

An Olympian's Oral History

JACK DAVIS

1952 Olympic Games – Helsinki
- 110-meter Hurdle -
Silver Medal

1956 Olympic Games – Melbourne
- 110-meter Hurdle -
Silver Medal



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Q: Tell me about your childhood.

A: I was born in Texas, in a small town south of Amarillo, Texas. At the age of six things got pretty tough in the small farming community where we lived, and my family decided to move to California. It was 1936 and the country was coming out of the depths of a large depression. My mother and father threw what possessions we had into the car and headed for the great California Valley with me, their only child. We ended up in the city of Modesto, where my father obtained a job working in a raisin drying plant. I had never seen as much water as I saw in the irrigation canals in which I later learned to swim. I started school in California at the age of six, and then the family moved from Modesto to Porterville, and then Sebastopol to Santa Rosa. My father then went to work for Purity grocery stores as a trouble-shooter manager. As a result, we moved to various cities in Northern California. In the first six years of my education I went to 13 separate schools, and somewhere along the line I didn't learn to spell. I did learn to get along with new people, however. We finally moved to Sacramento, and World War II started. My mother and father both went to work in the defense industries. Father was transferred to Indio, California, and mother went to work in Glendale, California, for one of the aircraft firms there. We then moved to Glendale. I think that the most impressive memories which I have about my life are from the love and care of my parents. They did not have very much money, but were fairly well educated for people in that time period. My mother played the piano and had what would be the equivalent of two years of college, and my father had what would be the equivalent of one year of college. During my junior high years, I spent a large amount of time at the Glendale YMCA.

Q: What techniques did you use to get to know the new children?

A: I was fortunate in that I was always as big as anybody else. Consequently, there usually wasn't anybody that was going to bully me around. I was always just very, very friendly, learned to smile, and be happy. I still do the same today. If I am traveling in an airplane, I have no problem at all talking to the person next to me. I am grateful to those childhood experiences for that. I went to the second grade and fifth grade in Lakeport. My mother was a checker, and at that time had to memorize all the prices. My father was the store manager. The store was down near the lake, which has about 75 miles of shorelines. I played on the waterfront while they were working. I loved to fish with a buddy and to build old boats, and I always had something floating in the water. I developed a real interest in doing things with my hands. For example, I liked to take bicycles apart, and paint them, and put them back together. It is one of those things that carried over in my life. During that childhood I always had a dog, probably because I was a little bit lonely. Everybody had brothers and sisters, and I never got one.

Q: Did your parents have time for any sports?

A: My father was only about 5'9" and very frail. My mother was 5'1" and not real heavy but always weighed more than my dad. They were both smaller, much smaller.

Q: From where did you get your height?

A: My mother's brothers were tall and my father's brothers were big. My father used to say that

he was the runt of the family. As my career in athletics developed, my father became very astute at analyzing my skills.

Q: Did you notice that you could run faster than other children?

A: I really didn't become an athlete until I was in high school. At that point, I realized that if I was going to go to college I had better get a scholarship. That is when I really began to be into athletics.

Q: Do you remember having any realization, when you were younger, that your body was skilled?

A: In junior high school I hung around the Y all the time because my mother worked all day. I played basketball there. I swam there. I was always as good as anybody else in those things. The YMCA in Glendale was run by Bob Magnuson and Homer Gould, who were both fine men and dedicated to the Y. The YMCA was designed for a kid like me because my parents both worked. I do remember meeting a little boy at the Y who became a pretty good basketball player. We were playing in the swimming pool, and it was always free play in the pool, and he would drop under the water, get a mouth full of water, and shoot out of the water and spit it at me through a hole in his teeth. He really made me mad. I can remember telling Dean that I didn't like that and not to do it anymore in a very firm way. We, of course, became very good friends, as little boys will do. We were like fish in the water and on the diving board. I didn't take a swimming or diving lesson anywhere. I can remember that I could do a full flip without any trouble, and now I couldn't do a flip for all the tea in China. My repertoire of dives was a full flip, a half gainer, a jackknife and a handstand off the end of the board. We also played basketball and we swam. The programs were busy all summer.

Q: Did the YMCA have clubs?

A: As I grew older, I became a YMCA camper, and then became a leader and worked at the camp on Catalina Island during my sophomore year in high school.

Q: Tell me about the club structure.

A: The club structure at the Y was based on age and size. I had to play on a basketball team which was the B team, because I wasn't as big as the big boys, but I was bigger than the C's, and there was a D team as well. There were organized basketball practices, the teams had uniforms, and we traveled to places in California.

