

# US Athlete of the Year

# BRUCE JENNER

**C**rossing the finish line of the decathlon 1500 at Montreal was the last act of Bruce Jenner's track and field career. But it was far from the end of his place in the sun. It was, in fact, only the beginning of a continuing recognition that far exceeded anything Bruce—or any other trackman—knew in pre-Montreal days.

Once one of a relative handful of practitioners of the lonely art of decathloneering, Jenner suddenly was everybody's hero. As telecaster Jim McKay was to say, Bruce's achievements highlighted the American Olympic effort. And of course McKay should know, for it was television more than anything else that made Jenner into a national celebrity.

True, Jenner helped, more than a little. He won trackdom's highest prize, the Olympic gold medal. His 8618 points not only constituted a big new world record but was good enough to be voted the outstanding single performance of the entire 1976 season (see p. 10). And Bruce radiated charisma. Big, handsome, finely attuned to a very supportive audience, sharing his place in the spotlight with an equally photogenic wife.

That combination of personal performance and attractiveness, plus media buildup, has presented Jenner with opportunities no other track and fielder has enjoyed. So as we wrap up a brilliant track career—including three world records and three straight No. 1 rankings—we do so knowing Bruce will still be with us. Not on the track, to be sure, but in print and on the tube as announcer, actor and endorser of products.

**T&FN:** How does it feel to be rich and famous?

**Jenner:** Well, maybe we've got the famous part licked. And we're trying to get some money in the bank. Let's take the famous part. On the whole, 90% of it is great. Every once in a while it causes a lot of problems. For instance, Chrystie and I were sound asleep on a plane to Hawaii. This lady woke Chrystie and asked her to awaken me to get my autograph. Chrystie didn't appreciate that at all and told her so, that she thought it was very rude.

The woman came back with, "You asked for it. You wanted to be a celebrity and now that you are you have to pay the price."

It's rare, though. The fun part is that you can get into places maybe you couldn't have got into before. After the Olympics I was invited to the White House for dinner. Sat next to Betty Ford. That was fun. The night before I was in Louisiana hunting alligators. So you know, your life changes from day to day, from alligator hunting to dinner at the White House.

**T&FN:** What else does it do for your way of life?

**Jenner:** For one thing, you appreciate your free time more. When I get

## Interviewed by Bert Nelson

home—we just bought this house down in Malibu, it's out in the country, with mountains behind us—I get my motorcycle up there and just get away. I feel I really need that. As soon as I get on the road and working you've got a million people running around all the time.

**T&FN:** Sounds different from training for the decathlon by yourself.

**Jenner:** It is, it's more demanding. Chrystie says I don't really know how much it takes out of me. Sometimes I just go and go and go and someone trying to keep up with me is dying. Like you hit three cities in one day with a speaking



engagement in each. It's tough on you, physically and mentally. I can take it for awhile. If I'm looking forward to doing something it's not hard. And I feel very fortunate because now I can pick and choose what I want to do and what I don't

want to do. It's a great position to be in.

**T&FN:** Are you enjoying yourself?

**Jenner:** Thoroughly. Working for ABC is a lot of fun. For instance, in about an hour I have to do some voice-overs for the Superstars show.

**T&FN:** You're not competing in it?

**Jenner:** Not this year. I've had no time to prepare. You know me, if I'm going to do something I want to be ready. Plus I've had enough competition this year.

**T&FN:** What else are you doing for ABC?

**Jenner:** Chrystie and I are doing a series of 26 interviews for *Good Morning America*. She has just finished a TV movie and I have a contract for two major-movie roles in the next year. I did a little something for the Christmas day show. I enjoy the sports aspect a lot.

**T&FN:** Would you like to concentrate on that?

**Jenner:** Eventually I'd like to make a career of it, to get the expertise to get into other sports.

**T&FN:** You're so goal oriented you must have one or more in mind now.

**Jenner:** Nothing really that specific, like winning the gold medal. I'll never again have that kind of big, specific goal and I can accept that. But I would like to do a good job for ABC. Not just until the next Olympics and then you're gone. Try to be professional enough to work at it enough to keep it going for a long time. That definitely is a goal.

