

Chaunté Lowe

by Jon Hendershott

A little more than 10 months after the birth of her second daughter Aurora last April, Chaunté Lowe won the USATF Indoor high jump with an American Record 6-7½ (2.02). And two weeks after that, she became the first American woman to win the World Indoor gold.

Already the claimant of the outdoor AR with her 6-8¾ (2.05) in '10, Lowe now looks ahead to the Olympic Trials and her third Games this summer. She is preparing with her coach, Georgia Tech's Nat Page, and with the support of husband Mario Lowe (a 53-0/16.15 triple jumper himself) and older daughter Jasmine, who will turn 5 in July.

Lowe knows she will be among the medal favorites for London, a status strengthened by her triumphant indoor return:

Lowe In A Nutshell

•**Personal:** Chaunté LaTasha Howard was born January 12, 1984, in Templeton, California. 5-9/131 (1.75/60). Married Mario Lowe on August 24, 2005; daughters Jasmine (July 30, '07) and Aurora (April 4, '11)

•**Schools:** North HS (Riverside, California) '02; Georgia Tech '06; now represents Nike

•**Coach:** Nat Page (college, professional)

•**PRs:** HJ—6-8¾ (2.05) AR '10 (indoors: 6-7½/2.02 AR '12); LJ—22-7¾ (6.90) '10

•**Major Meets:** HJ—10(NC, =2) NC, 1)USJ, =4)US '03; 1)NCi, 1) NC, 2)OT, nq)OG '04; 1)NCi, 2) NC, 2)US, 2)WC '05; 1)USi, 8) WCI, 1)US '06; 2)USi, 1)OT, 6) OG '08; 1)US, 7)WC '09; 1)USi, 3)WCI, 1)US '10; 9)US '11; 1) USi, 1)WCI '12. LJ—2)US '10; 6)USi '12.

•**World/U.S. Rankings:** HJ: '03—x, 6 '03; '04—x, 3; '05—2, 1; '06—6, 1; '08—6, 1; '09—5, 1; '10—2, 1. LJ: '10—x, 5

Toward the end of my European trip, I realized I was much stronger and was covering the ground in my approach a lot faster.

So I decided it was time to move to my full approach, which I don't usually do until outdoors. But I was just running out of room. So at my last meet I switched. And I felt like I was getting so much height. It was just little things that needed to be corrected. From that meet onward, going to the U.S. nationals, I stuck with the new approach.

I showed Nat when I got back and he said, "You're right; you're ready for this new approach." So we began tweaking it and

making small corrections that would allow me to jump higher.

And honestly in the two weeks from when I got home from Europe and went to USAs, my goal changed from just getting the A-mark to getting the American Record.

T&FN: So the AR was definitely in your sights. And at nationals, you got a then-indoor PR of 6-6¼ en route, so that must have been graphic evidence to you that, "I'm rolling."

Lowe: Oh yes. But I was so focused on 2.02, everything else was just a stop on the way to the AR. My expectations had gone so far beyond just getting a PR, if I had jumped only 1.99 I would have felt I was underachieving.

T&FN: It looked like on your first two attempts at 2.02, that you just barely grazed them off, maybe with your calves. Did those attempts convince you, "Hey, it's here. I can do it?"

Lowe: Honestly, what had convinced me was my practices leading up to the meet. The tweaking that Coach Page and I did was all that needed to be done.

I felt like I had more than enough power, speed and height. I was just grazing the bar. What I did at the meet was what I had been doing consistently in practice. I came down and just grazed the heights a little bit.

It really was just a technical thing and I thought, "C'mon, Chaunté, think of what you're doing wrong in your technique and focus on doing it right."

T&FN: Is it that you're experienced and know your own technique well enough that you can tell yourself that, without having to have Nat there?

Lowe: Yes, but it was hard doing it without him. But he went to Istanbul and that was a huge difference. Where at USAs, I was very fresh and ready to jump, my body didn't feel great at the Worlds. So



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“I’m very encouraged, especially since I don’t consider myself a good indoor high jumper”

having his eyes there and him telling me what to do and what changes to make, it definitely was a team effort to get this World Championships title.

T&FN: *How did the third jump at USAs feel to you? It was a make but did it feel any better to you than the first two?*

Lowe: To be honest, not really. You learn to do something by repetition and on each jump I did, I was able to stop, think about what happened and reflect on it in that short minute and a half between jumps.