Q: Did the YMCA pay for all the activities?

A: Yes. We used to travel in a truck with a canvas top and seats along the side. We would go to the North Hollywood-Monrovia YMCA, and one of our long trips was to San Diego. The Y had an asphalt playing field where we could play softball and handball against the old concrete wall that they had there. The rules had to be changed to fit the facility. If you hit the wall so high, it was two bases. Further up, it was three bases, and a home run was way up on the wall. In handball, we hit it against the big concrete wall which had been marked off. We would also play third-man-out or three-man-out, and you'd end up in a playoff of two, and you'd play four again. The YMCA did have organized gym class, as far as the old-time barbells, and these wonderful mats where we did tumbling and handstand. It was during the war years that I had so much fun at the Y. There was a Y that had a Curry's ice cream store. I'd

play there a lot in the evenings and we would always go to Curry's and get an ice cream cone, or even a chocolate sundae.

Q: Were there any Japanese or Hispanic students at your high school?

A: In the area where I lived, which was down across the railroad tracks, there were Hispanics that lived there. We called it Harlem Tutorville, and we had two kinds of interesting examples. One example was Tingo, who was obviously a gang leader. He was a long-haired, kind of the gang type. There was also Rudy Regalado, who went on to Glendale Hoover and played baseball. He became a professional baseball player after attending USC with me as a fraternity brother and lives in San Diego.

Q: Did you have any formal physical education instruction in high school?

A: We had a very fine coach by the name of Kenny Staub. His brother's name was Merle. Kenny and Merle were both the coaches at Toll High School. We did have formal physical education and formal after-school sports, and they were very, very good. Later on, I worked a summer in the Staub's private boy's camp up by Mt. Gorgonio.

Q: Tell me about the instruction.

A: I remember Kenny Staub doing something which has stuck with me all of my life. He would line the P.E. class up, as he wanted everybody standing up straight. He would occasionally take all of the boys over to the wall and stand them up so that they would touch their back all the way up. I can remember the day he tried to teach us how to walk heel, rim, toe, heel, rim, toe. To me, those are important things which are missing in today's high schools. He was one of the original old P.E. kind of guys. We also played organized basketball, touch football, and we had organized track and field. We didn't have a gym. At the assembly we received junior high school letters, and I probably still have my "T" right now from Toll Junior High School. I became student body president at Toll and I knew everybody.

Q: How were you selected for teams?

A: The teams were put together by Kenny Staub, who knew how to make the teams equal. We were assigned to be in either a purple team or a gold team because those were the school colors. He even teamed up with captains. I can remember playing on one of the basketball teams, on asphalt, with two courts at each end. I wasn't a great basketball player, but I was fair. We had a kid on that team by the name of Don Aiken, who was a tall, skinny kid, not a very tough athletic-type. We blew them off the court because I could rebound and he could shoot. He could hit from anywhere, and I was, by that day, as big as the other kids, and I could rebound. I remember winning the basketball championship in the ninth grade.

Q: Tell me about your first track experience.

A: We didn't have a very good track, so they would just chalk-out straight lines on an oval dirt. I can remember high jumping quite well there. I don't remember running any faster than anybody else, or anything else, but I remember winning the high jump. I know they didn't have hurdles.

Q: In junior high, were you aware that you were athletically skilled?

A: I was becoming a tall, thin, lanky boy and there were a lot of boys that were shorter, more developed, more coordinated than I. I was about six feet when I hit high school, and I grew another 3 inches.

Q: Tell me about high school.

A: I attended Glendale Hoover, a high school, at that time, of about 2,000 students, located in one of the nicer parts of Glendale. So, its student body is made up of a real ecostructure that's different than most high schools. It spanned two complete economic areas of the city. There was good student participation in everything. As a sophomore, I was six feet tall, 170 pounds, and I did make the football team. I got to play a few games and I did letter. I think someone became injured, and that's why I was able to play more. I was one of the two sophomores that lettered that year because of someone being injured. After football, I was in a P.E. class, and Victory Francy, the most influential man in my athletic career, had tryouts for all of the sophomores during his classes. He was from the old school. He stood up straight, wore short hair, ran a very strict ship. He had tryouts for the 180 hurdles and I walked away with it. He then suggested that I go out for the track team. I went out for track and discovered that I could broad jump, and that I could run 180 yards or 200 yards as well as anybody in my class. We had wonderful track teams at that time. We had A's, B's and C's. I've never been in a program that's as organized as that program was. We had good uniforms and a good track because Victor Francy made sure everything was good. During my sophomore year I broad jumped and started running the hurdles because you don't really jump right into a set of hurdles and become great. But Vic Francy really worked with me and he asked me if I intended to go to college. When I replied in the affirmative, he suggested that I try for an athletic scholarship. I started thinking about that, as my parents couldn't afford to send me to one of those kinds of colleges. Vic had gone to USC.

