Ms. Judy Rose
Director of Athletics, Charlotte 49ers Athletics and
Chair, NCAA Division I Championships/Sports Management Cabinet
UNC Charlotte
9201 University City Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28223

September 9, 2011

Dear Judy,

I recently reviewed the response from Connie Dillon (dated September 6, 2011) to my previous letter to the NCAA Division I Championships/Sports Management Cabinet, with regard to the Preliminary Championship Competition of the NCAA Division I Men's and Women's Outdoor Track & Field Championships. On behalf of the Division I Track & Field coaches of the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association (USTFCCCA), I provide these additional comments in response to Connie's letter as a way to inform the dialogue on this issue.

In her letter, Connie indicates that the Big 12 Conference "believe[s] that the decision regarding the preliminary round should be grounded in a discussion of NCAA core values." While we agree with this sentiment, we fundamentally disagree with the conclusions drawn throughout the letter concerning the relationship between NCAA core values and the Preliminary Championship Competition.

Coaches' Position on the Championships

Regarding the position of Track & Field coaches on the subject of the current Championships format, we disagree that no data exists to support our assertion that Track & Field coaches overwhelmingly support the current system. Once again, although there was some initial opposition to the present Outdoor Championships format from NCAA Division I Track & Field Coaches when it was adopted by the Cabinet in September 2008, that initial opposition has turned to overwhelming support since the new format was introduced and experienced at the 2010 NCAA Division I Men's and Women's Outdoor Track & Field Championships.

At the USTFCCCA Convention in December 2010, an Outdoor Championships working group formed by the USTFCCCA Division I Track & Field President, and consisting of coaches representing FBS, FCS, and Division I non-football institutions, presented its conclusions to the membership regarding the format of the Outdoor Track & Field Championships. Its conclusions were that it was time to move forward on the issue of the Outdoor Track & Field Championships format, and that the present format should be maintained and improved. As a result, they recommended a series of improvements to the Championships, which were then discussed and voted upon by Division I Track & Field coaches present. The proposals that came out of the working group's efforts were as follows:

I. To seek NCAA funding for all participants to the first round of the NCAA Outdoor Championship. 245-0-2 PASSED. [Big 12: 8 schools in favor, none opposed, no abstentions]
II. To seek $200,000 from the NCAA for host institutions of the Outdoor Preliminary Round sites. 237-4-3 PASSED. [Big 12: 8 schools in favor, none opposed, no abstentions]

III. To pursue the NCAA to recognize student-athletes who qualify to compete at the Preliminary Round of the Outdoor Championships with an NCAA participation award. 215-14-2 PASSED. [Big 12: 8 schools in favor, none opposed, no abstentions]

Again, no contradictory proposals were made to eliminate the Preliminary Championship Competition, nor were any proposals made in favor of pursuing any other format for the Championships. We believe that the combination of the working group's report, proposals made, votes taken, and the lack of any dissension regarding the Preliminary Championship Competition strongly indicates the overwhelming support of NCAA Division I coaches for the present Championships format. This is not a direct "yes/no" survey of coaches regarding their position on the Preliminary Championship Competition, but based on the recommendations of the working group and the subsequent action of the coaching body, we had no reason to conduct such a survey, since the directive from our coaching body was clear.

In addition, I wish to offer an important clarification, since both Supplement 29 from the NCAA Division I Track & Field Sport Subcommittee and the letter from the Big 12 Conference have made a point that "the stated views of coaches… [have changed] over time from unanimous support to eliminate the system in 2010 to overwhelming support to maintain this system in 2011." This statement is factually incorrect, and it casts an unfair, negative light on our coaches.

At the 2009 USTFCCCA Convention (before the present Championships format had ever been conducted), the NCAA Division I Track & Field Sport Subcommittee issued a request to the USTFCCCA to develop a new Championships format that would address the areas of: access to championships, cost containment, and deference to obvious qualifiers. To our understanding, this request was issued as a direct result of a similar request to the NCAA Division I Track & Field Sport Subcommittee from the Championships/Sports Management Cabinet at its September 2009 meeting.

