

RANDY BARNES

Conrad McCarthy

In 1986 Texas A&M frosh Randy Barnes shocked the track world with a quantum improvement from 66-9 $\frac{1}{2}$ with the high school ball to 71-9 $\frac{1}{2}$ with the big shot.

Training under Aggie assistant Robert Parker, who still coaches him, the 19-year-old West Virginian scooted up the all-time world list to a position of #11 by mid-April of that year. He also reached 200-9 in the discus.

Perhaps only Barnes himself was not surprised. "People don't understand that I came into college with a really big strength base," he says. "I was benching 450 in high school. They don't understand that it was technique improvements that brought the shot along."

Then, at the Mt. SAC Relays, confronted for the first time with the more restrictive TAC/IAAF taping rules, Barnes removed his customary wrap and injured his throwing hand.

The nabobs of negativism clucked that it was inevitable Barnes should hurt himself after too-rapid progress. The charge rankled the amiable thrower during two frustrating years of stagnated performance that included hand surgery and a withdrawal from school.

Thus it was with jubilation that Barnes returned to health last year, cracking 73-feet and taking silver behind Ulf Timmermann in Seoul with a throw that was for a short time the longest in Olympic history.

An indoor WR 74-4 $\frac{3}{4}$ at Sunkist signaled that Barnes may have still more in store:

T&FN: Did the World Record catch you by surprise, or is there some truth to all the rumors we heard of big practice throws last year?

Barnes: Well, I mean 74-4, I broke it by over a foot. I don't think I was expecting anything like that. I had two throws over 73 last year and I knew that 73- $\frac{1}{4}$ was in range. But 74-4: I haven't had too many of those in practice even.

So to get a throw like that, I was pretty surprised. But I knew my lifts had improved from the previous week. Going into the 71-10 I was doing X amount of weight with so many reps, and everything had gone up the following week and I was expecting the distance to go up accordingly.

T&FN: Was it all just physical?

Barnes: There were a lot of things. It was an emotional deal. I knew that the World Championships were coming up soon and that I was going to have to tear down and start a different kind of training program. And I knew that I couldn't hold the peak much longer. If I was going to do it, I needed to do it soon. The urgency of that kind of spurred me on.

T&FN: Were the rumors we heard

about big practice fouls true?

Barnes: [laughing hard] Yeah, I started them. I've got to tell Coach Parker this. . .

No, I didn't start them, I don't want to say that. Coach Parker says he did [more laughter]. No, people were asking me, and I didn't intend to put any extra pressure on myself, but I was pretty excited about the throws. My best was 77.

T&FN: Did you fly out of the ring on that one?

Barnes: Let me put it to you this way: on the release I reversed and came down with my right foot in the ring and then stepped my left foot out. To me that's a savable throw.

They're not sloppy, flying-out-of-the-ring-type throws. I had three others over 75, four over 74, and I don't know how many over 70 that day. It was a phenomenal workout; the best one I've ever had. And it was happening when my strength levels were very high.

T&FN: You're obviously off to your best start ever this year.

Barnes: I've never had this many indoor meets ever. I'm looking at my series of meets, and it's almost as good

**"I don't want to just
break a World Record.
I want to do what
Flojo did in the 100."**

as my entire year last year and we haven't even started outdoor season. That excites me a lot. The condition I'm in and what I'm throwing excites me too, because I'm not even in any kind of shape yet.

I don't know why the shot's going farther now. Obviously my technique is improving. It has to be getting better and better.

T&FN: *You took a break after Seoul; has your preparation been slower than last year?*

Barnes: I didn't do anything. I stopped completely. I went home and celebrated with my family and friends. I pretty much stopped everything cold turkey, which was my mistake.

I think once you're in good shape and you've been that way for a long time, you start taking it for granted. You don't remember what it's like to be out of shape. And I don't think I ever believed I was going to get that far out of shape.

T&FN: *How far?*

Barnes: I came back and tried to start lifting again, and with 225lb on the bench my arms were shaking; just lack of muscle tone. Everything had just deteriorated. So it took quite a while just to get that back under control before I could start pushing any heavy weights.

It was pretty frantic coming back. There were some big meets coming up, and I knew you guys were going to be expecting some big throws and I wasn't sure I was going to be ready. So that was a little nerve-racking for me.

T&FN: *In Seoul you mentioned that once you've hit the positions correctly in throwing the shot, you'll always remember what it should feel like. How did the record throw feel compared to other big throws in the past?*

Barnes: It felt a lot like the Seoul throw, except in Seoul it felt like I pushed away from it a little bit. In L.A. I felt like I got completely through the throw. My release was complete and I

didn't hold back or anything; I got a really good flip on my hand.

