For Keith Connor, a native of Anguilla, citizen of England and resident of Dallas, the climb to the top of the triple jump ladder has been a steady one.

After moving from the tiny West Indies island of Anguilla to the British Isles at the age of 6, Connor first became interested in track at age 11 and took up triple jumping five years later.

His first year in the event, 1974, found him at 46-9. Four years later he was Commonwealth champ, ranked No. 9 in the world, and posted a PR of 55-0. The decision to give himself greater training opportunities followed, and Connor enrolled at UTEP, staying for one year until Ted McLaughlin left to become head coach at SMU. Connor followed and has improved to 57-7¼, won Commonwealth, European and NCAA titles, set a World Indoor Record 56.9% and will surely rank No. 1 in the world for 1982.

An articulate man, Connor spoke with us about the triple jump, the sport and himself from his home in Dallas. More than a typical athlete, he knows his sport well, knows its history, and follows the current happenings:

T&FN: How is it that someone from Great Britain is at the top of the world in the triple jump when that has not been a strong event for Britain over the years?

Connor: One factor in that is that when we came through—myself and Aston Moore—we had good coaching. It’s just a matter of time before you catch up. You learn how they train, you learn the techniques, watch the best triple jumpers on film, and you sit down and simply learn the event. And if you apply yourself to it and you have the talent for it I think anyone can be No. 1 in the world in any given year.

In triple jump you’ve almost got to serve an apprenticeship. I’ve yet to see someone come out in their first two years of triple jump and, bang-bang, be at the top. I just think we’ve gone through the period where we’ve learned it and now we’re coming out with the goods just like anyone else.

T&FN: Do you see anyone coming up who could suddenly be right there?

Connor: I think right now the person who’s already probably done that and who’s going to put his stamp in a little bit harder this year is Mike Conley from Arkansas. I’ve seen him improve over a meter in just one year. He has all the natural attributes. He has the speed, the bounce, the rhythm for it.

And Al Joyner shows a lot of promise. Once he comes through, he and Conley, along with Willie Banks, Mike Marlow—if they’re still around in ’84—are going to be America’s main triple jumpers.

48—December 1982
Connor: I think that's because Saneyev's jumps were much more methodically learned. The Soviets know their event really well; they can almost do it with their eyes shut. The way they work is very methodical so that might give them the look of rigidity, of one-two-three.

I, myself, and Willie, and people like that, might look a lot more fluid because there's sort of a natural grace that black people have when they do events. People say they tend to make things look easy, although we're putting out just as much as anyone else. I suppose our bodies react a little differently to the stress.

T&FN: Do you follow the sport very much other than your own event?

Connor: Oh yeah. I follow track really well. I follow all the track events—East Europeans, the American side—everything, all the while. It's good to know what everyone's doing. It makes the meet more exciting. I've actually watched the progress of some athletes and to me they're like my heroes in a way.

T&FN: Do you have any favorite event?

Connor: I'd say my favorite event outside of triple jump would be the 800 right now. I think that's the real test. It's become an elongated 400 and it's a good tactical race at times. It's just long enough to be tactical and it's just short enough to be a real sprint in.

T&FN: What got you into the triple jump?

Connor: I was really into track as such. I played soccer until I was 19, but my heart was stuck on track. Cause I'd followed all the great guys I liked; Lee Evans, and people like that. And I always wanted to be smooth and quick like Evans or Tommie Smith; but I was never big and strong enough to be a sprinter and no way big enough to throw anything to implement.

So I ended up doing what was left for me, combining my speed—and what I had—and my jumping ability in triple jumping and long jumping.

T&FN: Did you have athletes you looked up to?

Connor: The people I really looked up to in triple jump for everything were, first of all, Saneyev. Then I suppose my interest was taken away by the black triple jumpers Pedro Perez and Adhemar Ferreira da Silva. Me and my coach, Ted King, would look at their type of technique.

I suppose I fashioned myself from those three guys. We found to be a good triple jumper you've got to know what all the other triple jumpers are doing and find the best things for you out of all that. You just can't go out there and copy someone's technique because within yourself you have a different technique from everyone.

T&FN: You appear to be much more fluid than Saneyev.

The Bible of the Sport

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