After receiving this request on December 11, 2009 and with a deadline of February 15, 2010, the USTFCCCA Division I Track & Field Executive Committee ultimately unanimously supported what has come to be known as the 24/8 Plan, among all other alternative plans considered. While I believe this is where the reference to "unanimous support to eliminate the system" comes from, I want to clarify that the unanimous support was **not** to eliminate the present format, but to unanimously support, among other new options considered, the 24/8 Plan as an alternative format. At the risk of sounding redundant, this support was given without consideration to how any alternative might compare with the current format, because the specific request by the NCAA Division I Track & Field Sport Subcommittee was to develop a new format, not to evaluate a new format versus the current format.

In addition, we agree that it is important to utilize conference representatives "to solicit input from the coaches within their conferences," and our Executive Committee includes representatives from each of the 31 NCAA conferences for exactly this reason. Based on our feedback through that group, we believe that soliciting input from each conference's coaches will further support our position that there is overwhelming support among NCAA Division I Track & Field coaches for the present championships format. While we are not privy to every conference's meetings, it was reported to us this week by both the Big Ten Conference and our conference representative for the Big Ten Conference that at their recent meeting, every school but one was in support of and wishes to retain the current format.

Finally, we disagree with the assertion that increasing funding for the Outdoor Track & Field Championships through the provision of NCAA funds for the Preliminary Championship Competition would somehow represent taking "from Peter to give to Paul." We understand and respect the delicate balances that the Board of Directors, Cabinet, and NCAA institutions must maintain in establishing funding priorities; however, if it were true that increasing funding in one sport would take from another, it would mean that other recent Cabinet decisions, such as increasing the Championships field in FCS Football, also somehow take away from the NCAA's other Division I Championships. We do not believe this to be the case.

NCAA Principle 2.15. "The conditions under which postseason competition occurs shall be controlled to… prevent unjustified intrusion on the time student-athletes devote to their academic programs…"

According to the September 6 letter, while recognizing that there is no evidence for a causal relationship between the Preliminary Championship Competition and present APR data for Track & Field, "currently 27 of 31 conferences hold their conference championship during the spring final examination window… certainly meeting the standard of 'unjustified intrusion'."

First, the placement of conference championships in Outdoor Track & Field is determined by conferences and their member institutions. There is no mandate as to when a conference must hold its conference championship, and conferences which feel that any conflict may exist between final examinations and their conference championship have complete freedom to move their conference championship to a different weekend. Thus far, we have heard of no complaints of this type from any conference other than the Big 12 Conference.

Second, if the scheduling of conference championships in Outdoor Track & Field is an "unjustified intrusion" for student-athletes, then other sports also suffer from a similar unjustified intrusion. Conference championships in men's and women's Golf, men's and women's Tennis, Rowing, and Softball, and the opening rounds of NCAA Championships in men's and women's Lacrosse, men's and women's Tennis, and women's Golf are all held during this same spring final examination window. In the fall, NCAA Championships in FCS Football, men's and women's Soccer, and women's Volleyball likewise conflict with institutional final exams. We are not aware of any regard for these competitions as "unjustified intrusions" and therefore fail to see how the same could be said of the Outdoor Track & Field Championships.

In addition, the elimination of the Preliminary Championship Competition is not likely to affect conference scheduling in any way. Prior to the introduction of regional competition in 2003, conference championships were held on roughly the same weekend as now, even though the national championship was held one week earlier, without any form of qualifying competition. Because conference championships' dates remained within the same period through the introduction of regionals and the Preliminary Championship Competition, we fail to see how the elimination of the Preliminary Championship Competition would affect the scheduling of conference championships.

