



## CHUCK DEBUS

Among the prize pupils claimed by Chuck DeBus is Pam Spencer, a two-time American Record setter in the high jump.

**W**inning means a lot to Chuck DeBus, and he does it well. Since 1972, DeBus-led Los Angeles TC squads have claimed 10 TAC women's team titles outdoors (and a pair of 2nds).

Combine those with a trio of TAC Cross Country titles and 4 AIAW crowns (three straight at Cal State Northridge—where he wasn't the official coach, but was the power behind the throne—and one at UCLA) and his total of 17 beats that of any other current U.S. coach, men's or women's.

In the TAC Championships, "teams" are often all-star squads with many collegians who aren't trained by the team's coach, and this has not been uncommon in LATC victories.

On the other hand, DeBus can lay claim to having coached personally 11 TAC individual champs in their year of victory. DeBus started the Albuquerque Olympettes in 1965, and in 1968 was rewarded with his first international team member, Olympic pentathlete Cathy Hamblin, just 15.

In all, he has now had 28 athletes take 109 international-team positions, including national record setters Jodi Anderson and Pam Spencer and Helsinki bronze medalist Diane Williams. Williams

was just one of six athletes he has coached to make the WC team.

Born in Junction City, Kansas, an unspecified number of years ago, DeBus migrated to Southern California in 1970 as a figure in one of the early attempts to professionalize the sport. When that fell through, he agreed to take over the LATC.

DeBus hasn't ever—and says he doesn't ever want to—earned his living from coaching. Instead, he has run his own business, for the last 2½ years being occupied with a movie production company (Golden Arts Productions).

As an innovative man with a vast knowledge of the technical aspects and inner workings of the sport, he has many interesting ideas about the state of the sport. His outspoken nature and overwhelming successes have made him a popular target, with many detractors.

From his beachview apartment in Santa Monica he shared some of his feelings the morning after the Sunkist Invitational:

**T&FN:** When Mary Decker won her gold medals in Helsinki, they were the first golds won by U.S. women since 1968. Are

the U.S. women getting better?

**DeBus:** There's been tremendous progress. One of the reasons I started coaching women's track & field is that I used to watch the U.S.-USSR dual meet on television, and our women were embarrassing. I felt it would be fun to try to close that gap. In 1978, we lost to the Russians by 4 points in Berkeley, and we could have won if two athletes weren't held out for one coach's personal reasons.

Yes, we're getting there. I think we have the potential to win medals in 10 events of the 17 in the '84 Olympics, and we haven't won more than 4 in a long time ['32]. We certainly could medal in the 100, 200, 1500, 3000, marathon, high jump, long jump, heptathlon and both relays.

Where we can't *right now* is the 400 and 800: we don't have the right people running the 400—we need people who can 22-low for the 200—and in the 800 we have the talent, but we're just preparing it improperly—we aren't developing all the



dimensions to optimize a person for the 800.

And the other events are both the hurdles. We have the talent, but we're 3 or 4 years away from developing it. And in the throws, that's a whole different ballgame. It's a cultural thing, and we have quite a difference in our beliefs versus the European and Eastern European beliefs.

**T&FN:** *You've expressed some disbelief in the long jump WR by Anisoara Cusmir.*

**DeBus:** I find it very hard to believe her record after having watched her work out in Helsinki for a week. She's a very fine jumper, very well trained. But she doesn't have the prerequisite velocity necessary to jump that far. There was a 25-2 foul in there, too. If she were fast enough to jump that far, she could run the 100 faster than Evelyn Ashford—and she just isn't that fast.

**T&FN:** *Do you think it's impossible even as a freak occurrence?*

**DeBus:** "Freak" in my mind would be a wind reading of more than 2mps. You know, at altitude and with excessive wind you're talking about a different thing—and this could produce such a mark by her. But she is a very good jumper.

**T&FN:** *How much has our system enabled some athletes to make a living off the sport?*

**DeBus:** I think it's something that would have evolved anyway. Corporations were beginning to get more involved and corporations tend to compete, and the athletes tend to reap the benefits. Someone like Carl Lewis would have gotten the money he gets now whether we had the present system or not—and he deserves it. The sad part is there isn't enough money to develop Carl Lewises.

We have the college system with scholarships and so on, but what happens to the athlete between the age of 22, when they graduate and they've got eight years of development ahead of them, up to the age of 30 or whenever? Not all of those athletes develop immediately.

