

He has been called the "quintessential technician" of discus throwers, for John Powell is nowhere near the largest man to whirl a discus. Yet his 233-9 toss from TAC in June makes him the third-longest thrower in history, and the farthest in 1984.

Except for 1978, a year in which he didn't throw much, he has been World Ranked no worse than No. 6 since 1972.

His goal since being 10 years old has been "to be the best in the world at something." That later changed to "having a physical activity that would keep me physically fit." But what he has done is craftily and expertly out-throw the Big Men in the Big Man's Game. His secret is what he calls "KISS—Keep It Simple, Stupid," and it involves a repetition of drills that Powell says "only one in a thousand people will do—they get bored with it and go back to the weightroom."

He is an interesting man to talk with, as his words can be spiced with a humor that borders on being sarcastic and tongue-in-cheek. After a lunch that consisted of a bowl of clam chowder and a sincere dish of veal parmigian, he spoke to us about his "last" season, explaining, "I've retired every year since 1978":

T&FN: How big a rival is Mac Wilkins to you? Do you have a dartboard with his face on it?

Powell: Now it's funny you mentioned that. I do have him on my refrigerator, with his Charles Manson-like beard. It's easier to compete against that than the clean-cut guy that he is today.

T&FN: Is that how you compete—by keying on someone?

Powell: Well, I've always made progress by keying on people. On one person. It's tough to key on the whole world. You say, "Listen, if I can get past this guy, I can be No. 1 in America." And with Mac in his heyday, you'd say, "If I can get past Mac, I can be No. 1 in the world." So, I mean, why worry about the rest of the world? They'll take care of themselves.

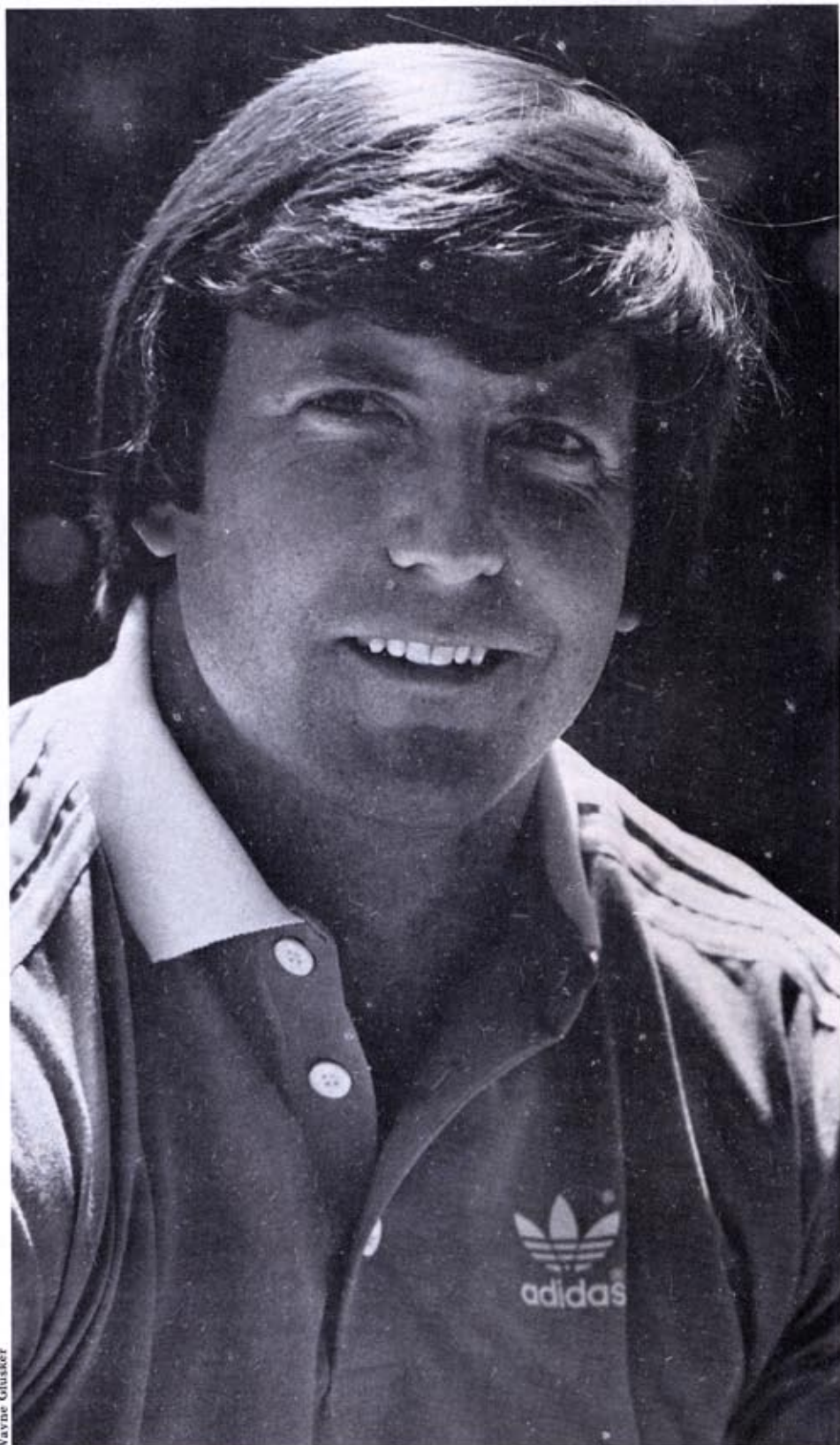
T&FN: How do you prevent boredom?

