

DWIGHT STONES

by Tom Jordan

Dwight Stones—ex-World Record holder, ex-amateur athlete, ex-high jumper—is sitting under a bank of klieg lights in a small bowling alley near the resort town of Freeport/Lucaya in the Bahamas. He has just completed the bowling segment of *The Superstars* competition, ABC's popular pitting of football-basketball-baseball-track-soccer-water skiing-etc. stars against one another.

Stones is not doing as well as he had hoped. There are three more events to go, and he is tied for 4th. If everything goes well the next day, he can still win the overall, but it will be tough. (He finished 5th.)

This is the second time Dwight has been in the finals of *The Superstars*; the first time got him suspended by the AAU and IAAF for what looks like forever.

In 1978, he finished 3rd in the finals and won \$22,100 (\$33,000 total, including the preliminaries). According to the AAU, one-third of the money was to go to the national AAU, one-third to the local AAU, and one-third to a charity of Dwight's choice.

Stones states that in conversations with IAAF personnel he was assured he could keep all of the money as long as he did not compete in the track-related events—the 100-yard dash and the 880. The AAU maintains that Dwight added a clause to his contract with the producers of *The Superstars* stating that the money won would go to his own Desert Oasis TC, and this was in clear violation of the rules. Stones was suspended in June of 1978 and the case has been in litigation ever since.

After exchanging the red *Superstars* jersey for his trademark Mickey Mouse t-shirt, Dwight is ready. With the clatter of pins in the background, his manager/lawyer in attendance, and a cluster of Bahamians and tourists listening politely, he talks about his life:

T&FN: Now that you've been in *The Superstars*, what do you think of it as an athletic competition?

Stones: I can remember sitting around with [Jim] Bolding and [Steve] Smith and some of the guys on the PCC, watching it, and saying to ourselves how well we'd do if we were in it. That this was a joke and that's a joke and everything's a joke.

Then Smith got a chance and he did horrible, and I always thought Steve was a great athlete. The *Superstars* require you to do many things at once: the swimming is tough, the half-mile is no joke—you've got *Bible of the Sport*

to be in shape to run 2:05. . . I think that outside of the decathlon, it's the best test of athletic ability. You've got some strength events, some skill events, and some total luck events in there. You get some of the well-known pro athletes down here and they don't do so well, and some of the athletes from sports that aren't as well recognized and they do a good job. So I feel I'm down here representing track and field and I'm doing the best I can.

T&FN: Have you trained as hard for this as you do for the high jump?

Stones: I've never trained so hard as I have for this. The high jump is easy compared to this, because it is so easy to overtrain in the high jump. There are guys out there who are sharper than I am, much faster, have better reactions, but they overtrain. There are a million overtrainers in the high jump.

T&FN: How do things stand with the AAU?

Stones: Well, the way things stand right now, my lawyers want to beat the AAU. I told them a long time ago that there wouldn't be any more money coming from me, but if they wanted to continue on their own, I would give them any non-financial assistance that they want. They want to win, and they're going ahead with the next step, which is to try to get a writ of mandate in April. If the AAU honors it, we'll see what happens then.

T&FN: Did the AAU offer you reinstatement for a certain percentage of the money you won?

Stones: They wanted me to give two-thirds of the money back to them. I'm not giving them 2 cents back. Basically what it comes down to is that for \$11,000 I can be an amateur. What it comes down to is straight bucks.

T&FN: Have you ever thought it might have been better to go and make a deal with a top AAU official. You know, like, "I'll give you \$2000 for your personal use, and I'll keep the rest?"

Stones: The AAU has so many deals going: they've got kickbacks from the travel agency, and kickbacks from TV. You know, the kickbacks have kickbacks. No. I

won't deal with them. I'm not going to give any of those people one red cent.

T&FN: Do *The Superstars* feel any responsibility for your suspension? You know, saying, "We'll invite you back for x-number of years?"

Stones: Oh no. Three times, that's it for everybody. They have said something about inviting me back as a veteran for a year after that, and that's fine with me. If they want me to keep going, I'll keep going: it keeps me in top shape, it's high visibility and it's a lot of fun.

T&FN: When you come down here, do you find that the guys from the pro sports perceive you differently because you don't make \$200,000 a year?

Stones: Well, I'll tell you. I approach this competition analytically, like I do everything else. I'm very analytical, and I'm a perfectionist. And some of these guys, they get a little upset, because I'm so prepared.

