

LARRY MYRICKS

T&FN INTERVIEW by JON HENDERSHOTT

If a scene more laden with drama could be concocted by the most imaginative screenwriter, it still would have to go some way to beat the situation in which Larry Myricks found himself in Montreal.

Last jump, in 3rd place, after a 27-footer had given Lutz Drombrowski the lead. And a nice dash of irony: Montreal's Stade Olympique was the site where Myricks suffered a broken ankle while warming up for the Olympic final.

But Myricks came through like the champion he is with his stellar 27-11½, the second-longest jump in history.

Coming through when he must have been one strongpoint of the 23-year-old Myricks, who received a degree in business management in June from Mississippi College.

He won the NCAA title this year on his fourth jump, after experiencing step problems on his first three efforts. He then added the AAU crown, becoming the first leaper in 20 years to win both major national titles.

He leaped a windy 27-2 for the AAU honor (plus a legal PR of 26-11½), but he really was just warming up for the summer. Myricks then took the USOC Sports Festival at altitude in a windy 27-1¼ (plus a legal 26-11½).

But his biggie came just a week before the World Cup, a 27-4¼ at Cologne to match the Collegiate Record. The stage was set for his return to Montreal.

When he reflects on that jump, and his career, Myricks speaks quietly (in a voice reminiscent of singer Lou Rawls) but certain in his opinions. He isn't flamboyant, simply confident.

T&FN: After jumping at least 27 feet in three meets this year, did you feel a really big one might come out in Montreal?

Myricks: Yes, I thought I would jump farther in Montreal; I couldn't guess how much better but I felt I could go longer. There was so much incentive to jump well in Montreal that I knew I would do better.

I thought Oliveira would long jump and since he had turned the best jump of the year, I was really looking forward to meeting him. I really wasn't aware of the East German and the Cuban until I got there.

It wouldn't have made any difference to me if I had known what they had done. I look at it like, those guys can jump 28 feet every day of the week, but the day they meet me they had better be ready to do it again because I'm holding back nothing.

T&FN: What were your thoughts 10-October 1979

about returning to compete in the same stadium where you had such a bitter experience in 1976?

Myricks: That was more incentive to jump well in the World Cup. I know I would have jumped well in the Olympics, so I wanted to sort of replay the whole thing and do maybe what I could have done in the Olympics. I won't say I would have jumped that far back then, but I wanted to try to relive the whole thing this time.

T&FN: How did the break actually happen at the Olympics?

Myricks: Well, it was a stress fracture. The doctors said later that it had developed over about 2 months before it actually broke.

I was taking a practice run before the finals and I always pop off the board to simulate a jump at the end of those practice runs. When I hit the board and came up, it just snapped.

There was no immediate pain, but I knew it was broken. I went back and sat down for a couple of minutes and then tried to get up, but it was very stiff then. I just thought [sighs] that I had come that far, but that I wouldn't get to finish. It was terrible to have to admit that.

T&FN: Well, now you have had a far better experience in that stadium. So what do you think of the jump now, 4 days later?

Myricks: Well I feel good at having turned the second-best jump in history. It puts me a lot closer to the record; not as close as I want to be but I'll just leave that to time. I want to inch up little-by-little.

When Beamon went that far, he just went from 27½ feet to 29. I think that when most people see that, they think he could never do it again simply because of the distance between his usual jump and that one great one.

But I want to improve in a 2- or 3-inch thing, working my way up. By establishing consistency, I'll feel a lot better about my chances of getting the record.

T&FN: So you would like to hit in the 28s consistently before setting your sights on the record?

Myricks: My sights are always on the

record. But I won't say that I'll try to go out next time and jump 28-2 or 28-and-a-half. If I do jump that far, that's fine, but if I don't then I'll still just continue to work my way up to those distances.

When I go out and jump next, I'll be looking past 27-11½. That's what I have now, so I'm looking for something better.

T&FN: Some observers at the World Cup said they thought maybe your jump is the best in history since it was recorded almost at sea level and in a windless stadium with absolutely no aiding wind. Beamon's came at an altitude of 7200 feet and with the exact allowable aiding wind. Some scientific studies concluded those factors may have added as much as a foot to his jump, so if that's true, then you may be a bit over 2" short of the "World Record."

Myricks: Well, I look at it like, what Beamon did is there and it is acknowledged as the World Record. My jump is the longest at sea level, so I suppose some people might call me at least a quasi-World Record holder.

But as far as self-satisfaction goes, I won't feel justified in even thinking of myself as any kind of record holder until I surpass what he did. He set the precedent and that's what everybody has to get.

T&FN: Many observers feel the long jump has stagnated in the decade since Beamon's record, simply because his mark is so far ahead of everyone else. What are your reactions to that?

Myricks: That's the only reason. It would be that way in any event—if the record was down so low, or out so far, or up so high that nobody was even near it and there wasn't much immediate chance of the record being broken, then the event really could bog down.

It's something that the jumpers have to deal with. I know the long jump would draw better crowds and more response if the record was down lower and we were closer to it. But the jumpers themselves have to get their state of mind right.

Even though they might be jumping 2 feet short of the record, they have to be satisfied with what they're doing. But they also have to keep an open mind and believe that it can be done one day.