And I thought, “What can I do to make the jumps better?” It’s not that it felt different, but just that I made less mistakes.

T&FN: *Then you tried 2.04 [6-8¼], just a centimeter below your outdoor AR. So to be trying a height like that, in your first full season back since Aurora’s birth, must have been tremendously encouraging too?*

Lowe: It was. I have never jumped this high, this early. Mentally, I wasn’t quite prepared for 2.04, but I was told I actually had some decent attempts at the height.

So I’m very encouraged, especially since I don’t consider myself a good indoor high jumper.

That’s because we train outside during the winter and it can be very, very cold. We were outside at times when it was in the 20s.

So there are lots of aspects of my training that we haven’t even touched yet.

T&FN: *So after your record jumping, what did you go over to Istanbul hoping to do? Medal, win, jump higher than 2.02, anything in particular?*

Lowe: One thing that’s really big with me is goal-setting. I’ve always reached my

goal, but sometimes it has been too low. I had a two-part goal going into Istanbul. The first thing was to secure the win. I assumed that would mean jumping at least above 2.02. I thought it would take at least 2.03 [6-8] to win. That’s what I was going in there prepared to jump.

Then after that, I didn’t want to set another

AR, but I actually wanted to take my first attempts at the World Record [6-9¾/2.08]. So we were going to go straight from 2.03 to 2.08 or 2.09 [6-10¼]. Tie or break the record.

We had been having the type of practices so that those were the type of things we were considering. So it was a big step and I think it threw me off that at 1.98, it was over. I was ready to go way higher.

T&FN: *Before you made 1.95 [6-5] on your second attempt, you were in 6th. Then you made it and were still in 6th. But then you put the screws to the field by making 1.98 on your first try. You didn’t know at the time, but that was the winning jump. Yet to make it on your first attempt must have been a huge psychological lift.*

Lowe: Definitely and that’s what my goal was when I got to that height. I saw that all the others missed their first. I knew I was down by two misses, so for me to get into medal contention, everybody had to miss at least twice. Once everybody missed twice, I thought, “Good, now we’re all even.” Then my mindset was that I had to clear the next height on my

first attempt. And I was completely ready to do it. But it never came down to that.

When I was going to jump my first at 1.98, I was walking back and reviewing my approach and what I needed to do to make it. I thought, “Keep fighting. Make your normal mistakes, but fight to get this on your first attempt.” That

Lowé An Old Hand At The Olympics

London will be Chaunté Lowé’s third Olympics. What did she learn from your two previous experiences at the Games?

“That’s easy. Athens in ‘04 was my learning experience. Once you go from one level to the next... and I’m amazed at some of the young jumpers like Will Claye, Christian Taylor, Janay DeLoach, who don’t seem to have any problems at all. They don’t have any learning curve—but for the rest of us...!”

“But I needed that one time to get over the shock. Beijing was more about preparation. No matter how many times you go, you’re going to have the nerves, the sleepless nights; the times when you might not feel quite so confident in your preparation and you might do something different from anything you ever did before.

“So with the third one, we will make a plan when we’re not nervous and in the mix of it and stick to that plan.

“And I feel I still have one more Olympics in me after London. I think for sure I would go all the way until 2016. I just turned 28, so I’m not quite old yet.”

was my goal—and I nailed it.

T&FN: *So was it hard to stay calm while the other five took their remaining jumps at 1.98?*

Lowe: I had to watch 15 misses total and 10 of them after I had cleared. I didn’t watch directly but I went over to the 60-meter start and I watched on the Jumbotron.

I kept my back to the jumpers because it was too nerve-wracking. By the time I got to the last height, I thought, “Is it really going to be this easy?” I didn’t expect that.

T&FN: *So what were your feelings when there was the last miss and you had won?*

Lowe: I couldn’t believe it. I think I let my guard completely down. I think I dropped to my knees and put my head down on the ground.

There had been so many competitions I had gone into where I felt prepared to do better than I ended up doing—

and especially Beijing. I felt like I grossly underachieved in Beijing [6th]. I had practices higher than what I jumped at the Olympics. So that really was a shock.