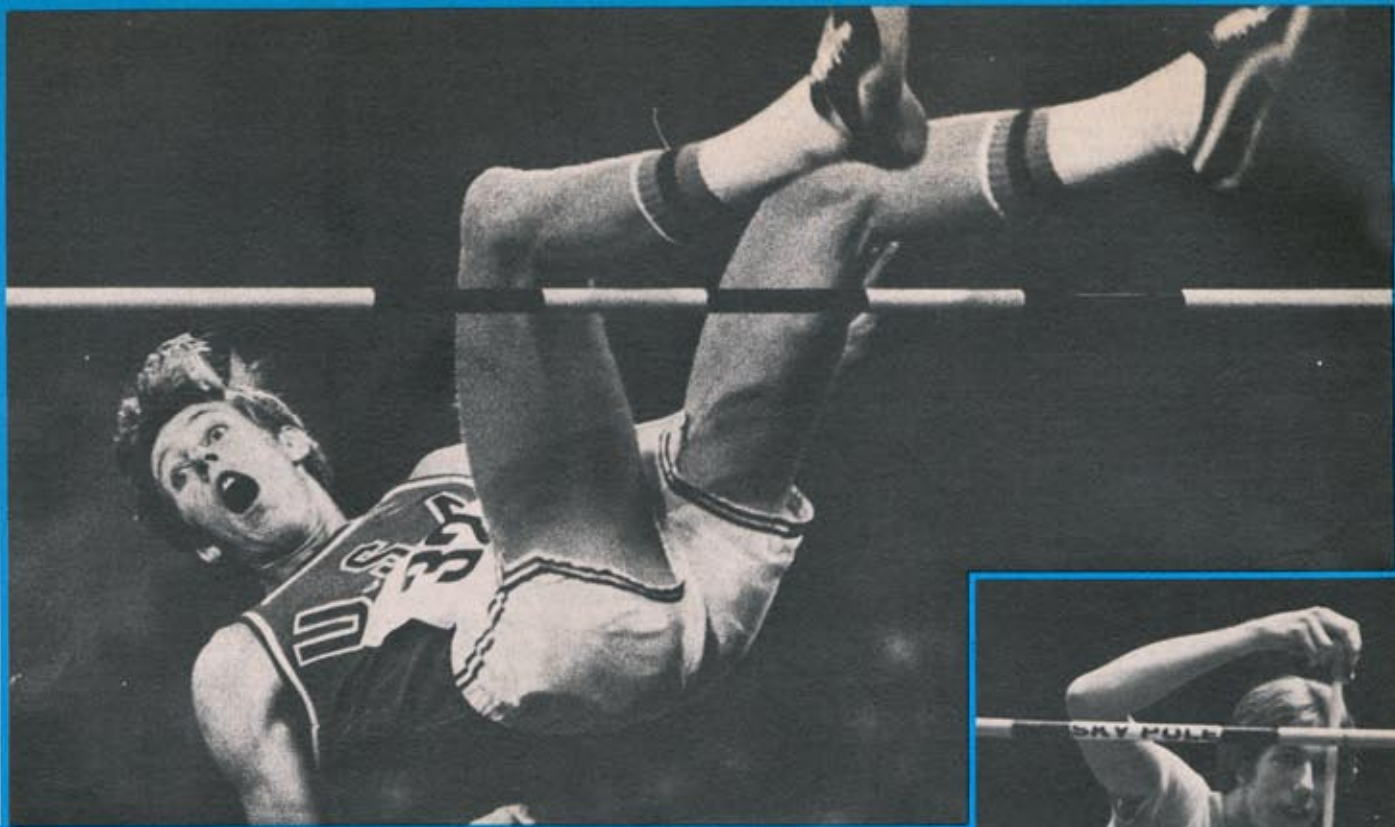
I say to them, "I've been suspended from the AAU, and can't high jump anymore. That's it; that's all she wrote. And this is my only way of making income. How would you feel if you were a baseball player placed on waivers, and nobody wanted you? You're making \$200-300,000 a year, and I'm busting my ass to make thirty."

You know, my best move in track is not my arm movement, my quick knee, or my good approach, but that movement [makes motion of taking money under the table]. I'm very quick from the top of the table to there. And I'm not the only one.

And all the good guys do it. You don't just go to Europe to jump and meet the best in the world. That goes along with it, but you go over there to make a living, let's face it.

