

# “NO EXCUSES”

HOW AMERICAN HURDLER GLENN DAVIS  
TOOK THE WORST LIFE THREW AT HIM TO BRING GLORY  
TO HIMSELF, HIS HOMETOWN AND HIS COUNTRY.

BY STEPHEN L. HARRIS

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*In the hot, dry summer of 1952, Barberton, Ohio, revealed itself to an orphaned boy as a tough, honest city; a show-me place where the wary citizenry gave no quarter to outsiders. Instead, you had to prove yourself to fit in, to be accepted. No excuses allowed. If you were young enough, the right place to start was on Barberton’s playing fields. Sports were the one constant that kept the city together. Tradition was rich, going back to the days of the great George Sisler, now enshrined in Baseball’s Hall of Fame. Yet the only true game in town was football. And the paragon of hard-nosed Barberton football was the legendary “Jumpin” Joe Williams, a kid so tough that in the 1930s with his big toe broken early in a game he single-handedly whipped undefeated and unscored upon Massillon High School. Just the right place for a 15-year-old, red-headed, raw-boned transplant from the coal country along the Ohio River to start his life anew. But first Glenn “Jeep” Davis, arriving with an embittered heart, forced to live with a brother 19 years his senior; had to beat back a demon that threatened to ruin his life and crush his one hope for salvation — the dream of Olympic glory. Only then could the boy with fleet feet and sudden fists prove himself to the people of Barberton. And only then could he take his place as one of the truly great Olympic champions. The demon was death.*

## PART ONE: DEATH IN THE VALLEY

Long before tragedy stole into the steep hills that rise on either side of the Ohio River, times were happy for the prodigious Davis clan. William Wallace Davis, the eldest of six brothers and sisters, was of mixed blood; part Cherokee Indian, part Scotch and Irish. His mother named him after the 12th Century Scottish freedom fighter later memorialized in the movies as “Braveheart.” Davis was a coal miner and ironworker and, in the semi-pro leagues where he played baseball, the game he loved best, his teammates called him “Babe Ruth.” In the small town of Fallonsbee, West Virginia, he and his wife, Edwina, struggled to raise a family of 10 children.

The youngest boy was Glenn. Born in nearby Wellsburg, on September 12, 1934, Glenn was always on the move. He never walked. He always ran. He clutched any kind of ball he could get his small hands on. The elder Davis, sitting in the living room of the family home, would often hear the front door fly open and then before it slammed shut, he’d see his littlest son already across the road, leaping a neighbor’s fence, ball in hand, heading down a rutted alley to play. If it was a basketball, Glenn learned to dribble it deftly between the ruts as he sped toward an old peach basket nailed to a barn door to shoot hoops. Watching him disappear with lightning speed, Glenn’s father was reminded of

a character in the Popeye comic strip who tore across the pages of the funny paper with the same reckless abandon. “Eugene the Jeep.” ZIP and he was gone! From then on, Davis called his son “Jeep.”

Because he saw that Jeep was a natural athlete, he wanted him to take up baseball. Every spare moment he drilled him on the finer aspects of his favorite game. Base running skills were endless. Slide to the right. Slide to the left. Watch where the fielder puts his glove. Slide away from the glove. Never slid head first. Slide. Slide. *Slide!*

“I slid until I cried,” Jeep recalled.

When he was 11 years old, Jeep sat in the darkness of a Fallonsbee movie theater, watching a Western. Of a sudden he was summoned to the lobby. He was told to hurry home. There he found out that his 17-year-old brother, Max, a soldier with the US forces in Japan, had been killed.

For the first time, death came calling in the valley.

Although too young to truly understand what had happened, Jeep went home to a grieving family. It wouldn’t be the last time. Still, there was always sports to get his mind off the hard times. In the ninth grade, Jeep took part in his first Brooke County Field Day. He’d never been in a competitive race before. Running in three sprints, from 50 yards up to the 220-yard dash, he won them all. Flushed with the excitement and thrill of victory, he knew then that he loved

track and field the way his father loved baseball. And maybe, just maybe, if he played hard enough someday he'd be an Olympic hero.

*Olympic Hero!*

The very thought hit Jeep like a jolt of pure electricity, running down his spine, coursing through his veins. In that instant a gold-medal dream was born. For the first time, Jeep Davis set his sights on the Olympics!

**T**homas Jefferson Hill taught history at Fallonsbee High School. He also served as track coach. He was a little, balding man who spoke so softly that his students and athletes were always asking him, "What didja say?" To Coach Hill, track was a "gentleman's sport."

By the time Jeep went out for the track team in the spring of 1951, Hill already had seen him in action. Jeep played football and, in basketball, because of his dribbling prowess learned in the rutted alley across the road from his house, was promoted to the varsity. He was almost too fancy for the coaching staff, bouncing the ball between his legs, passing behind his back, tossing up one-handed jump shots and slamming down dunks. Hill liked the youngster. He believed that Jeep was loaded with talent, and he took special care to teach him the fundamentals of running and jumping.

He once bragged, "When Jeep perfects his form, look out!"

"Everything good came from what Coach Hill taught me," Jeep said.