Q: By the time you are a sophomore in high school, you are aiming for a track scholarship to USC?

A: Yes, absolutely. As a sophomore in high school I broad jumped about 21'8", a pretty good distance at that time. I also began running the low hurdles, and, by the end of that year, I was doing well. The highs I always had to work on. I became a real low hurdler, 220, and a real broad jumper. By my junior year in high school, I won the CIF championship in the lows and our relay team won the mile. By the time I finished high school I was second in the state meet in the broad jump at 24'2". I held the national high school record in the 180 low hurdles and in the 110-yard high hurdles. We won the state meet.

Q: Did you have any heroes or role models on which you focused?

A: I was quite aware of the '48 Olympics. Of course, Mel was running, and we all loved Mel. He was kind of our hero. I was well aware of the '48 Games because I am just a year behind Bob Mathias in age. I could do a lot of events. When you can run the highs and the lows, broad jump, and high jump, you become interested in the multievent sports. In addition, USC Coach Cromwell began inviting me to track meets. Even Ducky Drake, over at UCLA, would send me tickets. By then my destiny was pretty well formed. I was going to be an athlete, and, of course, I'd always play football.

Q: Were you thinking that maybe you would possibly go to college on a football scholarship?

A: I could have gone on a football scholarship, but I just took the track scholarship. I was recruited in football, although I was still pretty light at that time. I graduated from high school weighing 180 pounds.

Q: Did you have any thoughts of trying to do decathlon or any other weight events?

A: Yes. The reason that I did not go into the decathlon is because I could win the high hurdles and the low hurdles. I could always broad jump further, run the 400 meters, the mile and all the running events better than the normal decathlete because I was a little lighter. The decathlon was weighted pretty heavily toward the shot put, discus and javelin. However, with my weight at that time, it was hard for me, who threw the shot 36 feet when the world record is 60 feet, to get the needed points. It is still badly weighted because the decathlon is set up to favor the weight people. I could have done well in decathlon, because when I was in college, we used to go to Europe in the summer and Mathias would be on the same team. We would go over, see what the best trophy was, and then we'd compete for it.

Q: What was the most important meet for you in high school?

A: The Coliseum Relays had a high school set of high hurdles, and I competed in that. I also competed in the state finals at Long Beach in my junior year.

Q: Describe your first competition experience in the Coliseum.

A: I was in awe of getting to run in the Coliseum on a cinder track, which I'd never seen. Everybody had a different sweat suit. Of course, we were competing against the big L.A. schools like Jordan, Jefferson and Lincoln, and here we were a little school out of Glendale. We were really excited because we won the state championship. I got second in the broad jump and I was first in the high hurdles and the low hurdles, anchored the quarter mile relay team, the mile relay team, and that was all the points we obtained. I remember McClackey High School out of Sacramento. I had to beat them on the anchor in the mile relay. I arrived at the tying position and had to hold on against this big sprinter for 220 yards. I could run it because I ran the low hurdles. I remember coming off the turn and beating this guy. That won the state championship for us.

Q: Did you have starting blocks?

A: At that time we had starting blocks that Vic Francy had made. Later on, a guy named Arnett, an Inglewood High School coach, came out with a set of starting blocks. We used Arnett blocks from then on. I have a pair of Arnett blocks somewhere in storage today. They were cast aluminum blocks. The ones Vic made were from extruded aluminum bar with wooden pedals adjusted with a wing nut that tightened on each side. He used to make them in the summer. We practiced with aluminum batons, painted purple and white, our colors.

Q: How did you practice the baton exchange?

A: Everyday we had baton practice, receiving and running, as part of the work out. You can't practice the baton exchange at half speed. You have to practice at full speed. Vic had this theory that when we were at our age, the best way to pass the baton was to receive it on our hip. We received the baton on our hip, slapped the leg, and pushed the baton up. Of course, later on in college, we passed it with the arm back. You would go out 10 strides, the hand goes down, you never look back, the person behind comes up, slaps your leg, and slides the baton up. Vic insisted on a firm pass. We had some awfully good high school sprinters.

Q: In the relay, when did you accelerate?

A: In the quarter-mile relay you are running 110 yards, which is all out. We, therefore, needed a good solid pass. In the mile relay, which is 220, I think there is a period when you have to kick back a little bit, not much, just a little bit.

