

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT

Pat Rico Speaks

by Siegfried Lindstrom

Pat Rico, the newly elected USATF president, will have as active and influential a role as anyone in shaping the post-Ollan Cassell federation and the future of U.S. track & field in general. While opinions on what to do next are legion, Rico—a competitor in the 1960 Olympic Trials discus, an official and former coach, and an IAAF women's committee member for the past 20 years—actually has to initiate the action. T&FN sounded out Rico on her plans.

T&FN: One of the buzzwords of this Convention was "restructuring" for USATF. That implies major changes. What can we expect?

Rico: Truly, it's been a very busy two weeks. There's so much on the plate and

"I believe that the constituency of USATF has felt left out."

it's sitting here. . . Which direction do I go in? But quite frankly, the first priority is to accomplish this transition and put a new CEO in place, and of course resolve the budget problems and a few other things.

My belief is there are many things out there that we have to do, and I think that our approach should be to prioritize, take a couple at a time, move them, resolve them and move on to the rest. You just cannot do everything at one time

T&FN: We understand USATF will hire a headhunter executive search firm to identify executive director candidates?

Rico: We are going the headhunter route. I think that's the most professional way of doing it, and I also think it will assure everyone here of a fair shake. I've met with one headhunting firm already, and I am putting in place a search committee within USATF. I hope to make it a diverse kind of committee. I'm trying to reach out to the different entities who in my opinion have been ignored in the past.

T&FN: Much talk around the Convention

centered on identifying a leader with marketing and promotional expertise. Many feel that the successful candidate might just as likely come from outside as from inside track & field?

Rico: Absolutely. There are people out there already, obviously, who are aware of our going through a transition and who probably will apply. I guess what I'm saying is that the process will be the same for everyone. No one has an inside track. The old boy's club is gone and everyone will be treated equally here.

T&FN: How many people would you like on the search committee, and what will their role be?

Rico: Five to eight members—no more than that. The search committee will be responsible for developing a job description for the CEO and would work with the search firm perhaps in refining it more. I see these two entities working closely together to develop that description which will hopefully bring on board the type of person that our organization needs to succeed.

T&FN: Many at the Convention spoke of current USATF budgetary woes, although specifics were hard to come by. What is the federation's financial status?

Rico: We really don't know. And that is an honest answer. The committee will be meeting in January. The budget was not recommended for passage by the executive committee. The recommendation was to hold the final meeting, hopefully, with the old budget and finance committee in January, working very closely with Fred Newhouse, who was the past chair and is now the treasurer. I sincerely hope that by that time, we'll at least have a good idea of where we are financially.

A lot of this, I'm sure you realize, is tied up with sponsorship—who do we have on board?—and projections of that nature.

T&FN: Some have called your election a mandate for change. What do you see, particularly, that needs changing?

Rico: I always refer to the fact that we are turning a corner here. This organization hopefully will adapt a little bit different philosophy of how we do things, of how we deal with people and of how we organize the various events under our umbrella.

I think it's very important that track & field

regain the position and prestige in the world and in our country that it once held. That's No. 1. I'd like to think that there'd be much better dialogue here between the athletes and the national office and the president.

This is our mandate—we are here to help athletes at all levels. We have to focus not only on the super-elite, but we have to look at the grassroots who are our future elite. So in my opinion it is very important for USATF to bring together all its entities, all the leaders in the different disciplines and start communicating.

I've always felt that there's been a divisiveness here in that each group—whether it's youth athletics or racewalking or what have you—has been concerned about its own turf and really didn't care what was going on in other phases of the sport. Yet we all carry the same umbrella—USA Track & Field. I'd really like to see better things happening between the different sports—a far greater appreciation of what the other is doing, of why they're doing it, how they're doing it, and how monies are dispensed.

I just think that there has been such a great need for better communications well on down into the grassroots of the organization. I think this organization deserves to know what they're doing up there, and deserves to be a part of that.

I really believe that the constituency of USATF has felt left out. They have a very valid point there. For whatever reason.

Now is not the time to keep harping on what we didn't do, or who didn't do what, or this person's responsible. Our responsibility now is to go forward.

T&FN: Can you point to specific troubles attributable to this need to improve communications?

Rico: We have not captured the market for our athletes—for whatever reason—we have not captured the market for many of our events, including the indoor and outdoor national championships. I guess what I want to see is a reestablishment of communication, and maybe better communication, between our organization and our potential sponsors out there.

T&FN: What do you bring to the project of improving communications?

Rico: Many people will tell you that I'm a good listener. I may not agree with what you say, but you're going to be given every opportunity to speak your mind and to give opinions.