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Above and Beyond

When the International Track Association first pitched its professional tent two years ago, it aimed to lure cash customers with a blend of carnival and first-class track and field competition. Unfortunately, performances have been spotty, purses have been paltry, and the tour's personalities have shown little of the crowd-pulling pizzazz so important to commercial survival. The I.T.A. still has problems, but its struggle to succeed has been made easier by a pair of iconoclastic performers: Shotputter Brian Oldfield and Pole Vaulter Steve Smith. Both world-record holders, they are also flaky, free spirits who have just what it takes to make the tour more successful.

Behemoth Brian, 30, is already looking beyond the track. "Why can't I play fullback?" asks the 6-ft. 5-in. 270-pounder. "I'm bigger and faster than Larry Csonka." He is not kidding. Cat quick, Oldfield regularly defeats the pro tour's women sprinters in a special 30-yd. dash. Last year he turned down a \$10,000 bonus offer to play for the New York Stars in the World Football League, but this summer he may try to talk the Miami Dolphins into giving him a shot at Csonka's vacated slot. He also hallucinates about entering the boxing ring with Muhammad Ali.

It is within the confines of the shot-putter's 7-ft. circle that Oldfield really exercises his power. At an I.T.A. meet last month in El Paso, Oldfield whirled and hurled the 16-lb. shot farther than anyone else in history. Spinning around with a discus thrower's 1½ turn, which no other shotputter has mastered, Oldfield fired the steel ball 75 ft., an astonishing 3½ ft. past the existing world outdoor mark. Oldfield's effort will not be recognized as a record by amateur governing bodies because of his professional status, but he has more pressing concerns. What he wants most is to blast the shot beyond the 80-ft. barrier.

"I don't throw or put the shot," he says of his new style. "I spring that thing out of there. I use my whole body, my total being." Too often, the force Oldfield generates in his spin whirls him out of the circle, disqualifying him on approximately half of his allotted attempts. "I feel confined in that circle," he says. "I have to learn not to be intimidated by it." Perhaps, but it is Oldfield himself who is the big intimidator on the I.T.A. tour. "On my baddest days," he says, "I'm better than anyone else."

Gliding Down. Vaulter Smith, 23, has had a tougher climb to the top. He joined the pro tour last year to compete head to head with Old Rival Bob Seagren. He has since taken Seagren twelve out of 18 times. And at Madison Square Garden the last week in May, Smith soared 18 ft. 5 in., exceeding by an inch his own world indoor mark.

Smith scorns training traditions and relies instead on self-hypnosis and surfing to stay in shape. "I try to make it fun," he says. Which is why he also carries a skateboard from city to city and delights in being towed behind a car at up to 40 m.p.h. or gliding down the nearest hillside. Back home, he says, he "can make it all the way to the liquor store without getting off." Like his tour mate Oldfield, Smith harbors fantasies outside his specialty. He has done the 100-yd. dash in 9.7 and occasionally kids star Miler Ben Jipcho about giving him a run for the money.

His goal is to become the first man to vault 19 ft. He will get his opportunity this week in Boston at a meet scheduled for Friday the 13th. That superstition does not faze Smith, who remembers that Vaulter Don Bragg set a record on a previous Friday the 13th. Record or no, Smith and Oldfield will probably increase their tour winnings, which exceed \$13,000 apiece this year. If conditions are right and the spirits are willing, I.T.A.'s new stars may take their glittering acts above and beyond.