T&FN: *We have noticed that when you take off, you angle to the right by the time you land. What causes that?*

Myricks: It's a habit I developed after '76 when I started jumping again. I found myself favoring my right ankle, rather than taking off the way I should.

I would tilt a little to the right and that would shoot me off that way since I was trying to take some of the pressure off that ankle. It was an unconscious thing, but I never tried to work out of it. I just didn't worry about it this year. I know I lose some distance by not going out straight.

T&FN: *Did you have any problems after '76 with coming down and really driving off the board, since your right foot is your takeoff foot?*

Myricks: That plagued me for a long time. I thought about how it broke, driving off the board, so for a long time I wouldn't hit and lift like I should. I would sort of just run off the board because I didn't want to put pressure on it.

T&FN: *How did you overcome that?*

Myricks: I finally got to the point where I told myself that if it was going to break, it was going to break, whether I tried to protect it or whether I just went ahead and jumped. One day I came down and tried to hit like I knew I should. Gradually my confidence built up and pretty soon I just forgot about it.

T&FN: *You have had a number of major injuries during your career—a broken left ankle in high school, then back trouble, and then the ankle in '76. But you seem to bounce back strongly and do even better. How did the injuries affect your determination?*

Myricks: The times I was hurt and had to sit out, there were still many things going on around me, but I had to just watch. Not being able to participate and accomplish things just made me want to do things even more.

I really enjoy long jumping. I enjoy doing it well. I know when I was hurt that some people said I wouldn't come back. That's a big incentive right there. I never had to prove anything to myself, because I knew that once I got back up and into it, I would be just as good as I was. I wanted to show people that they shouldn't sell me short, or at least give me the benefit of the doubt.

T&FN: *After your good indoor season in '76, you wrote to us, "Some of your greatest victories come after your worst defeats." Your two performances in Montreal certainly fit that.*

Myricks: Montreal has been both the lowest and highest points for me, so far. I have thought sometimes that maybe what happened in '76 was good from the standpoint that I might have jumped what I have this year several years ago. But the injury held me back and put me on a good *The Bible of the Sport*

schedule for next year.

T&FN: *Would you say that you apply the same determination to other aspects of your life as you have to returning to the elite among jumpers?*

Myricks: I feel I do. Anything you want to do well, you have to be



Paul Sutton/Duomo

determined, to work for it no matter what the obstacles. You can't take a haphazard attitude toward anything and expect to do it well.

I guess this determined attitude is just part of my nature, but at least in terms of track, I know that one thing that makes me very determined is the fact that many people think the record can't be broken.

I want to compete and compete well because one day I want to be considered the best who ever long jumped. I have a long way to go, and a long time to get there, but I've got to have that determination to do it. Because it's going to be tougher. I won't be improving by feet and feet, but by inches and fractions of inches.

T&FN: *Joe Walker [Mississippi College coach] once wrote of you, "Time after time he has shown the ability to rise to the occasion." The World Cup was a perfect example of that. Why do you feel you can produce on the big occasion?*

Myricks: I'm not the type to brag and make a lot of noise, but I do have a lot of confidence in myself and in what I can do. It's just a matter of relaxing and letting myself do it.

In a competition, when other people

are jumping well, I know I can jump well, if I just let myself do it. When things get hot in competition, some jumpers want to jump well but they won't relax and let themselves jump well. They will try too hard.

For myself, jumping well in competition reassures me and also shows everyone else that I can do it. The big thing in my jumping is not what everybody else thinks, but what I think. Personal satisfaction means a lot more than satisfying the public.

T&FN: *Your speed is a tremendous asset of yours. Not many jumpers can run 20.44 for 200.*

Myricks: Yes, it's a valuable asset. All the sprinting I did in school—the 100, 200, 400 relay and sometimes the mile relay—really helped my strength and conditioning. It seemed like I was jumping in the mid-25s during the college season while I was sprinting, but when I got into just jumping, things had built up and I had a lot of strength in reserve.

T&FN: *What has been the reaction of your family to your jumping in general and your Montreal performance?*

Myricks: I don't know whether or not to say they have been surprised. My parents and family have as much faith in my jumping as I do. Everybody has been very excited and very happy.

T&FN: *When he has the time, what does Larry Myricks do off the track?*

Myricks: I spend a lot of time with my girlfriend. I also like to roller skate and disco skate and I try my hand at photography whenever I can. When I really want to get away from things, I go fishing. I just like to get away and relax sometimes.

T&FN: *Do you have any ideas on what the jumper who breaks the record would have to be like physically?*

Myricks: Well, I can't put a size on it, but I do know he will have to be able to come down the runway good and strong. He has to be strong enough to come down that runway fast, yet keep control of everything.

T&FN: *When you first began jumping, and even when you first made your name internationally, how did you consider an effort like 28 feet—or even 27-11½?*

Myricks: I never thought it was an impossibility but I knew it would take a superior effort to do it.

I just thrive on competition. The better other people do, the better I can find in myself to do. □

Larry Ellwyne Myricks was born March 10, 1956, in Hinds County, Mississippi; 6-2/175.

Year	Age	School	200	LJ
1974	18	Forest Park, Jackson, Ms	—	23-6½
1975	19	Mississippi College Fr	21.2v	25-8½
1976	20	So	—	26-6½
1977	21	redshirt—recovering from injury	—	—
1978	22	Jr	20.44	26-5
1979	23	Sr	20.83	27-11½