The circumstances are never going to be totally right. Something is always going to go wrong; something’s not going

The Balancing Act Of Child-Rearing

Combining motherhood with training and competing as a world-class athlete can be a delicate balancing act, Chaunté Lowé readily concedes:

“With our first child, Jasmine, it was a lot easier because there was just one and we could give her all our attention. Now we have a preschooler and a toddler. You actually get to the point where you appreciate the time you had before you had the kids. You think, ‘I had so much free time. I could stay on the track for hours.’”

“Now, it’s like I drop them off at school, drive straight to practice and I don’t waste any time. I might have literally two 5-minute conversations about things other than practice. Then I go back and pick them up. So I have to be so accountable with my time.

“At the beginning, I quit track every single day. The youngest, Aurora, needed feeding every hour, 24 hours a day, for the first four months—and I was nursing. Then from 4 to 10 months, she ate every two hours and I still nursed. That ended only about a month ago.

“So it was hard. I was training and competing on literally no sleep. Now I’ve been getting great sleep because she wakes up only once, about 4:00 in the morning, and my husband gets up to give her a bottle.

“So that has been a big help—besides, I let him sleep for the first 10 months. [laughs] But we knew that one of us had to be awake during the day. I did all the night stuff and he did most of the day stuff. Now he gets up just once and he doesn’t complain.”



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Lowe Interview

to feel great. It's always going to be that type of situation—and especially at the World Indoor. There were just so many things that were wrong, yet to be able to come out on top, I felt good. I could let down my guard and finally check one thing off my list of goals.

T&FN: Had you ever even considered the term "World Indoor champion" before those third misses by the others? Or don't you think that way but just go to any meet to compete?

Lowe: I guess my mindset was different. Usually, I go to get a medal, but this time I went there to win. I knew it was going to be tough because Anna [Chicherova] jumping 2.06 [6-9] earlier in the winter, that's only 2 centimeters below the World Record. I knew that she would be ready, so it was very ambitious to go there aiming to take the win.

But I had picked up where I had been in '10 in that I decided to start my day by reading my Bible. When I made that decision, honestly, is when everything started going right for me.

There was just something about starting my day by saying, "Okay, God, no matter what, I did this for you." That's when that big change happened and my confidence started going up. But at the beginning of the year, no way would I have thought about the American Record, Visa champion and world champion. Absolutely no way.

T&FN: Can you compare, as jumps, the U.S. Indoor victory vs. the World Indoor win?

Lowe: I think that technically I was better at USAs. Looking at my own mark, I felt like I underachieved. So it felt good that even if I underachieved, it still was enough. Because of the practices we had had, I knew I was capable of a lot more. So that does carry forward a lot of confidence to outdoors and especially the Trials and Olympics.

T&FN: When you came back briefly in '11 after Aurora's birth, you said you missed consistency. Was that consistency in your approach and bar clearance or in your jump mechanics as well?

Lowe: I think the biggest thing is the runup. If you have a good runup, even if you're not technically sound over the bar, you have the power to get over it. Coach Page calls it "muscling the jump"; you can muscle over it.

The difference now in working with my runup is that I'm able to plant in exactly the same spot every time. When you're not in good shape, you're kind of all over the place. But

hitting the same spot consistently is the key.

T&FN: At this point in a long season, what does your indoor jumping tell you about what to expect outdoors? Or are you letting it tell you anything?

Lowe: I do because I am big on goal-setting. Now I have to reevaluate my goals. The best season I ever had in my life, I had jumped 1.98 indoors. I thought that was absolutely awesome. Then to go back to the same venue and already be so much farther ahead of where I was in 2010—and we know that '10 was a



Lowe came away with the big cash prize in Albuquerque

great year—is really encouraging.

Now we focus on just doing the training to get me back to the shape I was in in '10. Because I'm not there yet—and that's the best part. I'm not as strong, not as fast and definitely not as precise in my approach.

T&FN: You didn't go to your other Games as a 2.05 jumper and World Indoor champion. So all the other jumpers know what you can do. Your reputation definitely will precede you to London.

Lowe: I hope so. That would be the goal. I don't want to go in there as an underdog. I want to go in there among the very top, so that people think, "Wow, she's going to be in the mix."

Even going into Istanbul, I thought about the fact that my best years seem to be off years, with no championships. I don't want that anymore. I evaluate all the other jumpers and what their tendencies are. I tend to do well when there isn't any pressure. I want to start being able to compete well under pressure. That's my focus for this year. □

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