

RON LIVERS

T&FN INTERVIEW by JON HENDERSHOTT

Strong but silent. It might be easy to conclude that that old saw describes Ron Livers. He is not flamboyant, loud, abrasive or demanding of public adoration.

But when he steps on the runway and sprints/explodes/floats/bounces/soars/lands in his uniquely-personal art form of the triple jump, it is next to impossible to ignore Ron Livers.

This winter the mighty mite has been far more mighty than mite. He opened his season by matching his indoor best of 55-4½ at Ali, followed that with a 55-3½ at Dartmouth and then flew to American Records on consecutive nights, his longest measuring 56-0.

Livers comes by his great athletic ability naturally—it runs in the family. Older brother Larry was a world-class hurdler in the '60s, twin brother Don a national-class sprinter on Ron's same San Jose State team. Livers won 3 NCAA titles and the '79 AAU, the latter with the longest jump ever by an American, a windy 57-7½.

Yet, triple jumping to Livers is an almost metaphysical part of his being. It is Ron Livers at his very best, as he has shown this winter.

T&FN: So what is behind all your great jumping this winter?

Livers: I think the major thing is just taking off last summer and really getting into my training. I had picked up some new movements in my technique last winter and that's why my '79 indoor season wasn't as good as it is this year. I was just catching on to these new things that I had been taught by Milan.

Basically it was changed from a double-arm movement at takeoff to a single-arm action. You get so used to one way of doing things, the whole pattern of movement gets so ingrained into your mind, that it takes a while to learn and get used to something new.

All last winter I was getting the hang of it and it started coming around in June. It just took time. Oh yeah, I got it down pat now. It's really in the groove now.

T&FN: Is there a great

difference between jumping indoors and outdoors?

Livers: Oh, definitely. In the U.S., the indoor facilities aren't very good. A lot of times jumpers have to start up on the edge of the track. People walk in front of you, runners run around the curves in front of you. I really feel that our performances indoors in the U.S. are really phenomenal considering some of the conditions we have to jump under.

In Italy in '77 for the U.S.-Europe indoor meet, the track was a 200m banked tartan track, the whole infield was tartan and you could get your whole runup in there. There was plenty of room and you could get into your rhythm better.

In the U.S., our cadence is thrown off because you come down the slope of the track, instead of being on the level like outdoors.

There are a lot of distractions in the U.S.; the triple jump runway often is between the vault runway and the running straight and there are things going on around you all the time. There are very few times when things are perfect for the jump.

Like at Albuquerque, you had to make a zig-zag at the start of the runway because the vault pit stuck out. In your first 4-5 strides, there was a zig-zag motion because you had to go in-and-out, in-and-out. You felt like a skier starting a race out of a chute then having to make a sharp turn and then get back straight again.

T&FN: Did anything at LA give you a hint that a big one was in store? On your second jump, you got right to the end of the runway before you ever jumped.

Livers: Actually, I knew it before that, ever since the Ali meet. My condition was good and I had been jumping well. I knew that I had it within myself to jump well.

On that jump at LA, I just lost my balance on the step phase so I couldn't get up for the jump. But I felt that if I had been able to finish it out, I might have gone right out of the pit.

T&FN: Well, were you surprised at the Ali meet to equal your indoor best in your first meet of the year?

Livers: Slightly, because back East I usually just do workouts on grass because I don't feel like driving down to Penn all the time to work out in their air bubble. But I knew I was strong and the only thing that surprised me was that my timing and rhythm were already so on. I hadn't put in a lot of jumping on the runway.

T&FN: So a 55-3½ at Dartmouth just confirmed

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Bruce Kilham

that things were going well?

Livers: Right, because I always stress consistency to myself. I feel that that is one of my strong points as a jumper. I feel this indoor season is showing that.

T&FN: How did the jump at LA feel as a jump?

Livers: Actually, it felt pretty average or even below average. My movements weren't as perfect as I usually like them. My step was weak; I wasn't extending as far as I could. And my jump phase wasn't as strong as it usually is. So I was happy to jump 17m exactly. If I get in the right facility, I can come very close to the World Record.

T&FN: Which jump in your career felt the best, your 56-4¾ Collegiate Record or the 57-7½ at the AAU or what?