But the football\* coach at Fallonsbee didn't think much of the flashy, speedy athlete, even though he was only a raw freshman. And at the end of Jeep's first year in high school, just as his family was to move 100 miles away, to Marietta, Ohio, the coach told him that he had no talent.

"You'll never amount to anything," he predicted, cruelly trying to crush Jeep's Olympic dream.

Yet in Columbus, another coach soon thought otherwise. Woody Hayes, who ran the football fortunes of Ohio State University, heard stirring reports of a speedy triple-threat halfback who was tearing up the gridiron for the Marietta High School Tigers. Hayes drove down from Columbus to recruit him. However, it surprised him to find out that the running back was only a sophomore. Looking at the lithe teenager who barely stood six feet and weighed less than 170 pounds, Hayes apologized. "I was told you were a senior," he said to Jeep in his high-pitched lisping voice. "But I'll be back in two years."

During the football season, Jeep's father, a heavy smoker, was diagnosed with cancer. Whether it came from smoking or working in the coal mines will never be known. As the illness grew worse, the big, strong man, once known up

and down the Ohio River as Babe Ruth, weakened. Too frail to get around by himself, he was confined to a small room in the veteran's hospital in Clarksburg, West Virginia.

As autumn gave way to winter and then winter to spring, Jeep, now a high-school sophomore, eagerly looked forward to the 1952 track season at Marietta. The opening meet was on April 5, the Stonewall Jackson Invitational at Laidley Field in Charlestown. It was a cold, blustery day. Rain fell, pricking the skin like sharp tacks. The cinder track was caked with two inches of mud. In the finals of the 180-yard low hurdles, Jeep ground over the sloppy track, clearing thick wooden hurdles with globs of muck clinging heavily to his spikes. A true mudder, he plowed across the finish line first. A week later, Jeep entered the 10th annual Wheeling Invitational. It was a bittersweet homecoming. Facing old teammates from Fallonsbee High, as well as his mentor, Coach Thomas Jefferson Hill, he knew also that studying him like a hungry hawk on the sidelines waiting to see him falter was the high-and-mighty football coach who a year earlier had told him that he had no talent.

It was a much better day than at Charlestown. The sun shone brightly, warming the athletes basking on the track. When the meet got under way, Jeep was hot. He placed in the high jump with a leap of five feet, six inches. He anchored the winning shuttle hurdle relay. But he kept his most impressive performances for the individual hurdles. In the low hurdles he ran for a meet record of 21.8 seconds. In the 120-yard high hurdles he streaked to another meet record of 15.2 seconds. With three first-place finishes, he was named the outstanding performer. He was given his first trophy. After the meet, he went to Clarksburg, proudly lugging with him his shiny new piece of hardware. Inside the veteran's hospital, he watched his father's dimming eyes sparkle for a moment as he showed him the trophy.

"I won it for you, Dad," he said. And then Jeep carefully placed the trophy on the bureau next to the bed, and left it there.

"Son, someday you're going to be a great athlete," his father whispered. "Just don't ever do anything wrong."

It was one of the last words of advice he'd ever hear from his father.

William Wallace Davis died that summer. It was in the cool of morning. Mist hung like tears over the Ohio River. Driving back from Marietta with his mother and Dutch, a brother two years older than himself, Jeep sat in stunned silence. His father was one of his best friends. As he tried to reason the loss, his mother's head slumped back against the seat of the car. She died that night of unknown causes. Perhaps it was the shock of her husband's death. No one knows for certain. At the crowded funeral in Fallonsbee, the twin caskets of Jeep's beloved mother and father solemnly rested side-by-side. The couple was buried in the Bethany-Pike Cemetery, next to their son, Max.

\*American football should not to be confused with soccer.

Within a few weeks the surviving family split up. Jeep was packed off to Barberton to be raised by Bill, now the head of the family. Although Jeep loved him dearly there was no way he'd ever take the place of his father.

"To me," Jeep said, "my father will always be my Braveheart."

#### *PART TWO: A NEW HOME*

**I**t took Coach Junie Ferrall one year to turn around Barberton High School's football program. In his debut season in 1949, after inheriting a 3-6 club, he led the Magics to a 4-3-2 mark. Then in 1950 and '51, his teams posted back-to-back 8-1 records. Now, in 1952, as he sorted through equipment in the Barberton locker room before the opening of practice, Coach Ferrall hoped he could match the performances of the past two seasons. A young voice broke into his thoughts.

"When do I report for practice," the voice said.

Taking a quick glance at whence the voice came, Ferrall asked, "What's your name, boy?"

"Jeep Davis."

"Where you from?"

"Marietta, down along the Ohio River," Jeep replied.

Standing up to take the crick out of his back and get a better look, he was surprised to see such a skinny kid before him. "Not much meat on those bones," Ferrall said, sizing up the Marietta immigrant. "Don't you think you're a little light for this team?"

"Maybe," said Jeep honestly. "But I can run pretty good."

Ferrall shrugged and told Jeep when to report. As Jeep walked off, he wondered if the slight youth had the grit to play for Barberton.

On the first day of practice, Coach Ferrall got his answer.

