

One had to be shocked by the November announcement that Bery Wagner was leaving his position as head coach at Oregon State.

Effective Feb. 1, 1976, Wagner will be head of the track section of a \$19.2 million sports program being set up in Saudi Arabia by Whittaker Corp.

What could make one of America's most successful coaches into Bery of Arabia?

A man who is a member of the '76 US Olympic coaching staff (a position he will not have to relinquish).

A man with a full professorship at a highly-respected track school in the country's best track conference.

A man generally recognized as the guiding light behind the development of the Fosbury Flop.

A man who had coached seven different athletes to nine NCAA titles in the last eight years.

That's a lot to turn your back on. And anyone who knows Bery Wagner knows that just big money (a rumored \$60,000 a year for three years) wouldn't be enough.

The real story behind Bery's big switch is the state of track in this country. What it has already slipped to, and what is in the future.

Is the US in trouble?

T&FN: OK, you're obviously not leaving just because the money is good.

Wagner: My getting out is primarily frustration. Frustration that we can't run a program the way it should be run. I don't mean just Oregon State, I mean everywhere.

They [Saudi Arabia] will be able to do the types of things we always say we'd like to be able to do in the US, but never have the money to do them. I think it's a heck of a challenge. It's never been done before. Private industry has never contracted with a government to set up a sports program.

To not have one's hands tied by regulations that have been set up to try and keep people honest is going to be great.

T&FN: Has collegiate track in this country fallen into a terrible bureaucracy? Is that one of the big problems?

Wagner: For the schools to have to finance our entire athletic program for our entire country I think might be unrealistic. We could do it for many years, but with the turn in the economy, athletic departments are in trouble.

The membership of the NCAA (as distinguished from the executive committee or NCAA office) slashed track 40% as far as scholarship possibilities are concerned. Didn't exactly slash 40%, because all schools weren't up to the old maximum of 23.

T&FN: Who's behind it?

Wagner: I say it's the small Division I schools of the East who have the majority of the votes and they really called the shots. They like to have a few individuals in some indoor meets and indoor track is their big thing. They don't really run dual meets as we know them on the West Coast.

I would say the Pac-8, which has dominated the Nationals for many years, has been brought to its knees by legislation.

T&FN: For example?

Wagner: The rule on recruiting. For 16-December 1975

BERNY WAGNER

instance, Corvallis, a very small population area; I can bring in eight people to the campus—the whole year, cross country and track. If you're in a population area such as LA or New York, a lot of kids can come to campus on their own any time they want. That doesn't count as a visit.

But if we have to pay a kid mileage to come visit us, or buy him lunch, or give him a place to stay overnight (even a dorm), that counts as one of our visits. Just eight.

T&FN: And the old days?

Wagner: Just that a student-athlete could have one paid visit.

Through the new rules, you're almost going to have to find a way around it. Don't write the athlete, write the coach and let him relay your message, because if an athlete is "recruited" and he receives any aid at all on campus later on, this counts against your quota of 14 scholarships, whether he receives \$5.00 or \$1500. If he's not recruited, if you haven't been in touch with him, then he can come in on these programs and not count.

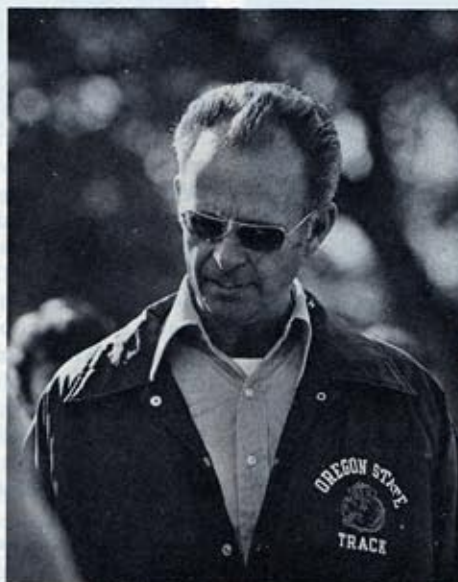
If an athlete is recruited—for instance, I write him and he writes back—then he is recruited. Then, if he has an on-campus job and earns money, whether I got him the job or not, it counts against us.

Last year, Rick Davis, a 240-foot javelin thrower, quit track because he either had to quit track or quit the job he'd gotten himself at the computer center on campus because he was making "too much money."

T&FN: What about the restriction on number of meets they've come up with?

Wagner: Not yet. In January, they will come up with a number of meets, possibly a restriction on when you can practice. They've already come up with the number you can take to a meet.

Indoors it's 22, outdoors 27 (but the home team gets 34). This 27/34 with the



DAVE DRENNAN

'You can't expect to compete in the Olympics anymore training 2 hours a day.'

type of competition we have in the Pac-8 practically guarantees the win to the home team.

They're proposing restrictions on a lot of things but the rules are changing so fast these days I'm not really sure which ones are in and which aren't.

