

Herman Frazier

by Jeff Hollobaugh

Nearly 17 years ago, a wiry Arizona State junior, not yet 22, charged hard out of the blocks in the most important 400 race of his life. Herman Frazier later said that he had not been expected to do much in Montréal's Olympic final. In fact, not one of our experts—unable to gauge the young man's determination—picked him to medal.

Sapped by his fast start, passed by Alberto Juantorena and Fred Newhouse, Frazier struggled to maintain his form to the line, clocking a lifetime-best 44.95 to take the bronze medal. Two days later, he joined with his teammates to win a gold medal in the 4 x 400.

A model student-athlete—he spent his freshman year at Ohio's Denison University on an academic scholarship—Frazier became an assistant athletic director at Arizona State in '79 and has been involved in collegiate athletics ever since.

Now an associate AD at his alma mater, Frazier chairs the NCAA's Track & Field Committee. In addition, delegates to the last TAC Convention elected him a vice-president of the new USATF. The first to admit he enjoys wearing his various hats, Frazier confesses, "I absolutely love doing what I do."

At a time when uncertainty about the future of collegiate track has many worried about the health of America's developmental system, Frazier shares his thoughts:

T&FN: *What are the main concerns facing you as chair of the NCAA Track Committee?*

Frazier: The first one is the continuation of the sport on the NCAA level and being able to maintain the numbers of scholarships for men and women—and hopefully be able to convince the NCAA that we need to increase those numbers.

As we look at the entire issue of gender equity, there's no question that the current 16 scholarships for women is something that we should consider increasing, because track & field is one of those sports in which you can get larger numbers and create some equality.

Obviously there is no sport for women that's going to get you anywhere near the numbers of men that you have going out for football. Football now has a maximum of 85 scholarships. You have to come up with a lot

of sports to offer women to get up to those numbers. If you take track & field and look at all the events you offer, there are ways you can go ahead and get those numbers up.

T&FN: *Will the gender equity issue impact men's track negatively?*

Frazier: Probably, but by the same token, I believe track and field offers some cultural diversity on our campuses. It gives us the opportunity to include some minority students in sports other than football and basketball. Cultural diversity on college campuses is something that all presidents should have to deal with. It's a major problem within our society and I think that track & field is one sport that gives you the avenue because there

are so many different events.

T&FN: *Is it possible—as some coaches say—that there may come a time when no scholarships are available for NCAA track?*

Frazier: There have been some discussions about going to "need-based aid" across the board for all sports. And people are fearful that may be the wave of the future, if only because of the skyrocketing costs that we're all dealing with on our college campuses. That's one I'm not sure I can give you a definite answer on. But I would hope we don't end up in that particular business.

T&FN: *What do collegiate coaches have to do to help save the sport?*

Frazier: There's no question you have to do the marketing and public relations of your program. I think that if you have quality competition and you can keep the meets to two and a half, maybe three hours, that will do a lot to get people in the stands to support your events. Coaches are going to have to be totally involved in promoting and marketing.

We've got to do what's best for our sport to keep it attractive to the public. The sport has become less desirable to some people for



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Over a seven-year span, from 1974-'80, Frazier ranked among America's top ten 400 men.

a variety of reasons. So I think we got an awful big platter in front of us.

T&FN: *Are you encouraged by the recent move of the NCAA Track Coaches Association to hire an executive director?*

Frazier: Yes I am. For a long time they've needed additional voice. They have the foresight to choose an executive director who is going to help them—if they pick the right person—in dealing with the NCAA and also the USATF, and being a voice for the coaches to come together. I think for so long everybody was an independent agent, and they've realized now with all the cutbacks in athletics that they have to bond together and do something to keep their profession going.

T&FN: *Is there any possibility—through alternate funding perhaps—that the numbers of participants at NCAA nationals can be increased in the future?*

Frazier: The only way would be if the institutions themselves were to pay for the lodging of [additional] athletes. Currently the expenses are paid by the NCAA. When that came into play, it dictated the amount of people who could attend a championship. Way back when I was in school, the institutions paid their own way.

The NCAA convened a committee last October in which they brought in all the committee chairs to discuss the future of all championships. Based on my conversations there, they're looking at—if anything—cutting our numbers more than adding.