Carrying the ball, Jeep was slammed to the ground. A sharp pain seared through his right shoulder. He got up, dusted himself off, and refused to show any signs of hurt. Although he didn't know it then, he had suffered a dislocated shoulder. The injury would hamper him for the rest of his playing days at Barberton.

In school, Jeep took on a surly role, always carrying a chip on his now throbbing shoulder. Still he found friends, among them quarterback Tom Dimitroff, destined to play for the New York Titans, later the Jets, of the American Football League; Gene Kapish, headed for Notre Dame as a teammate of Paul Hornung and Arlen Vanke, who one day would rule the world of drag-car racing.

There was also another boy in school. A bully who terrified students. Barberton High teachers seemed afraid to deal with the bully. On opening day he started through the alphabet, beating up boys whose last name began with "A." By week's end he reached the "D's" It was time to pick on the new kid from Marietta. He wasn't much to look at, so

he'd go down easy.

Blocking Jeep's way, he threatened, "Whattaya gonna do if I slap ya?"

"Slap you back," Jeep said.

"Yeah, hillbilly? What makes ya so tough?"

"Where I come from my sisters always tell me that the further down the street you go the tougher you get." Jeep answered in a hard-edged voice. "I live in the last house."

Enraged, the bully swung at Jeep. Ducking, Jeep came up with a straight shot to the jaw. A set of teeth came popping out of the bully's mouth. The teeth crashed to the concrete floor like broken piano keys. The first thought into Jeep's mind was, "Oh, my God, what have I done?" He didn't know the bully had a mouth full of false teeth.

The anger that Jeep felt over his parents' death gnawed its way into his soul like a rat. Unlike the bully who used his fists to intimidate weaker boys, he fought anybody he felt had slighted him—even if the slight was unintentional.

On the football field, Jeep shook off the pain from his dislocated shoulder, discolored to an ugly purple. It hurt like the dickens, but that was no excuse for quitting.

Meanwhile, the fights went on.

"You gotta stop this!" begged his friend Tom Dimitroff after another bloody-nosed scuffle. "There's just no excuse for fighting all the time!" Jeep liked him immensely. In only a few years they would be brothers-in-law, marrying the pretty Gombos sisters, Helen and Delores. Dimitroff knew the talent his buddy possessed. "Listen to me," he went on. "With what you've got you're gonna wind up a champion someday. You've gotta get that chip off your shoulder. You gotta set an example."

With Dimitroff, Gene Kapish and Arlen Vanke as his school pals, and with the stem disciplinarian, but kindly Karl Harter, athletic director and former head football and basketball coach who refused to put up with any rough stuff, Jeep suddenly realized he had found his home in Barberton.

The tough, honest city had accepted him at last.

#### *PART THREE: THE ONE-MAN TEAM*

**A**s Jeep prepared for his senior year at Barberton High, the rat of anger that gnawed at his soul was dead. His shoulder had apparently healed, and with that healing the chip that lay so heavily upon it was also gone. And because he was a senior, all that was left for him was to enjoy life. Play football. Run track. Hang out with the guys. Take the girls to the drive-in theater out on the Massillon-Cleveland Road. Especially the pretty, dark-haired cheerleader and volleyball star, Delores Gombos.

But still smoldering somewhere inside him like an ember waiting to be fanned back to life was the dream to be an Olympian.

The 1953 football team featured a sophomore quarter-

back destined for the pros named George Izo, Jr. With the speedy Jeep, now known as the “Barberton Bullet,” running and catching passes at the halfback slot and doubling up in the defensive secondary, the Magics had a shot at a great season. It wasn’t to be.

Jeep played tough-as he always did. He scored 74 points. In the Alliance game, he jumped up to intercept a pass thrown by Lenny Dawson. Stretching his right arm as far as he could he felt a familiar pang. He had dislocated his shoulder again. For the rest of the season, as Barberton finished with a 6-3 record, he wore a specially designed shoulder harness to keep his old injury from worsening. The contraption consisted of a wide belt laced tightly around his chest. Over both shoulders were two leather straps to stop the belt from sliding down his chest. Encircling the biceps of his right arm was a three-inch-wide leather band. A short metal chain linked the armband to the belt around his chest. The chain allowed him some flexibility, but not much. Its sole purpose was to hold the arm close to the body. Mostly, it rendered him a one-armed athlete.

At season’s end, however, Jeep was named to the north squad of the All-Ohio high school football team. During practice sessions, as the players got ready for the annual North-South Game, they elected Jeep co-captain. The selection didn’t impress the coaches. They relegated the Barberton star to the second team. Naturally, Jeep resented the coaches’ decision. Looking at the starting backs, pretty good runners in their own right, he was not impressed. To him they were “slow as smoke.” He had to do something to get the coaches’ attention. Sprawled on the sidelines watching the offense drill, he rolled his helmet on to the field as one of the coaches walked by. “I don’t want to waste my time if I’m not going to play,” Jeep cautioned him. “I’m going home!”

After that, the co-captain was moved into the starting lineup. During one of the last scrimmages before the all-star game, he broke away on three touchdown runs. Woody Hayes, watching the scrimmage, thought the Jeep boy looked familiar. Where had he seen him before, wondered the Ohio State coach? Going down on the field for a closer look, Hayes recognized the “Barberton Bullet.”

