

NO PRACTICE MAKES ALMOST PERFECT

Randy Matson has had no peer in the shotput, but his dominion is threatened by Al Feuerbach, who throws only when it counts by PAT PUTNAM

In recent years the shotput has been, by definition, an event won by Randy Matson, the executive director of the Boosters Club of West Texas State, who, at 6'6½" and 270 pounds, is just the man to put the arm on alumni. Matson is the Olympic champion, the world-record holder (71'5½"), the only man ever to top 70 feet and the only man ever to top 69 feet. Neil Steinhauer of Oregon is the second best shotputter in history, with a throw of 68'11¼". This put is the 26th longest ever made outdoors. The first 25 belong to Matson, as do Nos. 27 through 53.

One night in San Francisco a couple of weeks ago a new definition gained acceptance. The lexicographer was Al Feuerbach, 23, self-unemployed, out of the Pacific Coast Club by way of Emporia State, from which he has a degree in bus. admin. By shotput standards he isn't big, just 6'1" and, if you include the long blond hair, the mustache and the sideburns, 247 pounds. By the same standards his training methods are a shade unusual. But when he got off a throw of 68'11" that night he became the biggest thing ever under a roof. The old indoor best was 67'10", a mark Matson equaled while beating Feuerbach in Los Angeles a week earlier. In San Francisco, Matson finished second after three throws beyond the old record, but the longest was three inches short of the new.

The following night, in Albuquerque, Matson regained his supremacy—if not the record—with a throw of 68 feet. Feuerbach (pronounced fearbock) did 66'6½" and said he was still emotionally drained after his record put. "I tried to psych myself up," he said forlornly, "but it wasn't there."

Last weekend they met again in Portland, Ore. A few days before the meet, over prime ribs in a Los Angeles restaurant, Feuerbach viewed his indoor

record as a personal triumph over shotput tradition. For eight years, or ever since he first picked up a 12-pound shot in high school in Preston, Iowa (pop. 950), people have been telling him he was too small. O.K., he said, but for four of those years he put the shot seven days a week, three hours a day. He also lifted weights three days a week, three hours a day. In his last year at Emporia State he was both NAIA indoor (62'8") and outdoor (61'9") champion. "But that," he said, "just meant I was the best of the little guys."

Al Feuerbach thought he could be the best of the big guys. After seven summers pitching hay on his dad's farm he managed to save \$3,000. He drove to Los Angeles, moved into an apartment with three USC athletes and went to work. Twice a week he threw the shot. The rest of the time he lifted weights. And he brooded about the dogma that holds that unless a shotputter is 6'5" or taller he'll never make it.

"I guess if I'm not obsessed with throwing the shot I'm awful close," Feuerbach said. "But when people kept saying I was too small it just drove me harder. Height is just one variable. There's speed, technique, strength and coordination. If any one can be developed to a high enough degree, then the advantage of height can be overcome."

At the moment, Feuerbach is concentrating on building speed through strength, or, as he puts it, explosive strength. Now that the indoor season has begun, he works solely with weights. He never picks up a shot unless it's in competition, which led an astonished Matson to believe that Feuerbach was either a con man or that he had discovered something. "It's kind of hard to believe he doesn't train," Matson said.

"I figure I can't improve in practice," Feuerbach countered. "There's too much of a mental letdown from com-

petition. I've thrown the shot thousands of times in practice all those years. All the motor pathways have been developed. Now it's just a matter of speed. And speed is getting stronger, which I'm doing. Look at it this way: I have enough strength to throw an object weighing less than 16 pounds farther than the world record. Now I have to get enough strength to make the 16-pound shot lighter."

As a gauge he uses the bench press, and as of now he can press 380 pounds. Most of the good shotputters do 430 to 440. This past week Matson said he was pressing 420, which is low for him.

"Last summer during the AAU championships I was only pressing 340," Feuerbach said, "and I was only throwing 65 feet. Some guys get stronger and only gain a little on their throws. But as my strength jumps, so do my dis-



Matson seems to seek guidance from above.

tances. Don't ask me why, because I don't know. But I do know that if I'm pressing 450 by Olympic time, then somebody is going to have to be far over the world record just to be in contention." He thought about that a moment, then added, "I kind of expect that Randy will be."

