

# T&FN Interview

# FRED DIXON

by Bert Nelson

**F**red Dixon is the world's leading decathlete. His 8393 automatically-timed score is the best performance of the year. In making it, he soundly trounced Aleksandr Grebenyuk whose 8478 is first among the hand-timed totals (although probably intrinsically inferior to Dixon's auto mark).

But Dixon's climb to the top of the 10-event heap was neither quick nor easy.

He was rejected as a walk-on at the University of Oregon when he expressed an interest in the 220 but couldn't identify Oregon sprint great Harry Jerome.

At Cal State Los Angeles he never scored higher than 7101 while placing fourth and fifth in the NCAA. He was drunk, rowdy, "as wild as I possibly could be."

Now married and committed to Christ, Fred turned serious about the decathlon only to wipe out his entire 1973 season with a series of injuries. He broke through spectacularly with 8033 in 1974 and was leading the 1975 AAU after six events, whereupon he no-pointed in the discus.

Recovering from that experience, Fred totaled a fine 8277 against the Soviets and Poles and the next year improved to 8294 in the Olympic Trials.

Difficulties struck once again in Montreal where he was a legitimate medal hope, when he ran only 18.11 in the hurdles, no-heighted in the vault and finished 23rd with a meager 6754 points. He was, observers said, perhaps the most talented of all decathletes but did not compete as well as he should.

Now 27 and without progress in a non-athletic career, Dixon was saved from premature retirement by a special job offer. He was given time to train, but the facilities around Closter, N. J., were minimal and he trained only about as third as much as he had in 1976.

His auto-timed 8037 in the AAU, his first important win, was a bit of a surprise. And his 8393 against the Soviets was a real shocker.

Fred Dixon, for all his marvelous talent, wasn't supposed to be in good enough condition to become the fourth-highest automatic scorer of all-time. And he wasn't supposed to compete well enough to turn back the strong challenge he faced.

What happened? Has the 6-3½, 188 pounder finally found the key? Will he go on from here to challenge for track's two most sought-after goals, the world record and the Olympic title?

**T&FN:** Are you going to stick with the decathlon?

**Dixon:** I'll only continue training if I can do it without compromising myself as far as a career goes. Lynn and I have wanted to start a family for the last few years and have always put it off because of the decathlon. On the other hand, I'd love to continue. I'm excited about it. I really enjoy it.

**T&FN:** Why?

**Dixon:** It represents a challenge that's



Dave Deenan

never-ending. There is no way to master it. The challenge has been kind of an expansion process.

I've always been the type of person who shied away from responsibility, from anything I thought I'd fail at. The decathlon has slowly taught me that I am able to achieve something by working at it. It has increased my competence so much in other areas of life.

**T&FN:** I understand you weren't exactly in the best of shape for the Russian meet.

**Dixon:** I really wasn't. My quality of conditioning wasn't nearly what it has been, but my quality of effort was far beyond what it has been in the past.

**T&FN:** What kind of score did you expect?

**Dixon:** If things went well, the Lord willing, I thought I could score about 150 points more than in the AAU.

**T&FN:** How do you account for doing still another 200 points better?

**Dixon:** The only way I can explain it is that my quality of performance was better. In the past I always let down in one event or another. I was fortunate enough to get through it without any disasters.

**T&FN:** I think you're aware that a

number of people feel you have the most natural talent in the event but that you don't always compete as well as you could. What is your reaction to that?

**Dixon:** I would agree with it. I've been more disappointed than anybody in myself. But on the other hand, as you know, I'm a Christian and I've always kind of trusted the Lord with what does happen. I've always felt that what is required of me is to do the best I can and I can't ever remember a meet where I didn't do the best I could, except in the 1500 meters..

It's true I haven't performed as well as I would have expected. I've always admired Bruce Jenner so much for being able to do that. I never ever felt I had the gift for competition that Bruce had. But I think it can be developed and that I'm still in the process.

**T&FN:** On your God-given talents, do you think your body is capable of doing things better than Jenner's?

**Dixon:** I think Bruce's ability to compete well is his best talent. I have one advantage over him. Naturally, I have more speed.

