

Things really are looking up for Jim Howard. As 1986 began, the 26-year-old Texan already could claim the indoor and outdoor American Records in the high jump, thanks to two clearances of 7-8½.

Those record leaps already made Howard the highest American ever in the event. But Howard is relentless in his drive to climb ever higher. In his first four competitions of the '86 indoor season he attempted an AR ceiling of 7-8½. On his 12th attempt, he got it and then had two close misses at a WR 7-10½.

His latest record only reinforces Howard's place as the leading U.S. jumper, a position confirmed by his No. 2 World Ranking in 1985 despite a disappointing tie for 7th at TAC.

But that disappointment, in its own way, paved the way for Howard's big upper this winter: he quit his job as a chemical engineer to concentrate solely on high jumping.

A softspoken man not given to flamboyance, Howard is nonetheless critical of himself and his jumping. But his stern appraisals ultimately are directed toward just one end—jumping higher. To the '80 Oly Team member, that's all that counts:

T&FN: What was behind your decision to quit your engineering job and concentrate on high jumping full time?

Howard: Everything was fine and dandy last winter. I was jumping well indoors, I was working and the job played a big part in my life. It provided the security I needed, plus it kept my mind off thinking about nothing but track.

In the past, I sometimes ruined my performances by thinking too much. I would overanalyze everything. But while I was working, I was leaving my job and going straight to meets, so I didn't have time to think about the competition.

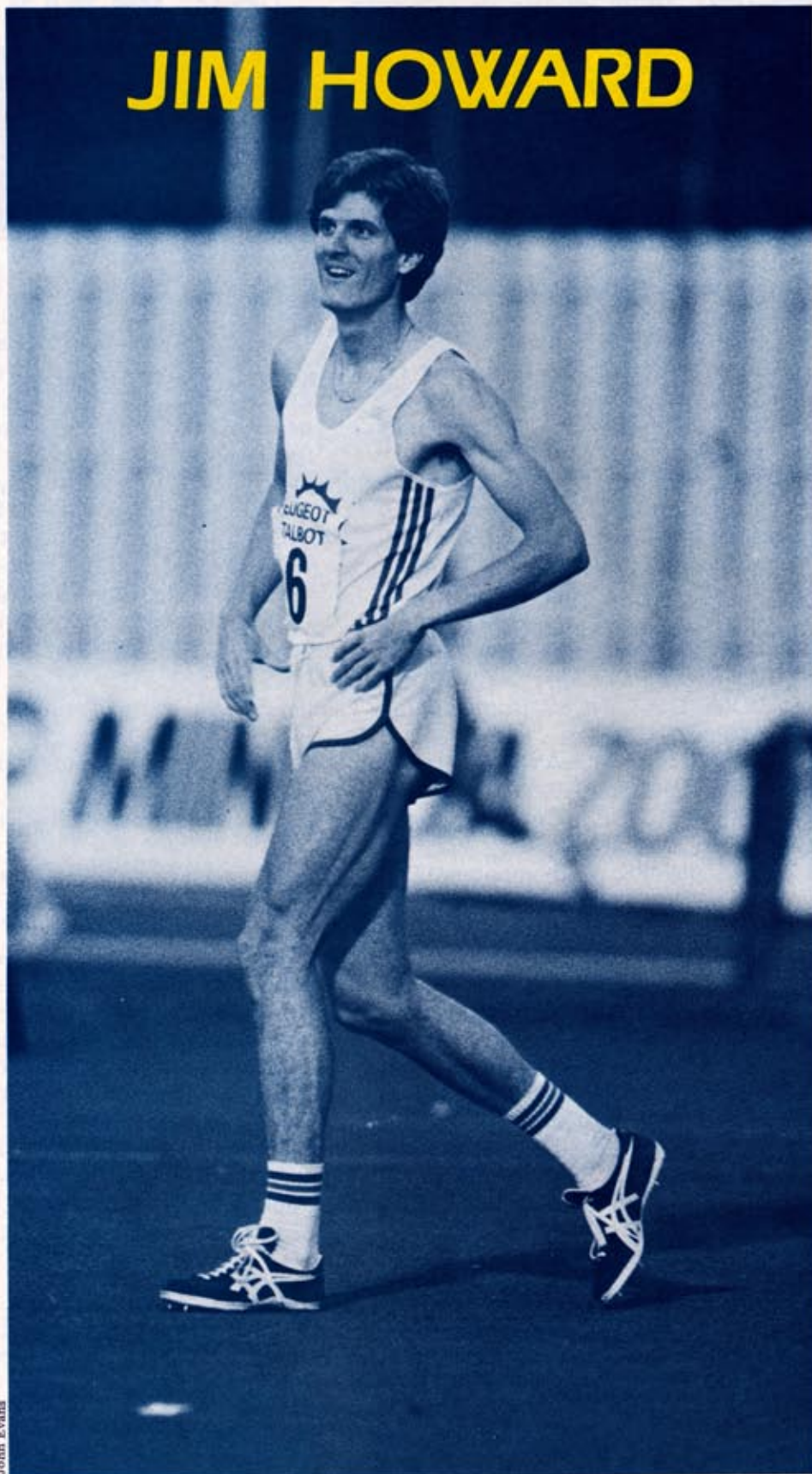
But after indoor season, the job went into really high gear. In Houston where I worked at the Anheuser-Busch brewery, we were really pushing hard and I was training only 30-45 minutes a day and sometimes only every other day. I was taking my abilities for granted.