So does Matson, who seems to be quietly enjoying Feuerbach's challenge. It's a refreshing change. Last year, outdoors, Matson won all 10 of the meets he entered. Now 25 and recently a father for the second time, he still trains as hard as ever: twice a week throwing, twice a week working with weights, once a week competing. Until Feuerbach came along his only rival was boredom, and that was running a poor second, too. As long as there was his own world record to better, he always managed to get the adrenaline turned on in a meet. Most of it, anyway.

"I had always hoped that I would never get to a point where I was satisfied to win with just a 67," Matson said a few hours before his fourth meeting with Feuerbach this year. "In the past I always felt I could have moved the mark out a little farther. Now with Al pushing me. . . ." He laughed. "I just hope he keeps pushing and doesn't start pulling. Of course, it's always easier to go into competition chasing someone instead of trying to stay ahead. His record at San Francisco has given me something to chase. And now I'm really looking forward to the outdoor season, when we can get real serious."

That morning a friend had stopped at Matson's breakfast table to say hello. Upon leaving, he said, "Say, that kid from Emporia is really throwing that thing out there."

Matson admitted that the kid from Emporia was doing just that. After the friend had gone, he shook his head. "I sure have been hearing a lot of *that* lately," he said. "I guess a lot of people want to see me get beat. It's kind of a funny feeling. But I think there is a lot more interest this year, more excitement, and that's good for shotputting."

The Matson-Feuerbach duel has been more than good. In the first three meetings between the two Feuerbach was named the meet's top athlete once, Matson twice. That hasn't happened to shotputters since Matson took over in 1965, if ever.

At the Memorial Coliseum in Portland, Feuerbach was the first into the



Feuerbach seems upset after being beaten by Matson in Portland, Ore. last week.

ring. He looked awfully quick. "He's not tall," said Matson, "but because of his size I think he can move better in the ring. He's not so cramped in there. And he can drive harder across the ring. If I drove that hard I'd wind up five yards on the other side of the toeboard."

Feuerbach threw a 66' 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". His first throw is always cautious. "I just want to get a mark," he said.

By contrast, Matson likes to go all out on his first throw. "They talk about psyching an opponent," he said. "The only way I know how to do that is to blast out that first throw." His first throw was 65' 1", which didn't psych anyone. Then, on his third attempt, Matson hit 66' 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ " to take the lead.

Feuerbach stepped in, the shot cradled in his right hand. Shotputting is the only thing he does right-handed. Spin. Flick. Grunt. 67' 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". He looked at Matson. "That Randy," he said, "he's cool. Nothing shakes him."

Unshook, Matson hit 68 feet, and the crowd roared. After Feuerbach did 67' 8", Matson finished with 68' 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", a meet record. The crowd approved every inch of it. "I was glad to win," said Matson. "And I sure was glad to see that last

one of his fall short. This is getting to be some duel." It was hard to tell if he was more elated by the victory or the challenge.

Later, in a small room away from the main arena, Feuerbach dissected his defeat and found hope. "I was ready mentally," he said, "but physically I wasn't quite alert. But that 67' 8" throw, that was so easy. And I got no explosion into it. I'm not happy with losing, but now I'm more optimistic than ever. If I can throw that lousy and do that well, why even right now I must have another two feet in me. Next week Randy and I go at it again in Fort Worth. I told him it ought to be a good one. He just grinned and said he'd be ready. Well, he's beaten me three out of four. Maybe I better reevaluate my training." He paused. "Maybe I better throw the shot in practice next week. Then, maybe I shouldn't."

Outside, the crowd roared once more. Steve Prefontaine, the University of Oregon's 20-year-old middle-distance sensation, who had won the two-mile in 8:31.6, a meet record, had been named the evening's top performer.

"Aw, I would have voted for Randy," said Feuerbach. **END**