

ARNIE ROBINSON

by Jon Hendershott

For Arnie Robinson, winning the Olympic long jump was a must.

One of the world's premier leapers since 1970, Robinson forged to the top in '72 and went to Munich the favorite. But he came home with only a bronze, as teenage teammate Randy Williams upset the charts, and all the jumpers, for the gold. It was a crushing blow for Robinson.

But that letdown provided the impetus for continuing to Montreal. It wasn't enough that he had ranked in the top four jumpers in the world every year since '71 save that down post-Olympic season of '73. Or that he was the No. 1 American of '74-'75, when he jumped beyond 27-feet in both years.

To keep jumping, Robinson and his wife Cynthia had to sacrifice. She worked to support them, while he worked part-time and trained. They lived on a shoestring budget. But it all paid off in Montreal as Robinson drew the first spot in the jumping order—and blasted the field with a PR 27-4¾. He produced a 27-1¼ in the second round and 26-9¼ in the fifth, all better than Williams' silver-winning 26-7¼.

Winning in Montreal was the only way for Robinson to atone for his failure in Munich and to justify the sacrifices made so he could continue. He not only wanted to win, he had to win.

T&FN: What effect did placing 3rd in Munich have on your motivation to continue jumping?

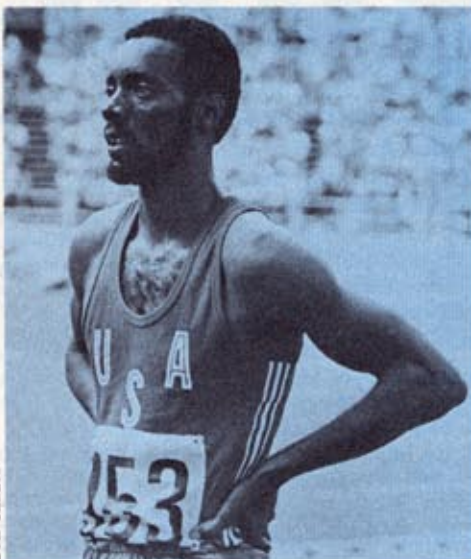
Robinson: When I lost in Munich, I was really down. The only reason I continued jumping in '73 was because I was in the Army. I kept jumping just to keep from toting a gun and going out in the field and marching. After I got out of the Army, I thought I might as well go for one or two more years and that took me to '75. Then I knew I had to go again—I had been winning, I was one of the best in the world and I just had to give it another shot.

T&FN: In looking back now, what happened in Munich?

Robinson: I made a lot of mistakes in Munich that I wasn't going to make in '76. My eating pattern was all haywire; I didn't follow my regular pattern of eating four hours before the competition so my metabolism, digestion and everything was all off. I felt weak when the competition came around. Plus my training schedule was way off. I was injured, I was partying. I just wasn't there for business. I was young and immature even though I was 24. But experience-wise I was very young. So things didn't work out good.

T&FN: So you went to Montreal and gain were the favorite. Did you feel you could win?

Robinson: I had no choice but to win. In '75 I started disciplining myself to win *Bible of the Sport*



Don Chadez

every meet I considered important and to jump 27-feet in doing it. All my training was geared that way. When I got into meets and the pressure was on, I thought about Munich: "Well, hell, I didn't do it there. I've got to do it now." Everything kept snowballing for two years so when the time came that I was the first jumper on the runway for the finals in Montreal, I was mentally conditioned to perform. I wanted to be consistent at 27 feet, so even if I had just an average day in Montreal, it would be a 27-footer. If I performed really great, it would be 28-feet, but just an average-level jump would be 27.

T&FN: How did you feel about your jumping in Montreal?

Robinson: Well usually I don't hit the board on my first jump, so I was happy to hit the board this time. Now, in relation to Bob Beamon, the runway was slow and I jumped against a slight headwind on my first jump. My last step was going to be a few inches behind the board so I had to overstride a bit. So if those two situations could have been right—a fast runway at altitude and hitting the board exactly right—that 27-4¾ could have been 29 feet.

These are the things that keep me going, coming so close to 28 and even 29. My jumps in Montreal were pretty good considering I didn't train for five weeks before because I had a groin injury. So jumping 27-4¾ in Olympic competition was pretty good—but supposing I had had 2 meters of tailwind like Bob had, or suppose it had been altitude like Bob was? I felt pleased with my jump, but also disappointed that I couldn't follow it up

with jumps which were much better, which I usually can do.

T&FN: We heard the runway was slow, the board was hard with no bounce off it and there were headwinds in the last few meters of the runway. How did the conditions affect the jumping?

