

Former Olympian back in athletics

Rafer Johnson backing fitness tests

By BERNARD SCHWARTZ
Of the Emerald



Olympic decathlete Rafer Johnson

Photo by Dennis Hickok

It is early September, 1960. Francis Gary Powers' U-2 was shot down a little more than four months ago, Vice-President Nixon is campaigning hard against John Kennedy and former UCLA track star, Rafer Johnson, has just finished a record-shattering performance at the summer Olympics in Rome, where he won a gold medal in the decathlon.

Before the year is out, John Kennedy will be president and Johnson will have received some of sports' highest honors, including "Athlete of the Year" by Associated Press.

It is now 1978, and Rafer Johnson is again involved with athletic programs. However, the events now take place in cities such as Eugene, Oregon and Wheeling, West Virginia, instead of Rome, Italy and Munich, Germany.

The greater Eugene-Springfield competition was held on Friday, and the state finals will be held July 7, at the University.

Johnson, 42, who still looks like an Olympic competitor, is serving as spokesman this year for Hershey's National Track and Field Youth Program.

The program, now in its second year, will involve more than two million youngsters nationwide.

It is being funded by Hershey's Food Corporation in cooperation with The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, the National Track and Field Hall of Fame and The National Recreation and Park Association.

The major aims of the program are to "develop physical fitness and to stimulate participation on the part of the child," according to The National Track and Field Hall of Fame.

Each of the 50 states will conduct its meets by the end of June, and the best qualified participants from each state will be selected for one of the eight regional teams.

On August 6, the regional teams will compete at the national finals, which will be held at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia.

Competitors, who must be between 10 and 15 years old, need no special equipment such as track spikes, and the competition can be held on any vacant playground, Johnson said.

As an athlete, Johnson heard many fellow competitors say they would like to "give something back" to the community.

"This is a way I can help," he said.

Although he is not coaching or directing competition, Johnson is taking time from his present job as vice president of community affairs at Continental Telephone Company in Bakersfield, Calif. to travel to different towns to promote the program.

"It gives the youngster a chance to do some work — he trains a little bit, goes out and competes — and sees some progress," he said.

It is not the winning or losing that is important, but the involvement and commitment. Children who normally would not go out for the track team can compete and discover how "performance is determined by the depth of the commitment," Johnson said.

Children who are already on track teams or who have won awards and letters cannot compete in this program.

The results of the competition teach youngsters to look at themselves as individuals having "a certain amount of ability," Johnson said.

"Sometimes it takes some searching to find an event, course or career where you have ability plus," Johnson said. Children competing can relate this experience later on in life to courses, schools and careers.

Although he is known primarily as an athlete, Johnson has long been involved with youth athletic programs. He now serves on the advising committee of the National Amateur Sports Development Foundation, Presidential Classroom for Young Americans and the advisory board of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare's Physically and Mentally Handicapped Committee.

Johnson said eventually he would like to start his own business, but he will always work with youth athletics.

"It's just something I like to do," he said.

Civic center up for approval today

By KEVIN HARDEN
Of the Emerald

When the polls close tonight, it may end a 15 year quest by several Eugene citizens who have been trying to bring the city up to its cultural par. It may also be the last time voters will have a chance to decide the fate of the proposed

Eugene civic center.

The center, which first began as an idea in 1963, has twice been rejected by city voters. But this year it may be different.

The latest Eugene civic center project was proposed a year ago by the Eugene Civic Center Commission. The commission was formed by the city council after the Lane County Auditorium Association, which failed to come up with a workable plan, asked that the city take over the project.

The 15-member commission consists of representatives from city and county governments and other interested organizations. It took over the project and put together a \$18.5 million center package that was presented to area voters in the form of municipal bonds in today's special election.

At first, the commission proposed the civic center be part of a

large hotel-convention center project. When that proved to be disagreeable to area theater patrons and community representatives, the hotel complex was dropped.

Setting a nine-phase work program for the center's completion, the commission covered every area of the center project from background research to evaluating the center's potential impact on the community.

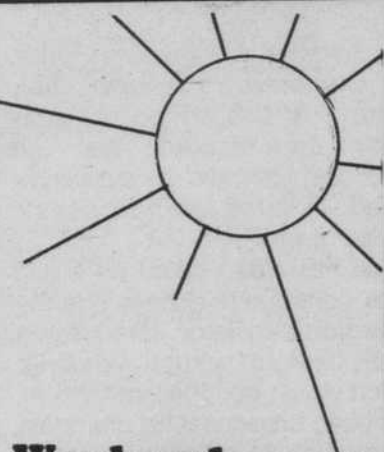
Earlier this year, the commission established a plan to provide a multi-purpose concert, theater and auditorium facility costing an estimated \$18 million. That facility would encompass a combined concert hall and large theater, with seating for an audience of about 2,500 people.

A smaller theater with a 500-seat auditorium, underground parking, recital rooms and offices are also part of the proposal.

While the center would cost well over \$10 million to build, the economic impact on the community as calculated by the Economics Research Associates could mean about 1200 new construction related jobs and nearly 200 more jobs once the center is completed. It could also provide about \$40 million in increased revenue for the city before the project is completed.

If voters reject the proposed center this year, as they have in 1972 and 1973, the chances that the city will have a civic center will probably fade, say the Friends of the Civic Center, an organization formed to promote the project.

According to figures compiled by the organization, if the center is not built this year for the estimated \$18 million, costs could increase more than \$100,000 a month for future construction.



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