

THE DECATHLON ASSOCIATION

DECA Newsletter

Volume XXXXV

Number 8

March (3), 2020

CANCELLED

Coronavirus Take Toll on Indoor Champs, Spring Season

Hello Again.....As everyone is aware, I have no report on the NCAA I indoor heptathlon championships. On Thursday morning, March 12, the NCAA had made a decision about its annual indoor championships in Albuquerque, NM....the meet goes on without spectators. This was, in part, a reaction to the NBA's abrupt decision to suspend its season after a player for the Utah Jazz tested positive for covid-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus. A second player also tested positive Thursday morning raising urgent questions about all sporting events with large audiences. By noon on Thursday, a domino effect was in motion as, one by one, every major sports league in the United States announced cancellations. Gone was Major League Baseball, March Madness, the NHL season.

By one pm on Thursday a number of major college conferences, notably the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Big Ten and the Pac-12, began pulling their athletes from the NCAA meet. Inside the Albuquerque Convention Center, which was abuzz with last minute warming-ups, logistical preparations and rumors, CE athletes picked up their vaulting poles and headed for the exits.

By 3:00 pm the NCAA, with the help of New Mexico's governor, reconsidered its position and cancelled the indoor championship meet. And, concurrently, announced that it was also cancelling it



outdoor championships (in Austin, Texas in June) and the entire spring season. The same for all spring sports. Some conference basketball tournaments were underway when word came. At the collegiate level at least, it was over! Major meets and the entire season ahead became a blank page.

Ah shoot ! The disappointment among athletes and coaches was palpable. Or my part, having arrived in Albuquerque that morning, I immediately returned home on the east coast. And I had plenty of airport time to think as airlines jockeyed my return flights. Yes, there would be delusion and frustration withing the track and field (and CE) community. All those hours of preparation and sacrifice, only to have the rug pulled out from under you. Damn it! Yet this had happened before.

I am old enough to recall that 40 years earlier our sport also had faced a major disruption that left America's top athletes without the opportunity to compete. In the spring, 1980 the Carter Administration pulled



the plug on US participation at the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow after the 1979 Christmas Eve Soviet

invasion of Afghanistan. In an attempt to make the Soviets pay for their transgression Carter forbade USA athletes from competing in Moscow. His words, in the spring of 1980, still ring in my inner ear.... "athletes from other nations may go to Moscow, ours will not." Whew. What a disappointment, not only to the athletes but to followers of track and field...like me. That decision set back USA decathlon fortunes ten years and it wasn't until VISA (with a national team) and Rebook (remember 'Dan and Dave') revitalized the event.

Not only did the Administration's 1980 decision affect the athletes, it denied a professional chance for me. I had a contract to teach an economic course thru the University of Moscow during the summer of 1980 in conjunction with an Olympic tour. O, what frustration!

I believed that limiting the opportunities of athletes was the wrong decision. I was (and still am) but a minor voice in my sport. Yet, at the time I was an open and vocal opponent of the Administration's stance.

As an economist I conducted a number of studies on international grain markets and farm subsidies and concluded (correctly I am certain) that the only one asked to sacrifice were the athletes. Much like 2020....athletes all dressed up and no place to go.

In 1980 no one was asked to sacrifice but the athletes. Making them the first line of defense and pawns of foreign policy made little sense to me. To me, cancelling sporting events was not the answer. Whether the President was poorly served by his advisers at the time was inconsequential. The decision

was made and Americans (under threat of revoking out passports) could not participate.

I was openly vocal and received any number of threatening phone calls for my position. Try making an anti-Administration speech to a local Lions or Kiwanis group!

But 2020 and the covid-19 pandemic is different. There is a greater good to consider here....the public's health. The NCAA made absolutely the right decision in cancelling their indoor T&F championships, and the entire outdoor season. They followed the lead of a number of sports organizations (NBA, MLB) while others followed. Within a day the Boston Marathon and the PGA's Masters followed.

What happens now? I don't know. But the reality of the situation has started to set in. Some additional non-college CE meets have postponed their meets as the nation works through the pandemic. All I can say is, that as news filters thru, I'll pass it on. At the present time, the major European meet, the Hypo-Bank meeting in Götzis, is still on the docket.

The health of our citizens is just too important. Keep your fingers crossed (after washing your hands).

And finally, some positive news...as the **2019 Webb Cup** was presented to Colorado State U head coach Brian Bedard (on right) in Albuquerque. With the cancellation of the 2020 season the Colorado State Rams may be able to keep the Cup (a traveling trophy) longer than anticipated.

