

In the misty history of early Greece, the hero Milos lifted a calf every morning, and as the calf grew, so did the strength of Milos. Like the legendary Greek hero, Mike Conley seems to thrive on hard work and meeting challenges. The harder he works in training, the stronger he gets—and the better he competes.

The 1982 and '83 NCAA runner-up in the long jump and 3rd in last year's triple, Conley realized the promise that put him on the U.S. World Championships team last year by scoring a notable double in Eugene.

A fine, but not outstanding, prep athlete from Chicago (where his first love was basketball), Conley was a sudden breakthrough star his frosh year at Arkansas, and he quickly developed into one of the world's finest performers at not just one event, but two.

The finest doubler of all time after Joao Oliveira, Conley upped his TJ best to 56-11½ in Eugene, making him No. 2 all-time among U.S. performers. And he clearly has the ability to improve on his 27-2 long jump from last year—and came within 2" of that PR to win the NCAA.

But the significance of Conley's career is comprised of more than excellent marks. His competitive ability is as exceptional as his talent: after a near non-qualifier at the NCAA his frosh year, Conley has placed no worse than 3rd in five NCAA finals. He has improved his marks and his placing every year. His long jump 3rd and triple 4th last year at Helsinki were extraordinary for a 21-year-old international rookie.

A week after his Eugene heroics, Conley discussed with T&FN his rise to international stardom and his plans for his young but already brilliant career:

T&FN: How do you feel now about your double in Eugene?

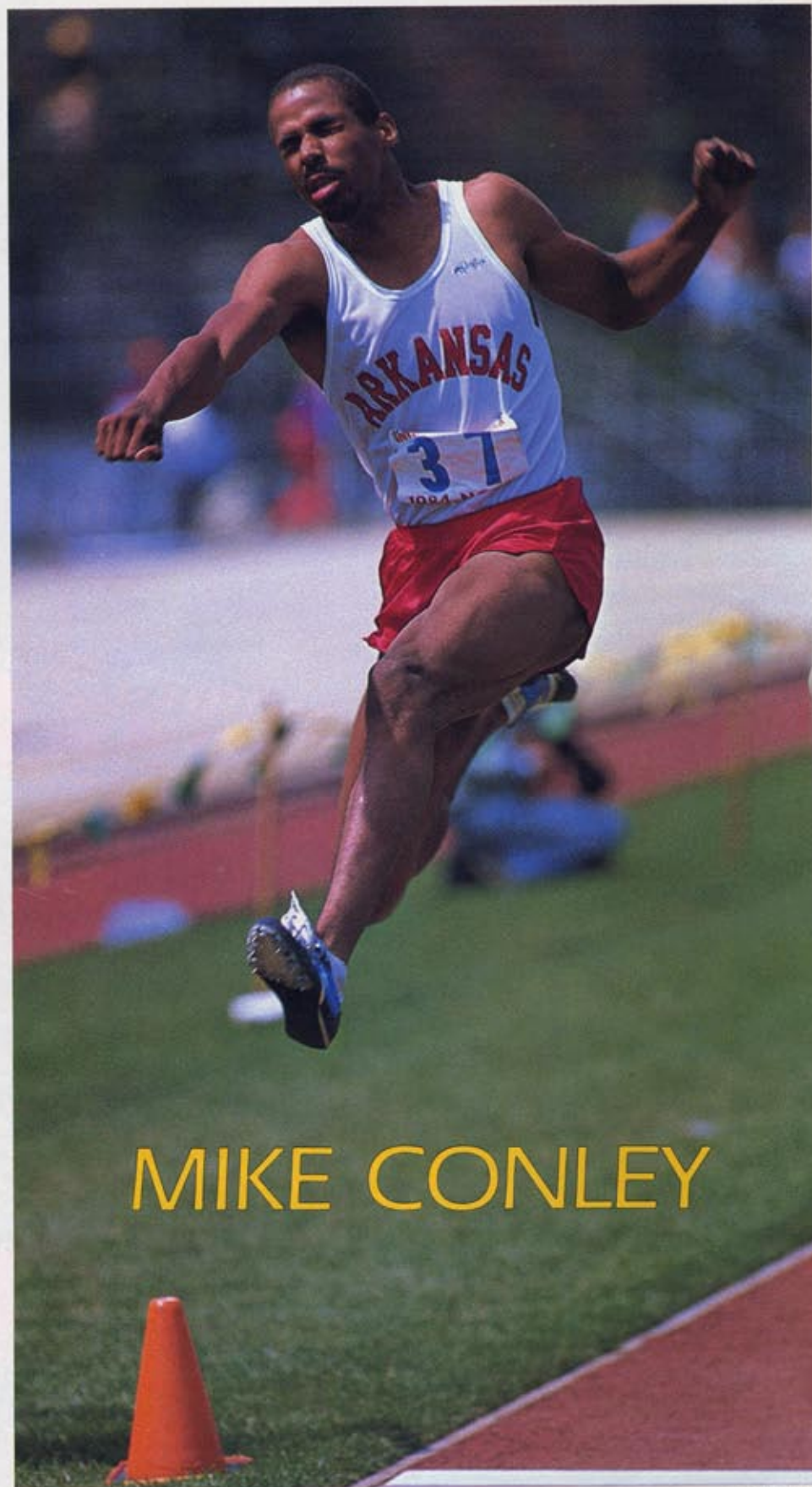
Conley: That double meant a lot to me. My frosh year, I bombed out in the triple jump and didn't make the finals. The next year, I did well in the long jump, but I wasn't really into the triple jump—my mind wasn't really into it. So this time, I took it one day at a time. I warmed up minimally, so I wouldn't wear myself out and would be able to give a good showing.

