

# Lance Deal

by Ruth Laney

*Lance Deal has been called "the sensitive thrower." He keeps a diary, talks about Zen, and credits the birth of his daughter Sarah last year with teaching him to relax. And learning to relax, he says, has helped him become a better hammer thrower.*

*Deal has earnestly chased the American Record since throwing a PR 266-0 in '92, which he raised to 266-3 at El Paso in April. In Knoxville he finally got the record, with a throw of 270-8 (82.50), beating Jud Logan's 7-year-old mark by exactly two feet.*

*Deal went to Montana State, where he threw the discus, but eventually recognized the futility of trying to prosper in that event as a lefthander.*

*He started "fooling around" with the hammer and moved to Eugene in '85 to train with Stewart Togher, the Scottish coach who has developed many topflight hammer throwers. Togher officially retired last fall, after USATF cut his coaching stipend, but Deal pays the coach to work with him part-time and says he could not have set the AR without his help.*

*The rest of the time, he trains in Eugene with Jim Driscoll, Scott McGee, and Steve Dering. Deal owns a metal working and manufacturing business in Eugene, where he makes weights and throwing implements.*

*He has been even more successful throwing the 35-pound weight indoors, winning the national title 7 times and improving the WR 6 times, most recently to 81-6, in '93.*

**T&FN:** Has it hit you yet that you've done something no other American has ever done?

**Deal:** It still surprises me sometimes. I'll be walking down the street and think, "There's never been an American that's thrown that far." I guess I felt like I was pretty much the best thrower in America for quite a while anyway. So it was just a matter of letting everybody else know it.

But I have a real firm grasp of how obscure the sport is. I fight really hard with myself to maintain my perspective about sports, which are overrated in our society. It's pretty easy to maintain that perspective, being in track & field as opposed to football or basketball.

It makes me uncomfortable to think that, as a pretty good athlete in a minor event in a minor sport, I'm making more money than my dad did when he retired as a teacher. That's silly. It's a pretty sad statement on our society.

**T&FN:** Did you plan to shoot for the record in Knoxville or did it just happen?

**Deal:** I really wanted to set it last year, when nationals were at Eugene, but it didn't happen. So it had been hanging over me. Then, about three weeks before Knoxville, I had a really horrible weekend at Jenner and Harry Jerome. I threw horribly at both of them.

Ed Burke said it looked like I was too anxious to get the record. When you start your season throwing 81m [265-9] and a few weeks later you throw 74m [242-9], you start wondering about what you're



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thinking.

My training was going fine. I was tired, but not 74m tired. I thought, "It's gotta be that I'm pushing for the record. I'll just do the things that got me to 81m and let everything else take care of itself."

In Knoxville, at qualifying, I really wanted to crank one, because I felt good. I had four warmups at 250. But I kept telling myself,



"Nobody cares what you throw in qualifying—just get in a throw in and get outta here." But I knew I was ready.

This sounds stupid, but sitting in my ho-

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tel room, I was wadding up paper and throwing it in the wastebasket, and I couldn't miss. I sat on the bed to floss my teeth, and I tossed the dental floss from the bed to the shaving kit on the sink, and it went right in. I knew my coordination was there. So I went into the final fairly confident.

But I wasn't really thinking "record." I was thinking 79m [259-2]; I was thinking meet record; I was thinking "Get a good first throw." That happened, and that was good, because I'm noted for fouling on my first throw in a big meet.

**T&FN:** You said after El Paso there was no rush to get the AR. But are you glad you do finally have it?

**Deal:** Oh, definitely. There was no rush because I knew it was going to happen. With the 266-3 early, I hadn't done much training. I wasn't doing anything special in the ring. I wasn't practicing some new revolutionary technique. We were doing the same stuff we'd been doing for years.

I knew the record would go some time this year, because I could feel what I was doing. I knew how to make it better that day, as I was throwing. As I let it go, I said, "For a better throw, I need to do this."

**T&FN:** What was it that you knew you needed to do?

**Deal:** Basically, I needed to slow down. You know when you have a good start, when you have a good second turn, a good second turn, and so forth. The temptation is, when you have a good second turn, to gun the third and fourth turns and try to smash it. In El Paso, I felt myself rush the third turn. In Knoxville I had a good third turn. The fourth still needs work.

