

Huffines Sports Medicine Podcasts

#150 – Coach Pat Henry

- S1 00:07 Welcome to the sports medicine podcast, brought to you by the Sidney and J.L. Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance, in the Department of Health and Kinesiology at Texas A&M University. At the Huffines Institute, we're always working to facilitate, apply, and bring you the most up to date coverage of the wide world that is sports medicine and human performance, all in the language you can understand and share with your friends. And now, here's our host, the director of the Huffines Institute, Dr. Tim Lightfoot.
- S2 00:37 Hello, and welcome to the weekly edition of the Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance podcast. I'm your host Tim Lightfoot, and today we have a special podcast being brought to you in conjunction with the Texas A&M Coaching Academy. And it's our 150th podcast, and we're so pleased to have a special guest with us today, Coach Pat Henry. Welcome to the podcast today, coach.
- S3 00:58 I appreciate it.
- S2 00:59 We're so glad to have you.
- S3 01:00 You bet.
- S2 01:01 I'm going to tell the audience a little bit about you and why we have you here. First of all it has been said of Coach Henry that he is the greatest track coach of all time. I think when you see this you will understand why. He has a background from New Mexico. A Bachelors degree in physical education. A masters degree in Educational administration from Western New Mexico. He is in his ninth season as Texas A&M track coach. He has worked at a variety of levels as track coach. He is the first coach to ever lead a school to three consecutive men's and women's national championships in a row. Since he's been at A&M he has seven NCAA outdoor championships and a total of 34 national track titles. Amazing, amazing career. So it's quite an honor to have you in live broadcasting--
- S3 01:46 Thank you very much. It's appreciating.
- S2 01:48 One of the things we always talk about is we always like our guests to tell us a little bit of how they got to where they are. Is there something that you decided you wanted to do when you were like third grade? You wanted to be the greatest track coach ever ?
- S3 01:58 [laughs] We'll I don't know about the greatest [laughter] You could put that with it. But I'm from a family of coaches. I think back today I'm glad we weren't bricklayers, because I think all of us would've been bricklayers. But Grandfather coached, Dad coached, I've got four other brothers that all coached, so we were afflicted with it a long time ago. And that was part-- You grow up in an athletic family, and you think about the things you want to do. Although a lot of my family were football coaches. I was the one who decided to go the other

direction. They were all track at one point, but a lot of football coaches in there, too.

S1 02:44 What attracted you to track and field?

S2 02:46 I like the individual aspect and the team aspect, and that's what's good about my sport. We're an individual sport, but we have a team score. And it's kind of the way I would look at it from a philosophy about how I coach the sport is-- It's about the individual; it's about the individual doing what he's capable of doing or she's capable of doing, and then at the end, they add up the score. Although I think I was on the same staff at LSU with Nick Saban and he and I talked about some things and football wise, it is still about each guy doing what he is supposed to do. And if he does what he is supposed to do, then everybody is successful. And it is the same philosophy. You think football is all about the team; it is a lot of about the individual getting his job done too.

S1 03:45 Well obviously you've been incredibly successful and there are a lot other track coaches out there. What do you think that has made your programs more successful than others? Is it something you do? Is it a philosophy that you have? I know you talked about each person doing their job.

S2 04:02 I started - once again out of a football family background basically, but track attracted me to the individual part of it. But to coach a team and to try to establish who you are and what you are, it takes time. Coached high school for ten years, junior college for four and LSU 17, and now this is 10th year. So overall of that period of time, I continue to change but I think our athletes enjoy the aspect of-- I hire people as well who have a like philosophy for about this sport. I think you have to have some continuity in your staff when it comes down to the overall outcome of your program. I have been fortunate enough at the high school level, you didn't get to really hire your staff. They were either assistant football coaches or basketball coaches. And so--

S1 05:00 The ones that showed up.

