

T&FN INTERVIEW

Primo Nebiolo

by Jon Hendershott

It's a rare opportunity when an interview request is granted by Dr. Primo Nebiolo. Although the president of the International Amateur Athletic Federation is one of the most powerful leaders in the sporting world, the Italian lawyer carefully controls his meetings with members of the media.

Particularly, the 68-year-old native of Turin has had an adversarial relationship with the British press in recent years. That tension, not surprisingly, has manifested itself in a guarded approach to chats with reporters.

Don't expect to see Mike Wallace grilling Nebiolo on "60 Minutes" in the near future.

Since Nebiolo was elected its President in

1981, the IAAF has experienced massive growth—in exposure and prestige, but perhaps most in financial terms.

Nebiolo spearheaded the IAAF's leap into big-bucks sponsorships, which enabled the body to greatly expand its slate of championships as well as its development program in emerging nations.

While some have said the IAAF has become "championship-heavy"—adding some esoteric title events like road 100Ks and ekiden relays—the sport has greatly broadened its appeal through the World Champs themselves, as well as world-title meets indoors and for Juniors.

All of this follows precisely with Nebiolo's stated aim of making track & field universally known and respected—even if seemingly by the sheer power of his own personality.

Nebiolo's bull-strong will and often dictatorial management style are exactly the traits which many of his detractors have criticized. Yet in a debate of style vs. substance, it's undisputed that Nebiolo has produced results.

His power extends through Olympic sports beyond track. He also presides over FISU (the world university sports body) and ASOIF (the Association of Summer Olympic Federations). And he soon should gain a longstanding ambition of membership in the International Olympic Committee (see box).

Whatever the view might be of Nebiolo and his way of doing things, it is clear he wants to help track & field continue to grow and prosper, and to put his beloved athletics atop the world's sporting mountain:

T&FN: What has been the most rewarding aspect to you in your first decade as president of the IAAF?

Nebiolo: I tried very hard to increase the image of the sport around the world. We have tried to have a good program, to increase the popularity of athletics.

[The federation] also developed a special philosophy for living in the new era of money. Before, we didn't have anything, in terms of money. When I was elected President, we had an office of three rooms and two employees. A budget of \$200,000 a year.

T&FN: What was the major outcome of bringing increased sponsorship dollars to the sport?

Nebiolo: In bringing in more money we created the philosophy of helping all the participants in major events, paying their travel and expenses.

This is a good philosophy, I believe, because we put all members in a position to send athletes to championships. Certainly, not the same number from one country as from another. But all the countries had the possibility to send young people.

T&FN: You feel it's important to bring together the world's youth?

Nebiolo: Yes, and our movement has come to represent the youth of the world—to bring many young people together and make contributions toward peace in the world.

Those athletes then can meet their colleagues, learn from each other, stay together and live in the same atmosphere, the same ambience. They can learn new techniques and the kinds of training done by others.

This is important because the mental approach to sport always has been the same: "If you work, you win. If you sleep, you lose!"

T&FN: What do you see as the result of



ALLSPORT/Gray Montimore

"If Pavarotti receives \$600,000 to sing, why can't Bubka receive \$50,000 for a World Record?"

giving so many athletes the opportunity for international competition?

Nebiolo: This effort has brought us many good results. We have discovered major areas of the world which could not give the sport anything in the past.

We also have gained much attention from the media—television has surely helped us very much. So we became one of the most noted sports in the world.

If we make a comparison among the great events, after the Olympics the soccer World Cup and athletics World Championships are next in importance.

But we also must remember when ranking events that our championships run for 8 or 9 days, where the Olympics have 16 days and soccer has an entire month.

If athletics could have 16 days, surely we could attract even more interest from the public; more media attention, more television, more pages in newspapers.

T&FN: Performances like [Mike Powell's long jump World Record] certainly grab the public's attention.

Nebiolo: Of course. But now we are satisfied because the popularity of athletics is immense. All people have heroes among our athletes. Track has its Maradonas—and they are bigger names: Bubka, Lewis, Powell, Krabbe, Burrell.

Yes, this is what has given me the most satisfaction—to be more known. Not me personally, but athletics and its athletes. Everywhere we go, the people know athletics.

T&FN: *Of course, the sport wasn't always so well known, was it?*

Nebiolo: No. When I competed, we would be lucky to have 50 spectators at a meeting. We would have the parents, the little brothers and sisters and maybe the fiancée or friends.

My mother never went to watch a competition of mine. She was afraid to see me compete! But now we have 70,000 people at meetings and worldwide television.

T&FN: *You were a long jumper?*

Nebiolo: Yes. The one thing I did know, though, was that my mother wanted the wind to help me. When I was

ready to go compete, she would stand on our balcony with a handkerchief and see how the wind looked. Then she would tell me, "The wind is good." Incredible!

