

After 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.

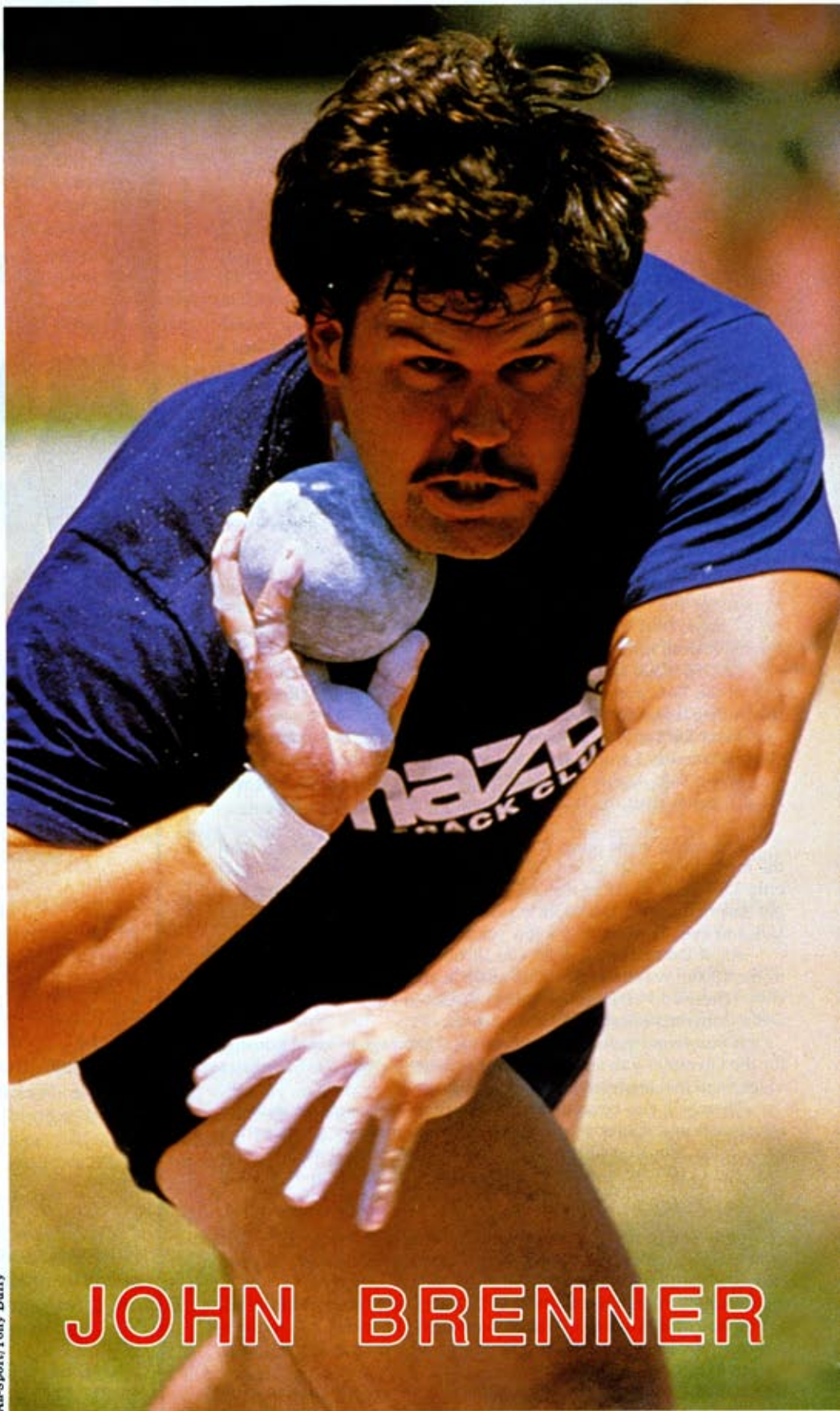
Another important thing I learned was that even though I had a high body weight, I also had high strength levels. In talking with some of the older veteran throwers about it, I really believe that some of those earlier levels of strength carried over into '87.

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 competing 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

All-Sport/Tony Duffy

in the beginning and that is just being a good, all-around athlete. I needed to get back to developing that overall athleticism. 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 lesson 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 competition to do well in one.

You have to be there and learn what it's like to throw in the qualifying 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 performance, 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 experience 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 become very human.

I experienced a similar thing at my first NCAA meet. I sat in the dorm 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 face-to-face. In Rome, you beat people like Timmermann, Beyer, Machura, Gavryushin, 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 comfortable, 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 encouraging, then, to lead the Rome competition 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 information 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 excellent 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 growls 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 yourself of course--who do you see as the main challengers 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 challengers in the Trials. He is the guy who is going to be really tough. If he is in top shape, he will make the team.

Gregg Tafrales 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 comfortably 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 collegiate 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--2)TAC Jr, 3)Pan-Am Jr; 1983--2)NCAA, 6)TAC; 1984--1)NCAA, 4)OT; 1985--2)TAC; 1986--1)TAC; 1987--1)TAC, 3)WC. Discus: 1983--4)NCAA; 1984--1)NCAA; 1986--dnq)TAC; 1987--3)TAC, dnq)WC.

His PRs (with positions on all-time World and U.S. lists): 73-10 3/4 '87 (5, x W; 2, 2 A); 218-7 '86 (14, x A); 211-1 HT '84; 229-2 JT (old) '84. Set two shot ARs in 1987 with 73-1/2 and 73-10 1/2. Holds Collegiate Record at 71-11, set in winning '84 NCAA.

His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	Affiliation	SP	DT
'78	17	California HS	60-11 hs	
'79	18	"	64-5 1/2 hs	172-11 hs
'80	19	UCLA	56-1 1/4	155-5
'81	20	Fullerton CC	59-3 3/4	182-11
'82	21	UCLA	64-8	192-10
'83	22	"	68-3 (x, 7)	203-11
'84	23	"	71-11 (x, 5)	208-2
'85	24	Mazda TC	69-3/4 (x, 4)	207-11
'86	25	"	71-5 1/2 (7, 1)	218-7 (x, 7)
'87	26	"	73-10 3/4 (4, 1)	212-7 (x, 5)