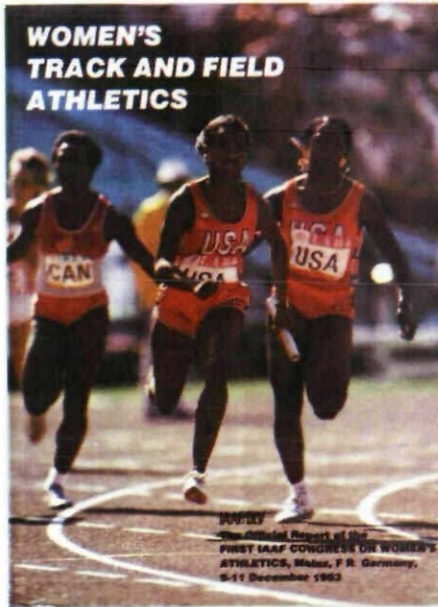


## BOOK REVIEWS

### WOMEN'S TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETICS



Books devoted to women's track and field are few and far between and the training suggested by the earliest books would provide today's junior girl athlete with little more than a good warm up.

As women's participation in competitive sport became more acceptable books and articles were written but they were mostly "watered down" programmes from male athletes. Throughout the world, however, women were beginning to train like, and indeed, with men and such a one, Ann Packer, was to win the 1964 Olympic 800m.

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women's athletics like Marita Koch, Jarmila Kratochvilova, Fatima Whitbread and Petra Felke, whose programmes would frighten many good class male athletes.

In preparing programmes for women athletes, there was always the worry that if she trained as hard as men she might come to some harm. It was accepted that her technique would be different due to lower hurdles, lighter implements, different physical and psychological characteristics, but she was also more prone to back injuries and every month she would "not be well" and her programme would have to be modified. But where could information be found about coaching women athletes?

Most books were written by *one* coach dealing with technique and physical conditioning or by a team of coaches, each dealing with one discipline or related disciplines, but usually these were geared to men with a slight acknowledgement of the "different needs" of women athletes. What was needed was a book written by a series of experts in the different disciplines in women's athletics and with the "medical" background to the woman athlete.

In 1983 the I.A.A.F. held its first Medical Congress in Espoo, Finland with its fine report which answered a number of the questions to women's athletics, but more was needed. It came later in 1983 with the first I.A.A.F. Congress on Women's Athletics which was held in Mainz (FRG) in conjunction with the D.L.V. from 9-11 De-

ember. "Women's Track and Field Athletics" is its excellent report. 80 lecturers from 15 countries dealt with all aspects of women's track and field under 9 topic headings:

1) *Gynaecological Aspects* – an excellent, and very readable, introduction and background to the whole congress.

2) *Anthropological Aspects/Constitutional and Biological Problems* – the first part deals with a comparison of male and female constitution; the second part deals with endurance work capacity.

3) *Self Image, Welfare Guidance and the Relationships Between Coach and Athlete* – an excellent and very enlightening paper on (Wo)man Management.

4) *Characteristics of competition* – biomechanical aspects of/and sex specific differences in the throws, jump, 100m, 400m hurdles stride pattern and heptathlon.

5) *Strength Training* – in practical terms, perhaps, the most important topic as far as Tadeusz Szczepanski (Poland) says in his excellent paper on 100m hurdles "women are constitutionally some 50% weaker than men".

This section covers the sprints, 100m hurdles, throws, high jump, a very good paper from GDR on jumps and multi event for *juniors* and an all too brief paper in "electric" strength training.

For me this was the most useful section, these are the *working* coaches and their papers contain much additional information on working with women athletes.

6) *Open Topics* – including motor tests and training top-level middle distance runners.

7) *Relaxation in Training and Competition* – a very important and often much neglected aspect of preparation.

8) *Cultural Identity of African Women: Opportunities and Obstacles in Sport*.

9) *Coaching and the Developments of Athletics in the Third World* – These last two topics were refreshing after the high powered material that had gone before, but items just as relevant at a congress whose aim was to develop women's track and field.

The report ends with a bibliography with 501 references. At present the standards in women's athletics are rising all the time. Sport is getting more and more TV coverage – perhaps too much coverage with too many (Grand Prix) races. To be able to handle all of this the athlete needs expertise from a number of fields and a number of top athletes now have a "backup team" – coach, physiotherapist, doctor, dietician, psychologist – all aspects are covered in this book. Everyone involved in athletics must read it – even the coaches of male athletes!!

On the debit side, for a book of 587 pages, there are *very few* points which can be faulted – 2 or 3 spelling mistakes, 1 or 2 occasions where the abbreviations used are in the original German. 1 or 2 with German captions. At the very start there was some confusion caused by the word "no" being omitted before the word "pill", and the page numbers were omitted from the contents pages. To rectify this takes only about five minutes and a good pen – a small price to pay for such an excellent book.

I recommend it without reservation.

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