



# THE NEW YORK WINTER

Indoor track, long the national stepchild of its outdoor counterpart, has in recent years stood on its own two feet. And those feet—fast ones—have filled arenas with a multifaceted appeal that has elevated the winter sport to an independent rather than interdependent plateau.

Indoor running—like cross-country—was always a prelude. It was a means to an end, not an end in itself. It was a whistle stop on a 10-month campaign that would culminate in June, not in March. It was a testing ground—not *the* test. Not anymore—at least not for thousands of runners who now rely on indoor track for fulfillment and reward, not just for trial and error.

In the New York City area, though, it has always been this way. The spring season is what comes “after indoors”; after the Garden and The Armory and, now, Princeton; after handicapped development meets, SRO invitationals and maybe a trip to Detroit.

Indoor track is King in New York, and the crown does not seem to be losing its grip, although it does slip a bit now and then. New York is down to three Big Ones, now that the Knights of Columbus meet has folded (again). And one of them, the AAU Nationals, has no per-

by Marc Bloom

manent commitment to the city. In fact, knowledgeable observers say the meet will soon move to the organization’s home base in Indianapolis. The other established meets are the venerable Millrose Games and the Olympic Invitational. The slick Princeton facility in New Jersey now has the IC4A and Met college meets.

The reasons for the increasing national interest in indoor track are complex and far-reaching. Among other things, they involve economics, politics and communications—factors one would expect to be involved in a decade in which this sport has gone through a vast metamorphosis.

Even if the atmosphere in New York is representative of what is going on elsewhere, the city has retained its uniqueness—the special qualities that make indoor track the cornerstone of its competitive year.

There is more of everything—more meets, more participation, more facilities, more spectators. This brings more enthusiasm and more competition, and causes a snowballing effect in terms of year-to-year events. “More” has not replaced “better”; it embellishes it.

The entire operation, which lasts 3½ months, has as its foundation a huge, 63-year-old building that stands like a fortress on 168th Street near Broadway in an upper Manhattan neighborhood known as Washington Heights. They call it, simply, The Armory (see accompanying article by Brian Caulfield).

For college and club runners, the Armory means three December “Development” meets plus the early-January junior and senior Met AAU championships. Depending upon one’s skills and affiliation, those events are either preps for the Garden, complements for dual meets or an entire season. For schoolboys, The Armory is virtually the whole shootin’ match. At least 17 major all-high school meets were conducted there this winter.

But the military drillshed—also known as the 102nd Engineer’s Armory (after a war battalion) and the State Armory (since the state took it over)—houses much more than track meets. On biting winter weekends, it is the pulse of the Big Town, bursting with exhilaration. It is legend and reality, fiction and fact.

The essence of the place is the crowd. Packed with transistor radios, phonographs and rubber lungs, fans come from all neighborhoods to encourage their teams and share in the Armory experience.

**PAGE 14: New York fans pack The Garden to watch action on the 11-laps-per-mile track. This is the mile at the 1970 Knights of Columbus meet. (Steve Murdock)**

They will stand—not sit—in a horseshoe balcony that overhangs the 220-yard wooden oval. Chanting lyrics that never change, the fans rock with sprinters' soul as their favorites encircle the dance-hall surface.

Dwarfed slightly by its neighbor, the sprawling Columbia Medical Center, The Armory is a microcosm of the metropolitan area. Suburban teams carrying \$30 sweatsuits in \$20 canvas bags file out of schoolbuses that leave them at the entrance. City kids pop out of the subway on the Broadway corner, dragging their belongings in potato-sack bags. Their friends have big hats and bigger radios.

The competitors suit up together in a long hallway that has the unmistakable odor of Atomic Balm. Take a kid that has run at The Armory, blindfold him, plug his ears and carry him to that hallway, and he will know exactly where he is.

The Armory, both in its service to the schools and its breeding of soon-to-be collegians, has enabled New York to conduct the finest indoor track program in the nation. Organized scholastic competition started there in 1911 and has been held regularly ever since. Invitationals can last from 10 to 12 hours, a testament to meet officials who will watch as many as 4000 youngsters exchange batons well into the evening hours.

