

BRIAN OLDFIELD

Jim Ryun, Randy Matson, Bob Seagren, Lee Evans: ITA started its career on a high note with the signing of four big world record holders. And the addition of super-talent Kip Keino a few months later seemingly filled out the cast of stars. Yet, through a tumultuous first season, the No. 1 performer was one of the "tesser-lights," Olympic shot putter Brian Oldfield.

Captivating crowds with his flashy garb (a variety of tight swimming trunks and flowered tops), eye-catching warmup tosses (underhand, overhand, two-hands, backwards, etc.) and surprising speed in trouncing female sprinters, the Brobdingnagian Oldfield was a clear stand-out. And he forged a competitive record to back up his ostentatious presence, becoming the first man to reach 70 feet indoors, raising the undercover standard three times, finally to 70-10½. Only once in 16 meets did he lose.

Those familiar with the Oldfield legend will recall that he was a so-so putter for Middle Tennessee State in the mid '60's. His 6-5 presence was first really felt on the scene when he was ranked 10th in the world for '69. He just as quickly disappeared before wowing the crowds with his now-familiar antics at the Olympic Trials in Eugene. He grabbed third spot on the team, eliminating world record holder Randy Matson and went on to capture sixth at Munich.

Now 28, Oldfield is recovering from an interesting summer which included such earthy pursuits as taking a fling in the Highland Games in Scotland. When interviewed in mid-December, he had just returned to his Chicago-area home after training at Western Kentucky for several weeks. Oldfield is an interviewer's dream—just turn him on and away he goes:

T&FN: You're well-known as a buffoon and a wildman, at least this is the impression left with most people. How close to the real you is this extroverted self?

Oldfield: Well, you see, I've got this party hat. I've got a party hat, and when I'm traveling—and I really love track—I put it on. You know, we're going here and there, bunch of guys saying, "hey-hey-hey," and it carries over, even into the competition. My training and stuff is pretty serious, and people who really know me know my serious side.

I tried to be serious but I never really got any press. People just used to report what I did. Then at Eugene, wow! People

by GARRY HILL

started asking questions, like, "What kind of person are you?" I answered the questions and I tried to be really sincere, but they just twisted everything. So I quit telling the press what I think, unless it is a group of people I trust. They'll print your bull, or they'll take something that is close to you or means something to you and turn that into bull. So I just don't tell them anything that means anything close to serious because they'll distort it.

You don't go around telling people how your wife makes love to you. Shot putting to me is that serious and I have many theories about it. But somewhere along the line that cigarette made everything I say not credible. So I just play it up the other way. I figure if they write bad press about me it's because I gave them some gooky stuff to write about it. But at least they're going to write about it, so it doesn't make any difference.

T&FN: What about the famous cigarettes? At one time you said that they had a good therapeutic effect, sort of a tranquilizer, or was it just a gimmick?

Oldfield: Yeah, it has a bit of a therapeutic effect all right. I quit smoking for two months this summer. I quit right after the Scottish Games in Santa Monica and continued until I got to Europe. I just couldn't hack it. I was a bundle of energy all the time. I found myself out at bars longer and later. I don't know if I was getting nose hits off other people's cigarettes or what. I just couldn't relax or settle down.

T&FN: I've never seen you smoking since you joined ITA. Did they tell you this would have a detrimental effect on the audience?

Oldfield: No, I just don't have the time. The way ITA is set up, you got to be there to take your throws. I don't really smoke in the middle of competition anyway.

I never blantly smoked out in the middle of things. At Eugene, I was finished with my qualifying and was watching the next flight. I went over with a bunch of the other guys and we were just sitting around. Richard Marks, a bunch of them. Hell, Jesse Stuart had a cigarette with me—we all smoked. But they got the picture of Oldfield. Some little wise-ass cameraman came around and thought that was really neat.

Click-click-click-click. It got on AP and they went crazy with it.

T&FN: Well, you have to admit it was sort of beneficial to your whole career.

Oldfield: Well, it made a personality out of me—which is good or bad.

T&FN: Do you have any regrets about leaving the amateur scene, other than previously voiced ones about not being able to go head-to-head with guys like Al Feuerbach?

Oldfield: The amateur scene I saw I never got much of. I never got any attention. That's what hurt me before the Olympics. The AAU had all this stuff going in Europe but we didn't get to go to any of the meets they promised. I threw the discus more than the shot and didn't get the experience I needed.

Last year, during the indoor season, I'd write to the promoters—maybe I didn't have enough experience, didn't get hold of them early enough—but I ended up spending money to go to these meets everybody else was ripping money off for. Everybody else was getting so much money under the table that there wasn't enough left to even bring me to the meet. So I pulled out.

T&FN: After you started throwing so well last spring, the rumors began to fly about the light shot.

Oldfield: I think that everybody that really knows me is making a big joke out of this. I'd never use a light shot. What brought this around was the LA meet. Some guy came up to me and gave me a 14- and a 15-pounder. I think he wanted me to endorse them. After that, I went throwing with Feuerbach. I threw about 74 with the 15 and about 78 with the 15. So Al told everybody how well I could throw with light shots.

Then, all of a sudden I start throwing well in competition. So everyone started joking around—but when things reach the press a lot of people just don't understand the joking. But anybody who knows would realize that I wouldn't use a light shot.

We had the shots weighed carefully. In fact, at one meet they wouldn't let DeBo [Fred DeBernardi] use his shot because it was exactly 16 lb. They wanted them all to be at least a fraction heavy to stop any rumors.

T&FN: It seems as if a lot of people are eager to chop ITA and discredit what they do.

Oldfield: They just like to print anything controversial. You know, if ITA wanted, they could make all the events look really good. Chop a couple of inches

