

T&FN INTERVIEW

KENNY HARRISON

by JEFF HOLLOBAUGH

It has been said that few people in the sport train with the mental intensity mustered by Kenny Harrison, the world's No. 1 triple jumper. The 26-year old Kansas State alum has worked steadily at his craft for eight years, climbing the lists ever so gradually, and redefining the word "focus" along the way. He calls it "going into a cocoon."

By virtue of his consistency and unprecedented string of 58-foot jumps, Harrison will be the favorite in Tokyo this summer, and he's confident.

In Stockholm last July he missed Willie Banks's WR by just 1½ inches with his 58-10; just two days later in Berlin he jumped 57-8½ and 58-4½ despite some technical errors. He passed his remaining four leaps, afraid he would break the World Record; he hopes to set his first in the United States.

Training in the San Francisco Bay Area with former Cal 55-footer Ken Williams, the Milwaukee native coaches himself. When he's in his cocoon, he's impossible to track down. All the prime contacts can do is shrug: "Kenny's in Japan," or "Here's Kenny's number, but I think he had it changed," or "Haven't seen him in a while, but I know he's training."

Finally, Kenny calls us. He's got a lot to talk about. Serious things. After an hour or so, he lightens up a bit: "Hey, who do I have to pay to get on the cover? Do I have to break the World Record several times?"

Finally, he says, "If you need anything else, just call me."

"But we can't ever reach you."

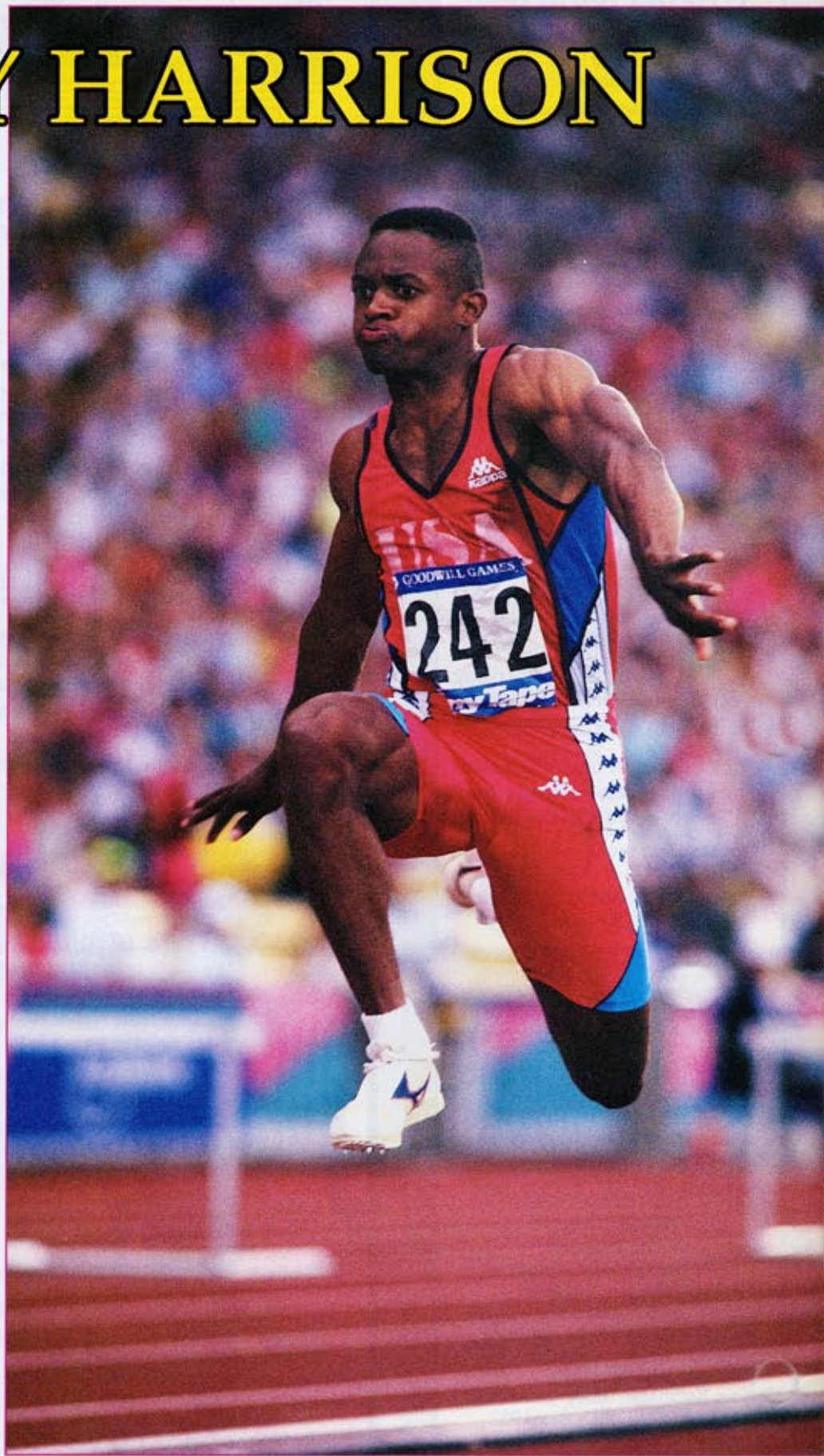
"Oh, that's right. I keep changing my number."

