

# DWIGHT STONES

The Big D. Dwight Stones, world record holder (indoors and out) in the high jump. One of the most scintillating, and certainly the most ebullient, of performers on the track circuit today.

The outline of his career is well-known to all close followers of the sport. A 7-1½ performer in 1971 for Glendale High (the best jump ever in all-prep competition), winner of the Olympic Trials as a precocious UCLA freshman, bronze medalist at Munich, where he said, "With my technique, natural maturity in the next few years, plus developing my speed and strength, I don't see how I can be kept under the world record in the next three years."

He was right. A distaste for the collegiate scene led him to the Pacific Coast Club, the influence of Tom Jennings, and the big steps down the road to stardom. (Directionwise: Dwight gives coaching credit to prep mentor John Barnes and current Long Beach head Ron Alice.)

In '73 he improved to his still-standing world record of 7-6½ and rated No. 1 in the world (and No. 4 among all athletes in Athlete of the Year voting, a compilation which intrigues the honors-minded Stones).

In the 2½ seasons since then, he has been the superstar of the indoor circuit, altering the world record on no less than 7 occasions, culminated by back-to-back marks of 7-6¼ and 7-6½ in late February.

For this, he was named Indoor Athlete of the Year for the second season in a row.

A consummate competitor who has moved his 6-5/180 body over more high heights than anyone before him (he owns 10 of the top 17 performances ever), Dwight's ability to be quotable and conversant is legend. Indeed, John Hall of the LA Times referred to the 22-year-old Stones as "The Tower of Bable."

Searching a bit for the real person behind the bluster and bravado, which is an essential part of all nearly all world-class performers, we put Big D to the test, letting him reveal his knowledge and insight into the science and art of high jumping:

**T&FN:** What do you want to talk about? I don't feel very creative this morning. I thought I'd just turn on my tape recorder and let you have free reign.

**Stones:** Gee, I don't know.

**T&FN:** Right, you're always at such a loss for words.

**Stones:** Well, what I'm having to do is every week check what I'm doing in workouts to make sure that I'm not going to start doing too much quality work or that my workouts aren't going to be too good. I have to realize that it's still late March.

I'm worried. I know that I'm ready to start doing speed-work for time. Or, it start'd be time, but it's not time because I know I can't really start doing anything, because I don't have a major competition until the first of June.

I talked to Ron [Alice, Long Beach coach] the other day and said, "When am I

## T&FN Interview by Garry Hill

going to start doing two 330s with a full recovery?"

He said not until Mt SAC, so that means I have three more weeks of doing 3 330s with a five-minute interval, which is like throw-up city.

**T&FN:** So why are you worried about getting ready too fast? Did you work too hard during the indoor season?

**Stones:** No, it turned out pretty well—jumping those jumps at the end, even though I didn't have any speedwork. I haven't done 75-yard sprints since December. Normally I do those all the way through. And a lot of triple-jump bounding. This year, I've only done triple-jump bounding twice.

**T&FN:** So how did you jump so high during the indoor season if you didn't really do all your great workouts?

**Stones:** I don't know. That's what makes me think perhaps 7-6½ is the kind of jump 7-4 used to be. Which means that the feeling is like around 7-8-and-something this year.

But I've said that so many times. I have 64 jumps at 7-7 and no clearances. So it kinda makes me wonder. But if I can go out and do what I did at UCLA the other day—I was in total control on my jumps at 7-7. I went for them. I didn't clench my fists, I didn't try to run faster. I didn't do anything tense. I treated it just like it was 7-4 or 7-5. I did try to be a little quicker at the plant and use more arms. I was up on every one of those jumps. It was just a matter of where my plant was because the wind was blowing.

**T&FN:** Why 7-7 rather than the record 7-6¾?

**Stones:** Because metrically it wouldn't work out—wouldn't be 2.31, and that's very important to me.

**T&FN:** So, do you think that because you have 64 jumps at 7-7 and haven't quite made it yet that it might be mental?

**Stones:** No, well it is in that when I would go for 7-7 I would change everything. Last summer especially. I started running too fast. I could feel afterwards that I had had my fists clenched. I could feel that my neck was really tight. I would really be cussing at myself, and only a couple of times was I able to relax, and they were close. I blew two of them by being tense.