Q: How did you work on your starts?

A: We practiced exploding out of the block. You might take five or six starts with a gun, run 25 yards, then you would finish. Maybe you'd go 25 yards one day, 50 yards the next, and then 75. We always had a manager and a clock so we could see what we were doing at that distance. Vic started that drill and it held with me all my life. The cutting edge of real training was the repeats. We didn't call them repeats, but that's what we were doing. That is how we became very strong. We had one of the five best sprinters in the state at our high school, Johnny Bradley, who won the state championship. For a small school we had very successful teams; it was the result of good coaching. Because of that good coaching that I received, I was never really challenged in the 220-yard low hurdles. This was during the time when the high school results came out in the newspaper. I can remember clipping the results on a Saturday morning. When we went into a meet, I knew the times of my competitors. We would also know the track conditions, such as where the wind was and the speed of the surface.

Q: Were your parents supportive?

A: I didn't ever run in a high school meet in which my parents were not present. They were never on the field, they were never obvious in the stand, but they were always there. They didn't even know Vic Francy very well. Sometimes during practice, on a Thursday, I would look up and there would be this lone figure, way up on the hill, just watching. It would be my dad.

Q: You were student body president in high school. Did you receive the confidence from your sports training?

A: I was very disciplined because I worked out every day for both football and track. Football would end and we would begin track. Track competition started during the Easter week when we ran the Easter relays.

Q: Was there any tension between track and football?

A: Track was the important sport then. I was the best known athlete in the city because I was a state track champion.

Q: How did you structure your classes in high school so that you would be eligible for college?

A: I put together the simplest college entrance schedule as I could, so that I would not spend a lot of time studying. I took foreign language for two years, geometry and other mathematics classes, and I maintained a B average. I also worked at the YMCA camp and, in my senior year, a USC alumni, who owned a Coca-Cola Distributing Company in Glendale, offered me a job. I worked very hard that year and made money.

Q: When did you talk to your parents about going to college?

A: They started getting interested when I became interested. They realized that I had an opportunity to go to a university where other people would be paying what at that time seemed like enormous tuition. For some reason they always believed that I would go to college. I did not want to go to junior college. Stanford started recruiting me, and then UCLA and Cal. Those were the only schools which I ever considered. I took the SATs and was accepted into all four of the California schools. I also had dreams of becoming a world-class athlete, and those four schools had excellent track programs. I had already set all of the high school interscholastic records in Southern California, so I realized that I should not go up north to the unfamiliar cold weather.

Q: Why did you not want to join Bob Mathias at Stanford?

A: They had not turned out a sprinter who had not become injured in years. The cold school is not conducive to keeping muscles warm. In addition, my coach, Vic, was always throwing in the barbs such as, "If you go up to Berkeley, you'll have to run in the fog all of the time."

Q: Tell me about your student body president activities.

A: I had to dress a little bit preppy. I introduced the speaker of the day and spent a lot of time organizing activities. As a result, at our first three class reunions, I was called upon to organize the activities.

Q: When did you first get your invitation to attend USC?

A: There were a lot of feelers, but I did not know where I was going when I graduated from high school.

Q: Were you a little nervous about that?

A: I knew I would go somewhere. I remember getting a post card from Stanford and a little form letter from USC. I talked to Jess Hill over at USC and decided that he was my kind of guy. USC was not as impressive as Berkeley, from an academic point of view. Dean Cromwell was still hanging around.

Q: When did you make the decision?

A: About three or four weeks into the summer I was invited by the Los Angeles Athletic Club to participate in the AAU finals in St. Louis. I was not very competitive, as the hurdles were three inches higher at the college level than they were in high school.

Q: Was this your first connection with the L.A. Athletic Club?

A: Several people at LAAC were involved with high school track, so I had known many of them. The LAAC officials usually invited a high school athlete to compete. I competed in the 200-yard lows and I placed second in the heats because I had been used to running 180 yards. I did not get to the finals.

During that summer I worked at the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, which was a lot of fun.

Q: Tell me about your arrival at USC.

A: By the time I arrived there, the fraternities were already starting to recruit me, and I had already had my first six beers. We were pre-registered for classes and thought we were big time freshman. I eventually ended up with Kappa Sigma, which already had many athletes as members. I was also given a job in campus maintenance for \$78.00 per month. As a freshman, and taking the usual freshman classes, I thought I really knew the world. By spring I started working out in track and field, although I really wasn't good enough to run the indoor circuit, which included New York Melrose Games, New York AC, Boston, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Chicago Tribune* meets. In addition, I was not known nationally, and, therefore, Eastern officials were not willing to pay my expenses for me to compete. I began attending football games, basketball games, going out with girls, and damned near flunked out of school. I obtained the only two D's of my educational career that semester, and I was placed on probation the next quarter, but it did not exclude me from athletics. As soon as I started training again, and had to organize my life, my grades went up.

