The university sport system in the USA is divided into three divisions, labelled simply enough, I, II and III. Division III universities generally provide the lowest level of funding to their athletics programmes and they do not offer scholarships for the sport. For most athletes in Division III, athletics is a part of an otherwise well-rounded life. This makes the conditions at these institutions similar in many respects to those faced by clubs, universities and schools in other parts of the world, where the majority of athletes compete and train mainly for intrinsic rewards.

Guthrie does not set out to write another Track and Field Omnibook, the definitive American athletics coaching publication by the late Ken Doherty. Instead of trying to match Doherty’s in-depth coverage of each event’s technique and training, he manages to carve his own niche. He succeeds because of his ability to take a sport that by its nature is almost unmanageable, separate it into essential components and thereby simplify it. He also delivers valuable advice on many basic but often overlooked aspects of coaching in a pleasant, readable style.

Coaching Track & Field Successfully is divided into three parts. Part I, entitled “Coaching Foundation”, covers coaching philosophy, communication and motivation and concludes with a chapter called “Building a Successful Track & Field Program”. Guthrie has done a good job of prioritising and summarising the topics here. He provides an overview of what it takes to build a successful athletics team and highlights the essentials of getting things going in the right direction in an organised manner. This reader found the number, quality and simplicity of the sample hand-outs and policies, very use-
ful. The chapter on communication contains plenty of examples of communicating with student-athletes both in a personal manner and via posted messages and announcements. Sample team travel itineraries and event workouts are also included.

Parts II (“Coaching Plans”) and III (“Coaching Event Techniques and Tactics”) are less connected than one would assume from their titles. The two chapters in the former, “Planning the Season” and “Preparing for Practices,” are not about training theory and periodisation but instead give a basic, start of the year to-do list for the coach as administrator. In them Guthrie covers tasks such as reviewing the previous season, planning the coming year’s meeting schedule, looking after uniforms and equipment and maintaining a record board. “Preparing for Practices” lightly touches on the concept of pre-season and in-season conditioning, posting workouts and scheduling facilities and it provides a few observations on workload levels.

Part III, “Coaching Event Techniques and Tactics”, comprises seven chapters that cover technique and training for the various events. Guthrie writes the “Sprints and Relays,” “Hurdles” and “High Jump” chapters and in these his gift as a writer is evident. He makes things that might be considered dense and difficult in the hands of another appear accessible, if not simple. As a coach, he has the confidence to refrain from over-analysing, over-training and over-competing his athletes. As a writer, his chapters display an ability to distinguish what is nice-to-know from what one needs to know. The sample workouts for the various sprint events at different times of the year are well organised and helpful.

The hurdles chapter is an adequate treatment of both the 100/110m and 400m events, including basic technique and training. Photo-sequences of non-world class athletes add to a comfort level that is present throughout the entire book. One of the few errors I found in Coaching Track & Field Successfully dealt with placing the lead foot on the front pedal of the starting blocks. An even number of strides to the first hurdle will always bring the rear-foot up. I am certain this is a mere oversight on the part of the author. In fact, the photo-sequence that accompanies the hurdle technique pages shows a left-foot lead hurdler from the front and in the background his starting blocks are set with the right starting block ahead of the left.

The middle- and long-distance events are covered in one chapter by Phil Esten, currently Professor of Exercise and Sport Science at Wisconsin-LaCrosse and a former cross country coach. The chapter differentiates the events and proceeds from there. There is an interesting and provocative training model that addresses the specific demands of the 800m and provides the scientific basis for preparing for it; coverage of the 1500-mile distance and the similarities in physiological demands placed on runners and a section on 3000-5000m that covers the different demands and methods involved in the longer distances.

Josh Buchholtz covers the pole vault and former Wisconsin-LaCrosse assistant coach Evan Perkins takes the horizontal jumps. The assistant coach and strength director at Wisconsin-LaCrosse Dennis Kline deals with the four throws.

While it is certainly good to have knowledgeable coaches whose job responsibility it is to coach particular events write about their specialties, in this case the approach creates a slight disconnect as far as the tone of the writing. As a reader, it takes a bit of adjustment to each of the markedly different writing styles and approaches used in these, nevertheless valuable, sections. As might be expected, the throws section has a heavy bias towards strength training and is one of the longer chapters, as it has to cover four distinct events. Perhaps here more time might have been spent on teaching progressions.

The only thing I felt to be missing from Coaching Track & Field Successfully was a
chapter on meeting management. Most American coaches also serve as director for their team’s home contests, so it might have been interesting to see the author’s treatment of the topic.

Coaches always seem to be looking for the easiest way to do things—if the reader’s idea is to find a cookbook solution to planning workouts this book will not completely fit the bill. Yet, the strength of Coaching Track & Field Successfully is that it shows how good coaches and coaching staffs simplify, for themselves and their athletes, the process of maximising potential. At 213 pages, it has room to accomplish its goals but it never becomes a chore to read. Its comfortable tone and relaxed style belie much of the accumulated wisdom contained in its pages.

Good teachers make difficult subjects simple and understandable. Guthrie and his co-contributors have done just that, which makes this book a great resource for experienced and novice coaches alike.

Reviewed by Brian Mondschein

Mark Guthrie
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