Greetings to all USATF South Texas Members: January 11, 2009

Happy New Year!!!

As your President, I want to share with you some feedback and direction from our recent attendance at the USATF Convention in Reno, and the focus we need for 2009 and beyond.

USATF National Convention: At the beginning of last month, your executive board, various sport chairpersons, and a few of our elite athletes attended the annual USA Track and Field Convention in Reno Nevada. Since 2008 was an Olympics year, many of the US' top athletes, coaches, and officials who participated in Beijing were present.

As at past conventions, we were made aware of changes to various sport rules, and we were given updates from various sport committees on the health and needs of USA track. Of course, we had the opportunity to share our successes and challenges in the many forums and within circles of our fellow association representatives.

For the most part, the Reno Convention was a great opportunity for us. We learned of the new restructuring that will be occurring at the National office. Most of us participated in the election of USATF's new national president, which eventually led to former Olympian and world record holder Stephanie Hightower being selected. And, there were the usual high-level, once-in-a-lifetime events such as the Hall of Fame dinner, Officials Hall of Fame affair, and our annual Awards breakfast. With USATF's CEO changing from Bill Rowe to Doug Logan, many of us attended forums that he was part of and he gave his perspective to the entire membership in a large presentation. Many of us met with top performers and leaders in our fields and hope to interact with these folks throughout the year, not just in 4 days in Reno.

At our end, we were extremely overjoyed with our association vice-president, **Sue Humphrey** being selected as the new USATF Women's Track & Field Chair. Also, our new association secretary **Jeff Brower** was selected as the USATF Masters Secretary! Finally, masters athlete **Carol Finsrud** from Lockhart was selected as a Masters Athlete of the year in the 50-54 age bracket and youth racewalker **Roberto Vergara**, previously from the South Texas Walking Club and now attending college on a racewalking scholarship in Kentucky, was selected for the prestigious Grand Prix Youth award as one of the top youth racewalkers in the US.

On a sad note, we were shocked with the death of former Masters athlete runner and racewalker Bob Fine whom many of us had the opportunity to work with in international, national, and regional settings. His death at the Convention's beginning put a damper on much of our activities and reminded us of the safety focus we must always strive for in our training and competitions.

From a program standpoint, we were informed that our Criminal Background program will need to adapt to the National's formula and be consistent in dealing with similar resources, regardless of the ease and success we've had at our end.

While we did have representation at most of the committees and discussions, we were not able to maximize every avenue—something we must work to correct in the future. The last minute involvement from some of our elite athletes and experienced alternates gave us more exposure and opened the door to more opportunities that I hope we can grow.

Attending this year's convention were….

David Dunbar (past President)
Bert Pickell (past Secretary, current President)
Sue Humphrey (Vice-President)
Jeff Brower (current Secretary, Masters Chair)
Joe Scecina (Treasurer)
John Drolla (Officials)
Seth Brower (Youth Chair)
Rose Monday (Women's Track & Field Chair)
Mike Wohlfarth (Men's Track & Field Chair)
Janis Bluhm (Racewalk Chair)
AC Jaime (Coaches)
John Head (Alternate)
Linda Wisian (Alternate)
Abby Ruston (Elite Athlete)
Latosha Wallace (Elite Athlete)

I encourage you to contact them for further perspective and convention feedback.

Additionally, while not initially in an official capacity, fellow South Texas member and former Olympic world-record holder Francie Larrieu Smith, who coaches Cross Country at Southwestern University in Georgetown, sat in on some of the meetings and shared insight with our folks.

We hope our current and past elite athletes continue their involvement and leadership in future South Texas association opportunities. They have much perspective they can share. Of course, we wish to assist in their further development and endeavors in any way we can.

Status of the Association: In absorbing all that was covered at the Convention, looking back on the past year, and in contemplating the direction of USA Track and Field in South Texas, I think we need to recognize our strengths and also focus on areas which need to be improved upon.