“Didn’t I recruit you down at Marietta two years ago?” he asked.

Jeep acknowledged that indeed he had.

When the all-star game finally started, Jeep was a workhorse for the North. During the first eight offensive plays, he lugged the ball four times. He ran for 12, 17 and 13 yards, a total of 42 yards, and the first quarter wasn’t half over. On Jeep’s fourth carry, a South defender rammed his helmet into his back. The force of the collision broke six ribs.

“After all I did to make the starting line-up, and that had to happen,” he later said. For Jeep, his football career was more than likely over. Playing for Ohio State was now out

of the question. And besides, the happy-go-lucky senior had made a commitment to attend the university on a track and field scholarship.

**B**arberton’s Track Coach, L.J. “Duke” Measell was ready to call it quits. He’d had a long career — 33 years. One more season. See if Jeep Davis might place at the state championships. It’d been five years since Bob Toneff captured the shot-put title. Other than Toneff, there’d been only one other state champion, and that was javelin thrower Welby Broadhus back in 1937. But with his speed, Jeep had a shot at placing — even if that dam harness hampered his style.

One of the first meets of the season was the Mansfield Relays. The weather always made a mess of early meets. Snow and cold rain, overcast skies. Winds blowing hard from every direction. And the athletes in their skimpy uniforms, goose bumps dotting their skin as big as eggs.

On the morning of the Mansfield Relays snow fell like a blizzard. It piled up, almost a half-foot deep in Barberton. Measell stared out his window at home. No track meet today, he figured. He went back to bed.

Meanwhile, Jeep was up. Making it to school in the snow, he waited outside the gym for his coach, bundled in a sheepskin coat. When Measell failed to show, he hopped in his car and drove the 60 blinding miles to Mansfield. The snow finally let up. When he got to the stadium, the track was clear. The meet was on. Jeep signed himself in, which was illegal, but he was still expecting Measell to arrive. He looked anxiously for his coach as he was called to the long-jump pit. He couldn’t wait any longer. Without any guidance, he trotted over. He warmed up, took his three jumps and won. Next, he sped to victory in the 100-yard dash. Then he got back in his car and drove home.

The next morning, Coach Measell opened the Sunday *Akron Beacon Journal* to the sports section. Catching sight of a headline, he coughed a mouthful of coffee across the kitchen table.

#### *Barberton’s Davis Wins Two Events at Mansfield Relays*

The 47th Ohio Class A High School Track and Field Championships featured the best teams from every corner of the state. Coaches and their top athletes poured into Ohio Stadium in Columbus from Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Mansfield and dozens of other cities and towns. For Coach Measell it was his last championship meet. His chances for a state title on his final try were about as good as inheriting one million bucks. Only one of his thinclads had qualified. But he’d bet that Jeep Davis had a good shot at an individual championship, if only he wasn’t wearing that infernal harness.

Although Mansfield, with its deepest team in years, was favored, Jeep felt he was ready to take on the entire state. He entered four events. The first was the long jump.

Barreling down the runway, Jeep launched himself through the air. Landing in a spray of sawdust, he reached 23-0-1/4 feet. Turning to an official as he hurried off for the start of the 100-yard dash, he asked that if someone jumped better to let him know. Otherwise, he'd let his jump stand.

When the gun went off to start the 100, Jeep hadn't had much time to get ready. As he drove out of his starting blocks, he discovered they hadn't been secured tight enough in the loose cinders. The blocks slipped backward. Jeep fell face forward as he lunged ahead. By the time he scrambled up, the race was lost. In a gallant effort, he took off after the runners. Cinders flew from beneath his flying feet. Without the full use of his right arm, he couldn't generate the speed to catch the field. His time was 9.9 seconds. He finished fourth. He picked up two points.

In the qualifying heat of the 180-yard low hurdles, Jeep set the state record with a time of 19.1 seconds. He then won the finals in 19.4. It was his first state championship. After two events he had scored eight points.

Meanwhile, word came back from the long-jump pit. His first and only jump had held up as the longest effort of the day. He was now a double champion and had scored 14 points. Checking the results of all the teams, it dawned on Jeep that with one event left he had a shot at knocking off the entire Mansfield squad to capture the state meet.

All by himself!

The last event for Jeep was the 220-yard dash. The competition was sharp, and he knew that to win he had to take off his harness. He needed the freedom to swing both arms. In a close race, as the eight top qualifiers thundered out of the curve and headed down the straight away, Jeep edged ahead of everyone. He broke the tape first in 21 seconds.

And all by himself, Jeep won the state track and field title, a feat that had never been done in the near half-century history of the prestigious Ohio championship meet.