Q: What did you select as a major?

A: I graduated in education with a bachelor's degree and later a master's degree. I really did not think that I had time for any other major.

Q: Tell me about your international experience with the AAU.

A: At Christmas time I would work for the post office and then save that \$300 until after the AAU meets. I would then qualify for the European team, and the AAU would pick up my travel bill, and I would head for Europe with a team of six or seven people. I would run all summer in Europe in many events.

Q: In 1951 you have to be focusing on the '52 Games?

A: I started talking about the Games in '49. By then, I ran all year-round. I would come back from the European circuit, have preregistered in class, go to school, take off about two months, and then start training for the winter circuit. I would commute back and forth on a lighter plane that had propellers on it, to the Eastern winter circuit. I would return and run the summer circuit in California. It was a great way to get into physical condition.

Q: Describe the cultural experience of your first track trip to Europe.

A: The first big trip was to the British Isles. We did not see any sunlight for the first few days in Britain. We ran in the old Ranger Stadium, which was a soccer stadium. All of the fans stood up or leaned against the rail to watch the meet. It was an old, tiered stadium that had grass growing on it. The spectators had a rail to lean against and a lower rail to put their feet on. The track itself was beautiful, all grass. All of the races were held on grass. We would be surprised when we went into the locker rooms because they usually had one shower that barely dripped water. We usually stayed in old hotels near the train station when we toured to various towns throughout Britain. In addition, we ran in the famous White City Stadium. When we were traveling by bus we'd stop and have lunch and get to meet the local people and see many churches. After meets, the local town council would put on a banquet for us. We

visited Windsor Castle and we visited several large country homes. There were many beautiful gardens to see and many town dignitaries to meet.

Q: How did you perform in the rain?

A: The rain was the reason that many of the tracks were made of grass. They also had heavy, heavy cinder tracks, which were just awful for a hurdler of my size and weight because I would dig into them. I weighed 190 pounds, at 6'3", and after I had run a set of hurdles, it looked as if a field had been plowed.

Q: How did you like Paris?

A: At that time I found Paris very hostile, although we had a lot of fun as young men. We took silk stockings for bartering or exchange. You can barter for a lot of things with a pair of silk stockings. The crowds were good because track and field is popular there and Americans were very welcome.

Q: Describe your preparation for the 1952 Olympic Games.

A: There were two separate programs for me. For one, I was in college, and the second one, I was in the Navy. In the national NCAA championships, I entered the 200 meters on a dare. I won my first heat, my second heat, and in the finals I drew lane one on the curve at Berkeley. Lane one gave me a real advantage, and I went like gangbusters out of the box. I came off the second curve in front. I was nipped at the tape by the eventual Olympic champion Stanfield. Four athletes from USC, Parry O'Brien, Sim Iness, Art Bernard and I made the U.S. Olympic team. Because there was no 220 low hurdle event, I ran the 110 highs in the Olympic trials.

Q: How did you work out for the Olympics?

A: I warmed up with wind sprints. They are the real essence of the warm up. In the first lap of wind sprints, you don't hit it as hard as your second lap, your third lap, and your fourth lap. By the time you have done four laps, walking the turns, sprinting the straightaways, you are warm and ready to work out. I'd go over and take starts with the sprinters. They probably consisted of five starts with a gun and a watch. After that, I would work out at top speed because when you try to work out at a slower speed, the timing would be altogether different. I would also do a series of hurdle snaps. This was the workout for middle of the week before a major event. It was usually completed on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The other days were spent loosening up.

Q: Is the hurdle technique still the same today?

A: It is much the same. I developed a technique, which was a little different than I see today. I dropped my head over the top of the hurdle, or on my leg, because I felt very strongly that my head pulled me into the hurdles. I could knock a dime off a hurdle because of the "pull down."

Q: Did you use any visual imagery?

A: We had a lot of people at SC that were studying those types of things. I remember for a time this particular doctor set up a hurdle with a sheet behind it with checkers. It was stepped off both ways, so

you could see it exactly. I would run that hurdle, and he would photograph it from the side.

Q: Was this early biomechanics?

A: Yes, by slow-motion camera.

