A
fter a 1987 season which saw him set two
American Records in the shot and win the
World Championships bronze medal, John
Brenner has yet to compete in 1988. He plans to
debut at the June 5 Pepsi meet, but his late season
opener doesn't concern the 27-year-old Southern
Californian.

He knows it will be a long enough season, so
the UCLA graduate is content with training hard
and planning for peaks at Indianapolis in July and
Seoul in late September.

But he remembers well his '87 campaign, in
which he broke through to top international class.
Those memories fuel Brenner's fire in 1988:

T&FN: Last year was a pivotal year
in the life of John Brenner: you put
behind you the pain and frustration of
recent years--missing the '84 Olympic
team, injuries which hampered you in
'85, a painful divorce in '86--to throw
two American Records and place 3rd in
the World Championships. But was
there one thing that really made the
difference for you in 1987?

Brenner: Looking back now, one
thing that really made a difference for
me was trimming down my weight,
losing some "baby fat" and getting
down to what is a good weight for me.

I'm around 285 now, where in past
years I was up over 300. I feel my
optimum competitive weight will be
around 275.

Another important thing I learned
was that even though I had a high body
weight, I also had high strength levels.
In talking with some of the older vet-
eran throwers about it, I really believe
that some of those earlier levels of
strength carried over into '87.

T&FN: So you're taking that into
account now?

Brenner: I have gone back some
this year to gaining more strength. I
was up over 290 earlier while training,
but just to get a decent strength base to
carry through the Olympic Games.

One thing I learned from compet-
ing in Europe in '86 was that you don't
have to be a big, bulky type of thrower
to compete successfully internationally.
One problem, as I see it, is that U.S.
throwers really haven't caught on to
this idea. I didn't either until I went
over to Europe and saw those guys and
how effectively they throw.

Eventually, I realized I had to get
back to what made me a good thrower

JOHN BRENNER

56—June 1988
Track & Field News
in the beginning and that is just being a
good, all-around athlete. I needed to get
back to developing that overall athleti-
cism. But that's very difficult to do
when you weigh 325.

T&FN: What did you learn about
throwing at the top international level?
Brenner: I learned a valuable les-
son in the World Championships, and
that simply was how to compete in a
major championship meet. An athlete
has to experience that kind of a com-
petition to do well in one.

You have to be there and learn
what it's like to throw in the qualifi-
ing in the morning, to use shots you
have never seen before and how to
cope with all the procedural things that
make a championship meet so unique.

I feel it's very tough for an athlete
to go to his first international
championship and do very well. Even
though I still had an injured hamstring
in Rome, I feel I did as well as I possibly
could. I was happy about my perfor-
manence, but I was especially happy
about the experience I gained.

That experience, I feel, is going to
be very valuable for me this year, both
at the Olympic Trials and the Games.
I feel I will be able to approach Seoul as
just another meet because of the ex-
perience I gained in Rome. The Trials
will be a big help, too, since we run the
Trials almost exactly like the Games.

T&FN: And often the only way to
gain that kind of experience is to live it.
Brenner: Another thing is just to
spend time around great athletes. You
see guys at practice, or eating lunch, or
just walking around that you might
otherwise only read about. They be-
come very human.

I experienced a similar thing at my
first NCAA meet. I sat in the dorm and
and saw all these guys I had only heard
about. You spend more time looking
than really competing. I know I did
some of that in Rome, but now I feel
I am beyond that and ready to go to
Seoul with the sole intent of doing my
very best. I started to gain that kind of
experience very late in my throwing
career; I'm sure I would be more
advanced had I gained international
exposure years before I did.

T&FN: You said last year it was
great to reach AR distances, but it was
most important to beat the name guys
ace-to-face. In Rome, you beat people
like Timmermann, Beyer, Machura,
Gaoysushin, and so it's safe to assume
you still feel that way?

Brenner: Definitely. If all I wanted
were big marks, I could throw only in
rings where I feel relaxed and comfort-
able, like Mt. SAC or UCLA. I'm sure I
could get big PRs in those places.

