



from the editor

E. Garry Hill

POST-OLYMPIC YEARS are frequently known for their lack of life; a general blandness as the torch passes from one set of heroes to another. Guess what? There's no Sydney hangover on these shores. I hate to go overboard, but would it be premature for me to declare that we're actually seeing a renaissance for track & field in the United States?

I don't think so. Not only are American fans reveling in a vintage year, I've also seen far more emotion (gasp! no cheering in the pressbox!) from those charged with covering the sport. The media is noticing us, and they're liking it. The buzz is about exciting performers, not dreadful tales of drug abuse.

Would it be premature to declare we're seeing a renaissance for track in the U.S.?

We've got people making news in events that the sporting public—not just track fans—hold dear, and even better, the people making the news tend to be engaging personalities who work well with the media and love to mix it up with the general public. Let me cite some conspicuous examples of those who are raising the sport's domestic profile:

• **Maurice Greene.** Americans love speed, and we've had the World Record holder in the 100 for three seasons now in the person of Mo, who has added two World Championships titles and the Olympic gold. An outgoing, bubbly personality, Greene came along at the right time in history, snatching back the WR from a furriner after Canada's Donovan Bailey had had the audacity to claim it while winning Olympic gold on U.S. soil, no less.

• **Marion Jones.** Sure, Marion's personal life has been a bit of a soap opera, but she's rising above it. The commercial opportunities one would have expected after a record 5 Olympic medals never eventuated, but she remains a huge-huge draw. Impossibly fast and impossibly tough to beat, she punctuates those dominating wins with one of the most engaging smiles on the planet. Who isn't in awe of her?

• **Stacy Dragila.** Another media darling whose proclivity for marathon-length post-meet autograph sessions may soon have her left arm looking like a lobster, Dragila soars at the top of the burgeoning women's vault movement. Americans have always loved their vaulters, and the fact that it's women instead of men doesn't bother Joe Sixpak at all. Dragila's pursuit of the 16-foot barrier—which may not take long at the rate she's going—will make for great theater.

• **Alan Webb.** Last on the list—but the leader of the renaissance—is this prep superstar, because if there's an event that Americans really warm to, it's the mile. The term "sub-4:00" may have lost its allure to hard-core statisticians decades ago, but for the rest of the nation it's the equivalent of the keys to the magic kingdom. Those who say it's too early to anoint Webb were saying the same thing when he broke Ryun's soph-class record back in '99. And they said it again when he had a sub-4:00 relay leg over 1600m last year. And now they still say it's too early: you can't base anything on just the single race at Pre (see p. 34).

It's *not* too early. Mr. Webb is here, and he's the real deal. Not only can he churn out a fast mile (evidently), he also does it with aplomb, keeping his head when a slow pace is called for and turning on the jets when that's the proper course of action. And he has an electric grin he's not afraid to share. And he's brimming with self-confidence without being brash. And he's already PR-savvy. After Dragila had signed autographs for more than an hour in Eugene, the crowd was told, "Stacy will only be signing for another five minutes." Webb, scribbling nearby, immediately yelled, "I'll go 10!"

The fact that Dragila and Webb were together at Pre, and that Greene and Jones had run as well—indeed that some combination of those four superstars has been at virtually every U.S. meet of significance this year—says reams for how USATF is doing wonders for the sport by bringing the stars back home. Competing on U.S. soil, where they can do the most good. Way to go, Craig!

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