To the teenage runner, The Armory

is also survival training. Finding the place first...knowing its fickle time schedule... adjusting to its splintered surface...the give-and-take of first-turn elbows...reacting to the crowd...avoiding getting ripped off (or beaten up). These are the realities of a memorable site where it is important to be at the right place at the right time.

A high school coach from Maryland returned to The Armory recently for the first time since his schoolboy days in Jersey. "It was more like a dungeon then, in 1960," he said. "I was in the 10th of 24 heats in the novice mile. There were 240 of us. It was like Times Square. I beat three guys who I knew weren't good because they wore sneakers."

Countless world-class runners have graced The Armory track, many of them before ever dreaming of such status. Even in the last decade, Armory regulars recall the efforts of Steve Williams, John Carlos (who once stopped traffic to run a challenge race in the street), Larry James and Marty Liquori. And Paavo Nurmi is said to have once run there.

Armory anecdotes are plentiful, and one that is certain to grow in the future occurred just last December, in the season's second development meet. It was in the final of the handicapped 500. Two promising quarter-milers were vying for position. One caught a couple of elbows in the jaw, and he decided he didn't like it.

After about 300 yards, he just stopped running—the race, that is. He flew across the "infield" and slugged his adversary, now heading for victory, in the back. A wrestling match ensued (while the race, or what was left of it, continued), and supporters of each athlete rushed to the

scene a la baseball. Officials were fortunate to have prevented a big melee.

There are also the subtleties that runners do not forget. There are jeeps in the warmup area. The concession, with its flow of hot dogs and mustard, is right behind the start. There are no starting blocks, and prudent sprinters have made wide strips of tape part of their sweats. There is an earnest but uninformed announcer who does not know the first names of even top runners listed on the program with only their first initials. If he were announcing the Olympics, sideliners will joke, he would probably say, "And the winner of the marathon, F. Shorter..."

"How many lives have been changed here?" asks Atoms Track Club Coach Fred Thompson rhetorically. Thompson's devotion to, and promotion of, women's track resulted in a dream-come-true for him, a program sponsored by the Colgate-Palmolive Co. that will rival that of the boys. Entrants from first grade through college, divided into four age-group divisions, will compete in seven events in seven meets at three sites (including The Armory). The championship meet will be held at Madison Square Garden, and each of the 27 winners will receive a \$500 grant-in-aid toward her education. Is there a better way to encourage, develop and maintain young runners?

There are other places in the New York area to run besides The Armory, such as West Point, the Columbia Bubble, Queens College, Hofstra and the Nassau Coliseum. Jerseyans used the Jersey City Armory before Princeton. Then, of course, there is Madison Square Garden...

"You can feel people right around you," said Irv "Moon" Mondschein, Penn assistant coach and 1948 Olympic decathlon runner-up who competed in the Garden for many years. "You feel their presence. Spectator involvement is the main thing. You can feel the electricity."

"There has never been a place like it," says Thompson. "Especially the old Garden." But Fred bemoaned the absence in recent years of "the person the people will break the door down to see... the charismatic athlete."

"Indoor track has always been more popular than outdoor track in the met area," said Walt Murphy, "especially when the East was the only part of the country



**The crowd is close to the track and the runners are close to each other, start to finish in this half-mile. (Steve Murdock)**



for indoor meets." Murphy is a legend of sorts in New York, having taken a year off from work to travel the US track circuit. He has seen indoor meets in 12 cities.

"Relays are a bigger part of New York meets," said Murphy, giving a reason for the city's winter success. "Individual events are always spotlighted elsewhere."

Capacity crowds have been common for the Millrose Games, which had its 68th running in January. And while the crowds are credited with contributing to the meet's longtime success, they have also dampened the meet's spirit in their demands for outstanding performances, particularly the four-minute mile.

"They are knowledgeable," said Murphy, "to the point where they know that a 62 quarter is a slow pace, but they're too critical, too time-conscious." Murphy rationalized. "Over the years New Yorkers have been brought up on great milers."