The sooner they can get paid, the better off they will be, because this is really a joke, and everybody thinks they make more money than they do. People are totally off base when they say people are making \$60,000 a year in Europe, but it gets printed in the *Olympian* magazine. Then the AAU uses that as an example of why we can't field a national team. That's

Horstmuller



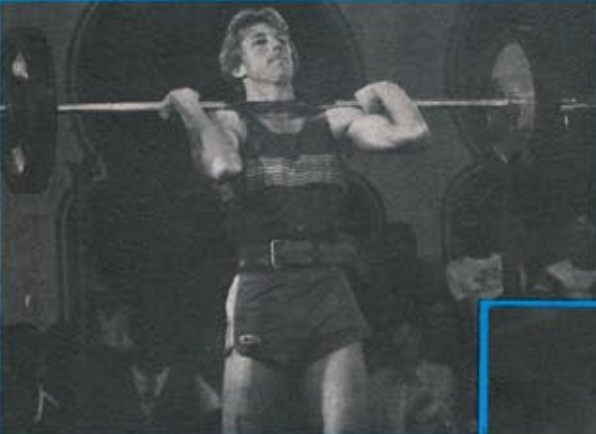
Steve Sutton

(Above) Stones moved into the spotlight on July 11, 1973 with an out-of-the-blue World Record 7-6½. Even he looked surprised.
(Left) As a Superstar, Dwight now dabbles in other activities.

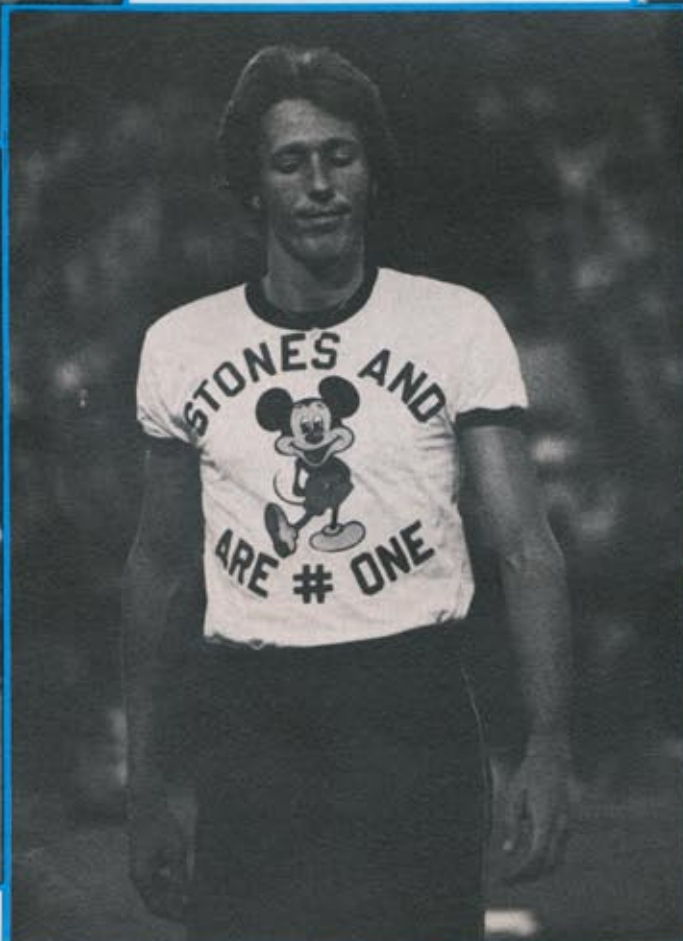


Steve Sutton

(Above) By 1975, Dwight was making sure his jumps were being measured right.
(Left) By the time of his last record (7-7¼ on August 4, 1976), he was a familiar sight wearing a Mickey Mouse t-shirt.



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caca. I can't stand that. And that's what gets the IRS interested in investigating athletes.

T&FN: What about rumors that you're in deep trouble with the IRS?

Stones: No truth to them. That was all cleared up a long time ago. I simply paid a penalty and that's all there was to it. The only thing they were challenging was my '73 return. They don't care how you make your money. Just as long as you pay taxes on it.

T&FN: Have you missed high jumping?

Stones: Not yet [in a surprised tone]. I've been to three indoor meets. No I really don't. I know I can jump higher. There's no doubt in my mind. This past summer, I jumped 7-7 in training, I jumped 7-6 in training; I was in the best shape of my life. I weighed what I wanted to weigh, my speed was up. With good facilities, good weather and another couple of weeks, I would have broken the world record at least once and maybe twice.

T&FN: You're talking like your career is over.

Stones: My track and field career? Sure it is over. There's no way they're going to get a writ of mandate. If they get

it, I'll fall flat on my face. I won't believe it.

T&FN: Have you lined up sponsors and so forth?

Stones: Oh yeah. All of that is in the works. First of all, if we get the writ of mandate, the AAU would suspend me for running the 880 in The Superstars, or something, which is also bullshit.