Q: Where were the Olympic trials held?

A: The trials were held in the Coliseum in '52. It was one of the hardest days of my life. That particular year there was Dixon from UCLA, Dillard from Baltimore, Davis from USC, Billy Anderson from Compton College, Barnard from USC, and Don Hildreth from Arizona State. Because I had beaten each of them during the year, I was heavily favored. Craig Dixon was so confident that he would make the team, that he organized his honeymoon to be in Finland. I usually talked to the other competitors as I was getting set up. I spoke to Harrison Dillard, and he did not answer me. He would not even look at me. Nobody was friendly, and I thought, "My, this is a serious operation, too." I got down on the line in the final race and three people broke, one of them being me. I had a false start. I had to hold and got off the blocks dead last. By the second hurdle, I was already coming on strong. About the third or the fourth hurdle, Billy Anderson had already had hit one, about the sixth or seventh hurdle, Dixon had looked over and hit one, and I'm still hanging in there, and by about the ninth hurdle, I looked around and nobody was with me. I could have quit so easily, I just didn't have a chance, but because it was the Olympic trials, I hung in there. Dillard, Bernard and I made the team. Some of the greatest hurdlers did not make the team. As soon as the Olympic trials were over, we went to Princeton, New Jersey and trained for about two weeks.

Q: Who was the Olympic coach at that time?

A: Brutus Hamilton. Arriving in Helsinki in the middle of the night was quite amazing. We flew over the northern route and arrived at midnight. We were assigned quarters that were built to be apartments. The Finns were so proud of their facilities. It was also the first Olympic Games in which the Soviets were to compete.

Q: How did you fit on the beds?

A: We did not fit really well. There were four guys in my room and one of them was Parry O'Brien, a huge shot-putter. Sim Iness, the discus thrower, and Cy Young, the big javelin thrower from UCLA, were also in the room. Each of us was over 6'3". It was fun traveling around because we were all so tall.

Q: Describe the Opening Ceremonies.

A: The day before the Opening Ceremonies we went out to the field and lined up by height. The tallest man of the American team was Clyde Lovellette; the basketball player from Kansas and the shortest man of the team was Dr. Sammy Lee. I was in the second row. We received a fantastic ovation when we entered the stadium on opening day. Interestingly, Clyde Lovellette and Sammy Lee both received gold medals.

Q: Do you remember the scoreboard with Paavo Nurmi's name on it?

A: Yes. I also remember the Finnish band playing the “Star Spangled Banner.” I looked over and saw these large strong athletes with tears running down their faces when the national anthem was played. It was a moving sight. I want to tell you a story about the competitions. On the first day of the competition, the shot put was scheduled. O’Brien, who was always a maverick, had a gray USC sweatshirt that he wore. He claimed that it was very lucky, so he wore it under his Olympic uniform. Wearing it he set a new Olympic record. He suggested that Sim Iness should wear it for luck in the discus event. Sim wore it, and by then, it was really stretched large. Sim set the Olympic record. Cy said that he would wear the sweatshirt, even if it did read “USC” and he was from UCLA. He won the javelin. By this time I was hooked, no one could keep me from wearing that sweatshirt in the hurdle event. As can be imagined, the sweatshirt was rather smelly and dirty by that time. It did not work as well for me, as I won the silver medal in it.

Q: Tell me about your event. You had the same time as Harrison Dillard. How was that decided then? Was it a new Olympic record?

A: We jointly held the Olympic record. I ran out of lane two, Harrison ran down the middle, and I still think that I won that one. It is very difficult when you have judges who are sitting on a stair step up each side of the track, to see the inside lanes well. The 10,000-meter race had just finished, so for a big guy like me to run on the track was like running in a sand pile. Harrison was short and had blazing speed, but I should have been ahead of him. That was the last time Harrison Dillard ever beat me. The next time I ran against him was on the indoor circuit in the 60-meter highs, we broke the 60-meter world record. Later, in Bakersfield, I broke the world’s record in the 110-meter high hurdle. That’s how I felt about losing that one.

Q: How did you discover the results?

A: They were placed on the scoreboard. Again, it was another real good life experience. I realized that I could not call every shot. There are some things which were out of my control.

Q: Do you remember standing on the victory podium?

A: I am sure everyone does. It was particularly moving, as the three flags were all American.

Q: What did you do after your event was finished?