- Communication: It is the key to growing our Association. In the past four years, we have grown immensely in promoting our Association and have developed a superb process in getting the word out. Through the direction of our past President, **David Dunbar**, we have been extremely successful in presenting essential issues at our executive board meetings and have highlighted critical issues that we are aggressively working on. Our quarterly Executive Board meetings and posted Minutes offer great opportunity and insight, respectively. Our association website, superbly maintained by **Jeff Brower**, provides eye-catching information and benefit to members, AND offers opportunities for athlete and chairperson exchange and teamwork. **Sue Humphrey**'s initiatives in offering coaching education and **John Drolla**'s providing officials certification training are noteworthy actions that seemingly get overlooked but offer much growth and opportunity. However, in some of our areas where we appear to be succeeding, information is not being disseminated to our membership. Athletes, officials, and coaches may not be aware of opportunities on a timely manner. Regardless of why this may be happening, it has obvious impact in that our members will lose out on an opportunity such as a race or a clinic, ultimately resulting in members losing confidence in chairperson and committee leadership.

-- **Focus for the future**: We need to take advantage of what great abilities our coaches, officials, and accomplished athletes offer to best develop our membership. But we can't do that - nor expect others to get involved - if they do not know what is available to them OR what initiatives they can take. We do a super job of communicating within an elite element of officials and committee chairs but we need to share fresh ideas, initiatives, and actions to others, AND solicit their feedback to expand even further. Whatever it takes, whether it be active use of our website, a newsletter, involvement with local media (radio, TV, blog, etc.), we need to inform and involve our members. I encourage all of our members to get involved with their respective sport

committee or leadership group and share their ideas, concerns, and initiatives. For situations in which sport chairpersons or executive board members are challenged in taking initiative in establishing developing opportunities, we need to expand our leadership teaming and pursue subcommittees to assist.

- Partnerships: To develop South Texas association membership, we have the expertise and numbers in most cases. To best focus on our number one effort – athlete development - we are involved in national, collegiate, scholastic, and home-grown organizations. On another level, we partner with fraternal and fellow organizations in developing a USATF presence of expertise – again, with the emphasis being on developing opportunities and growing our athletes, coaches, and officials. However, while the path to the Olympics can only be achieved through the USA Track & Field model, we wish to provide as much support to our members in reaching that accomplishment so we can not ignore the other opportunities which can help get our folks the experience and development to reach their maximum potential.

-- **Focus for the future**: A major emphasis at this year's Convention was USATF benefits. Specifically, what are the attractive elements of USATF membership? At our level, we need to look at other organizations who provide training and competition opportunities devoid of USATF and may be perceived to be competitors for our athletes and officials. We must build long-lasting relationships with other track and field associates to better grow our athletes, coaches, and officials. Our officials have collaborated in other union forums which have given them further opportunities and exposure on many stages but we need to do this with our coaches and athletes. Among our ranks, we need to establish and standardize local homegrown competition opportunities such as we have done in the past with the Police Athletic League or in the "Free Spirits" all-comers events. The recent surge of long-distance running events such as the San Antonio Rock and Roll Marathon offer us much opportunity to expand into LDR, Ultra-distance, and Trail/Mountain running. The growth of non-profit fitness groups into road races also offers training support for athletes and coaches – something we can take advantage of. Essentially, we can expand to those avenues, initially by partnering with existing groups then offering relationship support and benefits.

- Recognition: Our athletes, coaches, and officials continue to be selected for further opportunities based on their performances. While many of our members are striving to succeed, I would like to single out a few whose actions will offer greater impact in many ways for years to come.

- Under the strong direction and leadership of **Seth Brower**, our **Youth program** is moving along extremely well. With a small but supportive committee, Seth has established more opportunities for athletes and officials. His initiatives in bringing on board event experts to share their knowledge and skills in clinics provide much teambuilding and member growth. The recent Regional Cross Country Championships, which we hosted, received great accolades from attendees to include our Regional Youth chairperson.

- AC Jaime's constant focus on developing **Racewalking** at the elementary school level within the Valley area is also noteworthy. His presentations with school coaches, development of racewalking videos and training guides, and continual national-level training and racing opportunities are major initiatives that are already having strong dividends in Racewalking throughout South Texas. We will be hosting the Pan-Am Trials in March 2009 which will bring even more national and international emphasis to our Association.

-- **Focus for the future:** We need to honor our athletes with an established award process – quarterly, monthly, etc. something that **Don Austin** established when he handled the Masters award process for National. As we noted before, Masters-level officials **Joe Scecina** and **John Drolla** worked the Olympic Trials which offers much recognition to their expertise and our Association. Recently, some of our elite athletes came out and did sport clinics for developing athletes.