#### *PART FOUR: GOLD DOWN UNDER*

Ohio State University Track Coach Larry Snyder possessed a keen eye for judging talent. Recruiting the "Barberton Bullet," he saw in Jeep the same raw talent that had Fallonsbee Coach Thomas Jefferson Hill declaring that once the Davis boy perfected his form then "Look out!" Watching Jeep in the first days of practice in 1955, Snyder decided right away to see if his newest sprinter-jumper had the strength for longer races. He pitted him in the 440-yard dash against the defending Big Ten Conference champion. Tearing around the oval inside the huge Ohio stadium for the first time, the same stadium where the legendary Jesse Owens performed so brilliantly for Coach Snyder two decades earlier, Jeep roared past the Big Ten champ. The time was 47.7 seconds. Snyder pushed back his cap and whistled softly. Then, looking at Jeep, he just said, "Geez." The world record was 45.8 seconds. With training,

there was no reason that record could not fall.

"That's when it all started," Jeep recalled.

Snyder not only had a new 440-yard runner, but he knew in his heart that this freshman flash also had the making of a great intermediate hurdler. To bolster Jeep's speed, Ohio State also took care of his shoulder once and for all, surgically implanting a plate to avoid further injury.

"Coach Snyder did more for me in my lifetime than any other man," Jeep said. "He taught me how to behave and not do the wrong things. He taught me to be a moral man. When I was having trouble in English, he would come up to my dorm room and sit down with me and teach me how to write papers. No other coach would do that."

Jeep's day at Ohio State began at five in the morning. Crisp under still dark skies, he trained alone. No other athletes awakened so early. For the first 20 minutes he loosened up, getting his body warm against the cold. Jogging. Striding. Jogging. Striding. Then he ran a lap. Worked on his breathing. Then he ran a 600-yard dash. "I'd stride those yards out, do two or three of those. Or I'd run eight 440s. That'd be my morning workout." Then it was off to class. A second workout session took place in the afternoon when all the other athletes, too lazy to awake at five and workout with Jeep, finally showed up for practice.

Jeep never trained at half-throttle. It was always at his "combat pace." He kept running as hard as he could. "When it came time for a race I was so used to going fast that I could go fast."

In his first intermediate hurdle-race ever, as a sophomore in the Olympic year of 1956, Jeep streaked over the eight three-foot-three-inch-high barriers in 54 seconds. In his second race, he cut his time to 52.2, a time that equaled the mark of the bronze medalist at the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games. In his third ever race in the hurdles he was clocked at 51.8. Then a 51.1, faster than the 1952 silver-medalist from the Soviet Union, Yuri Lituyev, who held the current world record at 50.4 seconds.

The 1956 Olympics were scheduled for Melbourne, Australia. Lituyev was the obvious favorite for the gold. Another top pick was Eddie Southern out of the University of Texas. The dark horse was the promising sophomore from Ohio State, Jeep Davis. Every time he ran, his times got better and better. The clashes between the tall Texan and the bounding Buckeye turned into classic duels. As their careers continued after the Olympics, Jeep remembered that when they raced against each other it seemed the world record always fell.

The US Olympic Trials, held in Los Angeles on June 29, confirms Jeep's recollection.

The magic barrier for the 400 intermediate hurdles was 50 seconds. No one had ever breached it. Inside the mammoth L.A. Coliseum, the two speedsters squared off. They

hardly ever talked. But they set a blistering pace. When it was over, Jeep broke Lituyev's three-year-old mark. His time shocked Southern and everyone else who witnessed the race. 49.5 seconds! In only his sixth effort in the 400-meter hurdles he not only had shattered the 50-second barrier by a dazzling half-second, but lowered the world record by nearly one full second.

Southern was no slouch himself. He finished with a spectacular 49.7 seconds, a world-record run in its own right — if only Jeep Davis had been somewhere else that day. Josh Culbreath, obviously not as fast the other two, but by placing third, joined them as Australian-bound Olympians.

In the preliminaries for the 400 hurdles, Eddie Southern was a house afire. In the semifinals, held in the morning with the finals scheduled for later that afternoon, he burned up the track with a 50.1 effort. It was a new Olympic record. Jeep strolled in with a tortoise-like 54 seconds. Southern had gone all out in the semifinals. Jeep figured the Texan had spent himself. He was ready to teach him a lesson in the finals. But Southern was too much of a competitor to give up. He bolted into the lead, and held it going into the far turn. He was right where Jeep wanted him.

"I love to be behind so I can see what's in front of me, so I can pace myself to make the final kill down the straight-away," Jeep explained, recalling his great race. "I wanted Southern to know that I'm here, and I'm coming."

Racing on the outside, Jeep had trouble getting his steps down between the hurdles. Shooting for 13 steps, he was out of sync. Southern continued to hold him off. Then Jeep settled down, relying on a 15-step rhythm. Picking up his pace, he blew by Southern at the seventh hurdle. His time at the finish was 50.1, tying Southern's half-day-old Olympic record. Southern closed at 50.8.

For Jeep, his dream born on the banks of the Ohio River to be an Olympic hero, had come true! He had run with a brave heart. And he had run for his late father, the Braveheart of his life.

#### *PART FIVE: WINNING THE SULLIVAN AWARD*

If there is one track event that Jeep feels disappointed he never entered it is the decathlon. In the late 1950s, the world's best decathletes were C.K. Yang of Taiwan, Vassily Kuznyetsov of the Soviet Union and the American Rafer Johnson. But perhaps the best all-around athlete of them all was Jeep.