After the AR, my training partners said, "There's still more there in 4 and 5," meaning the fourth turn and the finish. So I stored that away. Actually, my third throw in Knoxville was a better technical throw than the AR, but

I had zero energy. I had dumped all my adrenaline into the second throw.

Maybe I shouldn't have blown all my adrenaline celebrating the AR. I thrust my arms up in the air and I was screaming. Maybe I could have thrown farther if I had stayed calm and focused. But I thought, "No way I'm gonna let this go away without celebrating it!"

**T&FN:** What has 270 feet done to satisfy your goals in the hammer throw?

**Deal:** I've gone way past my goals. I went way past 'em when I threw 81m—that was magical to me. What the 82.50 did was blow the ceiling off. I felt like there was a glass ceiling I was butting up against. Then I went out and threw 270 and a really easy 269 right after that—it made me feel like, "Maybe there is no limit."

It's not as scary now. Now I think, "If I do this, I'll throw farther." Before, a big throw would scare me. I'd think, "How am I gonna do this again?" That didn't happen this time. Now it's, "How am I gonna throw 83? How far can I go?" That's what I thought at 81. But I think it now without the fear. It's kinda fun.

**T&FN:** Was it hard to stay focused with everybody expecting you to set the AR?

**Deal:** It got kinda tough. It first started two years ago, after I threw 266. Every time I threw in Eugene, people would say, "Is today gonna be the day?" It gets to you. This year, after El Paso, even [wife] Nancy was saying, "Gee, if you can throw that far in April..."

Everybody was saying it, and I knew I was going after it. Instead of thinking about throwing the AR somewhere down the road, you're going for it every single time you pick up the hammer. So you can't just bash it. You have to do it right.

The way to throw far is to slow down, to relax. I had to remind myself of that. My sports psychologist told me it's sort of a Zen paradox. I see the psychologist about once or twice a month, and it really helps clarify things.

**T&FN:** What do you talk about?

**Deal:** I don't like to get into it because once you start talking about it, it changes. But there's stuff that has nothing to do with throwing, that is enabling me to throw far. Technically, there's only a few people I can talk to about the hammer, because we've got the language.

Bob Beamon couldn't describe his 29-foot long jump. He'd start describing it, and then he'd just start making noises. That's what it's like.

**T&FN:** How did you meet Nancy?

**Deal:** I had driven to Eugene in a Volkswagen squareback with all of my worldly possessions. I was staying with a friend of a friend. I was dejected and homesick. My host had a party one

night and invited a bunch of theater types. I had nothing in common with them. Nancy walked in and said, "Hey, who's that big guy in the living room?"

I asked about the scratches on her legs, and she said, "I play rugby." I thought, "Oh, somebody interesting!" That night, we went out dancing. Then I invited myself to Easter brunch, and we talked all day. And things just took off from there.

**T&FN:** How does a hammer thrower make a living in the U. S.?

**Deal:** For a while, we thought you had to be a pizza delivery guy. But we've branched out now—one of us is a fitness consultant, one is an apartment manager. I own a metal working and manufacturing business. I build weightlifting equipment and some throwing implements. I had another person working for me, but he had to get a real job.

**T&FN:** I understand you make something called "puds." What are they?

**Deal:** A pud is just a chunk of weight. The Scots throw something called kettle bells. It evolved from that idea. I've made them in different weights, all heavier than the hammer. It bridges the gap between lifting and throwing, and it gives you a chance to use all that strength you get from lifting.

**T&FN:** You went to Montana State on a football/track scholarship, then gave up football to concentrate on the discus. How did you come to be a hammer thrower?

**Deal:** I'd never even heard of the hammer until the summer after my freshman year, when I worked sporting-goods store. There was this hammer hanging on the wall, and I bought it for \$6, but I didn't know what to do with it. Then my throws coach got a call from [1972 Olympian] Tom Gage. He said, "You got anybody there who wants to throw the hammer?" I started fooling around with it, and pretty soon I was throwing around 140.

