

Making tracks

Female footprints on the cinders

By CARL STODDARD

Track is a very special kind of sport. It's a grueling, lonely way to spend a springtime. It's a contest matching strength and stamina against time and distance.

Until recently, high school track was mainly a male domain. But two years ago a few area schools started varsity track teams for girls. This spring, virtually every school has a girls' team, or allows girls to run on the boys' teams.

The girls' teams are still relatively small. For the most part, girls are still new to the sport. And, as one coach pointed out, they still must meet the test of competition.

But girls are into track for keeps. They practice for more than two hours every afternoon. Most run three to five miles during a practice, and the more dedicated run more than eight miles a day. Distance runners travel even further.

Mike Murphy, the girls' track coach at Southfield-Lathrup, called the sudden surge of interest in track "phenomenal."

"THE ENTHUSIASM is almost overwhelming. Everybody wants to do everything," Murphy said.

At practices, he found long lines of girls waiting to try the high jump, the shot put and every other track event.

Lathrup had a turnout of 34 girls for the track team. That's more than most other area schools.

"It was really a sleeper," Murphy said. "A couple of girls asked for it. We had one meeting and five girls showed up. We were going to scrap it, but we decided to call one more meeting. Forty girls showed up."

During the next few weeks, a few girls dropped out when they discovered how exhausting the sport could be. Most stuck with it, but Murphy said he was worried that some of the enthusiasm would wear off when the competition began.

'The enthusiasm is almost overwhelming. Everybody wants to do everything.'

**Mike Murphy
Girls' track coach**

"These girls have never competed in any varsity sports," he said. "All forty can't win."

AT FARMINGTON High School, a few girls have gotten the taste of varsity competition. The school has no girls' varsity team and so the girls who want to run track must try out for the male dominated team.

"We may have a couple girls competing on the team," said Farmington High athletic director Richard Tyler, "but I'm not sure they'll make it."

Another area school, Our Lady of Mercy, a girls' Catholic high school in Farmington, also lacks a girls' track team.

Elsewhere the teams are going strong. Although most of the teams are only two years old, the high schools have established schedules for competition. Some schools have three league contests, others have as many as eight. In Bloomfield Hills, there will be a girls' track invitational for the top runners in the area.

The other two Farmington public schools, North Farmington and Farmington Harrison, have about 15 girls on their track teams. Southfield High School has about the same number.

Southfield Christian, a private high school, initiated its girls' track program last year. Seven or eight girls are on the team this year.

Cathee Martin, team coach, said the activity helps to meet the girls' need to compete, but she doubted that it would lead to competition with the boys.

"I THINK IT would be pretty degrading, ego wise," she said, when asked about the possibility of boy-girl competition.

She said she would discourage sub contests unless the girl became too proficient to compete with the other girls.

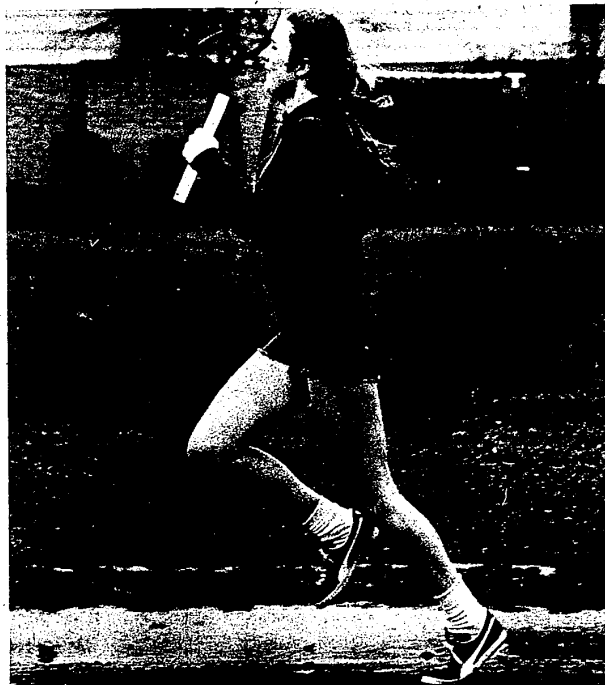
According to Murphy, a state law prohibits girls from competing in sports with boys if male and female teams are available. Where only one team is present, anyone may try out for the team.

Murphy said part of the interest in girls' track was sparked by the recent "female consciousness."

If that interest includes a desire to excel at a tough, hard and often lustrous sport, they couldn't have picked a better area.



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Interest in girls' track has been "phenomenal," according to one coach.

Staff photographs