in the high jump?

**Brown:** I just like the sport of track and the running and jumping over the bar.

The biggest thing that motivates me is the jumping. No specific achievement is like trying to get myself over that bar. For me, that is the biggest challenge with the biggest reward. □