
Where Are The Americans?

*Make sure you take the test at the end of the first paragraph.
Don't peek at the answers. Medellin is discussing one of the most exciting races you rarely see. . . the steeplechase. In the state of California you would think this would be the logical place to lead the way. Introducing hay bales in cross country races is just of the tips in this piece. Great idea.
Note the web site address for women's steeplechase information. This is another article sent in by George Payan, Coaches Alliance.*

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What's 3,000 meters long, very difficult to finish and has lots of water? No, it's not a mountain bike race or a swim across the English Channel, it's the 3,000-meter steeplechase. The steeplechase has 28 barriers and seven water jumps and is approximately 200 meters short of two miles. Can you name the men's American record holder in the 3,000 meter steeplechase? Can you name the women's American record holder?

In this country the steeplechase seems to be a lost event or an event with no meet. It seems only to be run in college invitationals or at the Junior Olympics and the Olympic Games. But, what happens in between? Where do we learn the event? (The Kenyans seem to be learning the event at a very early age.)

A CHANGE IN THINKING?

In a recent conversation I had with Dean Crawley, Commissioner of the Southern Section of CIF (California

Interscholastic Federation), Crawley stated that it is perfectly fine to run the steeplechase at any high school invitational. He even pointed out that if a league wanted to run the steeplechase at their league finals it would be up to the teams in the league.

Most of the concern about running the steeplechase is the problem of facilities; you need a water jump and portable barriers. But at most universities and colleges the facilities already exist. So why don't we run the steeplechase whenever it is feasible?

Another suggestion is to modify the steeplechase event for practical purposes when the facilities do not exist. Some races have taken place in which no water jump was used, but instead adding another barrier or hurdle in place of the water jump. This is at least an attempt to introduce the event to the uninitiated.

When I asked Crawley about running the steeplechase in the CIF Championships, he said that anything is possible in the future, and made reference to the women's pole vault and the changes that have occurred in our sport in recent years.

As far as I know, the state of New York is the only state that runs the men's steeplechase in their high school state meet each year. Why can't California and other states? The steeplechase could become an event in which a talented and coordinated athlete who might not win the 1600m or 3200m could switch to. In trying the event, the high school athlete could gain valuable experience and steeplechasing knowledge for the future.

At the USATF Junior Championships only the men's steeplechase is contested. The qualifying standards are 9:40 for the 3000m steeplechase and 6:27.00 for the 2000m steeplechase. It would seem that if a decent high school distance runner would practice hurdling and jumping the water barrier, the qualifying time should be attainable.

Soon we may also be seeing the women's steeplechase regularly at USATF meets. It is time that Americans make an effort to challenge the Kenyan dominance in the steeplechase and this needs to begin at the high school level!

By Rich Medellin, Esperanza High School, Anaheim, CA

A FEW SUGGESTIONS

Here are a few suggestions for coaches to begin drumming up interest in the steeplechase.

- 1) Use hay bales in cross country races.
- 2) Run the steeplechase in the pre-season meets.
- 3) Use regular hurdles instead of barriers.
- 4) Use a lower hurdle height until the athletes are comfortable hurdling.
- 5) Lobby meet directors to put the event into their meets.
- 6) Practice hurdling drills.
- 7) Practice hurdling for fun and a change of pace.
- 8) Run 2,000m races instead of 3,000m races for beginners.

WOMEN, GET READY!

The question is not if, but when? In the past few years the women's steeplechase has become an increasingly popular and promising event.

The women's 3000m steeplechase can become an official event December 31, 1999, if the IAAF can come to some sort of conclusion on the length of the water jump. It has considered two options. One is to shorten the water jump pit 60 centimeters (which is the recommendation of the IAAF). The other option is to shorten the water jump pit 14 inches (from 12 feet to 10 feet, 10 inches), which is the recommendation of the U.S. Development Committee. After the decision has been made, an official world record can be set.

The NCAA is also in the process of considering the inclusion of the women's steeplechase in 1998 as an official event in both Divisions I and

II. In both divisions, all barriers will be 30 inches in height.

In both cases, men's or women's steeplechase, it is time to make positive changes in the development of our future steeplechasers, to become a leader not a follower in the event.

WOMEN'S STEEPLECHASE WEB SITE

The USATF Women's Steeplechase Development Committee has a world wide web site—<http://www.sisna.com/users/bsi4>, with interesting information about the women's steeplechase.

P.S. The American record holders are Henry Marsh—8:09.17 and Courtney Pugmire—10:23.47 (this is not an official record but is the fastest American time, as the IAAF does not yet recognize the event).