Jack Clowser knew it. A s chronicler of track news for the National Collegiate Athletic Association, he wrote in 1957: "The superb Glenn Davis, world record holder for the 400-meter hurdles, can do anything below the 880, and broad jump too." A look at several NCAA meets bears witness to this versatility.

Beginning with the 47th Big Ten Indoor Championship,

hosted by Ohio State on March 1 and 2, 1957, Jeep was a one-man scoring machine. He blazed to victory in the 70-yard low hurdles, beating a strong field that included Olympic decathlon champion Milt Campbell. He grabbed seconds in the long jump, where he was barely beaten by Olympic gold medalist Greg Bell; the high hurdles, losing out to future silver medalist Willie May; and the 60-yard dash. He also anchored the mile relay, leading the way to a seeming win only to see his team disqualified because the lead-off runner unwittingly crossed into an opponent's lane. Jeep's 16-1/2 points set a championship record.

Three months later, he was again a whirlwind, this time at the 57th Big Ten Outdoor Championships, held in Evanston, Illinois. He collected a series of seconds; the 220-yard dash, high hurdles and long jump.

Jeep saved his best all-around performances for 1958. Again, he was the busiest track star in the Big Ten. At season's end he had scored a whopping 250 points. As he said, "Before every meet Coach Snyder asked me what events I ought to enter. The plan was not to set world records, but to score points so that Ohio State would win." Against Penn State, Jeep competed in nine events. In his career, he won 26 Big Ten championships.

At the Big Ten Indoor Championships he won the 60-yard dash, beating Bobby Mitchell of Illinois, the future National Football League Hall-of-Famer. Mitchell then edged him in the low hurdles. In the long jump, they tied for second. Jeep closed out the meet by capturing the high hurdles. At the outdoor championships, Jeep and Mitchell resumed their personal duel. In the 220, Mitchell squeaked ahead of Jeep for the win. Jeep then won the 440 with a searing time of 45.8 seconds.

During the 1958 NCAA championship, held under sun-drenched skies in Berkeley, California, Jeep qualified for both the 440-yard dash and the 440-yard hurdles. His hurdle win was overshadowed by his dash to a world record in the 440 of 45.7 seconds. Observing that race, Pacific Coast Conference Commissioner Bernard Hammerbeck, said, "Davis' . . . victory was a superbly paced effort as he took the outside lane around two turns, nailed his foremost adversary, Texas' Eddie Southern, at the head of the stretch and sprinted home for a seven-yard win."

Jeep's season was far from over. At a meet in Quantico, Virginia, with conditions far from sunny, he took part in the long jump. As heavy rain poured down on the sopping wet athletes, the runway was a mess. Jumpers were fouling, slipping and barely reaching the landing pit. Even Jeep had a hard time. With one jump to go, he dared to change his approach. Instead of splashing down the runway, he selected the four-inch-wide wooden edge of the runway. A simple two-by-four plank. With the balance of a high-wire acrobat, he sprinted atop the narrow board and launched himself to victory with a leap of over 23 feet.

That summer, Jeep was off to Europe with top US stars as part of the first series of track and field meets against teams inside the Soviet Union — an athletic thawing of the Cold War. The first stop, however, was in Oslo. In a single meet, Jeep captured the 100-, 200- and 400-meter runs and the 400-meter hurdles. Inside the Iron Curtain, he was just as impressive. In 10 races, he won nine.

In Budapest, on August 6, 45,000 Hungarians came out to see him compete in his last race of the hectic barnstorming tour. In his specialty, he was off on a perfect hurdle run. Smoothly he zipped over every barrier. At the last hurdle, he clipped it, but kept his balance. Breaking the tape in 49.2 seconds, he had set a new world record. The Hungarians rose to their feet and showered him with a thunderous ovation. In response, he jogged around the track. It wasn't enough. Twice more he circled the oval as the Hungarians continued their cheering. He then loped up the runway to the exit tunnel, turned once to wave and then was out of the stadium, as the roar of the crowd rang over the city on the Danube.

US Coach George Eastmont told a gathering of sportswriters, "Davis is the most versatile runner alive today."

At the end of the year, the AAU elected Jeep winner of the 1958 James E. Sullivan Memorial Award as best amateur athlete in the United States. He polled 1,858 points to beat Rafer Johnson, the great decathlete.

#### *PART SIX: IN DEFENSE OF THE GOLD MEDAL*

American Glenn Hardin was the legend that all intermediate hurdlers in the years after World War Two chased. The closest to catching him was Lituyev, who broke his world record. But in the Olympics, the best the Russian managed, as already noted, was a second in 1952 and a fourth in 1956.

Now it was Jeep Davis's turn to chase the legend.

With the 1960 Olympic Games set to open in Rome on August 25th, Eddie Southern was no longer in the picture. The rangy Texan, who pushed Jeep like no other competitor, had since retired. But two other American stalwarts were quick to take his place.