Even if conference championships are an "unjustified intrusion," as the letter asserts (and without solid evidence to support this assertion, we are not convinced that this is true), it would make no sense to eliminate the Preliminary Championship Competition as a way to address conference competition, as this change would not be likely to affect the scheduling of conference championships. If the scheduling of conference championships is the issue, then the focus should be on changing the scheduling of conference championships, not elimination of the Preliminary Championship Competition.

Further, I am not clear on the direction of the statement that "the impact of the current preliminary round system upon our conference champions and ultimately upon the advancement of the sport is certainly a factor that warrants careful consideration by this body." It is not clear whether this statement is referring to conference champion individuals or teams; there is no Automatic Qualifier (AQ) awarded to conference champion individuals or teams under the present format, and it is not clear which "conference champions" the letter is referencing.

In addition, the letter asserts that "the majority of track and field student-athletes compete in outdoor, indoor, and cross country." This statement is patently false. While we do not have exact numbers on the number of student-athletes who compete in all three sports, even a cursory examination of the NCAA's Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report shows that this statement could not possibly be true. According to that document, in 2009-10, 10,812 men and 11,934 women participated in NCAA Division I Outdoor Track & Field. Also according to that document, 4,652 men and 5,752 women participated in NCAA Division I Cross Country. We also know that not every participant in Cross Country also participates in Outdoor Track & Field, as we know that approximately 14% of all NCAA Division I institutions that sponsor Cross Country for men do not sponsor Indoor and/or Outdoor Track & Field; for women, that percentage is approximately 8 percent. Again, without knowing exact participation numbers across all three sports, it is clear just from examining what we know about Cross Country that the majority of student-athletes do not compete in all three sports, and therefore the majority are not in season "all year long," as suggested in the September 6 letter.

We do agree that most Outdoor Track & Field student-athletes also compete in Indoor Track & Field. However, it should be noted that the difference in the length of season at a school that sponsors only one of these sports versus a school that sponsors both is only two weeks (144 days versus 156 days; NCAA Division I Bylaw 17.23.1). Further, the 156-day season for Indoor/Outdoor Track & Field is the same length as the current season in place for women's Rowing, and is not a significant departure with playing and practice seasons in many other sports (e.g., Bowling, Equestrian, Fencing, Golf, Gymnastics, Rifle, Skiing, Swimming & Diving, Tennis, and Wrestling all have 144-day playing and practice seasons).

Lastly, the letter suggests that the GOALS data may be limited in the fact that "many student-athletes in this sport do not compete at the highest level… [and] the respondents are not necessarily representative of those who qualify for national championship competition." While this may be true, without GOALS data specific to those student-athletes who do qualify for national championship competition, it is impossible to draw any conclusion as to how that specific subgroup may have responded to questions about spending more time on their sport and more time with their coaches. The assumption that "since our rosters are so large, many may feel they do not have adequate time with their coaches" is an

assumption based on anecdotal evidence, one which is not supported by the actual data measured by the GOALS study.

NCAA Bylaw 18.01.1 Purpose of NCAA Championships. "NCAA championships are intended to provide national-level competition among the best eligible student-athletes and teams of member institutions…"

We disagree with the statement that the "national DOL identifies the 'best eligible student-athletes' with a high rate of reliability." Based on the data identified in the letter, only two-thirds (68%) of the final site participants entered the competition with a national descending order list rank of 24 or better, and one-fifth of the field (19%) fell outside of a national DOL of 36 or better. We believe that these are significant-enough percentages to indicate that national DOL does not offer a high rate of reliability in identifying the "best eligible student-athletes."

Cabinet Principle 4. "Insure that long-term sustainability of the championship is reflected in sound fiscal management and the development of strategies that can diversify and enhance revenue streams."

The numbers provided in the letter in this segment do not appear to be accurate. Only eight student-athletes or relays can score in each of 21 events in the Championships (a total of 336 across both genders), so it would be impossible to have 368 participants with a national DOL rank of 24+ score at the Championships. We likewise believe the number of 184 student-athletes with a national DOL rank of 36+ scoring at the Championships is incorrect.