Names like Venzke and Cunningham and MacMitchell and Dwyer and Delany and O'Hara and Beatty and Liquori have glamorized the event at the Garden. But meet directors were still looking for their first race under four minutes prior to this year's Millrose gathering.

Mondschein remembers the 1947 Millrose Games with just as much clarity as the London Olympics the following year. All of the races had finished, and the remaining spectators watched the conclusion of the high jump—as they do now with the pole vault—in eerie silence. Mondschein and John Vislocky, the winner the previous two years, were the only contestants left, with the bar at 6'7¾".

"I recall it like it was yesterday," said Moon. "It was a packed house. Real quiet. We were the only ones still jumping. My old man, Max, was up there. You could hear a pin drop. And in his broken English, he yelled out, 'Give a good jump, Irving!'"

"Yes, I won it."

## IMPRESSIONS OF A FRESHMAN

by Brian Caulfield

Caulfield is now a 17-year-old high school senior in New York City. He edits a track newsletter for Catholic high schools. This is an account of his beginnings in the sport.



Three of the thousands of high school athletes who race in The Armory each winter. (Mark Elsis photo)

The wind pierces my skin as I walk slowly up 168th Street toward The Armory. I stop before entering to take a deep breath, then open the door. I vowed yesterday after the workout never to return here. My muscles ached with fatigue and my throat was raw from breathing. Yet, here I am again with an unknown force pushing me.

Upstairs, my mind is diverted from my incumbent task by chatting and joking with my fellow freshman teammates. We discuss what happened in school that day, making fun of teachers and our coach, who is downstairs waiting impatiently. Talk becomes more strained, less spontaneous as we come closer to being fully changed into our shorts and track flats. It is a new experience for us all, and jokes can no longer hide our fears of the unknown. We walk with measured steps downstairs to the track to get the workout.

The joints of my knees and hips are stiff and almost creak as I jog the mile warmup around the 220-yard oval. I travel on the inside to avoid runners doing sprint workouts. The track is still fairly empty and voices echo wildly through the cavernous arena. After two laps, I decide to quicken the pace, not wishing to show I am an untrained freshman.

Being down on the track brings back memories of last Saturday—my first indoor meet. I was excited yet apprehensive. My thoughts would not sit still that day before I was to run. I got to The Armory much too early and suffered with my anxieties for over two hours. The coach said I was to run the third leg of the mile relay, which meant absolutely nothing to me. Making believe I understood, I continued to watch the meet much unnerved. The thought of not running the correct distance or going the wrong way in front of a crowd of spectators and athletes evoked a surge of immeasurable panic.

The whole scene of the two laps I ran is in full view now as I jog. When it came time for me to run, I was numb and felt nothing. I could hear the rooting of my teammates as I took off like a bullet, moving past three runners after the first 220. The cries inspired me, I forced my body faster, feeling the second lap could not be too hard if the first was so easy. A shout from my coach to loosen up and pace myself better only made me go faster. I wanted to show him what I was made of.

When I passed the 330-yard mark, it was as if someone had placed weights on my ankles. The effort of lifting my knees became intolerable and my arms stiffened. Breathing was possible only in short gasps, and my head twitched uncontrollably. I felt like a spastic, but the faster I attempted to move the more I would tighten up. That last straightaway

was like running in a vacuum, I moved easily but very slowly. My mind was hazy, time just stood still. It took forever to finish, yet it took no time at all.

After I gave off the baton, I fell in a heap on the splintered wooden floor, cutting my elbow and knee. It hardly mattered. When strength enough to walk away was gained, I went into a corner to hide, not caring how our anchorman would do.

The coach said I had run well but unwisely. The kids told me I did very well. I insisted it was a disgraceful performance and offered my resignation from the team right there. All thoughts of self-pity, shame and resignation were wiped away, however, when we were informed of our times. I had run 58 seconds, the fastest split on the relay! Even more, the coach said I had good potential, that I could really improve! I was riding the clouds all day.