Cliff Cushman, captain of the University of Kansas track team, a novice jet-fighter pilot at the school's Reserve Officers' Training Corps, was a talented athlete every bit as versatile as Jeep. A native of Iowa, Cushman went to high school at Grand Forks, North Dakota, where he won practically all running events track offered — from the high hurdles to the 5,000 meters. He stood 6-2, with a mop of curly blond hair, and wore a smile that easily told the world how much he loved life.

Dickie Howard, a military veteran, who had overcome a serious back injury, was no stranger to Jeep. In 1959, he had taken over as the premier intermediate hurdler in the country. That year the six-foot, 178-pound native of Oklahoma

City, won both the AAU and NCAA championships and placed second at the Pan-American Games.

The difference between Cushman and Howard was like the difference between a spring rain and a raging torrent.

"Cliff was awful quiet," remembered Jeep. "A truly nice kid, a great competitor." Howard was anything but quiet. The in-your-face competitor constantly needled his opponents. In fact, at the AAU championship in Boulder, Colorado, where he gained a berth on the 1959 US Pan-Am team by knocking off an ailing Jeep, whose lower back was injured while throwing the javelin, Howard sidled up to the dejected defending Olympic title holder and boasted that now he was the greatest 400 hurdler in the world.

In 1960, with his back healed, Jeep trained with a passion that had been missing throughout most of 1959. "I was doing my combat pace," he said. "Harder in fact for the distance I was to race." In practice, he was clocked several times at below his own world record.

The US Olympic Men's Track and Field Team that headed for Rome in the summer of 1960 looked to improve on its sterling showing four years earlier in Melbourne. The team was loaded with superstars. Speedster Dave Sime; long-distance runner Max Truex; high hurdlers Lee Calhoun, Willie May and Hayes Jones; the world's best jumpers, John Thomas in the high jump and Ralph Boston in the long jump; pole vaulter Don "Tarzan" Bragg; shot putters Parry O'Brien, Bill Nieder and Dallas Long; discus ace Al Oerter; decathlete Rafer Johnson; and, of course, intermediate hurdler Jeep Davis.

But early on the men faltered. The running events proved disastrous. In the end only four gold medals ended up in the US treasury — half of 1956's total. Two of those gold medals now reside in Barberton.

Failure of the men to catch fire on the Rome track was blamed on the wild night life they were leading, although many of them denied the accusations. Also, a virus felled several of them, including Jeep. After examining Jeep and the others, among them Dallas Long and decathlete Dave Edstrom, US Coach Larry Snyder reported, "I don't think it's serious. It's one of those things that last only a day or two."

The virus may have struck when the US team competed in a tuneup meet in Bern, Switzerland, a week before the Olympics. In that meet, held under the lights on a cold night, Jeep flashed a warning message to anyone who figured on wresting away his title. First, he stormed to a world record in the 200-meter low hurdles around a curve with a 22.5-second time. He hadn't raced that rare event in three years. The next day, he knocked off Cushman and Howard in the 400 hurdles with a time of 49.7. Lastly, he, Rafer Johnson, Jack Yerman and Jerry Siebert teamed up to win the mile relay (four-by-400), in 3:06.2 minutes.

Afterward, Jeep said, "I was not really running, just playing."

Then, when the Olympics opened, his playfulness took on the cold-blooded edge of a true champion. Despite the virus. The American trio of Jeep, Cushman and Howard easily made it through the quarterfinals and semifinals to the final round. In the finals, Jeep drew the outside lane. Sportswriter Allison Danzig of *The New York Times* lamented that the outside was "the worst lane," putting Jeep in jeopardy. He didn't know that the "Barberton Bullet" loved the outside lane like Brer Rabbit loved his 'briar patch."

But as the field shot from the starting blocks, tension swept through Jeep. "I was scared and had a hard time hitting my stride because I was hyper." His steps were off by four or five inches, although he and Howard were ahead going into the first turn. But quickly passing both Americans on the inside were Jussi Rintamäki of Finland and Helmut Janz of Germany. As the runners swung around the last curve, Rintamäki held first, Janz clung to second and Howard kept himself a step in front of Jeep.

"Dang!" Jeep said to himself. "I've got to quit this nervousness, this being scared!" Instantly a calmness settled over him. "I went back into my relaxed pace, but now I was doing it with more power." He roared out of the last turn. Meanwhile, Janz moved into the lead. Then Howard overhauled the German. On the last hurdle, Jeep caught everyone. He swept over the barrier, hit the cinders and then pushed off hard on his right leg and bolted like the bullet he was into a six-yard lead. As Howard tried one last desperate effort to catch the defending champion, the nearly forgotten Cliff Cushman slipped by him into second. Streaming over the finish line, Jeep felt he could have run another 100 yards. His time was 49.3 seconds, a new Olympic record. Behind him, Cushman tumbled to the track, the silver medal. Howard grabbed third.

The following day in the *Times*, Danzig called the American sweep of the hurdles, "a smashing comeback" for the men's track team.

For Jeep, he had defeated the legend of Glenn Hardin, becoming the first Olympian to win consecutive gold medals in the intermediate hurdles. Yet he wasn't finished. In an exciting mile relay, running the third leg, he helped spark the US to a world record of 3:02.2 minutes. His second gold medal of the Rome Games gave him three for his career. No other intermediate hurdler in Olympic history has ever captured three gold medals, not even the great Edwin Moses against whom Jeep would always wonder, "What if. . ."

