



TRACK & FIELD / Tom C. Brody

ON WAY TO FIRST WIN OF SEASON, MATSON GETS OFF HEFTY HEAVE AT SAN DIEGO

Now two wizards of oomph

The world's best shotputter, Randy Matson, is a big man to challenge, but an ex-runt from the University of Oregon is making him strain

Except for a band playing explosive excerpts from the *William Tell Overture*, periodic pistol reports and cries of "popcorn" bellowed, inevitably, at the exact moment when the time for a race is being revealed, an indoor track meet bears strong resemblance to an anthill. San Diego had its first taste of life in a formicary last week at its new International Sports Arena, and its meet went off as expected—but without a band. No matter. Sprinters, vaulters, jumpers and distance runners were at it nonstop. But for all this exercising, it was two brooding young giants, both of whom looked as if they were trying to hate everything in general and each other in particular,

who kept the crowd in a state of high agitation.

There was Randy Matson, 6' 6½", 260 pounds, the acknowledged wizard of oomph, the Texas A&M senior who did not merely break the world shotput record but demolished it two years ago with a heave of 70' 7¼"—and he was one throw away from losing for the second consecutive time. Who could be brash enough, strong enough, mean enough to challenge Randy Matson?

Front and center: Neal Steinhauer, one and a half inches shorter, 10 pounds heavier than the record holder, and a gentle, kindly man with an impish sense of humor. If he does not become the

greatest shotputter of them all, it will be because he has pushed Matson into an orgy of brand-new records.

Consider the results last Saturday night. There was no record, but Matson, who usually wraps things up on his first or second put, had to get off a throw of 66' 10¼" on his last try—eight inches better than Steinhauer's best of the night—to win. Yes, sir, the race is on. Steinhauer had beaten Matson five weeks before in San Francisco, and nothing like that had happened to Randy since 1964. The win was no fluke. Matson's toss, 64' 6", was his best ever indoors, and it was still a bit more than two feet short of Steinhauer's, a record. If Matson did not get the message then, he must have gotten it when he heard that Steinhauer had won at a meet in Portland, Ore. with a put of 67' 10", a second record.

To look at him as a 15-year-old boy, Neal Claude Steinhauer, 128 pounds of pure uncoordination, seemed least likely to lift a shotput off the ground, let alone break records with it. Except for a vast appetite, Steinhauer was fair on to becoming the runtiest fellow Eugene, Ore. ever produced. But that appetite! It was some 120 pounds later, when Neal was drinking up to \$45 worth of milk each month, that a friend asked his father why he didn't buy a cow. "We did," said Luther Steinhauer. "Neal ate it."

Little Neal grew five inches in his 16th year and had reached a more dignified weight of 150 when the captain of his choose-up track squad suggested that, in the absence of any specific talent, he might try throwing a 12-pound shot. Steinhauer said, "Why not?" and got off a toss of 38'. It did not start a stampede of eager track coaches rushing in his direction, but it was good enough for a first in the pickup meet and, more important, it rang the same kind of bell that such athletes as Jim Ryun, Johnny Unitas and Willie Mays are said to hear: to wit, "I can, with a little luck, lots of hard work and unswerving devotion, become the best in the world."

Steinhauer's supreme effort in his senior year at North Eugene High School was only sixth best in the state. How's that for promise? If that bell sounded suspiciously like a false alarm to other people, it did not to Steinhauer. Off went Neal to Westmont College in Santa Barbara, Calif., a healthy 200-pounder by

dint of long sessions with the weights. By the time he decided to transfer to the University of Oregon the next year he was consistently putting over 50 feet.