- Membership: We are expected to reach a certain membership level based on the total population of our extremely large ground to cover in South Texas. Every year we have difficulty reaching the required totals – usually accomplishing this within a month of the Convention. However, prior to the Convention, we did a demographic review of our membership – where are our folks from – and noticed that the majority of our members come from metro areas. This was not a surprise but when looking at all of the metro areas and some developing rural locations we noticed that the bulk of our active membership come from a 4-county radius in the Austin area. San Antonio, Laredo, and the southeast Valley have very strong, developing memberships as well but the current growth is in our northern element of our region. Of surprising note, there are more USATF South Texas members in Marble Falls than in Corpus Christi. Of course much of this can be attributed to our membership promotion, competing sports organizations, and limited opportunities for our members. Additionally, we have some rural counties that have large school districts but USATF membership is extremely sparse.

-- Focus for the future: Obviously, we need to continue the great efforts that have been successful in our northern region: 1) Promote our membership by being involved with businesses, schools, venues, etc. 2) Develop beneficial, attractive, and continual opportunities by having all our sport committees and chairpersons pursue USATF presence throughout South Texas, 3) Work with other sports organizations to bring them into our Olympics-based training path for athletes and officials, and 4) Continue to seek out local supportive benefits that may assist our members – make USATF membership within South Texas a desirable benefit.

- Income: In the last few years, we have been extremely strong stewards of the income raised from sanctions, membership, and our own events. From our past president Dave Dunbar "rescuing" the frozen funds from previous years to our current treasure Joe Scecina meticulous accounting and managing the process, the South Texas Association has very strong management of its finances. While income is raised, there are notable expenses dealing with travel and conference attendance that significantly lower our usable capital. Regardless, we have a healthy working budget and fluid process.

-- Focus of the future: We need to continue the solid process of financial review and executive committee support. However, so our funds do not become frozen because of inactivity and to best support the growth of our members, we need to look at what long-term support we can provide and devote those funds towards some areas. And, for highly costly equipment that we will always have a need for, we need to budget, look for grant or underwriting support, and other event opportunities that will support our buying these items. Not only will the additional equipment support our urgent training and competition need for our athletes but it will reduce the amount of loaning and renting AND actually make other organizations and schools come to us for support.

- Safety: We must continue to press safety at all of our training and competing venues. All of our regimens have a risk of danger – whether it be on a track, on the road, or in a pit. All members who attend opportunities must be safety conscious and ensure their fellow athletes and club members equally promote safety. While large-scale events will have more organizational structure and marshalling support, we must maintain the same vigilance and "eyes-open" outlook at even the smallest of track or road events. Additionally, when athletes and spectators are at an event, they need to be aware of liability and their responsibilities. It is incumbent upon us to ensure all who attend are aware and follow this guidance. I expect event referees and marshals to take the appropriate actions to ensure there are no unsafe elements and that whoever attends the events follow proper safety procedures or be removed from the venues.

-- Focus for the future: Of course, we must follow the guidance established in our USATF directives. Foremost, we need to think safety at all times and train others on the safety aspects of any event. With athletes ranging from 6 to 90 years of age, our competitions and training must be safe. Club managers and sport directors need to lead this effort. We must

always review our throwing implements, jumping pits, venue tracks and courses, etc. Going even further, all spectators, coaches, family members, officials, etc. must be part of our safety focus for our association's promising members to succeed.

Overall Assessment: The South Texas Association is growing and succeeding in many areas. It is refreshing to see some of our experienced and dedicated leaders continue to get involved in growing our athletes, coaches, and officials. It's also extremely exciting to see our athletes shine – not just on the track or road BUT in offering their time and sharing their training techniques with others. Yet, in looking at the potential of how much we can accomplish, we need to optimize the talent and leadership of our compassionate volunteers and provide opportunities for their developing leadership. By doing so, South Texas will be much more richer and we will continue our growth. In my eyes, the keys are communication, partnership, recognition, membership, income and safety.

I hope that all of you can find time to get involved in local and association-focused opportunities. If anyone has any ideas or suggestions in taking our association farther, please don't hesitate to let myself or one of your executive committee members know. We are here for you!

Sincerely,

Bert Pickell
President
USATF South Texas
(210) 520-9678
(210) 273-7983 (work cell)
bpickell@satx.rr.com

PS – We will hold our next USATF South Texas Executive Board meeting on Sunday, February 8, 2009 at the San Marcos Library at 3pm. All USATF South Texas members are welcome to AND encouraged to attend. Please share with us your ideas and future goals.