S2 05:01 The ones-- Although, in those years and I was at Hobb's High School in New Mexico. It's a one high school town. And we were an athletic community, so they care about everything. I got to pick a little bit, but I still had guys that staff-wise, you had to indoctrinate yourself. It's about the young people that you have, being confident that you know what you're doing, first of all. Secondly, you're consistent with the way you treat them, and the way you train. Those things are very, very important. Consistency is probably a key word for me in everything that we do. The young people coming in to the program, they have to know that you understand what it takes to get them to the next level, because there's always a next level. If there isn't a next level, then I don't want that person on my team. I try to recruit people, and even high school level, you had people. If you didn't have people who aspired to be better all the time, then you had the wrong person out there. You got to have those people. You got to change some people - their thinking process about that because many of them have never been told anything different than that, so that's what a coach is for is to try to change the way you think about things. I would say consistency is probably a key word in the development of my programs and our athletes buy in to what we're doing. They understand that we demand a lot. We expect a lot. They expect from us as well and so when there's expectations going both directions, expectations for each other on the team and you have to create that

environment as well because if you only have a few that care and the rest don't care or don't care as much then there's an overall outcome which isn't going to be very good.

S1 07:07 Yeah, it can cause problems can't it?

S2 07:09 But if you were running a business and you own a business, who are you going to hire? Who do you want working for you? And the people that you have working for you, do they want to build a business? Do they want the business to get better? Or are they just there to get a paycheck?

S1 07:26 Right, right.

S2 07:27 So, it's the same scenario.

S1 07:29 It's like--that's almost any organization, isn't it?

S2 07:30 Anything you do.

S1 07:31 Anything.

S2 07:32 Anything.

S1 07:32 So you've got 27 years at the collegiate level. What kind of changes have you seen? I know track and field is made up of a lot of different individual sports, but what are the overarching umbrella changes that you've seen in track and field over that time? Maybe, things that have caused you to evolve your coaching philosophy?

S2 07:51 Well, actually it's 27, but it's those four at junior college were big college years too. So over those 31 years to this point-- Of course, when we started coaching, the women's part of athletics was not anywhere close to what it is today. It wasn't even close. And so the development of females - the mentality and the physical changes that females have made has been the most dramatic thing that I have seen in my years--in 40 plus years of coaching. The mentality change, how young ladies have been given the same opportunity men now, and how they've taken that and run with it.

S1 08:39 I like the pun; that's a good pun by the way.

S2 08:41 That's exactly right. [laughter] I really don't think people really understand how far female athletics has come. When you look at some of the things that happened in sport when you relate it back to men 40 years ago and women today. Women are doing things-- in my sport, we're still not passing what men used to do. But we're getting closer and closer and closer. Swimming has had some passes, as we all know. Not yet in athletics or track and field.

S1 09:15 There are several articles that have compared the women's and the male world records in a variety of things, and it is amazing how in the last 40 years the women have made huge strides.

S2 09:27 And there are still big strides being made for men, but big strides are centimeters in thousandths of a second, where on the women's side, it's still inches and seconds.

S1 09:40 Yeah. I just watched the Boston marathon today, and the female that won, she cut almost two minutes off the course record. Amazing performance.

- S2 09:49 The men's relatively stable. I think as you guys in your profession know that one day, it may be a long time from now. One day women are going to run exactly the way men run, because training has caught up first. As we know, I think they use [?], and they retain fluids a little bit better than men do. That's just genetically, they're a little bit better. In the long run, the things that I have read and looked at, I think that women are going to have a little better machine to run for short distance, maybe sooner than the sprints.
- S1 10:35 Are they doing that in ultra swim? I guess some of the better ones are the women athletes in that.
- S2 10:39 Yeah. Women can do some things men can't do.
- S1 10:42 Yeah. Has technology changed much? Has that played a role?
- S2 10:47 Our sport is a lot of places where a lot of things are tried. You see football teams doing a lot of things track and field were doing many years ago, from flexibility to speed development and to dynamics of stretching and flexibility and/or the lack of what we think of as flexibility. All of those things we generate out of our sport for the most part because we have a way of testing and a way of doing some things. But as the sport continues to evolve, we learn more about what humans are capable of doing. I think that physically we know a lot about what the athlete can do and we're learning more all the time. Mentally though, we're way behind where we are physically, because the mental aspect of sport, I think we're touching on it. We're just getting a little bit better as we go, but it's not matching what we've done physically over the many years.
- S1 11:52 It's almost when you get to the edge of the physicality, that's where the mental state--
- S2 11:55 Yeah, the mental is a part of it and I don't know that we'll ever get to the end of the physical part of it. So, I know, well I don't-- I feel like mentally, there's no telling what we're going to be able to do as time goes. You know diets, supplements, have all changed. Most diet has changed for the better. Many supplements have helped. But most of the supplements of course, if you're eating correctly and you're doing things correctly in your diet, you don't really need the supplements people try to think that you need. If you just eat right and eat your greens and do the things that you're supposed to do, supplements just aren't that important. Now, there's a lot of cheaters out there that use some other things, and that has dramatically changed our sport, too. But our sport is pretty tough on it. The science just can't-- or the testing just can't stay ahead of the science yet. They're beating us still. They're still beating the testing systems. We're taking blood samples, and we're catching people that have done things maybe 10 years ago. That aspect of sport has changed sport a lot, in many ways for the worse. But I think that-- I'll only speak for track and field. If you get caught doing some of those things, you're done, that's it. We don't have any second chances in our sport, and I wish other sports would do the same, but I fear that we're going the other direction, not the right direction.
- S1 13:38 Becoming more lenient than anything.
- S2 13:40 Yeah, we're becoming more lenient than we are.
- S1 13:47 Why didn't track and field have a bigger imprint in America sports society? When we think of sports in America, we think about football and basketball and