They want the money. That's all they care about.

T&FN: Okay, cynics will say that Dwight had peaked and was on the way down, and some these young guys were coming up, and he decided to martyr himself. What's your reaction?

Stones: I think my record speaks for itself: I was world-ranked for 7 straight years; I was ranked No. 1 in the U.S. this year, even though they took 60% of my season away. Turn that thing off for a second. [Here he lambasts T&FN for printing a letter claiming that it was raining when he cleared his bronze-medal winning height in 1972. Asks how long is he going to have to answer questions about that. Says that the picture was after his last miss at 7-3¼ and T&FN should have known better.]

T&FN: What will you do now?

THE MOUTH THAT SOARED

One of the greatest high jumpers of all time, Dwight Stones has never been reticent to let the world know just how good he is. Or to let everyone know just how he feels on a myriad of subjects.

This frank attitude earned him many detractors, but it also made him one of the most highly visible figures in our sport the world around. For all his popping off, The Big D usually hit right on the mark with his statements. And the truth always offends a lot of people.

Somewhere along the line, someone affectionately dubbed Dwight, "The Mouth That Soared." Perhaps it was when he developed his habit of yelling "Got it!" at moment of takeoff, not even waiting until he was in the air. He was nearly always right, so well did he know his approach.

A collection of his gems, from past issues of T&FN:

August '72 (Pre-Olympic): "We don't have much international experience but we're young and hungry. None of us are going all the way to Munich to lose—particularly me."

September '72 (Olympic Edition): "From what I saw at the Games I think my technique in the flop is the best in the world. With my technique, natural maturity in the next few years plus developing my speed and strength, I don't see how I can be kept under the World Record in the next 3 years." He wasn't.

II July '73 (After his first WR): "I didn't want to try for any higher heights because I always want to go out a winner."

February '74: "I'll probably never finish school. I have a lot of friends with degrees who

are doing great jobs like pumping gas. I can do that without getting a degree. I'm just not a very good studier. . .

"I thought when Ollan Cassell was named Executive Director of the AAU things would get better. After all, he was an athlete and knew all the problems. Instead, he gave us a bigger hosing than any of the others."

I March '74 (Asked how he could afford to drive a Datsun 240-Z): "When I was a kid, we lived like upper-class folks even though we were of lower-class means. I've learned those tricks."

August '75 (When Tom Woods jumped 7-5½ at the AAU): "That's the first time I've ever seen anybody jump at my World Record. That's an awesome feeling. Woods is within an inch of my record. I can't stand that."

March '76: "If you set up the runway to accommodate my approach I promise you I'll set a World Indoor Record. If you don't I'll just go 7-0 and go home."

April '78 (when Franklin Jacobs commented to him on how people disliked him): "I'm the Muhammad Ali of track."

We'll miss you, champ.

DWIGHT STONES'S MAJOR RECORDS

OUTDOORS					
2.30	7-6½	WR, AR	Munich		7/11/73
2.31	7-7	WR, AR, CR	Philadelphia		6/ 5/76
2.32	7-7½	WR, AR, CR	Philadelphia		8/ 4/76
INDOORS					
2.24	7-4½	AR	Los Angeles		1/19/74
2.26	7-5	WR, AR	Pocatello		1/17/75
2.265	7-5½	WR, AR	Los Angeles		1/18/75
		-WR, -AR	Inglewood		2/ 7/75
2.27	7-5½	WR, AR	Oklahoma City		2/15/75
2.28	7-5½	WR, AR	New York		2/20/76
2.29	7-6¼	WR, AR	San Diego		2/21/76

Stones: There are some TV things which have an appeal. Some endorsement things which have some appeal. There are some entertainment-type things which loom on the scene. I'll have to find out if I can transform my shtik into something else besides the high jump.

T&FN: How many years do you think you had left?

Stones: Two. I'd have been there in 1980, there's no doubt about it.

T&FN: Would you have won the gold medal?

Stones: Well, no, no. It's too hard to predict anything. Look what happened in '76: I was the most prepared, in the best shape of my life, and I didn't win. I didn't want to jump in Moscow. I felt that even in '76. But I felt it would be a nice swan song.

Actually, I wanted to retire after the 1981 indoor season. Indoor season has always been my best. The indoor meet directors have *always* been good to me: they paid me well, I jumped well, I broke the world record in 5, 6, 7 different places, I always was popular with the crowds. That's what I wanted to do. Someplace like San Diego. Never the AAU meet, obviously.