However, setting aside those inconsistencies, we find it questionable to perform an analysis in which the cost of the entire Preliminary Championships Competition, which provides a post-season NCAA Championship experience for over 3,600 NCAA student-athletes, is compared to the number of lower-ranked student-athletes who advance to the final site through head-to-head competition. We have seen no other sport in which the cost of the Championships is assessed relative to the number of non-ranked or lower-ranked competitors/teams who advance in the Championships, rather than to the actual number of student-athletes who participate in the event.

Cabinet Principle 3. "Provide championship access reflective of the quality of nationwide competitive excellence and membership sponsorship of the sport…"

The letter notes that the "championship ideal is 'head to head' competition among the best competitors" and then argues that the high national DOLs of the final competitors who qualified to the Preliminary Championship Competition "translate… into a series of noncompetitive heats." However, these national DOLs rank very favorably with the RPIs of Championships qualifiers in other sports. For example, in the 2011 NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship, schools ranked in the top 10 in final RPI standings competed in the same tournament as schools ranked 107, 109, 129, 147, 153, 157, 188, 193, and 263. Similarly, in the 2011 NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Championship, schools ranked in the top 10 in final RPI standings competed in the same tournament as schools ranked 116, 121, 127, 134, 141, 147, 154, and 197. The same trend is evident in the 2010 NCAA Division I Women's Volleyball Championship, where schools ranked in the top 10 in final RPI standings competed in the

same tournament as schools ranked 105, 107, 113, 120, 126, 145, 185, and 283. It hardly seems that the first round of the NCAA Division I Men's and Women's Basketball Championships or the NCAA Division I Women's Volleyball Championship could be construed as a "series of noncompetitive games;" likewise, it seems unfair to make a similar statement relative to the preliminary round of the Outdoor Track & Field Championships.

In addition, the letter references present deterrents to potential institutional hosts, and it should be noted, again, that in addition to the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Championships depressing the number of potential institutional hosts, we believe that the number of potential hosts also has been affected negatively by the lateness of the bidding process. In each of the three years for which Preliminary Championship Competition sites have been sent out for bids, the NCAA has not sent out bids earlier than 12 months prior to the hosting of the competitions. In our opinion, this lateness has contributed to the small number of institutions that have bid to host the preliminary competitions, although these numbers have grown with each year of the present format.

The letter also references "the financial burden of hosting" the Preliminary Championship Competition, referencing Supplement No. 29 B, p. 6. It should be noted that this supplement only shows hosting data from two of the previous four hosts of the Preliminary Championship Competition. In addition, it should be noted that one of the two example hosts not only submitted a subsequent bid for a Preliminary Championship Competition but was awarded one of the two 2012 Preliminary Championship Competition sites [on a side note, this institution is from the Big 12 Conference].

The letter notes that "to date, the preliminary round achieves neither objective" of being both exciting and marketable to the track fan base and produces as evidence an editorial from the July 2011 issue of *Track & Field News.* These are subjective judgments on the part of both the letter writer and *Track & Field News*, and I could similarly quote an article from June of 2010 from the well-known Track and Field-news website *LetsRun.com* arguing just the opposite position (attached).

However, regardless of the subjective judgment made, Division I Track & Field coaches have expressed a strong desire to improve the Preliminary Championship Competition; unfortunately, the drive to improve the Championships as presently conducted has been seriously impeded by the process of continuing to revisit the Championships format, rather than committing to the format and focusing on improving it.

In addition, concerning the article from *Track & Field News*, it should be noted that the Preliminary Championship Competition visited by the magazine editor had a paid three-day attendance of over 20,000, which is not far off from the four-day total attendance recorded at this year's Final Championship Competition in Des Moines. Although we do not have recent attendance data for all NCAA Championships, we believe that there are a number of NCAA Division I sports that do not average 6,000+ in daily paid attendance at any round of their Championships (including the final site). Although this host is just one instance, we believe that the success of this Preliminary Championship Competition host in marketing the event and drawing paid attendance is a strong example of what is possible with the preliminary competitions with a commitment to their improvement.

