



## USATF Meet Phone App

The beauty of track and field is the sport's simplicity. Who is the superior runner, jumper or thrower? Track and field derives from the basic survival skills humans experienced as hunters and gatherers. Despite the uncomplicated athletic motion, track and field in the U.S. has struggled to communicate the simplistic beauty of the sport to American audiences. The average fan is lost in metric conversions. Performance marks are arbitrary; few understand the significant difference between a 12.79-second 110-meter hurdle finish and a 12.99 performance. Finicky no-show athletes add to promoter frustration. The emerging sports of soccer and lacrosse only amplify the dilemma of track and field popularity. Outside of Olympic years, U.S. track meets on average have a measly 600,000 television households tuning in, according to data from USA Track & Field (USATF), the sport's national governing body (Germano, 2012). Most frustrating of all, U.S. track and field lacks athlete recognition, despite enormous potential.

Vin Lananna, the director of Oregon's track and field program and considered the sports best promoter in the business says, "Anybody can market football and basketball. The sign of true marketing ability is to be innovative and creative in track and field" (McCollough, 2012). Luckily, we are coming into the age of information. Information, or more appropriately stated, education, can save track and field. Track and field must embrace the readily available information technology to gain fan support.

U.S. track and field needs to produce a household name. Olympic gold medalist Bruce Jenner said, "The ability to market our athletes is extremely important. You have to admit, we have gone up



against the marketing machine of football, basketball and baseball, multibillion-dollar budgets, and in golf, you had a superstar with Tiger that has really brought the sport back. We need to find a couple of those kind of superstars with great personalities, too” (McCollough , 2012).

A Wall Street Journal article written by Sara Germano, summed up the current state of the sport, “Track and field was once one of the top sports in the U.S., with runners Mary Decker and Edwin Moses winning Sports Illustrated Sportsman of the Year awards in the mid-1980s. Athletes such as Michael Johnson, Florence Griffith-Joyner and Carl Lewis were among the country’s biggest stars, capturing headlines for their style and major championship wins.” The U.S. has lacked a household name for 13 years.

A Survey Monkey poll conducted by Kansas Relays staff members in April of 2012, revealed out of 51 respondents, 87 percent were unfamiliar with 18 of the most successful track and field athletes listed. The 18 athletes listed represented the most significant U.S. and international track and field athletes, with the exception of Usain Bolt, since he rarely competes in the U.S.

Fortunately, U.S. track and field possesses plenty of athletes with potential to become household names. Ashton Eaton holds the world record in both the decathlon and heptathlon events, a feat Dan O’Brien and Dave Johnson (Dan vs. Dave) never accomplished, but never the less received plenty of publicity. Not only is Eaton an incredible athlete, he is a great looking, well-spoken gentleman. Olympic bronze medalist, shot putter Reese Hoffa brings entertainment to any event. The enormous teddy bear does cart wheels, dances between throws, has worn a wrestling mask to throw, solves Rubik’s

