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4 MILLION VIEWERS, 59 TV STORIES AT W-S NATIONAL MASTERS

By Bob Weiner, Chair, USATF Masters Media Committee

The Nielsen ratings and viewership report for the Winston-Salem USA Masters Track Championships tallied over four million viewers and at least 59 TV stories, including ESPN and regional ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, and Time-Warner Cable (which did 2 hours live on opening day). All did interviews with athletes and organizers. The stations came for three days of the event, from opening day with 3X Olympian and 1984 Flagbearer Ed Burke, on the 30th Anniversary of his carrying the flag, declaring for Winston-Salem, "Let the Games Begin Again!" Radio was similarly supportive with NPR and Chicago's WGN among the many.

The closing day, which generally has diminished coverage, had a remarkable first-ever in world track history, a 90+ year-olds relay team in three events, 4X 100, 400, and 800 – and six TV networks and worldwide media, including ESPN, the New York Times, and AP, covered that day, as well as "trunk" feeds on TV and radio stations across the nation. "TV was swarming" throughout the meet, as MTF Chair Gary Snyder said.

The major local paper, the Winston-Salem Journal, each day featured front page over-the-masthead headlines and front page sports stories, interviews, and color photos of competitors from an advance Thursday, as competitors and organizers arrived, through the final day. Literally millions read/saw/heard the stories that ran across the country. When I returned home to DC after the meet, friends and colleagues told me they saw it everywhere.

This best-ever championship coverage would not have been possible without the advance releases drawing the press including research and drafting of the lists and descriptions of the Olympians, world champions, locals to watch, possible feature events, and people's life summaries. The amazing research for the release was done by meet announcer Pete Taylor, MTF Active Athletes Committee Chair Mary Trotto, North Carolina USATF Masters Chair Eric Braschwitz, and meet director Noel Ruebel, all of whom used their experience and knowledge to provide the critical copy, bullets, and charts which gave substantive focus and written credibility to phone calls and emails to the media, a joint effort by the MTF Media Committee and *Visit Winston-Salem*. *Visit Winston-Salem's* Bonny Bernat, Casey Hough, and Brittany Norton contributed enormously.

The LOC's suggestion of featuring the 4X90's on the last day in the media was sheer brilliance, and thanks to Peter Blank of my own Potomac Valley Track Club (great innovative work Peter—wow!) for conceiving the event and team captain Charlie Ross (who credited Peter for calling him with the idea) for the huge work of phoning and organizing the team. USATF's Tyler Stevenson wrote daily releases with the results including world and American age group records set; because of that, the press ran all the day's winners in addition to the feature stories, and had precision in the follow-on stories. Thanks to USATF's Jill Geer, Susan Hazzard, Christa Mann, Amanda Brooks, Jim Estes, Max Siegel, and Stephanie Hightower among others for their support. In addition, USATF TV came, taped, and archived most of the meet so athletes and others can now see the performances.

Thanks also to Carroll DeWeese, MTF Treasurer and Games Committee Member, this year's David Pain Service Award Winner, for again helping enormously by assuring the media team's quickly getting the WR's and AR's to inform the press, and Sandy Pashkin, Games Committee Member, and Gary Snyder, national MTF Chair, for making the event run smoothly and answering many media questions.

Thanks especially to the athletes for doing hundreds of interviews and getting the message out that masters track and field is a mission of lifetime fitness and health through training and competition. Athletes interviewed—and it is impossible not to forget some key people—included Ed Burke, Nolan Shaheed, Flo Meiler, Oscar Peyton, Kathy Martin, Sheldon Contract, Bruce McBarnette, Charles Allie, Vickie Fox, Irene Obera, Tom McCormack, and our incredible 90-97 year-old relay team of Charles Ross, Charles Boyle, Orville Rogers, and Champion Goldy. The first winner of the first event, the women's 10,000, interviewed on Time Warner Cable, F40 Caroline Bjune, credited MTF Chair Gary Snyder's First-Timer program for giving her the incentive to come to the meet.

Let's not forget our own *National Masters News*, now published/and edited by the passionately dedicated twosome of Amanda Scotti and Tish Ceccarelli, who covered the meet onsite and has extensive coverage in the current issue. *NMN* is our voice as MTF's own magazine, now both online and hard copy, and provides regular e-alerts. Photographers Greg Coats and William Anthony, who shot the meet, are superb and dedicated. In addition, Ken Stone's blog, masterstrack.com, gave updates on meet logistics and results and presents opinions in the sport with Ken's long journalism history, expertise, and devotion to masters track.

The media success was a magnificent team effort. Thanks to everyone for building our sport! On to the return to Winston-Salem for the Indoor Championships!

To see selections from the TV clips, print coverage, and radio, as well as the advance meet press release, go to: <http://www.weinerpublic.com/masters.html> (Thanks to webmaster Jay Wind of the MTF media committee for maintaining this website and creating You-Tubes of the TV and radio coverage); official MTF site <http://www.usatfmasters.org/news.htm> (Thanks to Jeff Brower for his great work maintaining that); and http://www.usatf.tv/gprofile.php?do=view_event&event_id=6668&mgroup_id=45365&year=2014 (thanks to the USATF-TV staff).