I jumped the 7-8½ American Record outdoors in May, but it was a situation where I had only a one-day type of effort in me. I couldn't go two days in a row, because I wasn't conditioned for it.

At TAC, I jumped well in qualifying but in the final, I collapsed. I was sliding downhill and I knew I had too many opportunities in jumping just to waste them. So I gave them my notice at work the Monday after TAC. A month later, I left and went to Europe.

But in Europe I feel I never did jump up to what my expectations were. I had lost a lot of that strength that it had taken me years to gain. Now, and especially after the World Cup, I took advantage of my

JIM HOWARD



John Evans

by Jon Hendershott

full-time track and really trained, and I'm in much better shape as a result.

I try not to overtrain like I did before. I schedule my workouts months in advance; I started just after the World Cup to schedule my training for this winter. For the week before a meet, I even schedule what types of foods I will eat to recover from competing, whether it's two meets in a row or just one a weekend. It's a kind of "high-tech high jumping."

T&FN: *Is it fair to say that the full-time approach to jumping, as well as the meticulous preparation, helped pay off in the American Record at Albuquerque?*

Howard: Oh, yes. I've been able to focus all my energies on the high jump. I've had a lot of years to collect data on my jumping—I've been jumping since I was 10 years old and I have taken notes on my training since I was a senior in high school.

I've seen how I jumped, how I competed and how I felt, and now I'm starting to put the right formula together that works best for me. I'm so well in touch with my body now that I know what to do between competitions to keep myself fine-tuned. So I can stay at a high performance level for a period of 6-8 weeks and not begin to falter.

T&FN: *Is the difference between 7-8½ [his indoor AR] and 7-10½ [an indoor WR] more mental than physical, in that you are thinking that you are trying a record height and psychological things like that?*

Howard: Actually, it is quite different physically. People might think that a difference of one inch isn't much, and if you are talking about the difference between 6-6 and 6-7 that's probably true.

But when you get to heights above 7-6½ or 7-7, then every centimeter or fraction of an inch involves an exponential increase. You don't just jump "a little bit higher."

The higher you jump, the more horizontal speed you must have. More or less, you have to be flying, like a long jumper because you have to get your entire body over that bar. There probably are basketball players who can jump 7-10½ in the air, but they couldn't get their body over a bar at that height because you have to have a wide parabola to clear a bar. It takes a lot more speed and horsepower from the body to do it.

The high jump demands that everything must be totally on: every step of your approach; you have to be totally relaxed on the takeoff so you can hit the parabola right above the bar exactly right. So if you are off even 1-2%, you can miss.

T&FN: *You approach this like a scientist. The high jump brings out the engineer in you.*

Howard: Yes, I can get overly analytical, which can be a problem. That's why I

always jump better if there is someone to push me in a competition. Then I'm just jumping a height to win and not to set a record. In Albuquerque, Brian Stanton jumped 7-6½ and then he agreed to go to 7-8½ with me. So, I wasn't looking at that height as a record but just as a winning effort.

"Even If I Jump 8-Feet, I'll Be Trying For 8-1."