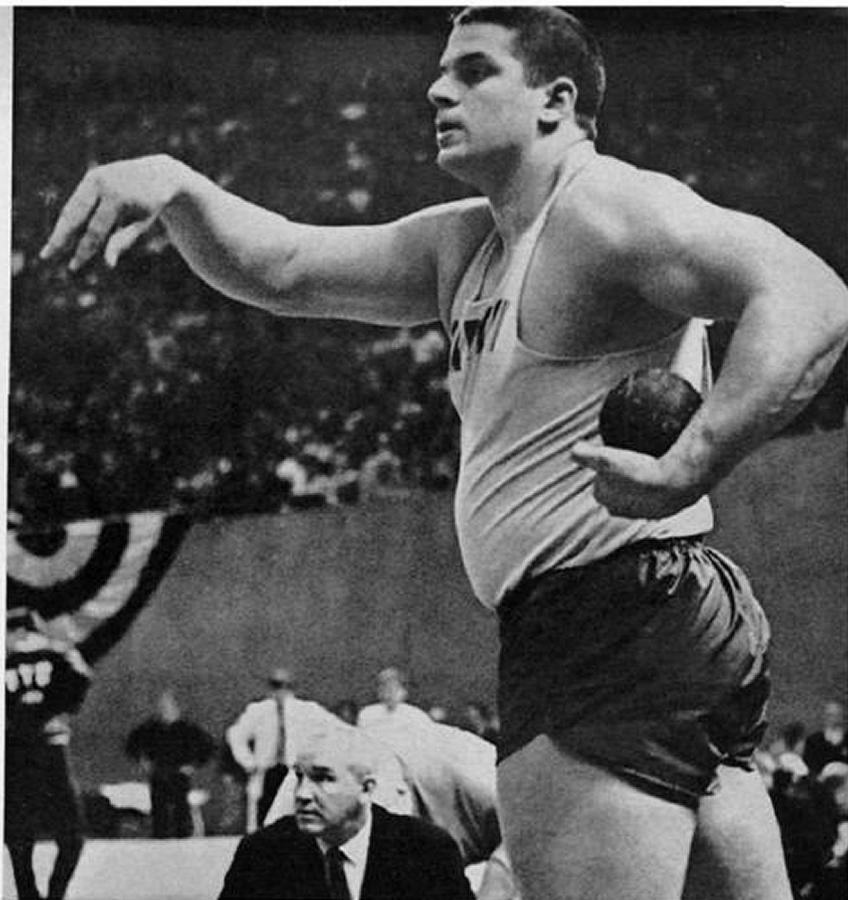
Bill Bowerman, who has been coaching track at Oregon since 1948, was not able to use Steinhauer in 1964 but he discovered two things. Steinhauer had excellent speed, and it is Bowerman's conviction that if a boy cannot go lickety-split for at least 25 yards he will be incapable of exploding with that brief frenzy of power needed in the shotput ring. And Steinhauer had desire. Bowerman spied him digging his shot out of the Oregon mud time after time and letting it fly again. "Desire" was Bowerman's word. "Ya gotta wanna," was the way Steinhauer put it.

Whatever the motive, when it came time to move indoors, an Oregon gym began to take an awful beating. The shotputters are confronted with a wall 55 feet from the indoor practice ring, and by the time the first indoor meets of 1965 came up Steinhauer was happily bouncing the 16-pound shot off it. Not only was he ruining the wall, he kept knocking out the overhead light bulbs—30 feet up—indicating a very formful arc. "I kept knocking them out," he said, "but they kept replacing them."

Word of such prowess had not swept the state, however, and when Steinhauer showed up for his first indoor meet, wearing a Westmont College sweatshirt, he was perhaps the least noticed athlete in the building. After five throws of more than 60', one sportswriter broke five consecutive pencils circling his name in the program. And Steinhauer firmly, if rather unexpectedly, was established as one of the best shotputters in the country.

But so far Steinhauer had fought only half the battle. He was also learning about the fine art of psychological warfare as conducted by the shotputting masters. Parry O'Brien, who was making a comeback at the ripe old age of 34, was full of kindness and good advice for Neal—until they met in combat. "Steinhauer went up to O'Brien all smiles," said Bowerman, "and Parry cut him dead. Neal was easily two feet better, but O'Brien beat him by a foot."

Nor was that the end of it. "Everywhere I went," said Steinhauer, "there was Mr. O'Brien. Everyone knew I could get the shot out farther than he could



STEINHAUER, WHO GAINED 120 POUNDS IN SIX YEARS, PREPARES FOR WEIGHTY WORK

and he kept right on beating me. The last time I had one over 63' and what does Parry do? Sixty-four. That's better than he's ever done in his life."

With Matson, it was a different problem. "I guess I just got it in my head that he was better than I was," said Steinhauer. In the AAU championships last year, for instance, Matson was struggling and it appeared obvious that his 64-footer was the best he had that day. "Gee, I should have eaten him alive," said Steinhauer. "But I kept thinking, he's the champion, he's done 70. Well, I talked myself right out of that one. That 64' 2 1/4" put was his best and mine was 64' 1/2". Schee!"

Before their meeting in San Diego last weekend, Randy Matson was sure that it was going to take something more than a psychological edge to beat his latest and most dangerous rival. "Steinhauer's improved," Matson said in Texas. "He's always had good technique, but there's a point where technique ends and strength begins. He's getting that strength."

Matson had that strength, too, but also a bad knee and a strong disinclina-

tion to put the shot indoors. The indoor shot, a steel ball enclosed in latex rubber, is half an inch to an inch bigger than the 16-pound shot used outdoors. "It loses its shape when it hits the floor," said Matson, "and I never have felt at home with it."

But Matson hates to lose. He had hoped to remain undefeated until the '68 Olympics and to win the gold medal in Mexico City. The disappointment of having lost to Steinhauer had served as a goad, according to his coach, Charley Thomas. "We underestimated Steinhauer. We kept hearing he was throwing only 61' and we really didn't prepare, because Randy progresses slowly. But Neal was throwing 65 and 66 in warm-ups. Randy worked harder the next week and I think he proved something when he threw the outdoor shot 67' in practice. If his knee holds up I think he'll surpass 70' this season. He's in the best physical condition of his life and, you know, Randy rises to the competition."

He sure does, and so does Neal Steinhauer. It should be a whale of a year for the oomphers. **END**