maybe baseball, but in Europe track and field is huge.

S2 13:59 In America, we have a mentality of red beats blue. You can't compare - it's hard to compare, anyway - a good football team of today with a good football team of 10 years ago. You don't really know how to compare those people. Our sport you do. You've got a tape measure and a stop watch, so in that regard, track has hurt itself in many regards because we have not worried about people sitting in the stands as we worried about what the individual athlete is doing. We're a lot more pure about it. We want that individual to jump 7 foot 7 in the high jump. Where the general public doesn't know the difference between 6 foot 7 and 7 foot 7. And that's a big analogy but it goes through all of our sport. So, part of it is track's fault. Track has not addressed the fact that if unless you have people sitting in the stands, and almost today unless you're on TV, you're irrelevant.

S1 15:08 Yeah.

S2 15:10 I mean, you're not happening.

S1 15:11 Right. No one knows your happening.

S2 15:12 Nobody knows your happening.

S1 15:14 Yeah.

S2 15:14 And, we have got -- and we are on a track back. We're trying to not-- I'm 62 and I'm at a point in my career, where, I'm trying to have another 6 or 8 year and my push is, and has been for a number of years, and there are a lot of coaches out there that are doing this right now - we have to get back to red beating blue. We have to get back to Texas A & M beating Houston, beating the University of Texas. We have to line up the sport and walk out of there knowing who won the track meet, not just knowing what the performances were. Knowing their team score and someone won. We have to get back to that. And every meet we have here indoor is scored. Somebody walks out of the building here a winner and a loser. The other aspect that has hurt our sport, first of all, we went to metric and that didn't help in the United States.

S1 16:10 Yeah. Because no one understands that.

S2 16:11 Nobody. And 2 meters 17, I don't know what that is in the high jumping unless I look it up what it is.

[chuckles].

S2 16:19 So, that's not good. There's a big push. We do here, we show metric but then we show feet and inches. And you have to do that. Once again, you can't get people in the stands. So the metric conversion - think in the long run - has hurt our sport as well.

S1 16:38 That's interesting, people know the mile. 1,500 meters.

S2 16:42 That's right. Indoors this year, just talking about the mile, four minutes is a huge, huge barrier. But there were 18 men that ran under four minutes this year indoors.

S1 16:53 Wow.

S2 16:54 Some guys didn't make the national championship because they couldn't run under four minutes in the mile. So it tells you what's going on. But the general

public doesn't know that. When you just said 'wow', I think most people do know the metric mile, they know 100 yards. They don't know 100 meters. So that's hurt us. At the NCAA level, the thing that has hurt us - and it's not intended to hurt us - you always had a competition but it was only one gender. There was only one gender. When gender equity went through and you say, we had to be fair across the board, so they combined men's and women's track as one event now. There's not two events; there's one event. You made the length of our meet twice as long. So what was used to be a 3 hour track meet is now a 6 hour track meet and very few people can sit in one spot for 6 hours or want to.

