

That you're making such a clatter?" (p.216). That is impressive, of course, and so is Miss Irwin.

Anne Hicks

**JUMP**, Debbie Brill with James Lawton, *Vancouver and Toronto, Douglas and McIntyre, 1986. Pp. 190.*

This book is the autobiographical account of the life of Debbie Brill, Canada's most enduring and best known active female track and field athlete. Brill has been the premier high jumper in Canada for the past two decades beginning with world age class records in the 1968 Olympic year and continuing today with consistent world top ten standing.

The book, *JUMP*, is solid and well written in the colloquial or lay language of active athletes. Further, it is an excellent collection of diverse and well crafted anecdotes that together weave a dense and richly coloured tapestry of an exceptional woman's life.

Brill's account provides a rare inside look at the life of a high performance female athlete. It sparks discussion on such controversial subjects as drugs, training regimentation, professionalism, motherhood and competition, sexuality and even the systematic production-line manner of developing Canadian athletes. Although these themes are not new, the manner in which they interact in the unfolding life of one of Canada's best known (and perhaps, by a different standard, the least known) athletes is a rare and novel exposure. It brings us, the readers, closer to the Debbie Brill that she wants us to see.

*JUMP* is organized chronologically into thirteen chapters. The first three chronicle her discovery and quick move to the high ground of international sport. The early theme is Brill's difficulty with travelling in a world filled with the pitfalls of media prying and of public performances in front of many thousands of people. Clearly, she was moved too quickly into such an arena without adequate preparation or support. Brill establishes a pattern of questioning who she is and why she competes, but in these first three chapters, there are few answers. Her only moments of control over a life lived on the competitive edge are described as thin slices of time where she was able to feel some contentment and security with her peculiar jumping style. Brill, the author, now a much more secure individual, uses the forum of the written to apologize for some earlier oversights in her treatment of people important to her and further, to take some well-aimed shots at the media, sport organizers and some rather ego-centric athletic personalities.

Chapters four and five chronicle her time away from track and field. She describes the poignant experiences of a year long search for isolation and for precious, healing invisibility. During the year following the Munich Olympics (1972), Brill recuperated. She describes how she feared most "the loss of (her) ability to dream" and how she knew she was healed when she wanted to regain some "sharp sense of (her) body"...the reopening of opportunities to jump! Readed, aware and apprehensive, Brill returned to the competitive arena. By the end of 1975, she was a more dimensional, secure and seasoned individual.

Chapters six through nine are descriptions of her roller-coaster ride to the position as premier high jumper in the world. After "no heighting" (no heighting is when an athlete fails in the first three attempts at her initial height, e.g., the qualifying height, and is not permitted to compete further) at the Montreal Olympics (1976), Brill was labelled as a "choker" and came of age as a person under intense public scrutiny. In 1979, she won the World Cup gold medal and became the athlete favoured to win the 1980 Olympic gold medal. However, the Olympic Boycott of 1980 left Debbie Brill watching the high jump event on television and seeing the gold medal go to an athlete who jumped 1.97 meters, the exact height she had jumped just one week prior to the Olympic Games! At that moment, Brill was the best high jumper in the world but with no place to bring her goals to fruition.

Brill brings these years alive for the reader with vivid descriptions of (a) the joy of competing, moving, being active and capable, (b) the restrictions which wore her down but failed to dull her growing strength, (c) the rhythm of a great athlete caught in the forward moving cycle of sport, and (d) the concentration required to bring 135 pounds of athlete into the most dynamic moment of take-off to then "fly" over the bar. Brill also paints a solemn picture of an athlete watching her gold medal opportunity slide slowly by. After the 1980 season, it was a deeply affected but very determined Brill that moved into 1981.

Chapter ten could easily have been entitled "The Bionic Mom." Brill decided to have a child and continue jumping. Most athletes would have actively sought retirement but Brill gave birth and a scant four and one-half months later, set an indoor world high jump record. Here is Brill's only mention of the women's movement and it is not a particularly favorable one at that.