**T&FN:** *How can the post-collegiate scene be changed to help these athletes? Through clubs?*

**DeBus:** It has to. That's the one way that these athletes, after they graduate from college, have a chance to develop. I mean, look at professional football, basketball or baseball players. Once they get to the age of 25-30, they're like concert violinists. They're incredibly successful: technically, mentally and physically—they're really peaking.

For us to get track & field athletes to that point, we need funding. Well, the only place that's probably going to come from is corporations, and it's probably the best place for it to come from.

What we really need is a system of, say, 16 teams that would be spread around the country. We'd call it the U.S. Amateur

Track League, and their season would parallel the collegiate season. At the end we would have a club championship, which would be the same weekend as the NCAA.

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## "Track & Field Needs To Be Modernized To The Modern Person"

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And then a week or two weeks later—or even later—we would have our national individual championships, where there would be no team title and no relays, and that's where we would select our international team each year, and it would bring together the clubs and the colleges. That way the club system would develop.

**T&FN:** *Is this a feasible idea?*

**DeBus:** It could be done. Track & field was the seventh-most-popular sport in America when I started coaching it, according to the polls. Now we're not in the top 15. Part of the reason for that is that other sports have changed their rules, modernized their rules.

We need big-time administrators like the Pete Rozelles or Lee Iacocas; we need big corporate dollars if we're to compete with the other sports in America. And we have to be willing to change some of the rules in the sport to make the sport more interesting to the modern fan without compromising the integrity of the sport.

**T&FN:** *What types of rule changes?*

**DeBus:** For example, in the field events like the the discus and javelin. Most people are not intrigued by those events. They go to a track meet, and if a guy breaks a World Record they jump up and down; otherwise, they don't follow the competition.

You see, what is a competition? A competition is a conflict that is resolved. What happens with the javelin, discus, sometimes long jump—those events—is what we have in an exhibition in throwing or jumping. We don't necessarily have a conflict, except for the competitors—they know what's going on, but the people up in the stands usually don't.

Let's take baseball as an analogy. Let's say we had no fielders out in the field and no fence. When a guy hits the ball, there's a guy out there running around with a little hat and coat and tie and he marks where the baseball lands. About 5-10 minutes later a couple of guys in hats and coats and ties walk out there with a tape measure, and they measure the distance the ball travelled. And they go over and write that down on a piece of paper, which is then taken up to the announcer, and 10 minutes later we hear the announcement—meanwhile, something else is going on over on

the other side of the field—that, "Yes, Reggie Jackson has just hit a triple, folks." Now it's pretty hard to get excited about that.

You see, track & field needs to be modernized to the modern person, the modern fan who's used to video and watching television.

**T&FN:** *So, we need more money and the only way we can get it is to make the sport more appealing?*

**DeBus:** Yes, it's simple. The way the sport is now, if I were a corporate president, I wouldn't be attracted to track & field. It's boring; it's a circus; there's no competition—it's an exhibition in jumping and throwing for the field events. And there's not much for them to relate to in terms of team competition, which is something we would have with the U.S. Amateur Track League.

**T&FN:** *I notice you have a copy of the movie Personal Best. There is a coach in the movie to whom you've often been compared.*

**DeBus:** I don't know where anyone gets that similarity. He's very unprofessional. The only thing that's good is that he's tough and demanding, and any coach has to do that. You can't necessarily be the friend of the athlete—you have to try to get the most out of them and sometimes that means being unreasonable. But you don't have to be that tough. If you know what you're doing—you're technically knowledgeable—and if athletes admire and respect you, you really don't have to be tough; they'll follow what you say.

**T&FN:** *How do you handle accusations of drug use and other criticism?*

**DeBus:** I thought Mac Wilkins' letter (*T&FN*, December) was very good. It's just human nature for people to be critical of others' success. Coaches just don't say, "Yep, he beat you because his coach is better than I am." No one says that—they always give an excuse, and drugs are a common one.

Coaches aren't the only ones who have to go through this—athletes do. Look at Mac Wilkins. Carl Lewis was down about this in Stockholm, too. Often the people who think they know the most about drugs are the most naive.

There's one statement by Norman Vincent Peale that is good for people who have to go through this kind of stuff: "And you will be criticized if there is any force whatsoever to your personality. There's just one way to avoid criticism: never do anything, never amount to anything. Get your head above the crowd and the jealous will notice and attack you. Therefore, welcome criticism as a sign that your life has vitality."

And my favorite is by Albert Einstein: "Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds." □