NCAA Bylaw 2.15. "The conditions under which postseason competition occurs shall be controlled to assure that the benefits inherent in such competition flow fairly to all participants…"

The arguments advanced in this section regarding "fair" access to championships do not seem to fit the reference to NCAA Bylaw 2.15. While the letter argues that "fair" access to championships could be interpreted in a number of ways, in fact, fair access to championships has already been defined within Cabinet Principle 3 as "reflective of the quality of nationwide competitive excellence and membership sponsorship of the sport." As a result, alternate interpretations of fair access as "[controlling the] competition so that the most talented win fairly without undue advantage" or as allowing for "talents to be developed and… [promoting] the cultivation of future talent" are in conflict with the principles adopted by the Championships/Sports Management Cabinet to determine fair access to championships. The traditional measure of fair access, to our understanding, has been championship access ratios, and by this measure, the letter concedes that "the preliminary round system is superior in providing increased access to a championship experience."

In addition, the letter writer asserts that "intercollegiate athletics is not central to our institutional missions of teaching, research and service." We strongly disagree and believe that intercollegiate athletics is central to the institutional mission of education. We believe that this sentiment is clearly evident in the basic purpose of the NCAA, as outlined in the NCAA Division I Bylaws:

> 1.3.1 Basic Purpose. The competitive athletics programs of member institutions are designed to be a vital part of the educational system. A basic purpose of this Association is to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body…

Likewise, NCAA President Dr. Mark Emmert has echoed that sentiment in his statement on the mission of the NCAA: "Our mission is to be an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of our student-athletes" (see Mark's Emmert's biography on NCAA.org). We believe that the notion that intercollegiate athletics is "not central to our institutional missions of teaching, research and service" could not be further from the truth.

Further, we believe that this proposal to ease the institutional burden by providing funding for student-athletes to compete in the Preliminary Championship Competition is not out of line with current practices in other sports. Preliminary round competitions are funded in sports such as Baseball, men's and women's Basketball, FCS Football, men's and women's Lacrosse, men's and women's Soccer, Softball, etc. We believe that student-athletes in Outdoor Track & Field should have the same opportunities to compete in an NCAA Championship and that this championship experience should be funded by the NCAA, as it is in most other NCAA Division I sports.

The September 6 letter argues that "targeting $5.1 million for increasing scholarships, coaching staff, or supporting the development of a fan base would do far more to advance the sport than maintain the current preliminary round system," but none of these are items that the Cabinet completely controls. Considering that the figure of $5.1 million is money already being spent by NCAA Division I institutions, it is important to recognize that funding from the NCAA for the Preliminary Championship Competition

would free up $5.1 million in institutional spending for other aspects of our Track & Field programs (e.g., scholarships, coaching staff, fan base development, etc.).

Finally, we believe that the argument that the Outdoor Track & Field Championships "further… [dilute our] academic programs to advance athletics without clear justification" and that this "threatens the credibility of our Association" does not appear to be based in reality. The NCAA Division I Outdoor Track & Field Championships do not represent a dilution of our academic programs, and certainly if any dilution of academic programs is going on through athletics (an assertion of which I am definitely not convinced), I would hardly rank the Preliminary Championship Competition of Outdoor Track & Field as more "threatening" to the credibility of the Association than, for example, the large numbers of contests in some sports. Just to take one example, student-athletes in Baseball and Softball compete in up to 56 contests in a 132-day season, and this would seem far more intrusive to academic programs than one three-day competition after the spring final examination period in Outdoor Track & Field.