Chapters eleven through thirteen chronicle her struggles to remain physically sharp and free of injury despite the physiological changes with childbirth, the stress of

repetitive jumping and the emotional upheavals in her life. Discussions about the eventuality of retirement from high performance competition emerge. In these final chapters, Debbie Brill continues to train and to jump competitively. Her goal is Seoul, Korea in 1988 when she will make her fifth attempt at an Olympic high jump medal.

Just as sport has not yet allowed Brill to reach her ultimate competitive goals, the parameters of this book do not allow Brill an opportunity to neatly package her life experiences. While it is exhilarating to see women like Brill grappling with the physical, ethical and moral dilemmas created by being a woman with a mind of her own, it is disappointing to find that Brill does not go beyond her own experiences to ask why she was and remains so unique and controversial. For example, concurrent with Brill's advancement in the sport world, the women's movement was gathering speed in Canada. Even Brill could not have failed to notice the "climate of change" and the increasing availability of choices to female athletes. Thus, her portrayal of her frictioned experiences with the media and with the Track and Field Association remains unconnected with how other female athletes (eg., Susan Nattrass and Diane Jones Konihowski) overcame similar problems. Here, Brill is a victim of her own isolation.

The book is written in good taste. It is a strong and powerful narrative of the life of a successful athlete which appears to "tell all" but does not. Rather than a muckraking account of the high and low experiences of a public figure, it is a roughly woven tapestry of the tremendous difficulties and joys of training for and competing in international sport. The experiences appear carefully chosen by Brill (albeit with the assistance of *Vancouver Sun* reporter James Lawton) to convey the Debbie Brill that *she* wants conveyed. Thus, there is no sense of intrusiveness or voyeurism on the part of the reader. Brill provides a slightly filtered but unsterilized account. There is a certain honourableness about such writing. Brill is as she appears, a bright and likeable woman.

The book *JUMP* does not alter the traditional invisibility of women in sport in any significant way. Rather, it serves to correct some of the wrongly held beliefs about women in sport. Along the way, Brill destroys such myths as (a) compulsory celibacy on team trips, (b) inappropriateness and ineffectiveness of female athletes who are over thirty years of age, and (c) the happy, well-adjusted athlete. She also raises the taboo subject of athletes' needs in conflict with those of the sport governing associations...in

effect, biting the hand that purports to feed her. Brill appears to be offering yet another challenge to sport organizers.

Despite Brill's apparent success with this book, she fails to examine the most compelling questions in enough detail. I looked for a fleshing out of her feelings around the 1976 and 1980 Olympic experience but was disappointed at the thinness of the descriptions provided. I was compelled to ask what is her relationship with the Track and Field Association now, what is her stand on the new amateurism and professionalism ruling within the International Olympic Association and what does she think about athletes' rights? Further, how did the inflammatory nature of her relationship with coach Lionel Pugh contribute to or moderate her sense of rebellion throughout the almost twenty years she has worked with him? Pugh's greatest contributions are his analysis and motivation of Brill as both a jumper and an individual. How did Brill manage to keep her growing ego separate and distinctive from his? She held back from commenting more than superficially on these.

Brill has clearly made unusual choices in her life and many people have been offended by her choices. Such people will, in all likelihood, be equally offended by her book. While some readers may see Brill as a talented but egocentric athlete, I found her to be a capable survivor. Brill's inspiring and often dramatic account is a successful affirmation of the life of one high performance female athlete in Canada.

Academically, this book has certain value as an autobiographical account written by a still-active athlete. Balanced with the tremendous volume of documentation available in the public sphere, Brill's accounting now steps to the forefront as the most accurate. This book can be useful as recommended reading in Sociology of Sport, Women and Sport, and Introductory Women's Studies courses.

It may be many years before it is necessary to ask "Where did Debbie Brill go?" She is extraordinarily long-lived and visible. In these ways, she is a unique part of the Canadian cultural mosaic.

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