

from the editor

E. Garry Hill

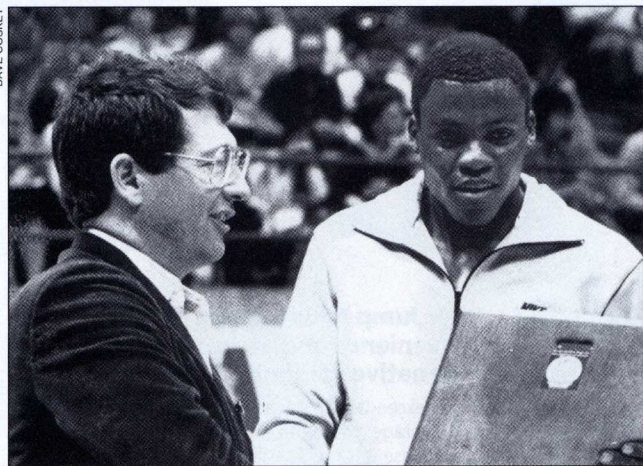
AIN'T WE GOT FUN?! Putting together this end-of-century issue was at the same time one of the most enjoyable and most difficult sets of pages the staff of *T&FN* has ever composed. How did Carl Lewis and JJK end up as our Athletes Of The Century? How did Jesse Owens end up on the cover? Therein lie tales.

In trying to come up with our various winners, we discovered just how much subjectivity goes into defining the word "best" as it applies to track & field performance. Some of the leading track minds on the planet simply opted out, saying it was too difficult a task. Others

had great reservations about their work.

Founding Editor Cordner Nelson, great wordsmith that he is, summed it up best, adding a disclaimer to his picks:

"It is beyond human capability to be correct in selecting the best athletes of the century. There is no way to factor out the influences of faster running surfaces, changes in rules, professionalism, politics, cultural differences, economic differences, weight training, accumulated training knowl-



Your editor was privileged to be able to present Carl Lewis with the first of his 3-in-a-row AOY plaques.

edge and other conditions, known and unknown.

"In addition, no two selectors have exactly the same values in choosing. Some may favor one event while others favor others. Some give added weight to an athlete's accomplishments in a second or third event, thus downgrading a pole vaulter or hammer thrower who competes in only one event.

"Some value best performance more than an old-timer's dominance of his event. Some value an Olympic or World Championship far more than any other meet, but other selectors disagree. Some value a long career far more than a short one, even though the short one may be more brilliant, and/or still a work in progress. It is simply impossible to do it right."

Reservations aside, we're very happy with the way it all turned out, and we hope you'll find not only enjoyable reading in the pages that follow, but also food for lots of post-meet arguments.

One thing you're sure to find is a certain amount of inconsistency as you move from section to section. That's partially by design, as we had different crews of experts working on different sections, and, as Cordner noted, not everyone thinks the same. Rather than impose any over-arching rules, we simply allowed each section to grow on its own, hopefully giving a much broader picture of the sport as a whole.

It was a broad picture we had in mind when we chose Owens for the cover, using the only-in-*T&FN* word "trackster" to describe something above and beyond sheer athletic endeavour. We wanted to celebrate someone who through track & field performance rose to stature far above that of "athlete." So while Lewis and Joyner-Kersey were the top athletes, when it came to total impact on the world stage, there was only one choice, Owens.

Jesse Owens, a man whose name became synonymous with speed and grace. Smasher not only of WRs, but also of myths, as Hitler and his cronies learned, much to their chagrin, as he showed the Nazis just how great America's "black auxiliaries" truly were. And, as Jon Hendershott so ably chronicles in the pages that follow, there was a terrible downside, as Owens discovered that in his own time he was still little more than an athlete. But the price he paid made him one of those who helped pave the way for those who followed.

Without Jesse Owens, there may never have been a Carl Lewis.

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