A: It was very interesting. I met a very neat woman whose mother owned a restaurant in Helsinki. The restaurant, which was on an island, was reached by boat. This young woman, who attended school in England and spoke perfect English, invited me to their summer cottage. I went out there with some of her friends. We spent three days sailing in the bay. After I returned home, we corresponded and met at different places. I had a close relationship with her for the next eight or nine years. Another memorable event in Finland was the Finnish baths. The Finnish coaches loved the steam baths. There were women taking care of them.

Q: How did you feel about that?

A: The women were large peasant women that you would see in Russia, or anywhere else. I had another interesting experience, which was the Russians sending their Bolshoi ballet group to Helsinki to perform

during the Games. I met a Russian woman hurdler who was working out on the track, and she asked me if I would like to go to the ballet, so I went, and it was another wonderful experience.

Q: Did you have the opportunity to visit other parts of Finland?

A: I ran a couple of races up near Lapland, and from there went to the British Isles. From there I went to Germany and ended up spending a few months competing in Europe. Even though it was a lot of fun, competing does not allow for a great amount of sightseeing. I was still competing hard.

Q: When you returned to California, was there a large welcome for you?

A: There were many receptions in Los Angeles for the returning Olympic teams. San Francisco had a welcoming parade which was really, really fun. I took the football season off when I returned to college. I started analyzing the fact that a professional football player, at that time, made \$6,000 a year. If you were real good, you might make \$10,000. I decided that was not worth the risk of becoming injured. I did prove to myself that I could still make the team. I could still make anybody's football team and that was important to me. I had learned to study and became a success academically. I spent, like, my junior and senior year as president of the fraternity house as well. That was a fantastic experience because I learned leadership skills in that position. In particular, I learned how to keep a group, in my case, a group of 75 men, out of trouble. I also learned basic things about dressing, such as wearing my tie correctly. I graduated in 1953 and entered the Navy. We were having a war in Korea and I had joined the Navy ROTC. I was an ensign in the Navy and, because I was drafted, I thought things were going to be good for me. I believed that I would be given super assignments. All of the guys who wanted to make a career out of the service signed up for battleships and destroyers. I signed up for shore duty. I was ordered to 32nd Street, San Diego. Upon my arrival, I was informed that gunnery school started the next day. In addition, I was told that I was assigned to the 3rd Marines, Korea, as a forward-gun fire spotter. I went over, fought for my country in six months of pretty rough action, and was scared to death. I was able to spend R and R in Japan every 90 days. I was assigned to the Navy training center in San Diego, where there was a training program being assembled for the '56 Games. I ran the winter circuit on the East Coast, and the Navy sent me to Annapolis where I was given the opportunity to train for the indoor circuit and the Pan Am Games. I also recruited for the Navy from the various Ivy League colleges. I spent a lot of time at Yale, at the Ray Tompkins House, the athletic dorm. I went to the Pan American Games in Mexico City and was asked to do a tour of South America with the U.S. Information Office. I went from Mexico City through Central America hitting most of the spots to Bogota, Columbia. I traveled through Peru and Chili and Brazil where I became ill. In addition, I spent a few days on the Amazon River, saw some villages in British Guiana and the east coast of Jamaica.

Q: What were your responsibilities on those trips?

A: I demonstrated warm ups and other exercises through which I would lead groups of children. I also knocked dimes off hurdles. Every week I would write a report about the people I met. I did the same, later in Africa, where I spent almost a year. By the time I completed one of these trips I was pretty thin. When I returned from the Central American trip I trained for the Melbourne Games.

Q: Where were the trials?

A: The trials for Melbourne were also at the Coliseum. That was an easier team for me to make.

Q: Describe the Opening Ceremonies in Melbourne. Were they as impressive as the Helsinki Games?

A: The Opening Ceremonies were impressive but not as impressive as the first one.

Q: With whom did you room?

A: I roomed with Tom Courtney, out of Fordham, a half-miler. I drew the outside lane. The photographs show that I should have been awarded the gold medal for that race.

Q: How did you feel about this second experience of coming in an unexpected second?

A: It really upset me. I had not lost to this guy all year, and didn't lose again to him. That was the only time he ever beat me, and he didn't beat me then. I think I had a mental block because I knew I was going to draw a bad lane again. It is difficult to gauge from the outside lane where you are in relation to other runners.

Q: Was there any thought of a protest? Was there much discussion in the newspaper about the result?

