

Delegate Report for USATF 2014 National Convention

by Johnny Jackson

This was my first Convention and it was quite an experience. Jim Engel had told me that I should have gone sooner and I am happy that Linda Melzer called and changed my mind when I had decided that I would not attend. I was a little shocked at how things did not start on time with most of the youth meetings that I attended and how one started 15 minutes late and 10 minutes in took a 10 minute break. Nevertheless, I did enjoy being there. I was impressed by how many coaches, officials, trainers, parents and USATF officers were there. I was also impressed by how passionate the director was about defending the rights of the youth program in the General Session. I think I will be going to the next ones also and would not mind being a delegate again so that I might do the entire process the right way next time. I misunderstood that in my report I had to write about every class I attended until I read it on the reimbursement sheet. Nevertheless, I was prepared since I had notes for all but one of the classes I attended. If I am needed next year I would be happy to attend. I want to make sure that I give back to a USATF Ohio program that has given so much to me in mentorship (Harold Martin, Jim Engel, Jim Snow, Fritz Spielman, Curtis Stitt).

Here is a brief synopsis of the meetings I attended.

Youth Athletics General Session:

From the very beginning the director was very passionate about a funding deal that was put through by the USATF Board of Directors from Hershey but without Youth approval. A grievance was filed on behalf of the Youth Program against the National Office and the CEO. The Youth program was represented pro bono. The Youth Director met with the CEO in South Beach for about 3 hours. They agreed to have more dialog over the next three months and come to an agreement that should produce an income of over 3 million dollars. The grievance has been shelved but not withdrawn. The next subject had the Director just as passionate. There was new legislation proposed from the national office that would allow the Board of Director to select who would be on the Ethics Committee. In turn the Youth Program put in emergency legislation to stop the Board from doing what they wished and as the director phrased "close the gap between the haves and have nots." The Youth Director felt that the National Office was trying to take the power away from the delegates and basically have the delegates working for the board instead of the other way around. He said that we bring in money and accomplishments and should not be ignored.

Men's Track & Field Meeting:

Contrary to what I saw in the Youth meetings, the Men's Track & Field meeting started on time, but was not as passionate as the youth meetings. Of course the meeting was a lot smaller and they set in a rectangle formation with all of the members dispersed around the tables and very few visitors from outside the membership. Truthfully, it seemed like a lot of old fogies or good old boys of track & field and very few young members around the room. Despite the "good old boy" feeling, I could also tell that there was a lot of knowledge and experience in the room. Some of the members I had come in contact with before at national meets and their track knowledge and experience is second to none.

The meeting was well organized and informative. The group talked about this being an off year for world championship meets and because of that they wanted to do something a little different. They want to run the 300, 600, mile and 2 mile in a 2015 stateside indoor championship meet. They said that they would use a formula taken from 200m and 400m races to determine a qualifying mark for the 300 and 600. There would also be some meets where they would have some 300 and 600 meter dashes for athletes to get a qualifying mark. The group felt that there might be some issues if every meet did not run the races the same way. In the championship they would run the 300m in the outside four lanes and would remain in lanes for the entire race.

The next thing on their agenda was the 102 new rule changes and the medal count from the World Juniors. On what they said was an excellent team, the U.S. Team received 21 medals in Eugene. However, the group was not satisfied with the medal count on the men's side. The men only received 7 medals out of the 21 and the group wanted to know how they could improve that count. They said that the USATF sponsors want results and they would have to find a way to get them. The facilitator went on to say that the USOC will become the second highest sponsor behind Nike and that their sponsorship will go up 5.2 million in 2015 instead of down in an off year like it usually does. He went on to say that the total sponsorship will go from 21.4 million to 34 million in the next 5 years with over 8 million going directly to athlete funding. Because of that increase in funding the sponsors expect our teams to do better. The facilitator also said that over one million would go to sports science. Finally, he stated that the track at the National Training Center had been resurfaced.

Although I found everything the group discussed to be very informative what I found most interesting was their dismissal and lack of interest of the youth program. I understood that there concentration was on Men's Track & Field but, they actually said that they were not interested in the youth side and that their concern was not on the college men either since not many medals were won by that group in the past meets. I found that interesting since some of the athletes at the World Juniors were in fact youth athletes and the up and coming young men of Men's Track & Field.

I did not understand how they did not want to put money or time developing the youth programs when they wanted to increase the medal count. I understood that they want instant success, however, I am sure the brain trust understands that it does not work that way in sports and definitely not in track. They did not seem to remember that their current athletes came from a youth program (most likely ours). They did not seem to realize that if they helped build the

youth program then they would ultimately increase their medal count. They cannot get to their goal without our (youth program) help. However, before the non members were asked to leave they left little doubt in my mind that their goal for funding to increase the men's medal count will not involve developing and training the youth or their coaches.

Coaches Education:

This was a very informative meeting and well run. We were told about last years progress and the upcoming changes to the coaching education. There was 45 level 1 schools this year with over 2000 coaches serviced. Goal is to have 50 level 1 schools per year. Also, 900 coaches have gone through the NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching. Level 1 has changed its book and coaches will have to go through recertification every 4 years. They will have special circumstances for those coaches that were certified before 2012. Those coaches will be required to get recertification by the end of 2016 and it will last until 2020. Also if you have a Level 2 certification then you never have to do level 1 again.

Next year the level 2 school will be July 5th - 11th in either Central Fla. or NC State. Level 2 Youth has been growing since its inception 5 years ago. Will be looking at recertification of Level 2 in the future.

Level 3 schools have had 37 people go through and completed the level 3 and IAAF level 5. They are trying to fine tune the level 3 classes and do a written test and a 6 month evaluation of the coaches own athletes.

First Timers Session:

The speakers introduced themselves and 3 of them have been around since the change from AAU to TAC. The facilitators then made everyone get up and introduce themselves, where they were from and their backgrounds. Again there were not many young people in the room but lots of officials and officers from various organizations. They said that the purpose of the class was to help us get the best out of our first experience and get us to committees we may be interested in or did not know we were interested in. Yet they did not talk about any committees or how you could join them.

They went on to explain the governing bodies and how the board decreased in number over the years, which they felt was a good thing. The board went from 105 to 31 to 15. I liked their explanation of what happens each year as far as law and rule changes and when they occurred. Governance changes in odd years and Competition changes in even years unless we need something changed for an upcoming championship.

Youth Session:

I could not believe how long this session was supposed to be (6 hours). What I really liked about this session was watching the bidding for The XC Junior Olympics and the voting for proposed changes. Of course this was also the session that started 15 minutes late and took a break 10 minutes in. Each group had a certain amount of time to submit their proposal while the other groups were left outside the room and no one was allowed to enter the room while proposals were being presented. Nebraska's proposal was good and Alabama ran out of time but Iowa had the best one of all. They were very detailed, had video presentations from people that could not be there, answered every question and had time to spare.