



SOME POST-RIO THOUGHTS

A Thank You & IAAF CE Challenge Standings.

Hello Again....here are a few thoughts about the significance of the recent Rio decathlon. After watching Ashton Eaton display many of the traits we admire---persistence, discipline, goals orientation, resilience, inner strength, and grace---- the victory stamps him not only



Rio winner Ashton Eaton

whose wishful thinking espoused that Eaton was vulnerable I would remind them of a quote that old UCLA coach John Wooden was fond of using...."Sports do not build character. They reveal it." The 2016 Rio decathlon certainly revealed it.

And it was a blessing and a change of pace to watch that 8893 record equaling mark in an election year in which one of the issues is whether the United States has lost its "greatness." A glance at the final places suggests otherwise. Way to go Ash!

Yet the victory can be seen with a much wider perspective. Ashton's iconic coach Harry Marra reminds us that America's international decathlon success had reached a low point back in 1990....a year in which we had gone 15 seasons without an American reaching a major podium. Recall Bruce

as the best decathlete of our time but one of the best of *all time*. His combination of two Olympic golds, two world champs golds and two world records has never been equaled.

To my foreign friends and "experts"

Jenner's WR win at the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games. And the world record itself was much traveled swapping residences in both Germany and Britain.

When Marra, then the head coach at San Francisco State University, walked down the hill from his San Mateo home and knocked on John Bennett's door in 1989 American decathlon fortunes took the first baby step to revival. Bennett, then Vice-President of Marketing at VISA, the credit card company, was willing to participate in one of the noblest event comebacks in T&F history....the *Visa Gold Medal Athlete* program. As Bennett would later say, Marra's concept of a national team was the intangible ingredient that sold the idea. Camps, clinics, Olympic winners' participation, stipends, clothing (we had great t-shirts), and more soon followed.

Bennett, frequently referred to as the program's "Godfather," recently recalled "I'll never forget one of the original USA VISA Team members coming up to me hesitantly on the first morning of camp and saying, 'Mr. Bennett, it's nice you put us up in this Marriott in single rooms but you can save some money there; we're used to doubling up.' He wanted the program to last!"

Personally I can recall that first team clinic in the spring of 1990 at SFSU. It was magic...Olympic champs....Mathias...Campbell.....Johnson.....Toomey.....Jennerplus Dewey...Millsport....great clothinggreat coaches....*even if one of our speakers*

had a heart attack...unforgettable. Reebok's 'Dan and Dave' would come later as would an annual team match with Germany. But the Visa Gold Medal effort paid off immediately...big scores...1-2 at Seattle's Goodwill Games later in the season... A *Wall Street Journal* feature...and so, at major internationals, we were players again....O'Brien a win in Tokyo in '91....challenges to the world record... Johnson's bronze in Barcelona....we were back on the podium. VISA's ten year investment in a 'national team' paid well-recognized and documented dividends. Few if any sponsorship programs have ever delivered more.

What has not been appreciated is the continual VISA influence on our decathlon fortunes since the Gold Medal program ended in 2000. Those who participated in that terrific curriculum...the coaches, the clinicians, and decathletes who have become coaches in the interim....have perpetuated the know-how which continues to deliver world class decathletes. Not only are we back on the podium, we seem to be *always* on the podium. VISA's presence today is palpable. (We

should reissue those great T-shirts).



Former VISA National team coach and Eaton's coach, Harry Marra

know-how that came out of that program.

Recently Marra summed it up well "...because of what VISA did way back then for USA Decathlon via sponsorship, support and encouragement, the effects from that 10 year partnership continue today into this 21st century." Our success has been remarkable

says Marra. "...since the year 2008, USA decathletes have won *every* world championship and Olympic gold medal contested. Every one....not a hiccup along the way." The streak is 8 (see table below)

Of course VISA is not the entire story by "the Coach" has a point and Marra offers his gratitude and thanks saying "In spirit, the VISA program continues today with former VISA Decathletes / administrators picking up the coaching responsibilities of today's decathletes." He pays particular attention to the contributions of John Bennett, Fred Samara and Tom Shepard. I might add many of the outstanding coaches/mainstays of that

Who Made to Podium?