There's also a proposal on the table that institutions gets to choose if they would want their funding for indoors or for outdoors. That's going to come up in the future. If I had my way, I would want the NCAA to cover all of it. Past those numbers, if they want to talk about some people supplementing with money from their own institutions, then that would be fine.

T&FN: *We've heard talk that the future of the NCAA Indoor meet may be in jeopardy. True?*

Frazier: Through some maneuvering, we were able to get that tabled at the last NCAA convention and it's gone back to committee. I would hope that everyone will be more in tune to that in upcoming legislation if that comes back from committee as a negative.

Again, when we talk about gender equity, why would we take away a major championship for the women? I think indoor track is totally different from outdoor track. You prepare differently, the strategy is different, but it's hard to convince people who I deal with on a daily basis that there's a difference. [But] I think we're going to get ourselves in order to try to keep that championship.

T&FN: *In your other major role in the sport, as a USATF vice-president, do developments on the collegiate level worry you?*

Frazier: Yes. As I put that hat on and think about the future of our sport, and how I would like to see us compete internationally, it scares me. I was at a meeting of the Pac-10



Conference, where our presidents actually said they were not sure that the function of a university is to produce Olympians—in any sport. That was a sad state of affairs to have to listen to that. But reality tells me that's what some people are thinking. And that's a shame.

T&FN: *Some in USATF have been very optimistic about the collegiate sport and the future of our development system. In contrast, many coaches have been extremely pessimistic. Indiana's Sam Bell won't hesitate to say the sport is dying. Where on the spectrum do you find yourself?*

Frazier: As I look at the last Olympic team from 1992, I would think that at one point or another, most of those people came through

“We've got to do what's best for our sport to keep it attractive to the public.”

the collegiate system. That says something.

In reference to Sam's statements, I think he says that to get people moving in a direction to keep this sport going. Sam has been around the sport for a long time and he's not about to let the sport die. He's put too much of his life and his time into the sport. That's where I go back to some of the other things I said earlier: we've got to make the sport attractive to the public, make them want to continue to support the sport and come out and see it.

T&FN: *Is our developmental system handicapped because it depends so heavily on the collegiate system? Are we losing too many potential athletes who can't get to college?*

Frazier: Yeah, and a part of that comes

from the demise of the club system. I used to run for the Philadelphia Pioneer Club, which was one of the best clubs in the country. One of the things that really helped me is that I had the opportunity, as a redshirt athlete, to run for the Pioneer club during that year hiatus [before competing for Arizona State]. I had the opportunity to run with guys like Curtis Mills, Hasely Crawford, Steve Riddick and Ivory Crockett, who were much more mature than I was at 19. There's no question having that opportunity made me mature, as it pertained to not only life but my pursuits on the track. I think we're missing the boat by not reinforcing that type of club system.

T&FN: *Is there anything USATF can do for the clubs?*

Frazier: I think that with people like [USATF staffers] Tom McLean and Ollan [Cassell] recognizing that fact, along with [USATF president] Larry Ellis, we're at the point now where people are going to start really looking at the club system. That's got to be the wave of the future.

TFN: *With both you and Ellis coming from a strong collegiate track background, might we expect the USATF executive committee to pay more attention to the developmental/collegiate scene?*

Frazier: We have to take a long look at that. But we also have to realize that we represent other areas, i.e., road racing and everything else.

T&FN: *Do you see USATF's hands tied in developmental work for the simple fact that the schools own most of the nation's facilities?*

Frazier: Part of that problem is because in some instances, there are archaic NCAA rules pertaining to opening facilities to outside organizations. Then there's always the so-called insurance problem that you run into. [With] George Steinbrenner—on the USOC as a vice-president—and Dick Schultz [NCAA executive director] as a member of the USOC Executive Committee, I believe there's going to be a push to allow colleges to really open up some facilities for training.

I think that they're starting in the right place. If they get Dick involved—if he's supporting it—hopefully things can be worked out where other athletes can utilize college facilities.

T&FN: *We've been talking about issues and problems, and naturally it sounds discouraging after a while. What out there encourages you?*

Frazier: The fact that I'm leaving here tomorrow morning and going back to what I consider is one of the best track & field carnivals in the world, the Penn Relays. When I go there and see the enormous amount of spectator support, when I see the enormous number of high school teams competing, those kinds of things are very encouraging.

On one hand I'm happy; on the other hand, I'm sad about what's happening in some of the other competitions throughout the country. □