I guess *Track & Field News* picked me to win both events, so I couldn't surprise too many people. But if I had taken 2nd, I probably wouldn't be talking to you right now.

T&FN: So what does this year hold for you? Is it hard to deal with the Olympic pressure?

Conley: There are the Trials and the Olympics and those two may be the only two meets I jump in the rest of the year. Before the World Championships last year, there was pressure and I was nervous, but afterwards, I knew I could do it and that relieved some of the pressure.

And this year, I know that I'm seriously ready, and stronger and faster, and I've got a lot of confidence. Not about anyone else, but about myself. I know I



MIKE CONLEY

can jump 57 feet in the triple if I have to. I still might not make the team, but at least I know I can jump that far.

I really don't think about competing until I'm there, warming up at the track. I like to think about other things—talk to people, go fishing before the meet—and not get too worried about anything. It really doesn't make any difference how much you think about it.

T&FN: *Once you've done your work in practice, you feel pretty confident?*

Conley: I don't want to say that some people have head problems, but some people do. Some people just can't compete right; they just get messed up worrying about things.

I like to keep things simple: I practice hard, compete on the weekends, get to the runway and give 100% because I have put in the practice.

T&FN: *You seem to have found the way to make things develop well for you. You were a fine high school athlete, but not many people were ready for you to improve as you have. Has your success surprised you?*

Conley: It never really surprised me, because I never thought about it. I never thought about jumping 57 feet. But I knew I was fast and had a lot of spring.

Even when I was a freshman in high school, when I watched people who could jump that far, I knew I had as much physical talent as they did. That just motivated me to work harder.

And Dick Booth [Arkansas field event coach] is an excellent coach and a fine motivator. The combination of me wanting to work hard and feeling I could do things, coupled with his motivation, have worked out well.

But I still don't think about it. Right now, I wouldn't want to say my goal is to jump 57 feet—because I might jump farther than that.

T&FN: *What do you think is responsible for your success?*

Conley: Luck, for one thing. A little bit of luck and, beyond that, God. I could have gotten hurt more but my injuries have not been severe. Staying healthy can keep me jumping another five or six years.

I jumped a lot less this year than last. In '83, I jumped in something like 31 meets. This year, I cut it down so I never took more than two jumps in any competition, except for a third jump at the conference meet. We figure, the more you jump, the more chance you have of getting hurt.

T&FN: *You have spoken a lot about staying healthy and you obviously have thought a lot about that since you have jumped so selectively. But a lot of athletes don't seem to take care of themselves like you do. Why do you feel it's so uncommon for people to stay healthy?*

Conley: The reason I'm that way is

because of the competitor I am. The worst feeling in the world is to lose or finish poorly and know that you could have jumped much better. I hate to have that happen due to injury, because I can't control it and I want to control it.

In high school, I was hurt a lot. My sophomore year I hurt my back so badly I could barely walk. I had to wear a back brace and I came down the runway funny and I couldn't compete the way I wanted.

The next year, I twisted my ankle playing basketball right before the state meet. I broke one ankle, had knee injuries.