Livers: I'd say that 56-4¾ over in Russia in '77. It felt the best and was the most exciting to me because I was in the air a long time and all my phases felt great. It was exciting because it was my first jump over 17m and I was the first American to win the triple jump in the USSR. All the big guys were there—Saneyev, Piskulin, Uudmae—and the crowd was really behind the event. Everybody was behind Viktor; on every stride of his down the runway, the people chanted, "Vik-tor, Vik-tor!" So it was an exciting atmosphere.

I'd have to rate the 57-7½ at the AAU right up there, though. Willie Banks had jumped his 57-footer and I think everybody thought the competition was over, but Milan came over to me and said, "Don't change a thing you've been doing; stay steadfast. You know it's within yourself."

T&FN: So what did the 56-0 feel like?

Livers: It felt much better; it felt more fluid, my run felt stronger than in LA and I just felt better in all my movements. Plus, the board had been moved back so we were landing in the middle of the pit, not right at the end like LA.

T&FN: Well, now where do you go—both in the triple jump and for this year, considering all the political turmoil?

Livers: If there are no Olympic Games, then I see a World Record indoors and out in my main view. Those are my main goals.

I also really believe I can jump 18 meters [59-¾]. I feel that's within my realm. That's also one of my top goals right now.

T&FN: Do you feel it could turn out to be a case of inner motivation, rather than outward?

Livers: Definitely. That's the way I train, from the inner to the outer. Like I don't lift weights; rather I get my strength through my flexibility. Nobody does the stretching I do. Flexibility is inner strength taken to the surface, where weights are outer strength that you try to put inside. It's always better if you can bring the inner strength out.

T&FN: Has this very inner, mystical The Bible of the Sport

approach to the triple jump come from Milan?

Livers: Yes, he has approached the event that way for some time and that's how I got into it. He told me I would win the '75 NCAA when I was a sophomore and I did. I've been working with him ever since, because there aren't many athletes who will help a rival and have the strength of heart to open up their secrets and share them with somebody who might beat them. I'll always be thankful to him for doing that with me.

Through him, I've gotten into seeing jumping as an art form, considering our movements as live art. We're trying to help the audience understand and appreciate our movements and, through that, the triple jump. We want them to see us flying, not jumping. We want to leave them spellbound by our movements.

We don't like to approach a meet thinking that we must win, but rather as an art form. If your movements are good, then the good results should come from that.

I really feel that one of my main strengths as a triple jumper is that I'm not afraid to try to reach that unknown, to try to break that barrier. A lot of jumpers are scared to feel the physical, they don't want to put out that—hmmmp! That supreme effort, that—hmmmp! I always like to put everything I've got into every one of my jumps.

T&FN: Does making that supreme effort put you at the razor edge of either carrying through for a fantastic jump, or losing it?

Livers: It does, for sure. You go so far sometimes that you go through that barrier to someplace you've never been. It's a new feeling. That's what happened on my second jump in LA: I went so far on the hop that I wasn't used to being out that far and it caught me by surprise.

That 57-7½ jump was the first time I really explored going into the hop like that and it hooked up for me. I carried through and that jump showed that it can happen if you can get used to going out to that unexplored realm you've never been to before.

It's becoming more common for me to reach out there and do 23 feet on the hop—which is a good long jump to some people. I'm getting more and more used to it and better and better jumps should come along because of it.

But, above all, I have to give thanks to the Creator for giving me the gifts that I have and allowing me to expand myself through my abilities. All of my thanks have to go to the Creator for giving me that talent. □

Ronald William Livers was born July 20, 1955, in Norristown, Pa., and scales 5-8/150. His progression:

Year	Age	Affiliation	HJ	TJ	W	US
1973	17/18	Pa HS	Sr	6-10	51-7%	—
1974	18/19	San Jose St	Fr	6-10½	52-2%	—
1975	19/20	"	So	7-4%	54-1%	5
1976	20/21	Philadelphia PC		7-4½	54-11	14 5
1977	21/22	San Jose St	Jr	7-2½	56-4%	3 1
1978	22/23	"	Sr	—	56-3%	7 2
1979	23/24	Philadelphia PC	—	—	55-11%	3 1

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