At that point, I could throw the very same throw—and you'd never see the difference—and it might go a foot less or a foot farther. It's all in the release at that point.

When everything else is done right—the hips come completely through, the right foot is turned all the way through, you're practically in the reverse stage before the shot is even gone—when you're in that kind of a torqued-up position, it's all in the fingers. Everything is happening so fast.

T&FN: *You've indicated that you found the WR to be more fun than Seoul, but what did you get out of the Games?*

Barnes: I feel like I've seen everybody now. Up until that point I hadn't thrown against everyone. If you can get to the Olympics I think it makes everything else seem like a piece of cake. It really does. It's hard to get up-

tight about anything else once you've gone through something like that.

A lot of people will tell you it was wonderful, fabulous; it was the best experience of their whole life. And that's all true for me too, but for me it was such a learning experience.

T&FN: *What was unique about it?*

Barnes: Just the stress, the intensity. Something you train for all your life. People were over there fighting sickness, stomach cramps, just from being in a foreign country.

You train that hard for so long; for something that comes only once in four years, and there are so many things out there that can deter you. You can drop something on your hand; twist your ankle while you're there.

Some of us throwers were in the gym in Chiba playing volleyball and Mike Buncic came down on his foot wrong or somebody landed on his foot.

We were a week away from the Olympics and his foot was black and

The Man Barnes Is Chasing

by Jon Hendershott

Shortly after he pushed the shot WR out to 75-8 last May, Ulf Timmermann was asked a serious question: How far will the winner have to throw at the Seoul Olympics?

With the sly smile that he flashes so easily Timmermann recalls, "I made a joke. I first answered, 'Longer than anyone else.'

"Actually, I felt that a throw between 22.40 and 22.60 [73-6 to 74-1³/₄] would be enough.

"But the most important thing would be actually to produce such a long throw in the Games. The point in the biggest championship meet of all is to win first, then worry about the distance."

As it turned out, Timmermann could have answered the initial question with, "D: All of the above." In Seoul, he did it all—and with more than a touch of the dramatic.

Trailing Randy Barnes, who had popped an Olympic Record 73-5¹/₂ on his final heave, Timmermann blasted the ball 73-8³/₄ on the ultimate throw of the competition to strike gold.

It was the longest throw ever in a major title meet and culminated a fierce duel which saw the Games best

revised five times (four by Timmermann). The man definitely can compete.

"When I stepped into the circle for my last throw in Seoul, I didn't think about any special thing to do," explains the 26-year-old East Berliner. "Randy had made a fine throw, but I knew I had to put that out of my mind."

Cupping his hands around his eyes, like blinders on a racehorse, he continues, "It was like I went into a tunnel.

"Time became just a blur, a haze; throwing was just a reflex. I just tried to do everything right and let it happen naturally. I knew inside that this was my big chance; I could make my place in Olympic history."

Timmermann's place in the sport's annals is now secure, thanks not only to his Olympian heroics but also to his World Record. His 75-8 (23.06 metricaly) made him the first thrower to exceed the historic 23-meter line.

In response to the age-old question of priorities, Timmermann says, "The Olympic gold is more desirable than a World Record. You will always

BARNES—continued:

blue. Really, that was bad judgment—and I was participating in it too.

T&FN: Did it scare you?

Barnes: The weight of the situation kind of hit us all at the same time when we saw Mike sitting on the ground with his foot black and blue. We all kind of looked at each other and turned white. We were thinking, "God, that could be us right now."

We realized what it meant. That's scary. It's scary to think that you don't get a second chance there. You're ready or you're not.

T&FN: I recall that you had a similar realization about there being no second chance when you watched your two teammates have to leave the field before the final three throws?

Barnes: That's true. I saw the disappointment in their faces and all of a sudden I became grateful that I had three more throws. I mean I was actually grateful. It was like, "Hey, wake up!"

T&FN: Does the fact Timmermann could have preceded you in the draw—and hence been unable to top your final throw—ever nag at you? I mean you could almost just as easily have won.

Barnes: Well, I would have won, let's say, but then again you're changing things all around. If he was before me in the order then maybe I wouldn't have gotten that throw on my last throw.

He did kind of have the luck of the draw, I would say. But a lot of people say, "Ah, if you'd just had one more throw, you could have beat him."

They don't realize that my five throws before that weren't even over 70-feet. What would make them think that a seventh throw would be 74? It might have been another 69-something. I mean you only get one of those kinds of throws every so often.

I don't have any complaints. I'm real happy with the way it all turned out. In any other situation it wouldn't have been any different.