**T&FN:** When did the possibility of capitalizing on your success become a part of your thinking?

**Jenner:** Oh, about 7:30 p.m. on July 30. No, really, I never went into it with the attitude that I'm going to make money at it. And I really didn't start thinking about it until probably a year before the Games. Then I thought, "Hey, if you win this thing, remember how other decathlon champs have done quite well with it."

I thought about it, but I never used it as a motivating factor. If they had put a million dollars at the finish line it wouldn't have meant more to me. I never can say I was in it for the money, but I think I looked at it realistically, as a businessman.

I knew if I won people would be throwing things in your face. I'd have to take a serious look at them. And the day after the Games a major cologne company offered me \$50,000 to do a single commercial. Right there, bang, one commercial, that's it. I didn't want to do that. I wanted a long-range contract, four or five years, not just doing commercials, but being a spokesman for the company. I

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knew what I was looking for. I told them no.

In fact, after the Games were over I probably turned down a million dollars worth of stuff. Now, with the help of a good friend and manager I'm picking the things that are right for me. I've finished my book. Doing a lot of public speaking and expect to sign a long term tie-up soon.

**T&FN:** *What happened with the Superman movie they said you were going to star in?*

**Jenner:** I didn't know if I was going to do it or not. It was a 25 million dollar production with Marlon Brando and Gene Hackman and that was intriguing. I came off much better on the screen test than I expected. But they said I looked too young for the part of Superman. I was very pleased that I didn't get it. I didn't like the image of it. You play the part of Superman on top of the all-around athlete bit from the Games and you're typecast for life.

**T&FN:** *Knowing there would be a lot of offers if you won the Games must have put a lot of extra pressure on you. And you added to it by giving up your job and living the decathlon. Did you ever feel you were piling too much pressure on yourself?*

**Jenner:** Once. I was sitting in my room watching Dave Roberts, the best vaulter in the world, get the bronze medal.

**T&FN:** *Not before that, in the months leading up?*

**Jenner:** Sure, there was a lot of pressure. But I could look back on my performances and remember that in the biggest meets in the last two years I had the best scores of my life. So in that way I could tell myself the more pressure I had the better I did.

**T&FN:** *Do you feel then the pressure actually may have helped you?*

**Jenner:** Yes I do, I really do. Pressure like the family buying \$3000 worth of Olympic tickets and my friends planning their vacations to see the Games.

**T&FN:** *Do you have any special technique for coping with pressure?*

**Jenner:** No, I really don't. But I think about the competition a tremendous amount. I really try to concentrate when I'm out there. I figured 80% of the performance was going to have to be mental and 20% physical.

**T&FN:** *How serious was your reaction to Roberts?*

**Jenner:** Pretty serious. When it was over I thought, here is Dave Roberts, favored to win, world record holder, sort of the same shoes I'm in, and something he couldn't control, rain, caused him to get the bronze medal. It really scared me.

**T&FN:** *What did you do?*

**Jenner:** I'm sitting on the balcony of the Village, overlooking the Stadium, and thinking that right now, inside the Stadium, Roberts has lost. I'm feeling the pressure on myself. More and more. The US wasn't doing well and a lot of people were saying all the big guns were dying and

I felt like I not only had to carry myself but I had to carry the whole US.

Then Pete Shmook comes by, hits me on the back and says, "Bruce, you've got to carry us now."

That's not what I wanted to hear! My knees started buckling. I went across the street to the hotel where Chrystie was staying and talked it out, telling her how I felt. That really helped.

**T&FN:** *Did you lose any sleep over it?*

**Jenner:** I was surprised, I slept much better during the whole Olympics than I thought I would.

**T&FN:** *Why was that?*

**Jenner:** I think it was because I had a lot of confidence. I knew I was in the best shape of my life. When I ran that 47.5 quarter in the relay leg a week or two before I knew I was ready. If anybody was going to beat me they would have to score a tremendous total. At that point I really didn't see anyone doing that besides Avilov, maybe, if he went crazy.