T&FN: *As a former long jumper, the Tokyo competition must have been fantastic to you.*

Nebiolo: Just incredible. And these are very intelligent men. I introduced the three medalists to the Crown Prince and they all spoke with him in a manner of which I was very proud. Very intelligent and well-spoken, which is very good for our sport.

T&FN: *They epitomize what could be called the "new athlete" in track & field: very intelligent and educated, very professional in their approach to the sport.*

Nebiolo: Yes, it is a new era of athletes and they are helping us greatly. Some people have criticized us by saying, "Oh, these are just boys and girls running everywhere just to get money." That is not true.

They earn money, yes, but they must live well to train and compete. If Pavarotti receives \$600,000 a night to sing, tell me why can't an athlete like Bubka receive \$50,000 when he breaks a World Record?

Artistically speaking, I adore Pavarotti, but the [financial] difference is enormous. Yet the talent is great in both men.

T&FN: *You spoke about changed philosophies toward sponsorship and money. A major change in the sport is that athletes now*

have trust funds.

Nebiolo: Now my dream for the next 10 years—whether it is me as President or anyone else—is to have a great program of development, especially in the newer countries.

It is true we have 184 countries in our program, the largest body in the world—not only for sport, but politically or any other kind. Even the United Nations doesn't have our number.

But we are administering to a great many countries and the majority of them are very poor. Many governing bodies don't have the money to buy the stamp to send a letter.

T&FN: *Is the development of those third-world countries the greatest challenge facing the IAAF in the coming years?*

Nebiolo: To me, this is the most important problem that we have to face in order to create a great organization. The next 10 years must be a "decade of help," where we put all our federations in the position of being able to increase participation.

We have given importance to areas like Africa, and now we must look at South America, the Caribbean, Asia, Oceania. These are areas which can contribute hundreds and hundreds of athletes—like Frank Fredericks of Namibia. There are many like him out there and they must be developed.

—continued on p. 58—

IOC Seat For Nebiolo?

Following a change in membership by-laws, Primo Nebiolo seems virtually certain to achieve his long-held ambition of membership in the IOC.

Meeting on the eve of the Albertville Games, the Olympics' governing body approved an article which will allow President Juan Antonio Samaranch to appoint two "at-large" members of his choosing. The previous rule limited nations to no more than two members, and Italy already had a pair (with lifetime membership).

Some international observers of sporting politics have speculated that Nebiolo waged a war of nerves with Samaranch to force his membership—first by threatening to change age rules for Olympic track to under-23 only, then by stymieing Samaranch's efforts to get South Africa back into the Olympics.

Nebiolo has claimed that as head of perhaps the strongest federation that participates in the Games he should have a position of power.

IOC sources acknowledged that the change was made specifically to allow

Nebiolo's membership.

While Nebiolo never was specifically named in the debate concerning the rule change, it was clear who would benefit most by the alteration. One can also assume that the decision was not easily reached.

Nebiolo's aggressive, often abrasive style has not gained him allies among some sporting officials, especially in Britain.

Some critics also pointed out that Nebiolo was unseated as head of the Italian track federation in the wake of the Evangelisti long jump scandal at the '87 World Champs, although he was never directly implicated in the fiasco.

Said IOC vice-president Richard Pound, "Members were concerned about the concept and the application of it; they had a hard time separating the two. But nobody really opposed the principle."

On the South Africa question, Pound said, "This may reduce some of the obsessive, compulsive quality of the tensions."

"If you have someone who has been so obsessive about getting on the IOC that risks dominated his decisions, it will be good if that tension is removed."

T&FN: So you see development as the IAAF's prime role in the future?

Nebiolo: We must increase development, yes. But we also must have a balanced, comprehensive program. We cannot follow just one path. We must not lose the prestige and image of the sport.

It is like a business: we must produce, we must invest, but we must not lose what we have gained up to now.

T&FN: Are those keys to the IAAF's success—good planning and hard work?

Nebiolo: Yes, and some fantasy too. We have succeeded perhaps because we work more than others. That is no secret. And surely our people are infinitely better than myself. They are the best.

But we must become more and more important. We must gain more money to help our people, to increase the number of our championships.

T&FN: What do you consider to be the single greatest accomplishment of the IAAF during the past decade? The establishment of the World Championships?

Nebiolo: To be known; to make our sport famous; to be something in the world. Whether it is because of our championships or our publicity or whatever reason, we must be known. We must be among the leadership vanguard of the sporting world, even in political matters like South Africa.

T&FN: Extending itself into political areas is another indication of the IAAF broadening its involvement in the world.

Nebiolo: I believe that we have the obligation. When such a great, important and noble sporting movement as ours makes such moves, what we do has an effect. This is the reality.

T&FN: What do you feel is the most difficult aspect of your position and of the IAAF's mission?

Nebiolo [without hesitation]: Ignorance. How is it possible that two women athletes in Tokyo took something? Such athletes are ignorant, as are all the people around them. Those who want only to profit from such athletes are more ignorant than they are. If athletes are intelligent, they will not do such things.