The way I want to look at it; if I did a taper program for two weeks now, where I did a 330-220-110 breakdown one week

and 150s and 75s the next week, with triple-jump bounding both weeks, I could break the world record in two weeks, but I don't want to. It would foul my program up.

**T&FN:** The world record is obviously subservient then to winning at Montreal?

**Stones:** Yeah. If I'm in the right shape at Montreal and I do the right thing (because of the amount of experience I've got).

I realize that Tom [Woods] and Rory [Kotinek] have a lot of experience, and that's good, because I think the three of us should make the team just because of the experience we've got and the marks we've achieved. But I've been to Europe more times, I've been to an Olympic Games, I have 8 world records under my belt.

**T&FN:** High jumpers don't have the best record of jumping high in the Games. If you set a world record, that would really be some kind of achievement.

**Stones:** Well, it's something I'd really like to do. With the right weather... the weather is something I'm really concerned about. If it rains up there—Tartan doesn't hold in the rain, well, actually nothing holds in the rain for a flopper—the floppers will be in trouble.

That means nearly everybody will be in trouble. Ferragne could emerge in the rain. He's got the straddle technique, he'll have the local crowd.

**T&FN:** In slippery conditions, if it gets slow and you have to pick your footing, one of those "pop-up" types could win it?

**Stones:** Woods would definitely have an advantage over Kotinek and me. He jumps with more force application than do Rory and me. We're more speed at the end.

And he's much stronger than me. There's no doubt about that. The man's an animal in the weightroom.

**T&FN:** Speaking of your 64 7-7 tries, are there any that really stand out in your mind?

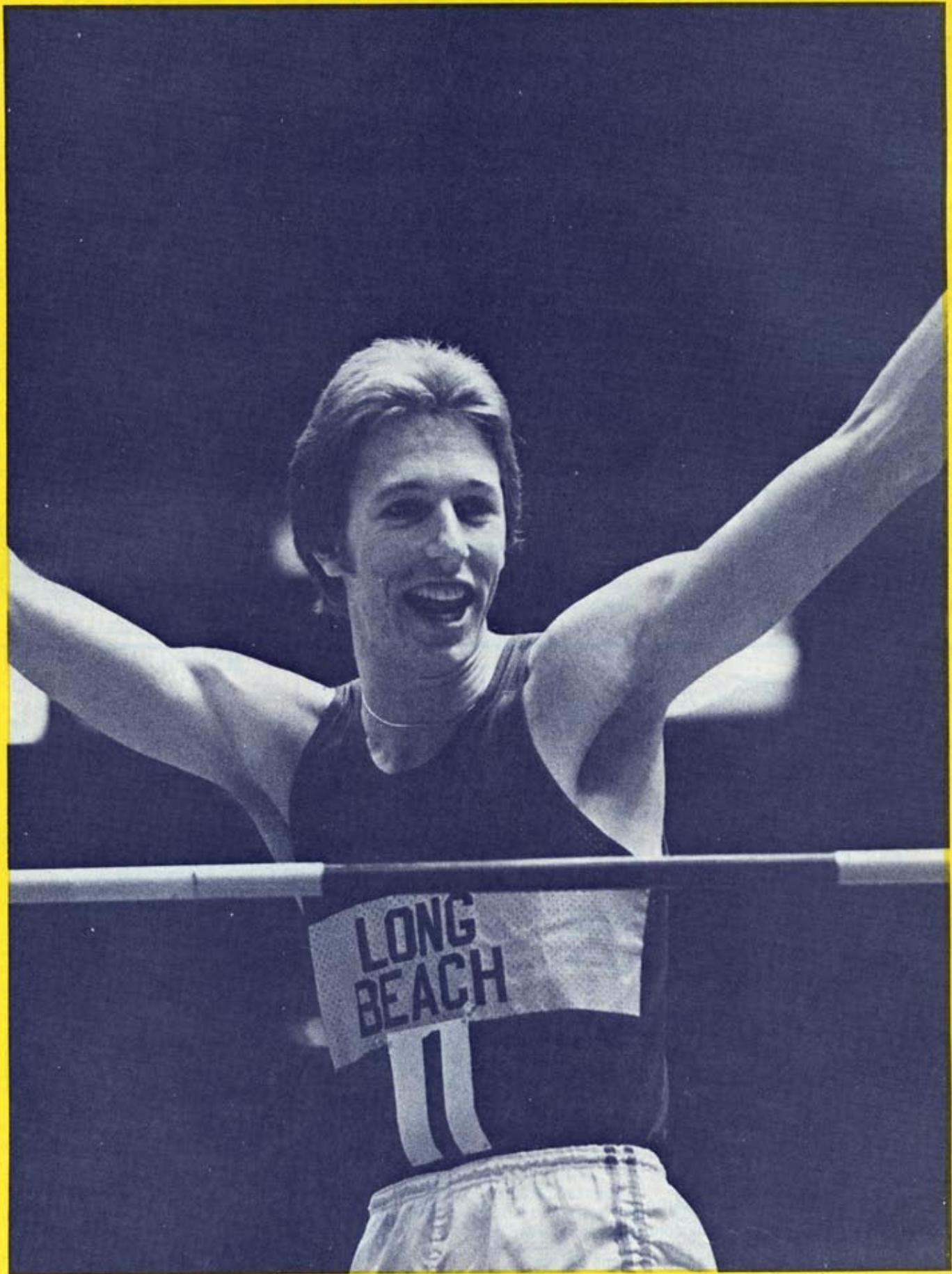
**Stones:** Oh yeah, the one in Berlin that stayed on for 7-8 seconds. Stand out?! That one blew my mind. It was a great jump.