People say to me, "Well, I guess not winning the gold medal in 1976 really knocked down your chances of making money in Europe." I'd say, "Nah, I was just about at the top of the pay scale for the high jump anyway," and in fact, my price went *up* after I lost the World Record. Because each meet promoter thought, "My meet is the one where he'll get it back." Each meet I was jumping well, jumping high. Each meet promoter anticipated me breaking the record at his meet. Losing the World Record is one of the best things that ever happened to me financially.

T&FN: How high do you think some of these guys like Yashchenko can go?

Stones: I don't know, I've never seen him jump. I understand he has bad knees, but these are just rumors. You know, when you're at the top of the heap, these rumors fly. He's got time, and he doesn't jump much.

You know why some guys jump 50-60 times a year? Because the athlete from the non-socialist, non-communist country has to make a living. You think Yashchenko makes anything off the high jump? You're right, he doesn't. He doesn't have to go to the meet directors and get \$2000 for jumping. So he doesn't have to jump that many times. We do—we have to live, we have to eat, we have to pay rent, we have to pay our telephone bill. So in 1973, I jumped 55 times, because I wasn't at a level where I could *afford* to jump much less than that; and as the years went on, I could jump a little less because I was making more at each meet.

It got to the point where I didn't jump as much anymore because I didn't need to. I invested that money from those early meets wisely—that's why I don't work now. And I got to the point where I came

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home in the middle of my summer. Then went back for a while.

The usual philosophy is like the Pacific Coast Club athletes—go over there for 3 months and just *suck* it up and just stay over there, because it costs so damn much to fly over and back.

In 1977, I was ecstatic when this one meet in Oslo cancelled—and it was a \$1200 meet for me. But it gave me some rest, some time to prepare for the next meet in case they slipped some good guy in on me like Beilschmidt or Wszola. It was a case of where I wanted to do better on a per-meet type of thing. I wanted to be ready to do well. So I started taking it easy between meets. It used to be that after the AAU meet, I was on the plane the next day.

T&FN: *Are you bitter about anything?*

Stones: Not in the least, Well, I'm bitter about one thing. I followed the rules that they set down last year. I didn't run the 100 and I didn't run the 880. If I'd run those, I would have been far and away The Superstars champ. There are a lot of things that go along with that, and I wouldn't have been in any more trouble than I'm in right at this minute. *That* makes me angry.

Everyone has said for years that I was going to be the one to stick my foot in this thing. And they were right! I stuck my foot in it. But if I had been planning to do it over The Superstars, I sure wouldn't have

skipped those two running events last year. I followed the rules, and I think it's obvious that I would never do anything that was going to benefit the AAU financially. So why would I go to The Superstars with the plan of giving them two-thirds of the money? There's no way.

If I had a tape of that conversation I had with the IAAF official, there would be no case. They are saying that certain conversations never took place, certain things were never said, which I am really upset about. I can appreciate that he has a job to keep, but I don't appreciate being sacrificed.

But I brought a lot of it on myself, and I'll admit that—I've admitted that all along. I've reconciled myself to never high jumping again. I've had my time in the sun, and track and field is something I was in, basically to use to get into something else. . . "using" is the wrong word. I wasn't "using track and field to get into something else" but it has opened up other things for me. I think winning The Superstars would be as high visibility media-wise as breaking the World Record.

All I expect now is a telegram or a letter or a note from the guy who gets 3rd in the Olympic Trials thanking me for not pursuing my case. Whoever gets 3rd, I want a note thanking me—that's all.

T&FN: *How would you like Dwight Stones to be remembered by track and*

field fans?

Stones: Just this one thing: that I made the high jump—after the mile—the most popular event in track and field. I think it's impossible for anything to replace the mile/1500 because I think that's just a classic event.

I developed my style of flop very early and was jumping very good marks at an early age. I had good success in high school and shortly after high school, and I think it took other jumpers a while to catch on. So when I was jumping 7-3s and 7-4s, that was unbelievable. I jumped the world record in '73, then 7-5 four days later, 7-4½ after that. That was amazing in those days; now it's commonplace.

I'll say that I feel very responsible for that [erasing the mental barrier]. I'm very happy that I've made the event that was important to me an important one in track and field. The mile is first, and I think the high jump is second.

Other than that, everything I did—no matter how off-the-wall, how controversial, or how obnoxious—I think that. . . if anybody can point out something where I've hurt the sport, I challenge them to tell it to me and convince me that I did. And nobody has ever taken that challenge. One thing I've always prided myself on is that I've helped the sport in a positive way. And that's the thing that's the most important to me. □

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