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GO LIKE NEVER BEFORE.



from the editor

E. Gary Heil

TIME FLIES WHEN YOU'RE HAVING FUN! It seems like only the proverbial yesterday that I attended my first NCAA Championships, which provides more fun on an annual basis than any other meet on the planet. Since my first, in Seattle in '71, I've actually managed to miss about a half-dozen episodes but also had wonderful visits—in sequence—to Eugene, Baton Rouge, Austin, Provo, Champaign, Houston, Indianapolis, New Orleans, Boise, Knoxville, Sacramento, Des Moines & Fayetteville.

Eugene, of course, is repeat-visit leader, having staged the meet 8 times during the 5 different decades. For an engaged crowd that understands the sport on a deep level and consistently raises the roof, there's nothing like Hayward Field, of course.

I came along just a few years too late to see the Oregon facility when it was really unique, featuring a set of stands on the infield past the finish line. I love the tales of people embarking on their last-lap kick as the runners disappeared behind the stands, and coming out in a totally different order.

The two sites with the friendliest people are definitely Provo and Des Moines. Throw in some snowy mountains and the option to run off to Robert Redford's Sundance Resort for a nice meal and the Utah site leaves me with the warmest glow.

Austin and Knoxville win the prize for best college street scene, with restaurant/bar strips that are a marvel. That's the amateur division, of course. For professional revelry, nothing tops Bourbon Street, of course, so even though New Orleans staged the meet in perhaps the worst stadium ever, I'd go back in a heartbeat.

For a native Pacific Northwesterner like me, New Orleans—like Austin and Houston—required some major adjustment to the heat and humidity. Particularly the latter. I don't understand how distance runners can even function in that stuff.

The biggest change in the meet, of course, has been the addition of the women. That's both good and bad. It's good that women now have the same opportunities as men, and it makes for twice as much good track to watch. It's that "twice as much" that makes it bad. I much preferred it when the NCAA and AIAW were separate meets, and I'd love to see the NCAA split the sexes again. Even for a hardcore track junkie like me, you can only absorb so much at one time, and with the meet doubled the way it is, I think both sexes see their product diminished.

You may recall that at one point there was discussion of staging a men's meet and women's meet "together," but alternating days to help sell the product. I'd like to see that avenue pursued in the future.

Somebody else who gets short shrift in the modern version of the meet are the decathletes and heptathletes, with so much overlap with the rest of the meet. Their part of the meet can't be announced properly and they also make for a crowded program that interrupts the flow of the rest of the meet. They should simply return to what they used to do and have the multis on separate days prior to the start of the rest of the competition.

That would also allow room in the timetable for the staging of proper qualifying rounds in the field events. Jumping and throwing in two large flights simply makes for long drawn-out competitions that are a disaster in the presentation department. And I think they leave American athletes ill-prepared for the Q-round system used in the Olympic Games and World Championships.

But guess what? Despite all my kvetching here, I wouldn't miss the meet for the world. So it's back to Eugene for NCAA No. 9. A fun time will be had by all.

Reflections on seeing the NCAA Champs in 5 decades