The recruiting thing right now: I can talk to a cross country man at a certain time of the year, and a trackman at others. I can visit them only between certain hours some parts of the year, other hours in other parts,

and most of the year not at all. We have to send them a contract at least a week or 10 days before they come to the campus. . .

T&FN: Isn't a lot of this picayune stuff as a result of football violations?

Wagner: I think it's mainly basketball. Basketball recruiting is responsible for most of the violations, simply because you can turn a whole team around with a single man. I understand why the rules are there. Coaches have cheated, athletes have cheated, parents have cheated.

It's just gotten so complex and involved I kinda wonder if maybe we shouldn't go to a local-type thing. If we can get a national program to identify and take the top people and give them the opportunity to excel.

I mean give them coaching, and the money to be able to afford to train. To be able to train five hours a day. You can't expect to compete in the Olympics anymore training two hours a day.

T&FN: Do you find a stance by the schools that they only want to subsidize "revenue-producing" sports kind of hypocritical? Not in the true spirit of what an educational institution should be providing for its students, its community; that it should be providing a varied background in physical activities; one, for the participation of the students and two, for the enjoyment of the student body and

surrounding populace.

Wagner: This is what we've always thought sports were for. For participation, for working for excellence with a certain group.

It seems to me that athletics are an honors-class type of thing—they're an advanced class. We have these things in other disciplines. Do we want them in athletics? If we do, we should fund them, if we don't then we should get rid of them. Not abuse them and then damn them, which is what is happening in some places.

T&FN: So you're leaving OSU, and earlier Don Meyers left Colorado (always a good track school) to go into real estate. Do you see a growing trend of coaches getting out of collegiate track?

Wagner: I believe coaches who have been dedicated to excellence in what you might call major programs have their sights set and goals such that they're not going to be able to change to a lower-key type situation, that more and more of them are probably going to get out.

There are many coaches who are disgruntled; no, let's say frustrated. This is the way I felt. I can see the reason for rules, but I can't see the reason for saying, "Yes, we want you to do a good job, but no, you can't have the tools to do it."

T&FN: Is all this going to have negative ramifications on our sport of track? If we do see a falling-back to a more regional level, is this going to hurt the level

of track in this country?

Wagner: I feel it is. If the membership of the NCAA wishes to cut track back, the numbers of people who can be helped will diminish. Only something like one in a thousand preps goes on in track after high school, and if we cut that back further, we're going to lose the one thing that the US has been able to do to maintain our position at the top of the men's track world—our vast pool of new and everchanging talent. The colleges have furnished this talent.

I don't know if it's realistic to expect them to furnish that talent, but they have. And I think by 1984, with what we are doing now, it is going to tell. We're going to find fewer and fewer qualified people to rise to the top in our helter-skelter system.

We don't have a national training camp, a national sports-medicine setup that tests our people, we don't have an identification system through physiology and biomechanics to see who our best athletes are going to be. It has just been a natural-selection process. To do it that way, we have to have hundreds of thousands of people in the sport. And we're not going to have them anymore.

T&FN: How can you justify the fact that you aren't running out on the collegiate system? Couldn't you stay here, and with a small amount of personal deprivation do the system more good by fighting the injustices being foisted on the

system?

Wagner: I feel I can be comfortable with trying something new at this point. I have worked through channels (which I believe in, rather than revolution) in almost every type of track organization in the US. I feel I have done some good.

I feel at this point people who have the same goals as I have are so frustrated by what is going on, whether it's by the lack of money or lack of recognition that there's any importance in having excellence in track and field.

I feel I can do more good someplace else. I'm going to get bitter if I stay much longer. I'm getting so frustrated that I'm afraid I would not do a good job.

Someone will come into the job at Oregon State. They will take the program from where it is and there will be future changes. But they are starting at this particular point, and they will be able to bend with the changes. I started at a different point. I can't make any more changes and still be effective I feel.

T&FN: What regrets do you have in choosing to leave the US?

Wagner: I have regrets leaving Oregon State; leaving a full professorship; regrets leaving some fine young athletes and co-workers. . .

My real dream is to be able to help come up with a program that looks so good that someone in the US would like to try it. □

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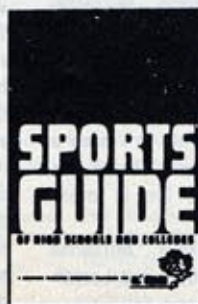
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70, 6.7; 70HH, 7.8; 440, 46.2; 500, 55.4; 600, 1:08.5; 880, 1:48.8; 1000, 2:05.1; mile (a soft spot), 4:01.9; 2M, 8:35.3; 5000, 13:34.2; MR, 3:10.2; 2MR, 7:20.8; HJ, 7'4"; PV, 17'4"; TJ, 54'3½"; LJ, 26'; SP, 66'8".

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