But that's not what I'm after. I
won't be in the sport forever, so I want
to prove myself as one of--maybe the
best. The best way to do that is to get
your longest throw ever, and do it on
the day when it beats everybody else.
That's my entire goal this year.

T&FN: It must have been encour-
aging, then, to lead the Rome compe-
tition for a few rounds.
Brenner: I realized later that blew
me away a little. My reaction showed
my inexperience. After throwing that
71-4, I should have capitalized on that
throw. I should have come back and
told myself, "You've got more in you.
Relax and go for 72."

I believe to this day if I had been
able to throw 22 meters [72-2 1/4] in the
next round, I could have iced the meet.
I could have kept Gunthor and Andrei
tight. But I pressed while they relaxed
and got their best throws in the last two
rounds. But believe me, that informa-
tion is filed away in the old memory
bank for use later this year.

T&FN: What are your reactions to
having a young thrower like Randy
Barnes coming back so well this year?
Brenner: It's great. I've talked with
Dave Laut several times and we feel it's
a great thing for throwing in general.
It gets me motivated, it has gotten Dave
motivated--if a guy like Barnes doesn't
get you motivated as a thrower, you'd
better retire. He's that tough right now.

Randy will be on the scene for a
number of years to come and anyone
has to acknowledge his presence and
his talent. I know my workouts have
intensified a bit since Mt. SAC.

T&FN: Did you see Barnes's ex-
cellent throwing at Mt. SAC?
Brenner: I did. It was the first time
in a long while that I sat and just
watched a meet. I was honestly amazed
at how effortless Randy made throwing
look. Sitting in the stands, you don't
hear the groans and the grunts. You
can't feel how heavy the shot really is.

But Barnes made it look so easy
and controlled... it was pretty scary
watching him, actually.

T&FN: Besides Barnes--and your
self of course--who do you see as the
main challenges for the U. S. team?

Brenner: I just don't see how you can
count out Dave Laut. He has the most
experience of any of the real chal-
lengers in the Trials. He is the guy
who is going to be really tough. If he is in
shape, he will make the team.

Gregg Tafralis has a chance. Barnes
we can't forget, still is very young--he
hasn't yet thrown in a TAC meet and it
will be his first Trials. If he isn't com-
fortably ahead of everyone early, he
could have a tough time.

But one thing in his corner right
now is that there aren't many young
throwers coming up. Other than
Randy, I don't see any other high-60s
throwers--let alone 70-footers.

T&FN: Why is that?
Brenner: I don't know; maybe it
just runs in cycles. But the level of col-
legiate throwing recently has been just
terrible. And TAC last year hardly was
better: placing in the nationals with a
mid-60s throw is awful.

We need young throwers to break
out of the low 60s and get up at 68-70
feet. But it isn't happening and I don't
know if it's because of coaching or
what. I'm sure that lack of support
hurts too, because shoe contracts
and that kind of support aren't there either.

Plus, I feel younger athletes have
a different attitude: they want to make
a lot of money and when they learn that
the main reward is pride, gaining wide
experiences and achieving of goals, they
move on. That hurts the entire sport.

Franklin Jonathan Brenner, Jr., was born January 4,
1961, in Long Beach, California, and is 6-4/285. A 1979
graduate of Fullerton (California) High, and a 1984
graduate of UCLA. Competes for the Mazda Track Club.

Placings in major meets--Shot: 1980-82 TAC Jr. 3 Pan-
Am Jr: 1982-83 NCAA, 6 TAC. 1982-84 I NCAA, 4 TAC;
1985-87 TAC, 1985-87 I TAC, 1985-87 I TAC, 3 WC,
1987-83 TAC, 8 WC, WC.

His PRs (with positions on all-time World and U.S. lists):
70-10 3/4 74 1 1/2 (5, 2, 2 1/4); 2 1/2-2 1/2 (75, 14, x 4); 21 1-
1 HT 94, 229-2 1/2 104, 96. Set two shot ARs in 1967 with
73-1/2 and 73-10 1/2. Holds Collegiate Record at 71-11,
scored in winning '84 NCAA.

His progress (with World and U.S. Rankings in parath-
theses):

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