**T&FN:** *What do you figure are your strong points as an athlete? Not by event, but the basic elements of an athlete?*

**Jenner:** One thing, I think the reason I did well in the Games, I made a commitment to myself and I wasn't going to let anything stand in the way. Once I did that I made it my whole life. Like you say, I put all my eggs in one basket and just went after it.

**T&FN:** *This is your strength, to be able to do that, to carry it out?*

**Jenner:** Yes. When I actually got to

## Jenner's 8618 Top Performance of 1976

Bruce Jenner went to Montreal with only one purpose—to win the Olympic decathlon. If he set a world record, then it would be all the better.

He won, alright, and produced the highest score in history in the process. His 8618 smashed Nikolay Avilov's auto-timed global standard of 8454, set in winning at Munich.

Bruce equaled his decathlon PRs in two events (LJ, PV) and set four new bests along the way. He got the shot, high jump and 400 the first day and, true to the Jenner style of fighting to the end, he finished with a 1500 best. That effort capped his record two days—the most outstanding performance of 1976.

Balloting for Performance of the Year:

1. Bruce Jenner's 8618	57
2. Edwin Moses' 47.64	49%
3. Miklos Nemeth's 310.4	16
4. Mac Wilkins' 232.6	15%
5. John Walker's 4:51.4	13
6. Alberto Juantorena's 1:43.5 (11); 7. Juantorena's 44.24 (7); 8. Dwight Stones's 7-7½ (4); 9. Waldemar Cierpinski's 2:09:55 (4); 10. Hasely Crawford's 10.06 (3); 11. tie, Jacek Wszola's Olympic win & Anders Garderud's 8:08.0 (2); 13. tie, Tadeusz Slusarski's Olympic win & Mac Wilkins' AAU win (1).	

the Games I had thought about it so much I knew exactly what I wanted to do. It was almost like the dream I had had for such a long time. I just went there and went through the motions over and over and over again. And when I really got there—just went.

Sometimes I'd sit back and laugh a little because it seemed—I can't say, easy—it seemed like I wasn't under control. Everything was just happening without me really being able to control all that.

**T&FN:** *How do you rate your natural abilities?*

**Jenner:** I don't consider myself a natural athlete at all. Better than most, perhaps, but I really consider myself a hard worker, more than I do a real natural athlete, say like Craig Brigham. I think the reason I could do as well as I did was that I just trained harder. And I was stubborn and I just wanted to work on every part of it.

**T&FN:** *Was there more to it than that?*

**Jenner:** I'd set goals for myself and try and meet them. I'd tell myself, next year is right around the corner, so make this the hardest workout, the best workout of your life. After the 1975 record against the Russians I said to myself, "Here you are, in the best shape of your life, with a world record. Now you can start training for next year."

**T&FN:** *How long could you keep this up, this constantly improving, if you had the motivation and the opportunity?*

**Jenner:** I think I could definitely go on another four years. The improvements definitely would come in the strength aspect of it.

**T&FN:** *What kind of score would be possible by 1980?*

**Jenner:** When I look at it realistically, if I could train four more years I think 9000 points would be quite possible. If you think of my score as hand-timed it's about 8710. That's just 290 points shy of 9000 and that's just 29 points per event. That's just a tenth in the 100, six inches in the long jump. There's not that major a difference.

**T&FN:** *Do you feel that in the Olympics you had one of those top hands where everything you did went right? One of those once-in-a-lifetime scores?*

**Jenner:** Not really. I don't think I was lucky getting all those personal bests. I heard a saying once, "The harder I train, the luckier I get." That's sort of what happened. You know, I listed all my expected marks, in a *Sports Illustrated* story, and I hit about every one right on the button.

**T&FN:** *Everything went as planned then?*

**Jenner:** Yes. I only wish I had started my kick in the 1500 a quarter-lap sooner. I would have had a chance to catch Litvinyenko and get pretty close to 4:10. But, who cares. 8618. I'll take it. In fact, that's the name of the corporation Chrystie and I started. 8618 Incorporated. □