

# TRACK COACH #211



## RINGMASTER TIM ST. LAWRENCE

Read a terrific interview with vault coach Tim St. Lawrence, who is developing vaulters and promoting the event at the Flying Circus Academy in upstate New York. It's all in the latest issue of *Track Coach* (No. 211, Spring 2015), along with a comprehensive piece on Superstition in Sport by Bob Welch, and Using a Critical Zone Model for HS Sprint Training, by Coach Jason Gable.

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# from the editor

*E. Gary Heil*

"I LOVE THIS NCAA PREVIEW EDITION." That was how I began this column back in June of '11, where I continued, "It was things like cranking out NCAA formcharts as a student that really got me hooked on the sport, and while much of my work now centers around professionals and their international exploits, there's still nothing quite like the NCAA Championships. And this issue of the magazine annually jump-starts my eagerness for early June."

**Will the split-sex  
NCAA Championships  
dramatically improve  
the product?**

That was the good news. Then I got to the negative side, regards the NCAA's finally including women by hosting a Nationals for them—as part of the traditional men's meet—in '82.

As I said then, "As nice as it was to see the NCAA finally embrace the women's side of

the sport, the decision to have a combined championships, to my way of thinking, has created a meet that's just too long and too hard to follow.

"Anything more than 2-3 hours for just about any sporting event and you simply lose the ordinary fans' attention. The NCAA has a slam-bang 3-hour final day, but with both sexes competing you only get to see 7 events for each sex and only 1 for each is a field event. I don't see that as much bang for the buck for those fans (and there are many) who only really care about one of the sexes."

I also quoted Oregon's Vin Lananna as saying, "A track meet is often referred to as a 3-ring circus, and there is a lot of truth to that. Too many things are going on at once. How can someone tell the story when they don't even know what the story is? "These are great athletes and those are exciting events. Unfortunately, not enough people are watching. I think what we can do is take [the meet] and repackage it so it's more TV-friendly. Now that ESPN has signed a 13-year agreement with the NCAA, we need to push the envelope to make sure we have a show which is media-friendly and popular with fans."

And now, the brave new world of a 2-sex meet is here, as explained in the April edition (*NCAA To Split The Sexes, Sort Of*). And, as explained in *Last Lap* of this issue (see p. 47), ESPN has bought into the concept, explaining its expanded coverage by saying, "Every event of the championship—including decathlon, heptathlon and all track & field events—will be covered live for the first time, which is great for the sport and its fans."

So, what's not to like about a meet that makes two divergent plotlines much easier to follow?

A major one is the fear of finding out that a women-only meet won't sell tickets well (and/or have bad TV ratings). Face it: across virtually all sports, men's events tend to put butts in seats better than comparable women's do.

As it relates to our sort, I remember vividly sitting in the stands at the '80 AIAW Championships (the precursor to the NCAA for women) at Historic Hayward Field, where paying spectators were virtually nonexistent, even in TrackTown USA.

My fervent hope is that it's just the older-generation fans—those who grew up in an era where women's sports, of all kinds were just an afterthought—who think that way and that the women-only meet will get the respect it deserves. Not only from the ticket-buying public, but also from the video audience.

I have little doubt that each of the two meets will be more exciting than the single one was since they combined 30-plus years ago. I just don't want it to come at the expense of the women's side of things. They have fought too hard and come too far from the dark days of men-only sports to end up as an afterthought.

I want double the pleasure—in a big-time way—of the meet that first got me hooked on the sport.