Powell: Well, like what I did last year. I changed my weightlifting routine. And I threw the 35lb weight to do something physical in basically the preseason. And as I got PRs in the 35, it excited me. Just like when I was throwing the discus and every time you get a PR you jump up and down. With the 35 I got the same feeling. Even though I was at a much lower level, as I kept improving my body didn't know that this PR was any different than a discus PR.

T&FN: Your discus PRs haven't come as often as they used to.

Powell: Before this year my last one was in '81, and the one before that was six years before, in '75. I mean, you have to wonder, "Have I maxed out?" And so I said, "OK, let's isolate it." And the exciting

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Wayne Glusker

thing is getting those PRs and feeling that excitement. It was suggested that when I started throwing the discus that the enthusiasm my body felt would carry over into the discus. So this year, I changed my pattern of throwing and threw the women's 1-kilo discus, and I threw the 1-kilo 88.70 or 88.80, which is 291. And that excited me because I'd never seen or heard of anybody throwing 88m with it.

T&FN: *Did it help when you started throwing the 2-kilo?*

Powell: Yeah, things started to happen. I had my first 70m throws in practice when I went over to train in Sweden with Ricky Bruch. For years, people had said, "Well, you can throw 220 maybe, but you'll never throw 230, because you can't do it." And when I came back I had a foul at the Jenner meet measured at 233-6. I thought, "Huh, I can do it." Then I win the national championships at 233-9.

The point is that I had changed. The belief stayed the same—that I could get 2 more centimeters. I was at 69.98; I wanted to be a 70m thrower before I hung it up. And instead of getting 2 centimeters I got 4 feet. Which I'll take.

T&FN: *Do people act differently toward you when they find out you've been a police officer?*

Powell: A lot of people still think I am, and I don't dispell that at all. It helps when I go on tours with young kids, and one will say, "And there's a San Jose cop." It enhances your status with them.

T&FN: *Have you ever thought of any practical uses for the discus?*

Powell: We did a TV special in '76 and I said at that time that I always carried them in the back of my police car and threw them through the door in barricade situations, and a lot of people thought I was serious. But no, not really. The discus is somewhat esoteric. But like I say, if you look for other lessons to be learned by throwing it, you will find it. If you look at it just as throwing a 2-kilo metal and plastic thing through the air, then that wouldn't hold my interest for 20 years. So it's the other things I have chosen to pursue that have helped me push my mind and body to their potential.

T&FN: *Whether it's your physical presence or your mental demeanor or because you used to be a police officer, you can be intimidating at times. Do you like that?*

Powell: It's not how I see myself, but it is how others see me. I've heard it from enough people that I know I'm perceived that way. Therefore, you're generally not jked on your first impression. There are some kinky people out there that don't like it. It's just something that people who know me for a period of time, they get

over that and they know it's not the real me.

But as a policeman it was definitely handy. A picture's worth a thousand words, and generally I didn't have to say anything except, "Get out of the car," and that would be instantly perceived. In a way, that may have been a key survival trait or something—it helped me in a lot of situations. But I had it before I went into the police department. I was nasty before I was a cop.