T&FN: *Where did you get this determination to be the best triple jumper on the planet?*

Harrison: I think the main thing is the fact that I was told that I *couldn't* be a good triple jumper. Coaches said I was too short to triple jump far; that I would never amount to anything. That was the main driving force. It keeps me going in my event. I feel like I have to prove something.

T&FN: *You might have had the World Record if you had kept jumping in East Berlin last summer. Do you have any regrets about passing those jumps now?*

Harrison: Not at all. I know that I've jumped that far. I've had jumps in other places, farther than the World Record: long fouls, over-rotations, missing the



ALLSPORT/Tony Duffy

board. I will never regret not jumping more in East Berlin.

To me those jumps are enough to let me know that there's plenty left. There are going to be a couple of really, really big jumps. They're going to be much farther than the World Record.

T&FN: *What do you think is the barrier of our generation—60 feet? Farther?*

Harrison: Farther than that. I really don't feel that 18.00 [59-³/₄] is important. I'm thinking 18.50 [60-8¹/₂]. I don't know if it will go farther than that. I talked to [Olympic champion] Khristo Markov, who's told me he's had jumps past 18.20 [59-8¹/₂], 18.30 [60-¹/₂]. And I believe him.

T&FN: *How do you train for a distance like that?*

Harrison: I'm trying to train through the year. I'm training stronger. I'm running longer distances. I'm trying to create a bigger base than I did last year for myself. Maybe it will allow me to jump in more meets outdoors. I'm really convinced that strength work will keep me competitive.

I want to be far stronger than last year. I don't know if that's possible, but I'm hopeful.

T&FN: *Training through this year—does that mean a lower emphasis on the Worlds than on the Olympics?*

Harrison: Yeah, definitely. Some people think I'm crazy in that way, to train through '91. But I'll still have a fairly strong emphasis on the World Championships.

T&FN: *How do you celebrate a great meet?*

Harrison: Celebrate? I don't celebrate. I'm low-key about it. The only celebration I'll do is my back flip, and then it's back to work; I have a long season. After the Goodwill Games I just jogged. The only celebration I'm going to have is after I reach the goal I've set. It's the distance I want in the Olympics and the Worlds; I'll be going crazy.

T&FN: *Are you too serious?*

Harrison: Me? A lot of people say I am. They say how I put too much work into it. How do I practice as long as I do? They say that. I am really serious. If I don't put the work in, someone will be better.

Maybe someone will be able to do the work—maybe not legally. And then I won't have anyone to blame but myself. I don't want that to be on my conscience. I don't want to have to go home at night and say I didn't train hard enough versus... I can't accept that at all.

T&FN: *Do people say, "Kenny, lighten up?"*

Harrison: Yep. My parents say that, my brother says that, my cousins... a lot of people say, "Lighten up." But they understand what I'm trying to tell them. When I'm training I'm serious.