1976 Olympic G *Montreal* Jenner gold

We went 15 years w/o an American on a major podium. IAAF world championships began in 1983.

VISA Gold Medal program: 1990-2000

1991 IAAF WC *Tokyo* O'Brien gold
 1992 Olympic G *Barcelona* Johnson bronze
 1993 IAAF WC *Stuttgart* O'Brien gold
 1995 IAAF WC *Göteborg* O'Brien gold
 1996 Olympic G *Atlanta* O'Brien gold
 2000 Olympic G *Sydney* Huffins bronze

Post VISA Gold Medal program: 2001to present

2003 IAAF WC *Paris* Pappas gold
 2004 Olympic G *Athens* Clay silver
 2005 IAAF WC *Helsinki* Clay gold
 2008 Olympic G *Beijing* Clay gold
 2009 IAAF WC *Berlin* Hardee gold
 2011 IAAF WC *Daegu* Hardee gold, Eaton silver
 2012 Olympic G *London* Eaton gold, Hardee silver
 2013 IAAF WC *Moscow* Eaton gold
 2015 IAAF WC *Beijing* Eaton gold
 2016 Olympic G *Rio deJan* Eaton gold

World Records:

1992 O'Brien
 2012 Eaton
 2015 Eaton

Since 1991: IAAF WC: 9/13 golds, 10 of 39 medals
 Olympic G: 4 of 7 golds, 8 of 21 medals



era.... Sloan, Tellez, Franson, Keller, Webb, Rovelto, Reid, Miller, Reardon, and so many others who I've overlooked for this hastily prepared diatribe.

The American success has been the result of a combination of financial support, and know-how and guys catching the fever and their willingness to sacrifice and do the work...it was not just technique, workouts, testing, nutrition..... it was the intangibles the VISA program supplied.....the motivation, goal setting and the shared experience of big league (and sometimes emerging) athletes..... and it continues to pay off.....we learned about pre-season testing.....the importance of physio help...how to prepare for big meets... and so much more. We don't have all the secrets, but we uncovered a bunch of them.

I'm not saying we don't have a lot more to learn and it would be wonderful for a corporate sponsor the return that program...it was a model for our sport. But, as Harry indicates, it is crucial that we recognize and thank those who pushed the program.

A few caveats. Even though we have been remarkably successful we have to be careful not to go too far in chest thumping. Let's be careful here...America does not 'own' the decathlon event. No nation nor individual does. Ask the Czechs, the Germans, the Russians. In the 1920s the conventional wisdom was that the Finns, because of their Olympic and world record success, *owned* the event....that Finns had some sort of comparative advantage over the rest of us and continued triumphs were assured. Moral.....name a Finnish decathlete today! Trivia....when was the last time there was even a Finnish entry in the Olympic Games?

Yes, we have been remarkably successful but our focus should be in front of us and not in the rearview mirror. Years ago Daley Thompson was always quick to remind me that he did not 'own' the work record. Rather he was just holding it until someone

better came along. And someone did..... and always will. I vividly recall Mathias counseling Jenner after Bruce crushed the WR in Montreal....."did someone tell you that you'll have the record for years and years? Don't count on it." said Bob to Bruce.

Let us recognize our debts, be grateful and move ahead. Eyes front!

IAAF CE Challenge Standings



The annual DecaStar meeting in Talence, France is scheduled for Sat-Sun, Sept. 17-18, 2016. It is the final meet of the IAAF CE Challenge. Below are current standings.

As of 9/2/2016	<u>total</u>	<u>average</u>
1..Kai Kazmirek/GER [Gotzis 8318, Ratingen 8323, Rio 8580]	25,221	8407
2..Jeremy Taiwo/USA [Gotzis 8203, Eugene 8425, Rio 8300]	24,928	8309+
3..Adam-S Helcelet/CZE	24,498	8166
4..Ashley Bryant/GBR	23,811	7937
5..Martin Roe/NOR	23,316	7738+
6..Brent Newdick/NZL	21,873	7291
7..Ashton Eaton/USA	17,643	2 meets
8..Kevin Mayer/FRA	17,280	2 meets
9..Damian Warner/CAN	17,189	2 meets
10.Zach Ziemek/USA	16,805	2 meets