

Walter Davis

by Sieg Lindstrom

Walter Davis seems to have found his rhythm internationally. The LSU alum's rise to triple jump world champion both outdoors and in suggests as much. An Olympian since '00, when as a junior collegian he made the Sydney squad in the triple and long jumps (choosing to contest only the triple), Davis's trajectory on the world stage stalled out thereafter. Stalled out, that is, until on a rainy night in Helsinki last summer he finally reached a global title place higher than 5th.

It was a gratifying win. The Louisiana native, who is guided by Bayou Bengal jumps coach Boo Schexnayder, had looked like a breakthrough waiting to happen for so long that casual observers had given up on their expectations.

Those who kept a close eye on Davis's high velocity but often low-percentage approach knew that long leaps were possible. For instance, on his final jump at the '04 Olympic Trials, Davis flew 57-10¹/₄ (17.63) into a slight negative wind.

But for a stray left foot that touched down early, Davis, according to the careful video analysis of exercise physiologist Jesús Dapena, might have soared just over 59ft (18m) on the jump.

T&FN touched base with Davis about his new

penchant for winning when it counts. During the phone interview Davis multi-tasked, whipping up a plateful of pork chops and black-eyed peas as he answered questions:

T&FN: Nice work! Two world titles in less than a year. What do you attribute that to?

Davis: I'm just starting to study the triple jump more. I'm starting to watch film and read a couple of books on people. Before, I'd just look at somebody's jump and stuff like that. Now I'm really starting to understand the triple jump. Also, I'm trying to stay healthy. Before I always had some type of foot injury or something.

T&FN: What have you changed in your program in order to avoid injuries?

Davis: It's just been good luck, I guess. And we used to jump like every Tuesday and Thursday. Now Coach Boo doesn't have us jumping that much. He says the key to jumping far is just to be healthy.

We jump on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but if our bodies don't feel like they're ready to jump, he'll stop us and make us do some type of general strength activities.

T&FN: Are you more consistent on the runway now?

Davis: I'm more consistent with jumping far. Every jump is not 17.30, 17.40 [c57ft], but I'm jumping far every meet; I'm more consistent that way.

I'm always trying to feel my way through the competition. Sometimes when I start off I might be over-rotated or I might stick my foot out.

T&FN: Explain for those of us who don't triple jump what being "over-rotated" means.

Davis: When you triple jump you want your hop phase to be under your body so your body's straight. If you're

Davis Not Jonathan Edwards

We asked Walter Davis, with his newfound enthusiasm for studying the triple jump in books and on video, whose technique particularly impresses him.

Davis: The World Record holder, Jonathan Edwards. His technique is the best I ever saw. Jonathan's technique, when he hits, it's so flawless.

T&FN: Is that the model you try to hit?

Davis: [laughs] Well, I know I can't do that model, but...

T&FN: Why not?

Davis: Because his is so different. He's different from everybody else; my technique is not like anyone else's technique. The way I got my technique, I just try to use my speed. Everyone keeps telling me if I could really use my speed I could jump the World Record. So I just use my speed so that everybody who says I could jump the World Record—maybe it will come true.

T&FN: Is there anything you feel during a big jump that tells you it's a long one?

Davis: With me if I feel like something's pushed me into my step phase, if I feel like something's pushing me in my back, pushing me forward, and then I hit the right position in my next phase then I know it's a big jump.

T&FN: Do you know why that is?

Davis: [laughs] 'Cause I guess I hit the right positions. If I hit the right positions, it feels totally different than if I don't.





“When I’m done jumping I want to be a coach. I like working with little kids”

over-rotated your leg is behind you. Your body’s in front and if your body’s leaning over, you can’t get a jump off.

T&FN: *With whom do you train?*

Davis: John Moffitt, LeJuan Simon, Lester Smith and Chris Hercules. We got a nice group down here.

T&FN: *Does it get competitive in practice?*

Davis: It’s competitive because with the short-run jumps everybody’s trying to go further than the person that went before them. That’s what helps us: the competitiveness starts at practice, and when we get to the meets it just carries over.

T&FN: *What enables you to produce those high-17m jumps?*

Davis: I don’t have the best technique of the jumpers but I think the thing that works out better is my speed. I’m faster than all those guys [see sidebar].

T&FN: *Mike Conley said in Helsinki that he thinks you could be a dominant triple jumper. Do you agree?*

Davis: I wouldn’t say “be dominant,” but I would like to do my best at all the major competitions. It’s really hard for a triple jumper to win every meet, if we have a meet this week and then one next week, because there’s so much pounding on your body.

T&FN: *You’re rare as an elite combination long jumper/triple jumper these days. Why do you do both?*

Davis: Because I can long jump a little bit, I don’t want to just stick to the triple jump. I don’t want to put too much stress on my body year after year after year just triple jumping.

T&FN: *Did you feel that winning a major title in Helsinki would make winning easier in the future?*

Davis: I didn’t know if it was going to be easier, but being at the meets, the guys they’ve got to respect you more, that you could jump far at any time. You’re on their minds all the time.

T&FN: *What is your plan for outdoors?*

Davis: I don’t know if they’re going to have many triple jump meets. Hopefully [injured Olympic champion Christian] Olsson will be back and they’ll have more triple jump meets. I’m not really sure.

But if there aren’t too many triple jumps, I’ll probably triple jump a couple of times so I can stay in the mix in the World Rankings, and then I’m going to try to long jump a lot this year.

T&FN: *What do you see as your potential in the long jump?*

Davis: Anything could happen. I think there’s no limit to what I could jump in the long jump. I just feel that I’ve got to study the long jump more too.