#### EPILOGUE: THE \$125,000 TURN DOWN

Football beckoned Jeep like a siren out of a Greek tragedy. But every time he got close to the sport, injury knocked him away. Twice in high school. And at Ohio

State, the fear of injury was enough to keep him penned along the sidelines. But in 1960, as he trained for the Olympics inside Ohio Stadium, he at last answered the siren's call.

Howard "Hopalong" Cassady, co-captain of the Detroit Lions, winner of the 1955 Heisman Trophy and a Buckeye graduate, and Bobby Walston of the Philadelphia Eagles, were working out. They wore shorts and helmets and tossed a football back and forth. Cassady, spotting the Olympic champion, hollered: "Hey, Jeep, think you can catch a football?" He fired a pass in Jeep's direction. It was fast, high and to the backside. Twisting, Jeep speared the ball like a pro.

That catch sent him north to Detroit after the Olympics for a tryout with the Lions.

As he fought for a spot on the team, Jeep wondered, "Can I still stand up in football shoes?" It had been more than five years since he starred at Barberton. He was small for a pro player, weighing just 170 pounds. But he was tough, and every time he got thrown to the ground, he bounced right back up.

"This boy Davis is a spunky cuss," Coach George Wilson stated. "He has a burning desire to be a professional football player." Lion linebacker Joe Schmidt nicknamed him the "Zephyr."

Although Jeep made the team in 1960, it took him another year to break into the starting lineup. With the Lions struggling through the 1961 season, Wilson designed a wide-open passing attack that would take advantage of Jeep's Olympic speed. The new shotgun formation was called the "Zephyr." Three receivers lined up on the right side, flanker Terry Barr, tight end Gail Cogdill and slotback Jim Gibbons. On the left side, by himself, was Jeep Davis. Quarterback Jim Ninowski took the snap from center, rolled right behind the blocking of fullback Nick Pietrosante. The formation left the center open, and Jeep cut into the middle of the field where Ninowski hit him with a pass.

Commenting on the newly designed offense, Coach Wilson said, "If he [Davis] ever gets two steps on a defender you're gonna see something."

The "Zephyr" debuted against the Rams. Jeep hauled in four passes for 54 yards. The Lions ended a four-game losing streak. The next week against the 49ers, the "Zephyr" was even more potent. In the first half, Jeep grabbed four passes for 43 yards. But as he caught his fourth toss from Ninowski, linebacker Leo Nomellini knocked him out of the game, and out for the rest of the regular season.

In fact, the injury basically marked the end of Jeep's football career. By 1962, the siren's call was hushed forever.

For Jeep, the next stop was Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Here he was named assistant track and field coach, groomed to take over the head post from Lou Montgomery in two years. Track was on the skids at Cornell

when Jeep arrived in upstate New York. But within a few years, he pried students away from their books for a few hours every day to run track. He literally talked them onto his team. One of them was a concert pianist. Then he trained them and shared in their excitement as they went on to glory around the country.

In the meantime, Jeep was still riding the crest of fame himself as a two-time Olympic hurdle champion and former receiver for the Detroit Lions.

Here was the ideal spokesman for a major tobacco company. Account executives for a powerful New York advertising agency showed up in Ithaca with an offer so enticing in the early 1960s that only a fool would turn it down. Or a person of integrity.

The offer was a \$25,000 signing bonus followed by a two-year contract to appear in advertisements around the country to extol the pleasures of smoking.

Jeep told the admen no.

Figuring he was playing hard to get, they upped the ante to \$50,000. Again, Jeep said no. Then how about \$75,000? Again, the answer came back. No. Certainly nobody could turn down \$100,000. But Jeep turned them down. The final offer was thrown across the table. \$125,000! A fortune!

Thinking back to the veteran's hospital in Clarksburg, West Virginia, where his once strong father languished close to death, the ravages of cancer eating away at him, Jeep remembered his advice. "Son, someday you're going to be a great athlete. Just don't ever do anything wrong."

The words of his brother-in-law, Tom Dimitroff, came back too, when they first became friends and stood together inside the Barberton football stadium, Jeep embittered over his father's death. "With what you've got you're gonna wind up a champion someday. You gotta get that chip off your shoulder. You gotta set an example."

Somewhere in America, in some city or town, some backwater burg or rich suburb, there might be a kid just like Jeep, with all the talent in the world. Looking for a hero. Looking for someone to be like. If Jeep smoked, then the kid might smoke. What would happen to the talent then? No, he had to do the right thing. He had to set an example.

And for the last time, Jeep Davis said no.

Now it was time to come home-home to that tough, honest city encircling Lake Anna with arms open to anyone willing to prove that they, too, are tough and honest.

Home to Barberton.

*"No Excuses" was written for the people of Barberton, Ohio, to honor their native son, Glenn Davis. A statue of their hero was unveiled in the town's center in June 1998. Sources: Glenn and Delores Davis, Davis family scrapbooks, Barberton Historical Society, archives at the AAU, NCAA, Big Ten Conference and Ohio State University.*

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