**T&FN:** Do you realize that your personal records all put together total more points than Bruce's?

**Dixon:** No, I didn't, although I knew it would be pretty close. I do realize my marks add up to quite a bit and that's where my future in the decathlon lies, in competing closer to my potential.

**T&FN:** Do you consider his score out of sight?

**Dixon:** No, not at all. I think that world record will be broken very soon.

**T&FN:** Let's talk about your being a Christian. Just how does it fit into your every day life and into the decathlon?

**Dixon:** It's all-encompassing. My wife and I accepted Christ as our Savior about five years ago, shortly after we were married. That's really the impetus of our lives, to serve God.

There are a lot of Biblical principles which can be applied to every aspect of life. It says in the Bible, whatever you do, do it heartily unto the Lord. That is how I look at doing the decathlon. God has given me ability and I'm accountable to do it to the best of my ability and to give God the glory.

**T&FN:** Do you pray specifically in relation to the decathlon?

**Dixon:** I certainly do. I really pray that the Lord will give me a loving attitude toward my competitors and that I won't be

Track & Field News



concerned with how well they are doing, if they are doing better than I.

**T&FN:** Could this be why you haven't competed as well as you should? You don't have what we call the killer's instinct?

**Dixon:** I think that at times that has hurt me. We shouldn't think that what we pray for ourselves is necessarily what is best so I think that all prayers should be prefaced with speaking to God that His will be done.

**T&FN:** Does this mean you just sit back and relax and let Him do all the work?

**Dixon:** No. I wish that could be true but it's not.

**T&FN:** I understand that in your younger days you might have raised a bit of hell. Is that true?

**Dixon:** Boy, that's not exaggerated at all.

**T&FN:** Do you want to talk about it?

**Dixon:** Yeah, just from the point that the only time I do talk about it is to illustrate to people the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

From my senior year in high school to my senior year in college I did just about everything I could think of. My weekends down in Mexico, going to bullfights and bars, just being as wild as I could. Drunk, rowdy. Barely getting through school because I had no interest.

**T&FN:** You were already in the decathlon.

**Dixon:** Yeah, and I used to smoke a pack of cigarettes a day while I was doing the decathlon. And drink at night.

At that time I was really lost. I just had no meaning to my life. The decathlon was just another entertainment, something I got some recognition for, so it was ego-bolstering.

There was no substance to my life. It finally got to the point where I was very unhappy, very depressed. I had a great deal of fear of life. I was really going downhill. But at the same time I had a lot of old friends, and a lot of relatives, who were praying for me. We came to believe in the name of Jesus Christ. I can't even tell you how miraculously our life has been changed.

**T&FN:** In your sinning days were you into drugs at all?

**Dixon:** Yeah, yeah, I was. We used to smoke a lot of marijuana, just to get more messed up. I was just doing everything everyone else was doing and because I was competitive and always wanting to be popular, I did a little more than everyone.

I think God allowed that because that can really be a witness now to a lot of people. There are so many experiencing that right now. I'm excited when I can share that with somebody, that I know

exactly how they feel and what they are doing.

**T&FN:** In the decathlon do you follow your own performances carefully, keeping a record of everything?

**Dixon:** It's an amazing thing. I can recite almost every mark of every guy of every decathlon I've been in. At least in American meets.

**T&FN:** Do you remember that much about other events in track?

**Dixon:** I look over *Track & Field News* a few times—I love getting it—and read it a few times every month, almost memorize it from cover to cover as far as statistics go.

**T&FN:** You're a track fan then?

**Dixon:** I really am. I always will be. I love track, going to track meets.

**T&FN:** Good luck, Fred. I have a feeling something will work out so you can continue to compete.

**Dixon:** I hope so. I'd like to do it a little bit more. I really enjoy it. And another thing that keeps you going is always conceding there is a little more there, you can squeeze a little more out of yourself.

I feel this last meet put me into a new frontier, a new frame of thought anyway. I saw that things are possible that maybe I was doubting in the past. I just hope I'm there in 1980. □

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