T&FN: *You've really had to design your own way of being a successful thrower, since you aren't as strong as some of the others. Have you ever been posed with a similar circumstance in life where you had to develop a program because you couldn't use what the others use?*

Powell: I would like to be creative in the various areas of life I go into. I also like kind of a track to run on to give me kind of a feel, and then I'll deviate from it. For example, I knew that when I was coming up that all good discus throwers lifted weights, and I added running to that. I remembered from running 440s how good I felt after the workout was over—you feel so great when you finish. But I knew these things had benefits.

There are other areas in life. You have to be creative to go through five years on the east side in San Jose and come out unscarred. There were plenty of opportunities where we were in hostage situations or a man-with-a-gun situation where you had to be fairly creative and make your own rules as the situations came along. So it was a challenge, and you cut your own path. I probably wouldn't do it if it didn't.

T&FN: *Are you ever depressed that you haven't won a gold medal?*

Powell: No, I don't get depressed about it. You have to remember when the Olympic Games take place and you have these people coming from all over the world, all the major competitors are champions. So you have a battle of champions, and you may or may not win. And chances are that you won't—you've got 10 highly qualified people there, there's only gonna be one victor. I've been on four teams, gone to three Olympics, and had the opportunity to win but I didn't. The answer is it's disappointing, but on the other hand, I do have a couple of souvenirs—two Olympic medals. It could have been worse.

T&FN: *What's your reaction to people who say that the American discus throwers blew it the last couple of years?*

Powell: Generally, there will only be a handful of people who'd say that. When you get into a situation like that all you have to say is, "Would you mind walking a mile in my moccasins? Then we'll discuss it." It's easy for people to be critics. The

thing is, only successful people have critics. You don't kick a dead horse, you don't beat it. You know, it goes with the turf. We could have done better, but we could have done worse, too.

T&FN: *How much of a satisfaction was there when you could walk away from meets having thrown farther than all the big guys, the behemoths?*

Powell: Not much. Somebody once said to me, "John, you don't have an inferiority complex—you are inferior." Sometimes people see themselves as the David in the David and Goliath. We know that David whipped Goliath in that particular encounter. I've sort of seen myself as the David competing against these Goliaths. You talk about a Ben Plucknett or even a Mac Wilkins when he bulks up, a lot of them are very, very big. You wonder, "Can I compete with them?" You look on it as amazing as opposed to some kind of an ego trip.

My forte is I am what I am, and I don't think I have the potential to ever be as strong as they are. I thought that I would get a better return spending my time throwing than spending it in the weight room. Other people have a different genetic makeup, like Art Burns who is very strong and very quick—he throws with his attributes. I don't happen to have those.

I mean, there's no way I could compete against Art Burns using those attributes—his are so much more phenomenal than mine that I'd be an idiot to try to compete with him on those particular traits. But when you take all the overall qualities, I can be competitive. And it's just amazing to me that by paying attention to your talents and abilities that you can go a lot farther than you think. And sometimes, farther than your competition. □

John Gates Powell was born June 25, 1947, in San Francisco and is 6-2/235. Attended Mira Loma High School in Sacramento ('65), American River CC ('67), San Jose State ('69). Now competes for Bud Light. First threw discus as college frosh. Set WR 69.08/226-8 in '75. His PRs (with World and U.S. List positions in parentheses): SP—56-1 '76; DT—233-9 '84 (3, 2); HT—191-11 '84; Wt—66-4%. His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	DT	Rank	Major Meets
1966	18/19	141-0		
1967	19/20	164-1		
1968	20/21	187-5		16)TAC 11)NCAA
1969	21/22	195-0	(x, 8)	8)TAC 4)NCAA
1970	22/23	201-6	(x, 4)	3)TAC
1971	23/24	207-1	(x, 8)	7)TAC
1972	24/25	210-8	(5, 2)	4)OG 2)OT 4)TAC
1973	25/26	218-8	(4, 1)	2)TAC
1974	26/27	223-4	(2, 1)	1)TAC
1975	27/28	226-8	(3, 1)	1)Pan-Am 1)TAC
1976	28/29	221-7	(3, 2)	3)OG 2)OT 2)TAC
1977	29/30	223-0	(4, 2)	3)TAC
1978	30/31	190-10		
1979	31/32	220-11	(6, 3)	4)TAC
1980	32/33	223-9	(5, 2)	2)OT 2)TAC
1981	33/34	229-7	(4, 2)	4)TAC
1982	34/35	224-2	(6, 3)	3)TAC
1983	35/36	224-1	(4, 1)	dnq)W Ch 1)TAC
1984	36/37	233-9		3)OG 1)OT 1)TAC