T&FN: What are your own personal plans for the future? Or are they one with the IAAF's future?

Nebiolo: Any plans are not for me. I do this because I am convinced it is useful, so why do I have to plan for myself?

I believe that if I want to enjoy myself in life, I must continue to do things for my sport. □

58—March 1992

Change TAC To What?

by Pat Crandall

Yes, get rid of TAC! (The name, not necessarily the institution; that would be another letter.) And yes, we are the laughing stock of the sports world for the "the" and the generic term "athletics," the Brits be darned.

So here's the guidelines, and my own suggestion for the new moniker:

- Must have "track & field" in it. Athletics is already out and "track" means horses or stockcars to Americans.

- Must have "American" or "United States" in it.

"National," as in NBA, NFL, NHL, is reserved for the big pro boys who don't have an international audience to insult in implying we are the only nation on Earth.

- Yes, we need association, or organization, or union, etc. to imply we do have all our sugar in one sack, so to speak.

- Most importantly: it must be short, simple and pronounceable.

Americans love acronyms they can toss around to show they're in the know. TAC's only commendable attribute was that one fan could say to the other, "OK, I'll see you at TAC in June."

So, what's a good name? I looked at USTFA, USTFAA (the "and" could be used), AATF, TFUS, ATAFU, ATAFU, USTF and finally settled on ATFA.

American Track & Field Association.

It's as short as possible (under my rules) it's clear, distinct and it's probably the most pronounceable. It's not perfect, but given the parameters, I think it's the most workable. So, see you at ATFA in June?

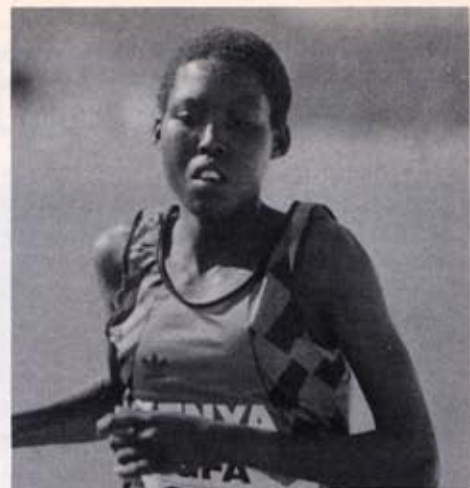
[Maryland resident Crandall is a longtime contributor to T&FN and avid player of rotisserie-league track.]

Kenyan Women Coming

The times may be a-changin'. Now joining the by-now-expected large numbers of new Kenyan distancemen who appear annually on the world stage are some of their distaff counterparts.

Susan Sirma, Delilah Asiago and Jane Ngotho all made major international splashes last year, but as Joan Samuelson said last summer, "Obviously there are a lot more back there in Kenya."

Correspondent Isaack Omulo-Okoth reports, however, that reaching potential can be tough for Kenyan women. As an example, he offers a touching account of 14-year-old Lydia Cheromei after she won last year's World Cross Country Championships Junior title in Belgium:



Horsmiller

Cheromei's gold medal went home in her pocket, wrapped in a white hankie.

"Cheromei and her teammates were given the equivalent of \$28 each for shopping in Antwerp and fare from Nairobi back to Singore Girls High School (the motto of which is 'Striving for Excellence')."

After an arrival in Nairobi kept secret from the press, Omulo-Okoth continues, "A Kenya AAA official drove Cheromei and her Singore teammates to a city-center bus station—infamous for its petty criminal occurrences and filth—where the girls boarded an overcrowded country bus to take them home.

"Cheromei's gold medal was wrapped in a white hankie she bought in Antwerp and safely kept in her pocket.

"By the time she and her teammates reached Iten [end of the paved mountain road at some 13,000 feet], it was 7:00 p.m. Hungry and wet after a downpour soaked them on arrival, they first went to the home of Cheromei's coach, Brother Colm O'Connell, where her other coach, Sister Christine, was also present.

"They bathed and had their first meal of the day, changed into warm clothes and were driven to Singore, where the school was illuminated with ecstatic celebration after word went around that the world's conqueresses had arrived."

Omulo-Okoth further reports that Cheromei, the only Kenyan to win an individual title at the cross country Worlds, owns no spikes and borrowed the pair she wore in her Antwerp victory.

Chances for Cheromei—a Nandi and the fifth child of eight—to finish high school and continue running competition were good, as her father possessed adequate numbers of cattle to keep the family solvent. This year, though, the eldest daughter required a Caesarian and, writes Omulo-Okoth, "The bills hit a figure quite out of an average Kenyan imagination to possess, let alone pay as a bill."

Concludes Omulo-Okoth, "Lydia Cheromei will be a brilliant athlete if she gets Kenya's version of club competition. That's school and college life, which affords the only appropriate outlet to track pursuit." □

Track & Field News