— Davis Facts —

•**Personal:** born Lafayette, Louisiana, 7/2/79; 6-2/183 (1.88/83)

•**PRs:** 6.78i; 21.11; 27-³/₄ (8.25); 58-2i (17.73)

•**Schools:** Beau Chene HS (Arnaudville, Louisiana) '97; Barton County CC '00; LSU '02

•**Major Meets (LJ/TJ):** 2/1)JUCO, x/5)USATF '99; 1/1)JUCO, 3/3)OT, 11)OG '00; 2/1)NCAA, 8/3)USATF, x/5)WC '01; 1/1)NCAA, x/1)USATF, x/2)World Cup '02; 2/2)USATF, x/7/nq)WC '03; 4/2)USATF, nq/11)OG '04; 4/1)USATF, x/1)WC '05; x/1)USATFi, x/1)WCi '06

•**World/U.S. Rankings:** LJ: '00—x, 4; '01—x, 5; '02—x, 5; '03—9, 4; '04—x, 5; '05—x, 4. TJ: '99—x, 8; '00—x, 3; '01—8, 1; '02—3, 1; '03—4, 1; '04—8, 2; '05—4, 1

I’ve talked to Llewellyn Starks about the long jump, and he’s telling me I’m just as fast as the long jumpers, I’m just as fast as Dwight [Phillips]. So it’s like if I could run down the runway and keep my speed, I should be able to go 28-feet also. It just depends.

T&FN: *We published an article a few years back about a dip in U.S. long jumping at that time, since turned around by Phillips and others.*

You and your peers took offense. You’re also not keen on some comments retired jumpers have made. Has the criticism motivated you?

Davis: Yeah. When Kenta [Bell] was jumping real good, in one article Willie Banks was talkin’, “Kenta’s gonna separate the men from the boys,” and this and that. But it’s motivation. They don’t know what’s goin’ on in our camp, so whenever I meet up with who they’re coaching—because they’re coaching some people—I always make sure that they don’t beat me. “OK, I just beat your guy, so maybe you should stop all that talkin’ and help somebody out or something.”

When people get talkin’ it’s motivation. The Romanian guy [Marian Oprea] was talking about breaking the World Record at the World Indoors because he was jumping real good early in the season.

So I was like, “OK.” It was motivation. When he got to the meet he jumped like 17.20-something [c56-6], I think, on his first jump.

I was like, “If I put something out on my first one, I’m gonna have everybody pressing.” So I went out and put something in my first jump, and everybody was trying to jump 17.70-something [c58ft].

T&FN: *But the officials mismeasured the jump and at first you didn’t get credit for the true distance. That didn’t throw you off?*

Davis: When they did that, I was a little upset. I was like, “Dang, they tryin’ not to give

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Walter Davis Interview

me what I jumped.”

But if they wouldn't have changed it, I felt I had some more in me. I wouldn't say I would have been mad. I'd have been real hyped up so I'd have went down there and I'd have jumped something again.

They put the 17.73 [PR 58-2] up after the third jump, I think. So I was like, “OK, I'm cool with that”—because nobody had passed me up. But if somebody had passed me up I was so ready I felt that I could have passed them back up.

My last two jumps I was trying to get the World Record but my calf cramped up and I just stopped.

T&FN: What about the outdoor WR?

Davis: You can't say I'm going to get the World Record. It's just going to come. I didn't know I was going to jump 17.70-something. That day I was just feeling real good.

I woke up that morning and did a little light shakeout, and when I did my shakeout I was sprinting. I was running real fast early in the morning. I was like, “OK, today's gonna be a good day.”

T&FN: What's your pattern in the triple jump? Do you jump strong leg-strong-weak, or weak-weak-strong?

Davis: I go strong-strong-weak. Some people go weak-weak-strong. They say they want their strong leg for their last phase, but my coach in high school told me you want to go off your strong leg twice.

T&FN: What's your strongest phase?

Davis: I think my hop phase maybe is my strongest. Because I've been playing a lot of basketball also. During the season I'll play a couple of basketball games [each week] just so I can keep my explosiveness. Playing basketball you be working on quick-twitch muscles, and that really helps me out.

T&FN: Besides playing basketball, what do you like to do when you're not at the track?

Davis: Like I say, I started studying the triple jump so if I'm not at home playing Madden or the [PlayStation 2] basketball game, I'll be in a mall or in a library or something like that.

T&FN: In a library?

Davis: Yeah. I go to the library and get books about the triple jump and stuff like that. And since I'm done with school I'm trying to be a travel agent. I got my certification for travel agent so I'm about to see what I can do with that now: doing all the computer, setting up cruises and vacations and flights for people.

But when I'm done jumping I want to be a coach. I like working with little kids.



Davis got to do the flag thing in both Moscow (top) and Helsinki.

T&FN: You made your first Olympic team back in 2000 when you were just 21 and a Barton County CC soph. What was that like?

Davis: That was my first time going overseas. That was my first time flying for so long, 'cause I had to go from California to Australia. The flight was so long, I was like, “Dang!”

When I got there it was great. I met so many people. I saw the Michael Johnsons, Marion Joneses. When you go to those you start meeting famous people, the people that you see on TV about track & field. I got to meet Sabrina and Venus and NBA players, and stuff like that.

That was good, but meet-wise the crowd was so big. It was a big stadium, there were so many

people. That was my first time competing in front of so many people.

I had a good time; I just wish I could have jumped better than what I did.

T&FN: What about Athens?

Davis: It was a nice meet too. My training partner [Moffitt] got silver. That made it much better that someone I train with got a medal. I was happy that he got one. I didn't get a medal, but my training partner did so it was like, “OK, you pushed him, he pushed you. It paid off for somebody.”

T&FN: And 2008?

Davis: 2008? 2008, I want it to be like 2005 and 2006. □