T&FN: *What percentage of your life right now is centered on track?*

Harrison: Probably 85-95%. It's tough. Right now, like I said, I've come off a season. I think I've lightened up a

"If you want quick fame and glory, go to Hollywood."

little bit after reaching my goal. Next year, into the cocoon again. I'll be training harder than I ever have before.

T&FN: *Are young people scared off track & field because of the hard work involved?*

Harrison: People today, they want to get everything so fast, and they don't care about waiting, and putting the time in, or putting the work in. They want the quick fix.

Those are the people who only last two years in the event. They get in, they get whatever they wanted and they get out—or they get kicked out. People who are in it for the long haul are people who put the work in.

I think that's what's hurting our sport right now. A lot of people think that they can't compete: "They're too far ahead of me. Why should I put the work in? It's going to take too long." It's a big copout to me.

If you want quick fame and glory, go to Hollywood. If you want to be good at what you think you're best in, then you step on the track and put the work in.

T&FN: *What can be done to get the kids out there?*

Harrison: I think it's going to get worse, as time goes on. But somebody has to reach the younger athletes and tell them you just have to be patient. You just need to put the work in and take the time. I'm speaking from how long it's taken me to do it, and I've had a plan for eight years.

I have to be patient—I can only take so many jumps this year, I can only take two jumps this meet, maybe three jumps this meet in order to be around long enough to see my goals reached.

T&FN: *You've expressed frustration about the "major" sports. Are they getting too much attention, and draining track's talent base?*

Harrison: I can't help but look at basketball and football and how they market their sports. We've proven we have the best athletes in the world, and we don't even market that. It's so disappointing to see that it's not being done in America and it's done in other countries.

In Europe 30-40,000 people show up at a track meet on a regular basis, and here you can't get 15,000. And—if you do—they don't understand what they're looking at.

T&FN: *Is that because the public doesn't understand the sport?*

Harrison: Yeah. People ask me, "Are you going to the Olympics?" That's the first question. I hate that question. There's much more to track & field than just the Olympic Games. There's so much involved and the public only knows it as the Olympics. And that's so frustrating.

We're just not out there playing, you know, goofing around. Come out there and just stretch awhile and then come on to the track and run, one time every four years. That's not what goes on.

T&FN: *When all is said and done, is all your hard work worth it?*

Harrison: To have finally reached the No. 1 spot, I look back now and see how somebody can say "God, this is difficult to do. Why would he want to put that much work into it?"

But there's not a better feeling in the world to know that nobody on the face of the planet for that year was better than you at what you do... and there's a lot of people that do it. □

Kerry "Kenny" Lorenzo Harrison was born February 13, 1965, in Milwaukee, and is 5-10/165. Graduated from Central HS in Brookfield, Wisconsin, in '83, and competed for Kansas State in '84 and '86-'88. He currently represents the Mizuno Track Club. His PR of 17.93/58-10 is the second-farthest leap in history, behind only the 17.97/58-11¹/₂ of Willie Banks.

Major Meets: LJ—6)NC ('86); 2)NC ('88).

TJ—11)NC, 22q)OT, 1)TAC Jr, 2)PA Jr ('84); 1)NC, 4)TAC ('86); 2)NC, 7)TAC, 6)OF ('87); 6)OT ('88); 1)TAC ('90).

Progression (World & U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	LJ	TJ
'82	17	—	48-8 ¹ / ₂
'83	18	—	52-4 ¹ / ₂
'84	19	25-8 ¹ / ₂	54-1 ³ / ₄
'85	20	25-8 ³ / ₄ i	53-5 ¹ / ₂ i
'86	21	26-9 ³ / ₄ i (x, 6)	56-0/57-1 ¹ / ₂ w (x, 4)
'87	22	26-8 ¹ / ₂	56-0/57-2w (x, 7)
'88	23	26-7/27-0w (x, 9)	56-3 ¹ / ₄ (x, 4)
'89	24	25-11	57-3 ³ / ₄ (4, 2)
'90	25	26-0	58-10 (1, 1)