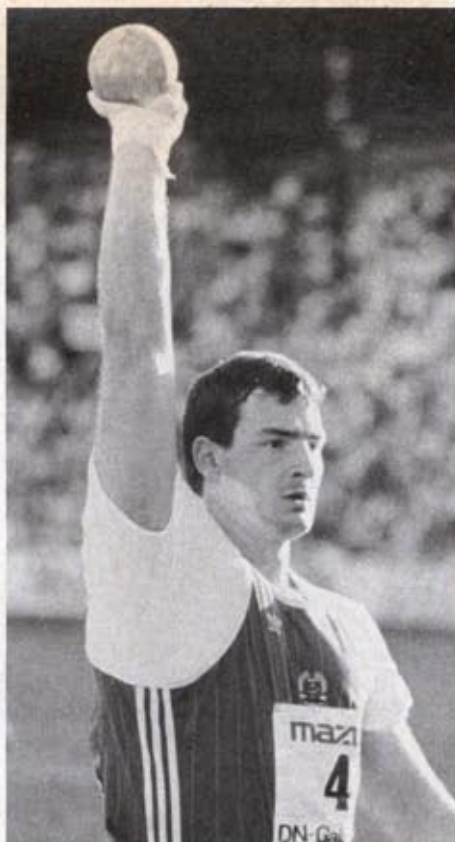
T&FN: And now you've got a big throw behind you for your next meeting.

Barnes: Yeah, it's close. It's almost a foot away from the big one.

T&FN: How does it feel to be knocking on the door of that outdoor WR?

Barnes: Pretty much because of what I've been seeing in practice, it's not a big surprise, if that's what you're saying.

12—March 1989



Timmermann owns two things that Barnes would like to have: the outdoor World Record (75-8) and Olympic gold.

I'm not there yet. I still want the outdoor WR, and, without tooting my own horn, I don't want to just break a WR. I want to do what Flojo did in the 100. I want to totally just shock somebody. And until that happens I don't guess I'll ever be satisfied.

It's hard to make a comment like that without sounding real egotistical, and I'm not trying to sound like that. I want to make that *real* clear.

T&FN: You don't come across like a jerk when you say it. You just have your sights set high and you're secure in your abilities.

Barnes: Yes, and when my confidence level is there, the shot's going to go. At the Millrose Games 67-11 was my best before my last throw. On my fifth throw I had used a smaller shot and the thing just flew out of my neck. It was embarrassing.

I was mad; I wasn't throwing far up to that point. I got on my next throw and I threw 72-7. It's really strange; the confidence is there. I just know that it's there, and that helps me a lot.

T&FN: How confident are you?

Barnes: I'm not intimidated by another thrower as long as I'm paying attention to myself and what I'm doing. You hear an athlete say that all the

time, and it's pretty much a true statement.

Usually when you're in a competition, watching the other throwers, watching what they do, you're probably not ready to throw yet; you haven't done your preparation right.

But when I'm throwing well, and I've put in all the work, I'm not worried about going in there and choking or losing out of fear. If I'm throwing well and I know it, then it's time to show what I've got.

T&FN: What do you think you'd be doing if you weren't a shotputter?

Barnes: Good question. I'd be a rock star. I love to play the guitar.

Eric Randolph Barnes was born June 16, 1966, in Charleston, West Virginia, and is 6-4 1/2/290. Graduated from St. Albans High School (South Charleston, WV) in 1985 and attended Texas A&M until 1987. Now competes for the Mazda Track Club.

Major meet finishes: SP: '84—5)TAC Jr; '87—nm)NCAA; '88—1)OT, 2)OG. DT: '86—nq)NCAA; '87—nq)NCAA.

His progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	Affil	Shot	Discus
1984	17/18	WV HS	51-9	—
1985	18/19	*	66-9 1/2 hs	182-3 hs
1986	19/20	TxAM	71-9 1/2 (9, 3)	200-9
1987	20/21	*	68-8 1/2	203-11
1988	21/22	NYAC	73-6 3/4 (2, 1)	—
1989	22/23	Mazda	74-4 1/4	—

TIMMERMANN—continued:

have the medal, but you can lose and regain records many times in a career."

He should know. His PR before the 75-8 was a WR 74-2 1/2 from 1985, but the honor of top mark passed through Udo Beyer and Alessandro Andrei in four installments before it came back to him.

He adds, "But I also feel that records can be very significant barriers to overcome. It was very important to me to be the first to throw 23 meters. Breaking such a barrier is nearly as important, in terms of history, as a gold medal."

About a dozen years before his historic '88 season, Timmermann wasn't even in the sport. He started out as a rower. No, he wasn't close to his present size of 6-4 1/4 and 250ish.

"By age 12, I was still only 5-6, not big enough to continue in rowing," he says. "And even though my parents both competed in track—my father threw the discus and my mother was a multi-eventer—I didn't automatically move in to the sport."

No club would accept young Ulf; it

Track & Field News