That was only four days ago. I guess my experiences yesterday matured me greatly, because I already feel like a hardened veteran in some ways. Yesterday is something I do not wish to remember, but it is impossible to block out. The memories are all too vivid, painted in colors of pain and nausea. My feet ache and swell as I remember the hour of pounding, and the sight of those sharp turns on the track causes my ankles to hurt. The butterflies are let loose once again and my body becomes weak. I snap out of it, though, when I hear the coach call my name. I am ready for action whether I want it nor not.

"Ten 220s at 32-second pace!" I mutter to myself in disbelief as I walk away from the coach. "Doesn't he know this is only my second day of this speed work stuff? I can barely do one 220 in 25!" My teammates voice similar sentiments, but after 10 minutes of bitching and stalling, we start.

Due to a general lack of confidence, freshmen are notorious for pushing the pace in practice. We are no different. As we cross the finish line after sprinting our first 220, the coach yells, "Twenty-nine. Too fast if you guys want to finish!" The warning, of course, goes unheeded. The one who finished first feels proud. He has proven himself. The rest of us regain our breath and plan to win the next "race."

The once sparsely populated Armory is now swarming with hustling bodies, and the air is beginning to smell foul from perspiration. The monotone of hundreds of voices is broken every once in a while by the angered shout of "Track!" as a group of swiftly moving runners passes slower ones. The incessant

parade of runners swooping in an oval causes a steady stream of cool air to flow off of each turn. During their workouts, runners flock to the turns to catch some of the breeze.

I sigh with relief as I cross the line first to complete the fourth 220. This one, like all the others, is done under 30 seconds, and once again the coach's warning to slow down is shrugged off. A freshman gives little thought to pacing. He is impatient for success. It must be grabbed at the first offering. That is what we are doing, racing for success on every 220.

Boy, are we sorry! We have completed only six 220s, all below 30 seconds, and there is no more strength in our legs. We are a group of cramped and sore idiots, and I will definitely vomit if I do one more. When the coach is not looking, we sneak away into a corner

and sit down. Now that we are equally dead we decide to pull together, work as a team. We agree that instead of racing each other, we should take turns leading. That way, we each get a chance to "succeed" and the pace is not as frantic. We are learning!

The last four 220s are considerably slower, and the competitiveness among us has melted. I finish the last one with a contented smile, and walk off with the others as we discuss every stride of the past 10 laps. The fatigue and soreness disappear faster than I thought possible, and we decide to do a mile warmdown.

I feel a new respect for each member of the group, and sense their respect for me and each other. I feel like I belong, for no one can deny I suffered and achieved this afternoon as much as any one in that group. Despite (or because of) the pain, I think I will love this sport. ●



## COME JOIN US IN INNSBRUCK

Do you get as excited as I do when there is mention of the Olympic Games? Does watching the best athletes in the world compete against each other have any appeal . . . and how about just plain old good snow . . . a European setting . . . the excitement of watching cross-country skiing at its best, including the biathlon, ski jumping and the relays; the bobsledding competition is fast and quick; figure skating; ice hockey; and glide along with the speed skaters; and of course there is the downhill skiing. Just thinking about all of this excites me. And I'll see all of this on our Olympic tour to the Winter Games in Innsbruck, Austria. We leave February 1st from New York. That's only a year away. We'll only be taking 60 people with us. We have already signed up 16 people and we'll need a deposit of \$150.00 per person to hold your place. Cost of the two week tour will be around \$1000 from New York. We'll see 23 events, we'll be housed in a small rustic town outside of Innsbruck and we'll enjoy two group dinners. There will also be Olympic Trading pins, travel bag and other personal items. I certainly would like to have you join my wife and me on this trip. After taking 72 people to the 1972 Games and preparing to take 350 to Montreal we are both anxious to meet you on this one. Send your \$150 deposit directly to: **Bob Anderson, President, World Publications, Box 366, Mountain View, Calif. 94040** or give me a call at (415) 965-8777 and I'll answer any of your questions.