**T&FN:** For the past two years, you've been

— continued on p. 54 —

### DEAL IN A NUTSHELL

Lance Earl Deal was born August 21, 1961, in Riverton, Wyoming, and is 6-2/260. Graduated from Natrona County HS (Casper, Wyoming) in '79, and competed for Montana State '80-'84. A converted discus thrower, he placed 8th in the NCAA discus in '84. Currently represents the New York AC.

**PRs:** SP—60-2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> (81); DT—202-2 (84); HT—270-8 (82.50) AR (94).

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

Year	Age	HT	Majors
'84	22	62.52/205-1	nq)NC
'85	23	68.48/224-8 (x, 9)	9)US
'86	24	74.66/244-11 (x, 4)	3)US, 3)OF
'87	25	75.94/249-2 (x, 4)	4)US, 1)OF
'88	26	75.64/248-2 (x, 2)	3)US, 2)OT, nq)OG
'89	27	78.34/257-0 (x, 1)	1)US, 2)WCup
'90	28	77.66/254-9 (x, 3)	3)US, 1)OF
'91	29	78.44/257-4 (x, 2)	2)US, nq)WC
'92	30	81.08/266-0 (8, 1)	2)OT, 7)OG, 3)WCup
'93	31	80.80/265-1 (9, 1)	1)US, 9)WC
'94	32	82.50/270-8	1)US



# Next Month In T&FN

## The European Circuit

What distance treats will Scandinavia bring us this year? Find out in the October issue of *Track & Field News*, as we feature coverage of the big affairs in Stockholm and Oslo. And if those two heavyweights don't tickle your fancy, then results from the Grand Prix meets in London, Nice or Monaco certainly will.

There's more to this summer than just the GP Circuit though, and the next issue will also feature the Goodwill Games and the World Junior Championships.

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### Deal Interview — cont. from p. 17:

*way out ahead of your U. S. competition, winning meets by 20 or 30 feet or more. Is it hard to stay motivated without meaningful competition?*

**Deal:** There is competition—you just have to look in the right spots. I've got plenty of competition overseas. But it's hard to maintain focus in January, when you're lifting weights, and doing a million throws a day, and it's cold and rainy and snowing on you, and your coach is trying to make you do something your body doesn't want to do. And you know you've got another two or three months of that.

It's hard then to keep those people [Europeans] in mind. It was a lot easier when I could look across to the next slab and see Ken Flax, or see Jud indoors and see how far he was throwing. That kept it a little bit closer to you. Now I read the magazine and look at the other marks and know that they're in Belarus or Russia or Hungary, training just as hard as I am, if not harder.

**T&FN:** *After your AR, another thrower was ecstatic about your drug-free reputation.*

**Deal:** It's very important to me, but I don't like to talk about it. A wise person once told me, "If you mention [drugs], it's negative." By default, you're accusing somebody. But I had a coach come up to me at Knoxville and say, "You've proven to my athlete she can get the AR without taking drugs." The message I want to get across is that you can do it without drugs. I want kids to have the other side of the story.

At first, I didn't know about drugs—I was stuck in Bozeman, Montana. Then, when I did learn about them, it limited my throws for a while because I thought, "How do you do it without them?" Now I realize you just stick with it and have patience.

I don't feel that it's a moral victory. I feel just dumb lucky that I went to Montana State and didn't get involved with it. There's always a temptation. Eventually, you see guys doing it. When you're a 220 thrower, you have guys saying, "If you did this you'd throw a mile."

After I found out about drugs, I called home and told my dad, "This is what's going on. It's not that unhealthy." My parents always let me make my own choices and never said, "Don't do this." So when they did say that, I listened.

My dad's a diabetic. He knew about steroids, that they were suspected to affect the pancreas. He said, "Lance, you don't want this disease." And I said, "Oh, OK." That's how close I came.

Kids think they are invincible. Nothing's going to hurt you. You can drink and drive, put on a football helmet and bash your head into a wall. That isn't going to hurt you, so a silly little pill sure isn't going to hurt you. But it does.

I want to throw far. But I also want the feeling I had after the American Record. No qualifications. I felt good, period. □