A: There was quite a lot. The call was close enough that I could not complain unless I had a photograph, which did not come out until later. I did have a wonderful time there. Being that I was more mature, I attended more events and really appreciated the Games. The Australian people were so friendly. I met an Australian, whose name was Johnny Walker, at the airport. He invited me to visit his sheep station in the outback after the Games. It was pretty amazing to travel so far over vast desert. There were many dirt roads and a few village huts which could be seen from the aircraft. The soil was high desert red. We landed and went to his family house, and as the sun went down, we drank squash - vodka and concentrated orange juice and gin. He had wanted to take me on a kangaroo shoot but I declined. He lived a classic existence in the middle of the desert. His parents were very cultured. Their home was beautifully furnished with a piano and other nice things. The food was a little different as we ate lots of mutton and veggies.

Q: Did you go on any tours in Australia?

A: Yes, I went to Bendigo and ran on grass there. I ran the best race of my life. I also traveled a little with Jack Kramer, who was always the toast of the town. We had one continuous party as we traveled across the country. After the '56 Games, I went to Africa for the State Department. Every place that I went, I was met at the airport by somebody from the consulate or the State Department. All arrangements were made. After Africa, I ran my last race in the original Greek Coliseum. I came back and have been working ever since. After my first job at Texaco, I worked for ABC Television for 12 years as an account executive. I left because the headquarters were moving to New York, and I wanted to remain in California and develop some ideas of my own. I decided to get into development by building a golf course in San Diego County. I played it and sold it. Next, I built a marina in the South Bay, called Coronado Caves. I stayed with recreational projects and built Park City, Utah next. My latest project is the Olympic Training Center here in San Diego County.

Q: Tell me the entire story about this site.

A: I have to say that the idea was not mine. It did not originate with me. It originated with Gloria McCall, a councilwoman here in town, Ernie Hahn and Terry Brown. Those are three of our real outstanding citizens. Ernie Hahn is a developer that everybody knows, and Terry Brown owns the Atlas Hotels. They are the real guiding light. Our first big coup was obtaining a donation of 154 acres of land given to us by Eastlake Communities, owned, partially, by Ron Lane, an old SC baseball player, and very successful developer. The area is one of the fastest, nicest growing areas in San Diego County. We next confronted the problem of working our way through the U.S. Olympic Committee. They're the most frustrating, inept body I have ever known. They are currently in the best shape they have ever been in. Until recently, they had no development plan. We obtained the appropriate agreements with them. We had to agree not to go for their sponsors, even though we were building the facility for them. We agreed to build it for them and then give it to them to run. I traveled all over the world researching various training sites before we started designing this site. Naturally, we will have a track and field facility. Archery and bicycling will be provided for, as well. In addition to the training facilities, we plan to build a thousand-room athletic hotel. It will not be a dorm, but a group of executive suites. We have also planned for a world-class rowing, canoeing and kayaking center. Field hockey will be played on a million and a half dollar field that has special artificial turf, with sand in it, that must be watered to a certain temperature. We are building a gym for team handball. There will also be a sports medicine center that is 48,000 square feet and has a weight room that's almost that same size. All are connected to the village. We have a guest center that is almost 100,000 square feet, with a big map of the United States on the floor, in terra cotta, with the names of each athlete who medaled in the Olympic Games, by state, engraved on it. There will also be guest centers and fast food stands. Visitors will arrive by electric bus at the visitor's center.

Q: Have you provided for gymnastics?

A: We have not planned for gymnastics or the water sports in the first phase. We will have baseball and soccer, though. We aim to be ready in '93.

Q: Do you have any words of wisdom for young children who may read this manuscript?

A: I think sport provides a very important learning experience. Through training, you learn self-discipline and time management. You learn a certain mental attitude because you can't ever win a race if you don't think you can. You might not be able to win it, but you've got to think you can. The same principle applies in business. I think the Olympic Movement is really well and healthy.

METHODOLOGY

Dr. Margaret Costa, of California State University, Long Beach, conducted this interview. The interview was recorded on audiocassette and then transcribed. The interview addresses the following major areas:

Family History

Date/place of birth; occupation of father/mother; siblings; family residence;

Education

Primary and secondary schools attended; college and post-collegiate education;

Sport-specific Biographical Data

Subject's introduction to sport—age, event and setting of first formal competition; coaches/trainers/ others who influenced athletic development; chronology of sports achievements; Olympic competition; post-Olympic involvement in sports;

General Biographical Data

Employment history; marital history; children; communities of residence; retirement;

General Observations

Reactions and reflections on Olympic experience; modernization of sport; attitudes on and involvement with the Olympic Movement; advice to youth and aspiring athletes.

Interview transcripts were edited and may include additional material based on subsequent conversations and/or subject's own editing.

The opinions and recollections expressed in this oral history are exclusively those of the Olympian interviewed. They do not necessarily reflect the positions, interpretations or policies of the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.