But I've had a lot of attempts at say, 5½, that were 7s. No doubt in my mind, and that's irritating. That's one of the unique things about the high jump and vault. In any of the other field events, you get six chances, and if you achieve a tremendous mark, that can win it. In the high jump you can make 7-0 by 5" but you don't get credit for 7-5.

**T&FN:** Here, let me read you what our TajNuts Panel says about your chances for Montreal [see p. 36—Big D is one of the

April 1976—9







more overwhelming favorites].

**Stones:** Wow! That's something. Really?

**T&FN:** Well, you have ranked first in the world for three years, you're still in your prime, you're still setting records. More than anything else, I think it's just that inch-gap you have over everybody else. You have gone that much higher. They're going to have to pull out a much bigger one than you are.

**Stones:** Well, I don't have the record of choking in big ones either. I don't have a "Ron Clarke" syndrome. And I don't want one. I've always pretty much come through.

The way I look at it, when I finally jump 7-7, after all these damn close ones and so many attempts at the damn height (I've never tried to get a height so many times): say I do it in the Olympics, or just after the Olympics, I think within a month I can break the world record two or three more times. Just because of the fact the pressure of that one jump is off.

A lot of people say, "Why don't you go for 7-7½, or something like that?" I tell them that if I have one that barely falls, that hangs for 4-5 seconds, that I would have made 7-7. That would upset me.

And I hate to skip over world records. Brumel never did that. He didn't skip from 2.24 to 2.26. He just went boom-boom-boom, and that's the way I want to do it. I've got a lot more world records to do outdoors to catch him. He had 5 or 6 didn't he?

**T&FN:** Yeah, he went 2.23, 2.24, 2.25, 2.26, 2.27, 2.28. [That's 7-3¼ to 7-5¾.]

**Stones:** So he had 6. I want to have it 10 times. Eleven times. I want to go from my 2.30 to 2.40 [7-10½]. That's my goal, my dream. To do that 11 times, at least once in the Games, and win two Games in a row. Nobody's ever set a world record in the Games, and nobody's ever won the event twice.

**T&FN:** Obviously, no thoughts of quitting. Track is still that integral a part of your life?

**Stones:** It is, but not as integral as some people think. A lot of people say I relate everything to it and think I have no other interests. That's BS.

You have to put a hell of a lot into it. But I have a good time. I have my sailboat, my car. I go places and do a lot of things and have a hell of a lot of fun in Europe besides the fact I jump a lot. There are other rewards to be gained from jumping.

Woods has been trying to tell me for years that track isn't that important to him, but that's a copout. I know it is, or he wouldn't be going at it like he is.

Tom's a good competitor and we have a good time. Rory's a good competitor too, but he gets a little tense sometimes. It's amazing what Rory's done on so little experience. To do 7-5 and lose is amazing.

