



Tommy Lewis, David Reyna and Justin Meads (left to right in foreground) practice running sprints at Kyle Field. They are just three of nearly 300 youngsters participating in the College Station Junior Olympics, a summer track program sponsored by the city's Recreation Council and the A&M Consolidated Community Education program. Consol Head Track Coach James Giese teaches the program which is now

in its tenth year. The youngsters range in age from six- to 13-years-old. Steven Bottsford is the high jumper (above right), seen barely ticking the bar off its placement during one effort. Occasionally, the team competes in local meets. Many of the youngsters continue running track throughout high school and college.

Battalion photos by Steve Goble



To be so young...

Nearly 300 youngsters join Junior Olympics

By PAUL MCGRATH
Battalion Sports Editor
Coach James Giese, stopwatch in hand, gestures a trio of girls forward on an imaginary starting line. "Okay, girls," he says, "last time we did 1:50. This time let's do 1:40." The girls toe the invisible mark obediently. "Ready, set, gooooo!" The girls begin their strides, concentrating on setting a pace and bringing back the tantalizing urges of the wind to run as fast as one can. To do

so, means a loss of needed energy down the backstretch and will gain nothing but a glowering condemnation from Giese. As they head towards the finish, Giese waves the stopwatch in front of them as if to tempt them, shouting encouragement whenever possible and criticism whenever necessary. "One forty-one, one forty-two," he calls out as the girls sprint past him. "Real good, girls. Now go sit down until it's time to run your second quarter."

Giese, Head Track Coach at A&M Consolidated High School, is in charge of the Junior Olympics summer track program for area youngsters. The program is sponsored by the College Station Recreation Council and the A&M Consolidated Community Education organization. There are nearly 300 youngsters involved with the program this summer, Giese said, a program which has expanded every year since it was started 10 years ago.

Giese makes sure every youngster who participates receives a T-shirt with "College Station Track" lettered on the front. He had to order 21 dozen this summer and will soon order another two dozen. The youngsters are divided into three age groups: bantams, ages eight and nine; midgets, ages 10 and 11; and juniors, ages 12 and 13. There are several six- and seven-year olds who compete in the lower age bracket, however. Both girls and boys participate, working out twice a day on Texas A&M University's Kyle Field. The morning workout is usually for distance running while the evening session includes speed drills.

From time to time, the youngsters compete as a team against neighboring programs. They went against Brenham two weeks ago and were supposed to host Alief Monday, but the Alief team never showed up. Alief's failure to appear was disappointment to Giese's proteges as he had built some adrenalin inside them. Alief has one of the finest track programs in the state and Giese made sure to inform his team of this fact.

"I told them all about how Alief was going to come in with their club uniforms and how they travelled all over the country to compete," Giese said. "The kids were real pumped up to run against them."

Giese was also unhappy that Alief did not arrive as he seems to intensely want to defeat them. There appears to be a clash of coaching philosophies between his methods and those of Alief.

He said Alief only competes youngsters who will earn points in a meet. Giese says he can't do that, he wants to give every youngster an equal chance.



Coach James Giese (above left) signals (left to right) Elizabeth Earle, Amy Basco, Kathy Anding, Karen Tatum and Missy Griensbeck to begin their practice quartermile run.

"They (Alief) can spend year after year with one high jumper," he said. "Some of our kids have never high jumped before. Some of them run at it, jump on it, or throw themselves over."

Yet, Giese does his best to help each of the youngsters, a trait which has not gone unnoticed by the youngsters themselves.

"He's a great coach. He really knows what he is doing," Tanya Feltz, 13, said.

"He's a great inspirer. He really helps you a whole lot," Jennifer Arnold, also 13, added.

Twelve-year-old Ken Patranella included another perspective of Giese's character.

"He doesn't yell at you like all of the other coaches," he said.

The youngsters enjoy the program for a variety of reasons.

"I really like running," 11-year-old aspiring distance man Peter Glenn said. "I'll run as long as I live."

"I've made a lot of new friends and I like it a lot," Jennifer said.

"It gives you something to do in the morning besides sitting around the house and picking fights," Bill Merka, 11, figured.

Merka claimed there were some fringe benefits.

"It helps you get girls."

How?

"That's something that I can't explain."

While on the subject of girls, 11-year-old Tommy Lewis seemed a bit critical of his female teammates.

"They slow us down."

The youngsters apparently enjoy running above the field events, often saying the field events were too difficult.

"I like running better," Kyle Patranella, 11, said, mocking the grunt and form of a shot putter.

The youngsters, some who have participated in the program for four years or more, are determined competitors, but realize that winning is not emphasized.

"We probably won't win but five events next week," Giese said of the team's upcoming meet in Houston.

"If I was to just carry my winners (those he expects to do well) I could take them all in my Volkswagen. But that's not my way."

"The most important thing is to want to try as hard as you can," Tanya said. "Winning is also important, as a group as well as an individual."

However, the ribbons or medals won are held as preciously as any treasure. Young eyes always brighten when effort is rewarded.



Wendy Mann clutches a ribbon to her chest after winning her event. Victory is evident on her face.



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