When you're just trying to stay competitive in a competition, it takes the mental strain off you completely. You aren't trying for a record; you're just trying to beat the other guys.

T&FN: *Patrik Sjöberg seems to be your prime rival; you met him nine times during 1985 and won five of those meetings. What do you think of him?*

Howard: Patrik definitely is my prime competitor because not only can he jump high, he can also do it often. That is something I look for in a jumper: you can count on him to always jump high. It doesn't matter what the conditions are, or if you jump three or four times in a week; he can be counted on to jump high. And that's what Patrik is like.

T&FN: *You have said that continual improvement means you decide that a height you once considered high is no longer satisfying to clear. So there seems to be an element of restlessness and dissatisfaction that keeps you wanting to improve. True?*

Howard: Oh yes. I have learned over the years that you have to throw away your old set of expectations and move on to new ones. In the past, I know I put a lot of pressure on myself to clear heights I considered high, so I probably put out a lot of energy needlessly.

Now such heights come regularly and don't take that much effort. I'm more relaxed and I feel I have saved myself physically so that when the bar gets high, I'm then able to really gear myself up. I know my best efforts don't have to come until the bar is above 7-7.

Consistency comes with the experience of doing it and being up at those high heights. So many jumpers who make a big improvement of 4 or 5 inches or so have a hard time establishing consistency in their performances. I've seen jumpers get so mixed up because they want to use the exact movements they did when they jumped the big height.

They don't realize it's a *physical* thing to jump that height. Your body jumps it, not all the images you try to conjure up in

your head. I don't believe in that; I believe that jumping high is a result of what you have in your body and your legs, not what your mind is telling your body to do.

Also, I feel I'm more relaxed to compete against the bar rather than the other jumpers. I don't really care who I'm competing against because the real competition is you against the bar. [PCC coach] Tom Jennings has given me some excellent perspectives on that: he told me that when I was younger and competed against certain jumpers, I was always moving, stretching, jogging. I was wasting my energy just because I was nervous.

But now it doesn't matter if I'm jumping against Patrik Sjöberg and Dietmar Mogenburg. I stay with my same routine and just remember that ultimately it is me versus that bar. I don't care if they pass or whatever. I just follow my own game plan because I know it's best for me, and it's stupid to try to play into theirs.

Sure, I have a short-term feeling of being very happy after setting an American Record. But there is a degree of restlessness because one of my very next thoughts is, "I could have set a World Record." So right away I turn my thoughts to thinking what I could have done to set a world mark. What could I change in my routine?

I never let down on myself. After I set a record, for example, I used to go off my diet for a little while and celebrate. But after the Albuquerque meet, my first thought was, "Boy, I'm going to stay on my diet if I want to get that record next week."

So I always keep myself going. That's what has helped me most. I know that a lot of jumpers feel like they are on top of the world if they set some kind of record. They feel they don't need to push on any farther.

But, I feel that even if I jump 8 feet, I'll be trying for 8-1.□

James Allen Howard, Jr., was born September 11, 1959, in Texas City, Texas, and is 6-5/175. Now competing for the Pacific Coast Club, he graduated from Alvin (Texas) High School ('78) and Texas A&M ('83). His 7-8½ in '85 is the outdoor American Record; his 7-8½ this year is the indoor AR. He is #8th on the combined all-time world list, #4th on the all-time world indoor list.

His placings in major meets: '79-7)NCAA; '80-6)NCAA, 11)TAC, 3)Oly Trials; '81-2)NCAA, 4)TAC; '83-dnq)NCAA, dnq)TAC; '84-1)TAC, dnq)Oly Trials; '85-7)TAC, 2)World Cup. His progression, including places in the World and U.S. Rankings and on the World and U.S. Lists:

Year	Age	Affiliation	Class	HJ	WR	AR	WL	AL
1978	18	Alvin HS	Sr	6-11				
1979	19	Texas A&M	Fr	7-3i			=56	=13
1980	20	"	So	7-3½	- 6		=51	=9
1981	21	"	Jr	7-5	- 7		=24	=7
1982	22	unattached		7-2½i	-		=147	=39
1983	23	Texas A&M	Sr	7-6½	- 9		=15	=3
1984	24	P Coast Club		7-7½	6	2	=9	2
1985	25	"		7-8½	2	1	=6	1
1986	26	"		7-8½(A)				