Josh Williamson

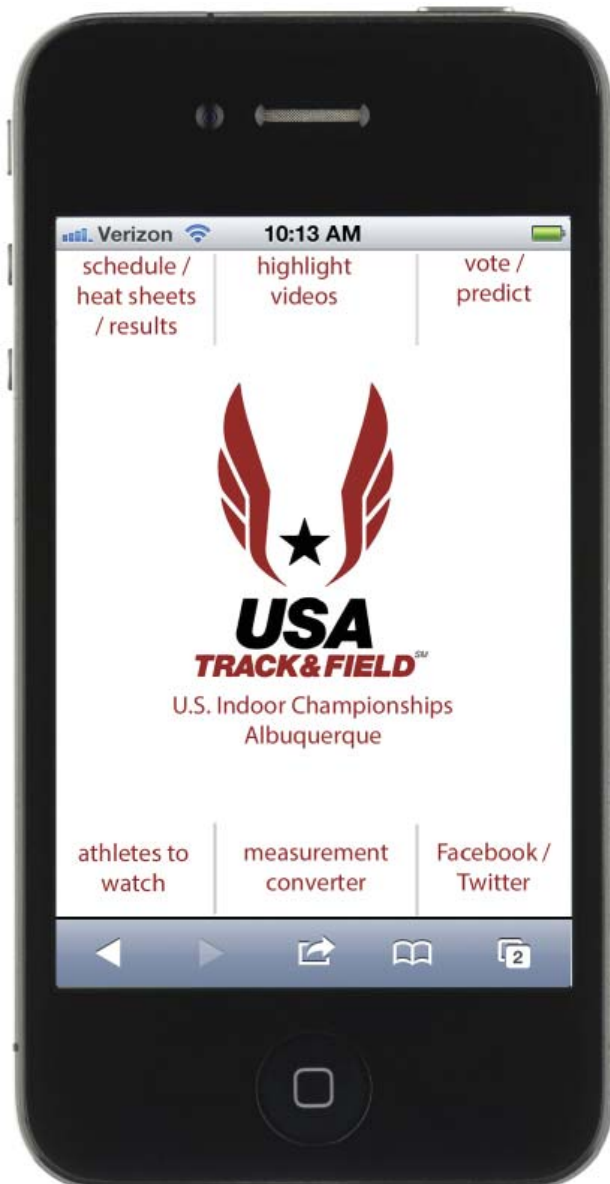


Cubes in less than a minute and has a back-story that will make any fan shed a tear. Two-time 800 meter Olympian Nick Symmonds owns a pet bunny named Mortimer, has auctioned off his skin, travels around the world to train and he also dated Paris Hilton. Household names are present; their stories need communicated.

A USATF meet application could alleviate the sport's shortcomings and extend U.S. track and field's

reach by educating and connecting athletes and fans.

USATF sanctioned track meets need the assistance of a strategically designed phone application to increase track and field popularity. Six application categories will supplement fan engagement. The phone app will assist fans watching the track meet on their television sets or viewing the meet in person.



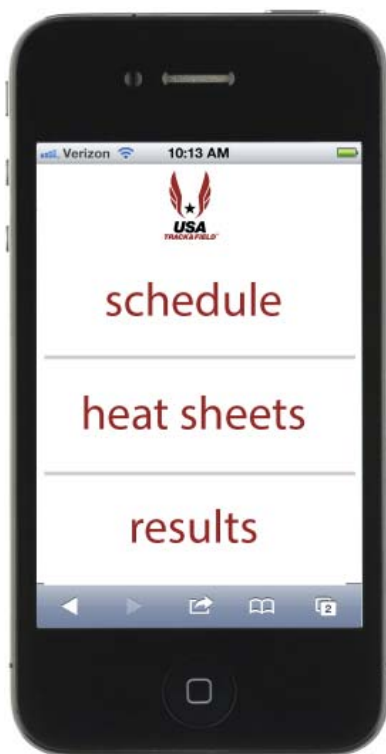
#### USATF's Meet Phone Application Goals:

1. Educate the fans
2. Extend track and field's reach through social media
3. Provide fan interaction

## Schedule/Heat Sheets/Results

### Schedule

Typically, track meets print out a black and white sched-



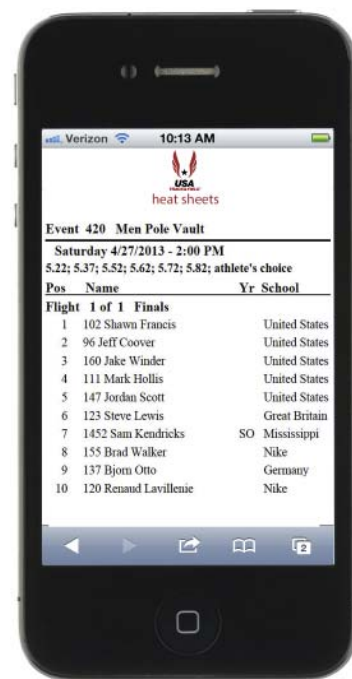
ule. Track meet schedules are important to fans, athletes and coaches because unlike football and baseball, track meets usually have 50 start times, taking all of the events into account. Track meet schedules disappear quickly and usually require a reprint. Then, meet patrons misplace their copy. A track and field meet app needs a schedule of events.

### Heat Sheets

Track meet heat sheets are similar to a baseball batting order. Heat sheets list the order of events with each athlete's heat and lane assignment. The heat sheets also list the athletes' order for field events. Heat sheets can be tough to come by at most track meets because of the volume of paper it

takes to list every individual in the meet. Non-track fans ask, "Why not sell a program with heat sheet information?" Most track coaches enter their athletes one week in advance so it is not feasible to print hundreds of programs in a week. Additionally, track and field athletes are finicky. (Track is one of a few sports that requires close to 100 percent health to compete. Even Usain Bolt could not win or even place in the Olympics with a slight ankle sprain.) Athletes scratch within days of the meet, rendering a printed program useless since scratches change lane assignments. Not only are heat sheets tough to find at meets, but the sheets only list lane assignments and possibly an entry mark.

Easy to access heat sheets via a phone app would solve the issue for fans





since printing is not required. Furthermore, the heat sheet section of the app will allow spectators to click on an athlete's name for a quick bio. The USATF already possesses bios on all relevant athletes on its webpage. In addition, internet sites automatically record athletes' best performances through electronic timing and measuring. Producing bios and latest performance marks could be easy for the app programmer.