Robinson: Those conditions existed there, but I didn't care what the conditions were. I was disciplined and it could have been raining or there could have been a tornado but I didn't care. I was going to jump and I was going to win. I think the other jumpers let the conditions get to them. Randy did very well, but the Europeans really broke under the pressure. The conditions weren't just right for them and they aren't used to that. I think they were surprised not to be able to set up ideal conditions for themselves.

T&FN: Even if you hadn't been assigned the first position in the jumping order, were you intending to get a good first jump?

Robinson: Because I hadn't trained very well for the five weeks before the Games, I knew I couldn't put together a good six-jump series. I had to bust one of my first three jumps out there because I knew I would fatigue down. So regardless of where I was in the order, I was ready to key on the first or second jump. I knew I had to shoot my wad then because I knew I couldn't play a catch-up game and come from behind.

T&FN: You looked fast on the runway all year and you ran some sprints in Europe. Did you concentrate more on your speed, particularly your runway speed, this year?

Robinson: This year I did very little jumping and more speed and strength work. I wanted to work on my technique in the five weeks leading to the Games, but it ended up that I couldn't, so all my jumping this year, all the 27s, were off speed.

I trained some with Bob Beamon and I was running 9.3 100s in practice. I tried to do everything Bob did in '68 leading up to his big jump and one thing he did was work with sprinters and run repeat 100s. Start at 10-flat and get down to 9.3 with a running start. So we did that a lot this year and it not only increased my speed on the runway, but it also increased my overall strength.

T&FN: Might it have been a blessing that you weren't able to work on technique, but instead sharpened your speed and carried that sharpness through to

the Games?

Robinson: You could be very right. If I had been healthy, I might have worked myself to fatigue. I could have torn myself down without knowing it. But I rested and did more sharp, precise work than I ever did before.

T&FN: In Montreal, you said the US would be shocked in Moscow, that the US would win less medals, both in track and overall. What are your ideas for improving the US system?

Robinson: Well our collegiate program is super so we shouldn't change much of that. But we need a better program for the post-graduate athletes. The majority of the Olympic team is made up of post-graduates. [Ed: 42 of the 65 men's team members were.] After an athlete gets out of school, he has to be able to train; he can't work full-time and become a medal winner. They have to supplement their income, find tax breaks, something to help pay the bills. They also have to be able to compete against the world's best. They need to have these things taken care of so they can train, because they are going to have to be ready in 1980. The communist countries will really be gearing up for that one and the only way we can compete with them is to follow some of their examples. And these things can't be done just a year before the Olympics. A program would have to start next year and build to Moscow.

T&FN: How have you managed

within the US system?

Robinson: When I got out of the Army in '73, I had decided to continue for at least another year and I wanted to continue the type of program I had in the service—we didn't work and just concentrated on training. I went back to San Diego State and collected my GI bill. My wife was working at school and modeling too, and I asked her if she would work so I could train. We reduced our spending to a minimum and tried to save. I knew we could have better things in the future and that made me work harder.

T&FN: Did you and Wes Williams really work on a garbage truck?

Robinson: We would work for the San Diego Sanitation Department during the summers, after the season was over. The work really tore us down and no way could you do that work and try to train. But the pay was good and the hours fit in and we really had no choice in the matter. We wanted to help make ends meet. Wes is still doing it and he tried to make the team this year, but there is just no way.

T&FN: You once said that 28-feet was an important enough goal to keep you jumping. Is it still?

Robinson: After I won at Montreal—and I'm still thinking this over—I asked myself why should I continue jumping? I'm debating now if that is a big enough goal to keep me going. It will mean the same kind of sacrifices and I don't

know if it's worth it.

T&FN: Is 29 feet possible again?

Robinson: It's more possible if we can get a big invitational in Mexico during the peak season with all the good guys, all the good competition. I think Bob could have gone farther if he had had the competition.

T&FN: Is there really that much difference between a 27-4/4 and 28-feet?

Robinson: I don't think so. For me, I can jump 27-4/4 making mistakes. So 28 would come doing everything right, not perfectly but just correctly. I have never yet had a jump where I did everything right. If I can get 27 doing things wrong, then I know I can hit 28 with no hassle when I do things right. And if I could do everything perfectly, and be in perfect conditions like Beamon was, that's 29.

T&FN: If you got your "ideal" leap, in perfect conditions, how far would it be?

Robinson: Whew . . . I don't know. If everything was right, I could jump 29-5, 29-7. I know I can jump 28-5 right now, so with everything perfect add another foot.

But I'm not a great natural long jumper. I'm slow compared to most, like Randy. If we can get a sprinter who is fast, but tall and has the spring like I have, he could jump 30 feet. In Mexico, Beamon was the prototype of that jumper. He was tall, had a tremendous amount of spring and at that time he was very, very fast. That was the ideal jumper. At that time, he was the jumper of the 21st century. □

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