While the letter argues that "continuing to advocate for such a system demonstrates callousness with regard to the financial difficulties of our member institutions and the academic success of our student-athletes," we do not believe this to be the case. Concerning the financial difficulties of NCAA member institutions, we have argued elsewhere in this letter and in previous correspondences for additional funding for the Preliminary Championship Competition to shift some of the financial cost of the competition from NCAA-member institutions to the NCAA itself. Regarding the academic success of our student-athletes, we are strong proponents of planning and positioning for the academic success of student-athletes in Indoor and Outdoor Track & Field, but we do not believe that academic success and the Preliminary Championship Competition are mutually exclusive concepts. We believe further study is needed concerning potential factors influencing present APRs in Track & Field, and I believe that, if asked, our Association could easily identify a number of areas for potential exploration and improvement along these lines. Similar steps have been taken in the sport of NCAA Division I Baseball, without affecting its Championships and with initial success to this date.

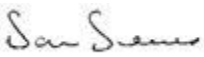
As argued in the September 6 letter:

> "We should never allow cost containment measures to deflect us from pursuit of objectives central to our core values. If we truly believe that the current preliminary round system advances our principles, we should stand firm in our commitment to that system and support the request of coaches to increase NCAA support to fund preliminary round."

We firmly believe that the current format of the NCAA Division I Men's and Women's Outdoor Track & Field Championships does advance the principles of both the NCAA and the Championships/Sports Management Cabinet. As a result, we ask that the Cabinet stand firm in its commitment to this system and support our request to increase NCAA support to fund the Preliminary Championship Competition.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,



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encl: LRC Editorial: The Case for (Pure) Regionals

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LRC Editorial: The Case For (Pure) Regionals

By LetsRun.com
May 26, 2010

The final round of the NCAA outdoor track and field championships gets under way on Wednesday in Eugene, Oregon. To compete in Eugene this year, athletes and relay teams had to finish in the top 12 of two NCAA preliminary rounds. The qualification system used this year by the NCAA has been labeled the Pure Regional system by LetsRun.com and it is one we wholeheartedly endorse. In our minds, if the NCAA is going to a regional meet (which we think they should), then this year's system is a step in the right direction.

However, the top coaches from the BCS schools all seemingly are adamantly opposed to the Pure Regional system and the top coaches at Tuesday's press conference repeatedly ripped the Regional system. Well, we're writing this editorial to tell you why they are wrong. We'll go through their most popular arguments as to why they think Pure Regionals are a bad idea before telling you why we think they are a good idea.

Dismissing The Most Popular Arguments Against Regionals

1) The top coaches fear the top athletes won't qualify by some fluke and their national title hopes will be dashed. This seemingly was the #1 fear of most of the coaches prior to Regionals. But the facts proved this not to be the case, as by and large the top athletes that are likely to score at NCAAs did qualify and the coaches admitted as such at the press conference. LetsRun.com has done some research and determined that 85% of the top 10 in each event advanced to Eugene for the men and 84.4% for the women. Of the top 24 in each event, the qualification rate was 67.8% for men and 67.6% for women.

2) It's expensive. Yes, extending the season by two weeks is expensive. But is it any less expensive than having to fly all over the country in the middle of the season to try to get on the national top 24 in the descending order list? Plus BCS schools complaining about expenses? Give us a break.

3) It's geographically discriminatory. This was one of the arguments used by **Vin Lananna** on Wednesday. Well, in our minds, a Pure Regional system is way less geographically discriminatory than using a pure descending order list. Yes, some years regionals may be held under conditions that favor warm weather schools or cold weather schools, but at least under Pure Regionals, everyone gets one crack under the same conditions. A descending order system of qualification favors certain geographic and rich schools way more than regionals. Stanford is a long way for a distance runner from Maine to try to get to in the regular season, just as it's probably tough for a sprinter from Buffalo to get too many cracks in warm weather.

4) It's bad for fans. We'll be the first to admit that a regional meet isn't likely to generate fan interest. But the time trial affairs that a pure descending order list involves certainly don't generate any more fan interest. Fans certainly aren't clamoring to line up to see distance kids run at Stanford at 11 pm in the middle of March. If you don't believe us, re-watch videos of the Stanford meets and check the number of people in the stands for the 10,000s.