And heel bruises! My senior year, at the International Prep meet, I had heel bruises. My best jump was only 47-1 until I jumped 51-10 on my last jump. I just had to get out that one.

T&FN: *No wonder you have a special insight into preventing injury.*

Conley: I'm just glad it happened early and wasn't so severe that I wasn't able to come back.

T&FN: *How far will you have to go to make the Olympic team?*

Conley: If I triple jump the way I did at the NCAA, I'll make the team. But I'll need to improve in the long jump; I was running fast, but I was flat.

Since then I've been running a lot and working a lot more on technique. I run indoors on Astroturf, where there's not so much chance of injury. But it does hurt my timing.

T&FN: *It sounds like you work hard.*

Conley: I think that's the only way you can have confidence at the head of the runway. The only times I have really messed up was when my body was just not ready to jump far. With that in mind, you may not go far, but when you go down the runway you are confident that you can be competitive.

But when you haven't worked hard in practice, you go into a competition wondering, not knowing if you can do it.

T&FN: *What about in the Olympics? Are you looking for out-of-sight marks?*

Conley: Whatever the field is jumping, I want to be right in there. You never know how things will go—I may just blow my mind and jump a foot farther than ever. Then again, I might not.

The main thing is that I want to stay consistent. The way I have been jumping, if I can stay consistent around 56-10, the big jump will come.

T&FN: *What do you think you will do differently in the future?*

Conley: Next year, I think I will do a lot more, period. There won't be the pressure of an Olympic year; I want to enjoy my last college season and jump in all the meets.

I want to run a lot of relays and help give Arkansas a good name. Few people probably realize that our team was 3rd in the NCAA. We've got all our scorers

returning and we're only losing one person from the entire team.

T&FN: *You're a computer sciences major in school. What would you like to do after you're out of college?*

Conley: I'm not sure, but I think I would like to find some way to combine my major and track. I don't know what it might be yet; I'd like to graduate first. And I may have to change locations once the job hunt starts.

T&FN: *You really like it in Fayetteville, don't you?*

Conley: Yeah, I do. It looks just like Oregon, only the weather is hotter. The town is in the hills, it's real pretty and there is lots of hunting and fishing. It's not like the big city, not like Chicago. I don't think I want to settle in a small town, but I would like to live in a small town, at least for a while.

T&FN: *People have commented on your loyalty to Arkansas, about how you wore your Razorback hat on the victory stand in Helsinki. Do you remember that?*

Conley: Yes, I remember. I was kind of misrepresented. I knew I was wearing a Hogs hat, period, but not that I wore it on the victory stand. Some people seemed to want to think I wasn't proud to be an American or something like that. It was a pretty emotional experience, though. The World University Games and the World Championships were my first international competitions.

T&FN: *You must feel that going to Arkansas was a wise decision.*

Conley: It was an excellent decision and I'm just glad I made it. At the time, I was a little scared that I might make the decision for the wrong reason. But Arkansas was the first school that recruited me and it was the only school I visited.

They told me I could play basketball, too. I quit playing my frosh year and I have been very happy with that decision. I would have been just another college basketball player. Pro basketball is only for the elite few and if I had played, it would have been a lot less likely for me to become an All-American and a world-class athlete in track. □

Michael Alex Conley was born October 5, 1962, in Chicago and is 6-2/170. Currently a junior at Arkansas, graduated from Luther South High School of Chicago in 1981. Presently 9th on the U.S. all-time LJ list, 2nd on the U.S. TJ list. Placings in major meets: 1981—2nd TAC Jr LJ, 1st TAC Jr TJ; 1982—6th TAC LJ, 2nd NCAA LJ, 5th TAC TJ, dng NCAA TJ; 1983—3rd World Champs LJ, 3rd TAC LJ, 2nd NCAA LJ, 4th World Champs TJ, 2nd TAC TJ, 3rd NCAA TJ; 1984—1st NCAA LJ & TJ. PRs: 200 20.37 '84; LJ 27.2 '83; TJ 56-11" '84. His progression, with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses:

Year	Age	Affil	Year	LJ	TJ
1978	15	HS	Fr	19-2	42-8
1979	16	"	So	23-5	45-11
1980	17	"	Jr	22-5½	49-7½
1981	18	"	Sr	24-5½	51-10
1982	19	Arkansas	Fr	26-10½ (x, 6)	55-9½ (x, 5)
1983	20	"	So	27-2 (4, 4)	56-6½ (4, 2)
1984	21	"	Jr	26-11½	56-11½