- S1 17:56 It's hard to do that. I have students that can't sit still for an hour and twenty minutes.
- S2 18:00 No, that's right. I don't want to go to a 6 hour track meeting. I'm tasked with it all the time. So, if you combine both basketball programs and said, "You have to have a women's game, and you couldn't leave until the men's game is over. I think there would be less people sitting in the basketball arena also. So, inherently, the NCAA has caused us a big problem in our sport, and don't even realize it. They really don't. I don't think they understand. No other gender has combined; even swimming has suffered.
- S1 18:31 Great point. I never even thought about that.
- S2 18:33 So, the time frame has hurt us too. Those are all excuses. We have 21 events, so really, we have 42 events outside. That's tough to run in a time frame. If you want a duel meet with just us and someone else, it's still a long time frame. Running it as fast as you can run it. Probably the worst event in athletics today is the high school track meet. There will be 90 schools show up at one site, and you have to go at 10:00 in the morning, and you may not be out of there until 10:00 at night. The parents come and watch their child run the 100 and they leave. You can't do that in other sports. That's just not the way it is. We haven't addressed that and understood that. The reason it happens in high school once again, it's a little bit of an excuse, but you've got to have about 100 officials to run a track meet. There aren't too many people that can organize 100 volunteer people to help run off a track meet.
- S1 19:44 So while you've got them there...
- S2 19:44 So while you've got them there, everybody and their brother comes to one site.
- S1 19:48 Yeah.
- S2 19:49 So our sport is those are excuses, those are reasons for I think some of the issues we have today but they're legitimate, but they need to be addressed. They need more help from the NCAA addressing it. What I don't like from the past year is NCAA changed the scoring in tennis because of the same kind of reasons. I'm hoping that they get [?] track and field. We're a big huge sport out there, of all athletics in the NCAA we're 33%.
- S1 20:27 Wow.
- S2 20:29 So for us to be pushed in the corner, we're 33% of all competition. That's all sports combined. That is mens and women's track and field and cross country is 33%; that's a huge amount of people.
- S1 20:44 And people-- with football being such a big number and they are big numbers

but compared to this, they're not.

- S2 20:49 People just don't know that the other thing up here at the top, you see. Last year we took track-- we made sure every competition we went to, we knew. I don't think very many people understand we competed in front of 208,000 paid spectators last year. See here at Texas A & M, we have a tremendous indoor facility; one of the best there is.
- S1 21:12 It's beautiful.
- Our outdoors may be the worst. It's worse than the Southeastern Conference and it was the worst in the Big 12. We can't even have a track meet here. Now we haven't won an indoor championship; we've won seven outdoor championships. So the facility, that doesn't work the way most people think. You've got to have great facilities to win. But it has hurt us here at Texas A & M because we can't win an outdoor track meet. Baseball here has a game on Tuesdays and a game on Thursday and a game on Saturday. So people are in a rhythm of coming and watching. We have no way of establishing any rhythm of competition here. Indoors, we do a pretty good job, but even there we only have five competitions. Unlike where they'll have 50 here.
- S1 21:57 So in the spring season, when people want to get outdoors, and maybe watch a athletic competition, we don't have a venue yet.
- S2 22:04 They can't watch track and field. And we're graduating a lot of people, Texas A&M, through our track program, and we are graduating some unhappy people at that.
- S1 22:15 And for the audience listening, what coach Henry has been referring to is a fact sheet, and we'll actually put that up, and that will be on the show notes for this podcast. So help yourself to pull that down and look at it, it's really some fascinating statistics. You have the great, I guess honor or privileges, you have one of the sports that has athletes that compete directly in the Olympics. Of course swimming does, and.
- S2 22:42 Sometimes a curse, almost.
- S1 22:43 Oh, it's a curse, really?
- S2 22:44 No, it's a great thing; it really is. But we're also put into a category that we're an Olympic sport. We refer to it as an Olympic sport. The Olympics only happen once every four years.
- S1 22:57 Right.
- S2 22:57 We are every year. [chuckles].
- S1 22:59 That's right.
- S2 23:00 We're a college sport. But we have from time to time, we do have Olympians on our teams, and, yeah, the NCAA championships in our sport is probably the second best track meet ever. And the Olympic games being the only one that might be a little bit better in some things.
- [chuckles].
- S1 23:22 And we come back to how Americans look at track and field. That seems to be when they get really interested in track and field is when the Olympics rolls

around.

S2 23:31

That's right.

