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Gene Shaver, star distance runner, is all set for the starting gun. Will he reach the tape first?

It's Not a Three-Ring Circus
It's a

Track Meet

By Donald Hansen

IN THE year eleven-thousand seven hundred B.C., a prehistoric man chased a fair cave lass up a few glaciers and around a couple of mountains, and that, so the story goes, was the origin of the sport called track. All Clyde Caveman got for his efforts was the dubious honor of fathering the human race. But born in all men is the urge to excel, a competitive spirit, and Clyde was no exception. Put together these inbred characteristics and you have the most ancient of sports, track and field.

The ancient Greek Olympian games, predecessor of the modern Olympic games, were the first officially recorded track meets. Some Greek historian chiseled in stone in 776 B. C. that the Olympian games were in progress, but they had probably been going on in some form or other for many years prior to that.

The sport has changed very little through the centuries. All that modern tracksters have over their early cousins is a scanty outfit and a pair of spiked shoes. Hurdles, shots and vaulting poles are just improvements over the makeshift barriers, rocks and small trees used by the ancients. So when you get right down to it, science and progress haven't done much for track and field, and probably never will. It is a sport of man against man with nature doing her share of hindering. Who can shake the grip of gravity for the highest or farthest jump? Who can defy fatigue and tightening muscles the longest?

Standardized Sport

Modern man has set up arbitrary distances and weights in order to standardize the sport of track and field. Now that everyone runs the same distance and throws the same size shot and discus, records can be kept from year to year and school, national and world records determined.

A track and field meet resembles a three ring circus in many ways. The tall, lanky youths, who look like they are split to the ears, are down at one end of the field high jumping. On the other side, the burly giants are heaving the steel shot all over the sod, while the

runners are galloping around the cinder oval. In track and field there is place for every man—the tall, the short, the thin and the husky. And what's more, a good race or a gravity defying pole vault can be easily as exciting to an interested fan as any football or basketball game.

To coach a track team is no small job. With 14 or 15 different events in a meet, coaches, like George Brettnall, Cyclone mentor, are kept busy trying to shape ex-prep school athletes into collegiate competitors and champions. Each man needs special attention to iron out his individual flaws in style and training. Every event needs different forms of exercises and planned practices. It's a big job to train and coach a 40 man squad in 15 specialized events and straighten out each man's individual mistakes.

Need Natural Ability

Some men are born natural athletes, others become good through hard work and perseverance. Sprinters are usually born sprinters. Nothing on earth can change a "plow horse" into a thoroughbred racer. The same is true with the human variety. A man can either run fast or he can't. The same is true in the high jump. An athlete either has spring in his legs or he hasn't. But from there on it's the job of the coach and the man himself to develop his style and skill to the utmost. It is usually in this small margin that an athlete is changed from a good competitor into a champion.

Distance men, hurdlers, pole vaulters and others with natural ability can develop into top-flight performers by long hours of practice, exercise and the desire to be great. And don't underestimate the power of "the will to win." Glenn Cunningham is a good example of what exercise and the will to win can do. Cunningham's legs were badly burned as a boy and doctors doubted that he would ever walk again. Cunningham not only walked, but became the world record holder in the mile run.

Enthusiasm for track and field has steadily increased since the turn of the century until it is now one of the major sports in this country. Big relay carnivals, like the Chicago Relays, Drake and Penn Relays have given track an added boost. But the biggest stimulus to track competition comes every 4 years—the Olympic Games. For almost 3 months last summer, the Olympic “goings-on” were front page material all over the world. An athlete that can represent his country in the games had attained one of his life ambitions.

Women, never let it be said that track is entirely a man's sport. More than one young lady has etched her name in the annals of track fame. “Babe” Didrikson was one of the outstanding United States entrants in the 1932 Olympic Games at Los Angeles. In the Olympics last summer, the only double winner was a woman. Mrs. Blankers-Khoen, of the Netherlands, a 30-year-old mother of two children, clipped off victories in both the women's 100 meter dash and 120 meter hurdles.

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