

by Dave Johnson

KEITH CONNOR

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 sported 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 57-7½, won Commonwealth, European and NCAA titles, set a World Indoor Record 56-9½, 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.



Jon Hardesty

T&FN: *Does the lack of coverage for the triple jump get to you?*

Connor: It used to, but how I look at it, you got to take what comes. You're not out there to get newspaper clippings, you're out there to perform as well as you possibly can. It bothers you after a while, but you always have to say to yourself, 'Well, so what, I'm still doing what I want to do and I'm doing it as best I can.'

T&FN: *Do you think that lack of publicity has anything to do with why the triple jump has taken a long time to get off the ground in Britain?*

Connor: That's right, you know. I think it's an event that kids don't want to get into because they have never heard about it; it shows no glamor. For instance, I never heard about the triple jump until I was 16 and was taught it. And I had followed track & field since the Olympics in '68 when I was 11.

T&FN: *Great Britain seems to be making a resurgence internationally.*

Connor: This uprise, I think, started quite a while back with Seb Coe and Steve Ovett in about 1975-76. They came through as Juniors and with time that's helped British athletics a lot.

We were ahead at one time, but that was just middle distance; the Brashers, the Chataways. Perhaps we're still lacking a bit in field events, but I think on the track we've made a lot of headway or sustained what we've had for quite awhile.

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 any kind of implement.

So I ended up doing what was left for me, combining my speed—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

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 someone from England to go off to Texas?*

Connor: Well, in my case I was sort of in need of a change. Also the problem at home is the facilities aren't bunched in one area so to carry out an athletic program you've got to travel a lot just to get all the facilities you need. So it was a bit of a bind, while over here it's a lot easier; everything's in one place.

T&FN: *What do you feel about the criticism foreign collegiate athletes have received in this country?*

Connor: Admittedly, when a foreign athlete has an American scholarship an American is not going to be able to get that scholarship. I think that is an injustice to the American athlete if you don't want competition.

As for taking away from American athletes, that's a lot of crap. Period. Simply because to be around good quality foreigners with competition during the collegiate time has helped the American athletes a great deal. And if they don't want to admit it, that's up to them.

But for example, the UTEP team lost the cross country championship for the first time in five years and the Wisconsin team won it. Those guys from Wisconsin who went along and trained harder and put themselves together to come out and beat the foreigners are better because they had something to achieve. And competition is something that over here is preached to the children constantly: competition, be No. 1,

be the best.

When you hear people talking about how foreigners shouldn't be allowed over here, I think those are the people who fear the competition. If they don't like competition against foreigners within America, what do they want athletes to do when they go to the Olympics, compete against Americans only?

Sometimes they're going to have to face the foreigners and isn't it a lot better to know your enemies than to go into the battle blind? I feel that the American athletes competing against the Africans all year for 4 years, by the time they come to the Olympics they're going to know how to beat this guy—if they can beat him.

T&FN: *What about the "over-age" complaint?*

Connor: It's a personal thing. The athletes come over for their own reasons. Most American kids at the age of 18, they decide, "Hey I'm going to go to college and go as far away from home as possible." But at the same time, as far away from home as possible usually at the most is 2½-3 hours flight, and you're in the same nation. You know you're going to the same society, but just in another location. For instance, if you leave the West Coast to come to Texas there are very few adjustments.

I think if you asked a lot of American kids, "Do you think you could go to England and work out for 4 years and to a university?" they'd say, "Hell, No!" Because, if anybody, Americans are very homey people. The world is America. At the age of 18 the world to me was more than just Europe.

T&FN: *Do you feel that Americans are isolationist in their views?*

Connor: Yes, wouldn't you say so? Look at the Super Bowl. You always get the term "world championship." Basketball, you get the "world championship." They're both incorrect statements. It's not the only professional football in the world, it's not the only professional basketball in the world.

Their knowledge of athletics outside of America is very isolated. You see a lot of college athletes don't know the best guy in their event in Europe. They just know the best guy in America. □

Keith Leroy Connor was born September 16, 1957, on the island of Anguilla, and is 6-1/178. Majoring in sociology and business at SMU. Holds the Collegiate Record at 57.7%, the No. 2 jump in world history (also has a wind-aided mark of 58.5%). Other PRs: 100, 10.81/10.69w; 200, 21.9; 400, 49.4; LJ 25-3/4i. His progression, with World Rankings, placing on world list and finishes in major competitions:

Year	Age	Affil	PR%	wr	wl	Major Meets
1974	16	WSAC	46.9	—	—	
1975	17	"	48.6	—	—	
1976	18	"	52.4	—	—	
1977	19	"	53.7	—	62	4)Euro Cup
1978	20	"	55.0	9	16	6)Euro 1)BCG
1979	21	UTEP	54.1	—	46	
1980	22	WSAC	56.3%	6	4	4)OG
1981	23	SMU	56.9%	7	4	4)TAC
1982	24	"	57.7%(A)	7	1	1)Euro 1)BCG

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