And one might argue that Pure Regionals might actually increase fan interest in a weird way. Under a Pure Regional system, only the the "in form" athletes will be competing at NCAA finals and therefore there will be a better NCAA final - which is the only meet that is likely to generate large fan interest anyway. We here at LetsRun.com have always thought that casual fans should be told by coaches and athletes not to go the qualifying rounds, as it's like paying to go watch a practice or pre-season game. So who really cares if the crowds aren't large at NCAA regionals? The NCAA finals may be better as a result, and it's not like many of these coaches that are complaining about fan interest are doing a lot to create fan-attractive meets in the regular season.

5) It extends the season by two weeks. We don't like extending the season either, but the top athletes will be going to USATF nationals much later in the year anyway, so this actually helps them.
Now that we've dispatched the arguments against regionals, we'll tell you why we think regionals are a good idea.

Why Regionals Work

1) It's the fairest system available. Everyone qualifies head-to-head on the same day or they go home. No wild cards like in last year's hybrid regional system. No qualifying on different days or even different months in totally different conditions, as is the case when you go to a pure descending order list. One of the simplest beauties of track and field is that it's easy to determine the winners and losers of things. No judges are required as they are in gymnastics or figure skating. Thus, a pure regional system appeals to the inherent simplicity and fairness of the sport of track and field.

2) The NCAA Tournament Argument. It's very similar to the NCAA basketball in the sense that the top athletes still qualify but it gives the little guy who can peak when it counts a chance and it gives the little guy some meaning to his season. As we stated above, nearly 85% of the top 10 athletes in each event advanced out of Regionals this year. Thus, the stars aren't getting hurt. But in terms of the whole field, nearly 1/3 of the people in the top 24 didn't make it under Pure Regionals this year. In our minds, this is ideal, as it gives the little guy who knows how to compete and rise to the occasion a chance to make some noise in the big dance. It also gives them something to shoot for in the regular season.
We received a great email along these lines from a D1 track and field athlete that perfectly sums up why we think Regionals should exist. It's way better than what we could write, so we'll paste it here in its entirety:

hello letsrun,
I was just reading the editorial on the regional system and the wilson 24/8 plan and had a comment to make. Because of the objective nature of the little black numbers on he clock or scoreboard in track and field I think sometimes we lose sight of other important aspects of the sport. Sometimes its not just about what is the best, most objective, fairest, or safest way to decide who runs at nationals. What about the joy of competing, the prestige and satisfaction of getting to say "I am a regional qualifier", or "I made the first round of NCAA's". It is a very objective sport but I also believe there are aspects of the sport that are equally important to getting the best athletes to the NCAA final. If the post season is only about nationals you lose some of the joy of competing for many athletes who are in fantastic shape and deserve to be rewarded by an extra meet or that glimmer of hope that they could make it to nationals

even if they don't have the best marks. I also think it would be interesting to see athletes opinions about the system, not just coaches. just some food for thought. Maybe it will spark interest for another article.

It's kind of ironic, as this athlete is actually from a BCS school but his argument is very powerful (of course, it was equally ironic that while the big coaches were bashing Regionals on Tuesday, Oregon's **Andrew Wheating** was telling them how much he thought Regionals had helped him this year). The vast majority of athletes competing in D1 track and field never realistically will be in the top 24 in the country in their event, just as the average NCAA basketball player will never realistically compete in the Final Four. But at least Regionals (or the tournament) gives them a shot at glory.

The top coaches from the BCS conferences seem to think quite simply that Regionals are a waste of time. We disagree. Just as the first two rounds of the NCAA basketball tournament are not a waste of time, Regionals aren't a waste of time either. If you believe Regionals are a waste of time, then do you favor having only a 16 team NCAA b-ball tournament, as we know almost every year only a top 4 seed is going to win? Heck, why not just ban all non-BCS schools from the NCAA tournament considering that a non-BCS school hasn't won the tournament in more than 20 years (since UNLV in 1990)?