But it's gonna start happening. The high jump has just been stagnant for too

long. It's been dominated by two guys pretty much for the last 15 years or so. Brumel and me. It's gotten so that 7-4¼ just doesn't do anything for the crowd anymore.

**T&FN:** And doing something for the crowd is really big for you, right?

**Stones:** Absolutely, very important.

**T&FN:** You really eat it up... How do you react to negative crowd reactions? You seem to attract more than your fair share of boo-birds.

**Stones:** Right. I always try to consider why it is and where it is. A newspaper reporter who might have been looking for a hot scoop and decided to screw me over. There are places like Montreal, where the whole crowd was for Ferragne and Forget...

We had the same height there, but I had a few more misses because I had to keep changing my run, and as I've said time and time again, if I don't have a good run I'm in trouble. When my run starts coming together...

**T&FN:** Your technique is basically so polished now that it all comes down to the runup?

**Stones:** Yes. It's mainly a matter of feel now. I need to use my arms more, and I have to think about that every time. It's still improving, but at such a small pace it doesn't look like it's improving.

The major improvement is the run. I have so much more speed. So much control. All I have to do is think about getting those arms up.

**T&FN:** So, were you pleased with your indoor season, even though you won only 7 out of 12 meets?

**Stones:** Very, very pleased. A couple of the meets were close—such as the marathon jump at the Times—that could have gone either way.

I think I wrapped it up pretty well with the two world records at the end. That pleased me very much. Just off those two marks to get Indoor Athlete again, that really pleases me.

Considering the things I wasn't doing in workout; to jump high. If I'd really wanted to taper for this indoor season I could have been awesome.

**T&FN:** Considering the fact that indoor track doesn't really mean as much, do you prefer outdoors?

**Stones:** It sure looks as if I prefer indoors more. I'm getting my runs down about 90% of the time. I like the closeness of the crowd. The crowd is usually very good. It's hard to explain but obviously I've broken the record seven times indoors. Granted, it started out lower, but to put that many efforts together, I must like it.

I do enjoy it. I can cope with the noise, yet the people know when to keep quiet. That controlled environment—I hate the wind. Just hate it. I don't have any wind, I'm never cold, very rarely is it too hot. The surface is usually controlled because it's artificial all the way.

Outdoors, it can be tough for me. I

could set a couple of world records, win the Games, but a couple of outstanding 1500-meter marks and I'm not going to get Athlete of the Year. The last field-event guy to get it was Matson in '70.

This could be the year. I started out with two records indoors and got Indoor Athlete. But I'm going to be jumping every day after the Games. I mean every day. It's going to be tough to stay undefeated, because I'm going to be jumping my butt off.

**T&FN:** Do you think you were ready for that record in '73, or was that one of those jumps that people just pull out of nowhere?

**Stones:** I had the roll going. Almost no defeats. I'd gone from 7-3 to 7-5 in a month-and-a-half. I was strong in Europe, the amount of back-to-backers I was doing. It seemed that, as if in the charisma of the Olympic Stadium, that it would happen.

But I've been in so much better shape since then. But even though I haven't been able to get the mark to top the world record, my consistency continues to rise. I've done 7-5 like 18 times. But the world record I've only done twice. The consistency level is more important from the Games standpoint. It's the consistent guy that has the best chance. Obviously a certain amount of luck enters into winning an Olympic gold, because it's just one competition...

At Montreal, the qualifying round isn't going to take anything out of me. I have to jump 7-1, but I'm ready for a long competition. There'll be 20-25 people in the final with that 2.16 [7-1] standard. That's going to keep a lot of people in on third attempts. In the final, they're going to have lots of misses at 2.10, at 2.14.

**T&FN:** Combine that with some rain and boy, it's going to be a long one.

**Stones:** Right, it'll be a five-hour competition. The amount of jumps could be really important. Attempts could be important. Starting high could be important. Then again, with the weather, starting lower and not having any misses could be important. It's hard to say.

**T&FN:** You've also got the advantage in that you've been in a couple of 15-plus-jump competitions. You'll know how to handle one of those if it comes to it.

**Stones:** True. For example, in Greece last year the people were going pretty beserk: not as bad as an Italian crowd. It blew Tom's mind. They were a little more quiet for me, but not when Rory and Tom were up. I think Tom jumped 7-2 and was third or fourth. That was good experience for him. Now he knows how to handle something like that.