Educating the public of track athletes is vital to gaining support. Imagine a typical sports fan reading the lineup and realizing a particular athlete is from the same state or attended the same university. The fan has found a commonality, and will likely root for the athlete. Knowledge brings the novice fan one-step closer to becoming a true fan. The more familiar the public becomes with track athletes the increased likelihood of following the athletes. Each bio will feature the athlete's Facebook page, Twitter and website link so app users can easily follow the athlete. The goal with social media is to gain fan and athlete interaction. Kirk Wakefield praises interaction in his book *Team Sports Marketing*, "If you've ever met a professional player in person, odds are that you have continued to follow that player and his team. The more familiar that you become with the player, the higher is the likelihood that you will watch the player on TV or attend a game" (Wakefield p. 17).

## **Results**

Meet management posts paper results in one or two places within a facility. A crowd surrounds the results, as only a couple people in front can view the tiny print. Finding the event of interest is also difficult because patrons are required to search through masses of events and names. Often, management posts the results out-of-order, making it more difficult to find. The search for results becomes



less frustrating if accessible through a phone application. Again, in the results section, fans will be able to click on an athlete's name to find bio information along with their Facebook, Twitter and personal website.

## Meet Highlights

Two months ago, I witnessed a world record at the U.S. Indoor Championships in Albuquerque. Pole-vaulter Jenn Suhr accomplished the feat at the end of the Saturday session of the meet. Unfortunately, she did it in front of a crowd of only 500 people. Nearly everyone had left.

All major meets are videoed with replays shown on a video board, so it would be relatively easy to instantly add a 20-second highlight to the app. Each app highlight video will allow the user to post to Facebook or Twitter. The crowd in Albuquerque could have found the highlight on their app and reposted it. Likely, others that were not present would repost the video and suddenly, track and field is broadening exposure. Track and field is a three-ring circus of sorts. With so many events occurring at the same time, fans can easily miss a great jump or throw. Highlight videos could be a helpful tool to enhance the fan experience.

Only a limited number of videos should exist to prevent slow processing of the phone app. Videos



showcasing athletes' personalities need to be included, such as Reese Hoffa quickly completing a Rubik's Cube.

## Vote/Predictions

### Vote

Most meets select a male and female performer of the meet. A section of the app will allow the fans to nominate and eventually vote for the athlete of the meet. The nomination and vote can repost to the fans' Facebook and Twitter accounts.

### Predictions

The major sports of football, basketball and baseball gain fan support because of gambling interaction. Track and field has never caught on in Las Vegas, but it would not hurt the sport. Obviously, the USATF cannot arrange gambling, but there is not a law against predictions. To add to the fan interaction, the app will list five events. Before the meet begins, fans can predict the winner of the five events. The app will track the predictions to add some excitement. In order to abide by the law, prizes will be not awarded, but the USATF cannot control a fan's side bet with a friend. Prediction engagement is a major cause for the NCAA's basketball tournament success. It is time track and field followed suit. Social media needs to share the predictions to spread track and field's reach.







## Athletes to Watch

The “Athletes to Watch” section highlights the top athletes at the meet. The watch list will feature six athletes (three males and three females) with their bios and their events’ scheduled time. The section educates the novice fan so they know the best athletes and can watch accordingly.

## Facebook and Twitter

The social media section provides USATF Facebook and Twitter feeds. The aim is to have fans join and become social media advocates to extend track and field’s reach.



## Conversion

The use of the metric system in track and field continues to disconnect American fans from track and field. For instance, a high jump of 2.14 meters does not stimulate American fans, but the uncertain metric performance registers excitement when fans realize the leap stretches over 7 feet.

American fans are even confused about the event distances. Few realize the 1500 meter run is 93 percent of a mile or the 800 meter run is just five yards short of a half mile. A conversion chart provides





needed perspective.

Professional runner Shalane Flanagan provided her insight of being relatable in a Wall Street Journal article written by Sara Germano.

“Shalane Flanagan won the women’s marathon at January’s (2012) Olympic Trials and in 2008 won an Olympic bronze medal on the track in the 10,000 meters. She says there is no doubt her profile as a professional runner has been elevated since moving to the marathon. ‘The marathon is much more relatable to the public,’ she said. ‘Thousands of people run a marathon a year, whereas the track is much more exclusive to elite athletes.’”

A simple conversion portion of the app helps educate fans to make the events relatable. Relating distances becomes especially important when considering the amount of Americans that run recreationally for exercise, a 2010 Mintel Report, estimates 25 percent. (Popularity of Exercise, 2010). Track and field needs to relate to the growing group of recreational runners.

The USATF phone app could possess many features, but it is vital that the app remain simple to operate. Socially connecting athletes and followers creates lifelong fans. Extending track and field’s reach socially produces brand advocates. Effortless education and interaction allows fans to fully enjoy the track and field experience and come back for more.