S1 23:31

It's like national pride thing is on the line and then they forget about it the rest of the time.

S2 23:36

That's right. I'll go back to our initial statement. I think we've lost the team aspect of our sport. When you think of the Olympic games it is the United States against the world.

S1 23:49

Right.

S2 23:49

And so people can grab on to that, and they do. And we're not giving them that opportunity at the collegiate level until you get to the National Championship. Then we don't have the crowd that's following us, because they don't quite understand. Although there'll be 20,000 people to the National Championships, and still they have a regular meet, they're not going to have those kinds of numbers when we should. We should be able to do that. When I was in college, when you were in college, I'd go to track meets on campus and when I was participating, we'd have 12, 15,000 people at a track meet. We're an Olympic sport in that regard, but we're a collegiate team sport.

S1 24:37

Because of the success you had, you've drawn quite a few people to Bryan-College Station. That's really as almost an epicenter of track and field training, and some of your coaches are amongst the best in the world that you have. And you have many world champions that are back here at training at various parts of the time. That must be a real positive influence for you collegiate athletes as well - to be able to train against some of the world's best.

S2 25:01

That's right. And our people - of course they know who are great athletes are. You actually cannot participate-- We have a certain number of athletes that can actually train with our team. And those are ex - A & M for a period of time and that's if they're a volunteer assistant - we're allowed six volunteer assistants. But I can't just let anybody come out here and train with us. Even if they're an Olympian, I can't let them come out here and train with us. Our numbers are really-- the things that we can do-- now they can train at separate times. And some of ours know they're there and they get to watch every once in a while somebody do something. But the interaction is not what I would really like for it to be but that's the rules.

S1 25:50

That's interesting. I've been told that in the past, and it was interesting. I didn't realize that NCAA limited the amount of interaction there could be between the professional track and field athletes and the amateurs. Are they afraid it might rub off, or what [chuckles]?

S2 26:04

There's lots of issues. The football team couldn't let all the guys who are applying for a football come back in there and lift, and be around the football team either. It's the same thing. It's the same for all sport.

S1 26:20

Interesting. Interesting. Especially when you got people that would like to play you--

S2 26:24

train [crosstalk]. If they were a great violinist, no one would put those restraints on them coming back here, and being around our violinists here at school, or a great actor.



S1 26:35 They would celebrate them.

S2 26:36 That's right, and we only celebrate a very few, and don't let the others come around.

S1 26:43 Coach Henry, it's been great talking to you. Thank you so much.

S2 26:47 I appreciate it.

S1 26:47 For your input today.

S2 26:49 You bet. You bet.

S1 26:49 And for everything that you've done for the University, and continue to do.

S2 26:53 Well, thank you. I worry about being a little bit negative, but in some areas I got to be a little bit negative about some things. But we're a positive program. We're fortunate to be here. We're blessed to have people that support us. We're working on a new facility and that keeps me going and we continue to recruit great young people to come here and represent Texas A & M.

S1 27:21 We'll come back and interview you right before the new track and field stadium opens up.

S2 27:24 That's good. I hope that isn't too long.

S1 27:27 Yeah, I hope not either. What the audience can't see, I'm sitting here faced with this wall full of National Championship trophies, which is pretty impressive. So I think after that, you have the right to say whatever you'd like about track and field.

S2 27:40 Well, thank you very much for that. I appreciate it.

S1 27:42 Thank you for being with us.

S2 27:43 You bet.

S1 27:43 I thank all the listeners for taking the time to download and listened to us today. We hope that you join us next week and the weeks afterwards for the next 55 casts as we get number 200 over the next six months or so and until then we hope you have an active and healthy week.

S? 28:00 Thanks for listening to the Huffines Institute weekly sports medicine podcast. This podcast was produced by [?] and made possible by generous support from the Omar Smith family and the Sydney & J.L. Huffines family. This podcast is published under Creative Commons 3.0 license. That means you can't sell it or change it but feel free to give it to everyone you know and to talk in blog about us. In case you are wondering our opening and closing are provided by johnmilesproduction.com, music was provided by Dave Zeltner. Find him on the web at davidzeltner.com and just so you know we love hearing from you. If you have questions or comments please send then to huffinespodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu. From all of us at the Huffines Institute, we hope you have an active and healthy week.