That's why I think the three of us should make the team, although as I've said before I think one of us is not going to. That would be our most representative team.

**T&FN:** You think that one of the three will miss, even if it's you?



**Stones:** Yes, and I said that about the team at Munich too. I said that one, maybe two of us wouldn't make the final. It was just a feeling I had, and I've got. It's a bad twong, because I'm as eligible to not make it as anyone. I'm not leaving myself out, as I was in '72, because I knew what those guys were up to.

I hate to say it, but I think one of us won't just because we are supposed to make it. You just can't eliminate room for someone like the Dwight Stones of 1972. The guy who gets 3-4 PRs in the month before the Olympic Trials. You can't discount a kid like that. Somebody who doesn't have a terrific mark yet.

**T&FN:** *You and Tom have a strange relationship. My perception is that you are pretty good friends, fairly close. Yet there is a lot of antagonism.*

**Stones:** Sure. The original antagonism was just us getting at each other sarcastically. Now we have "the man" in the middle. His mentor. The Coast Club man. And Jennings knows how to get publicity, for, and out of people.

I hear that Ripley is getting obnoxious as hell right now. Jennings has a way of doing that to you. He did it to me, and I'm a pretty strong sonofabitch as far as character is concerned, but Jennings is an amazing guy. He gets you on such an ego trip. He has you so—you're so great.

It's not as if you get much recognition in this sport. You get a guy like that telling you how great you are and you start thinking that nobody else is going to tell you how great you are and you start thinking, "Maybe I am." He had me going.

I think this stuff with Woods and Kotinek was mainly publicity. We have to get our names into the paper in order to promote the sport. Whether they are controversial articles, or rah-rah articles. If it's in the paper, people are reading it and it's in the public eye. Let's face it. There are enough people in the country who go off negative stuff. The more publicity there is in the paper, the bigger crowd you get.

**T&FN:** *So how are you reacting to the collegiate scene after three years off?*

**Stones:** I feel that the collegiate program really keeps you at home. Really keeps you in a controlled environment. That's one thing you can say about the PCC, no control there. You're flying all over with that club. Those three years made me so strong. So able to come back. Not just physically, but also mentally.

It's nice to be able to pick my competitions this year, to be able to train so hard. This year is the first time I've ever thrown up in practice. I've thrown up like five times after my hill workouts or 330s. I'm getting in shape and having a good time. It's a good situation for me and I'm I'm I decided to use it.

**Jim:** I've got my one goal down—I won the NCAA Indoor. Now I've got to win the NCAA Outdoor and then if I win the Games I think I've won just about everything. □

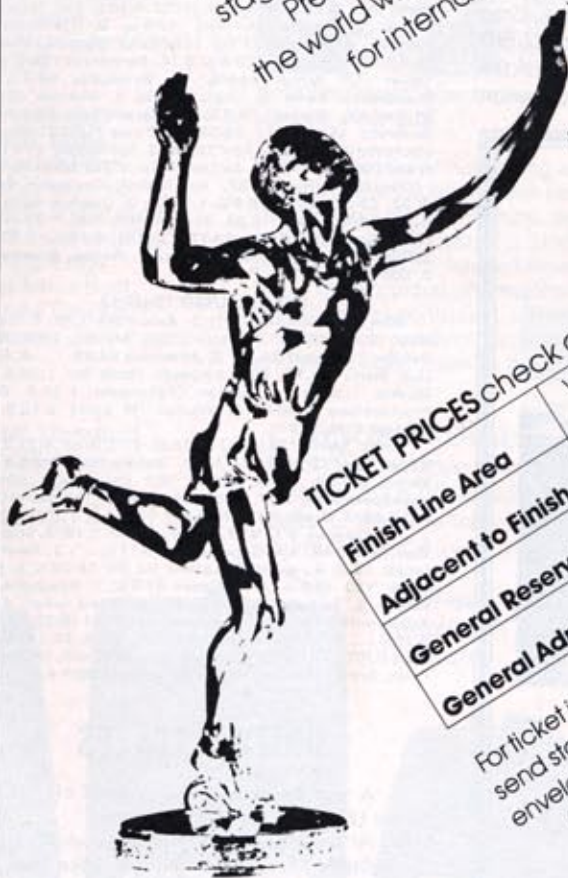
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