



Catching up with Jeff Guy: Nike Cross Nationals Southwest Regional

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Arizona Track

Nike: Big names, no return...or the kids?

Nike may have originated from running, but it's safe to say that the company has made huge investments in professional athletes that aren't runners.

But Jeff Guy, the meet director of the Nike Cross Nationals Southwest Regional and Desert Vista High School's pole vault coach, says that Nike is reinvesting their money in the younger generation.

"They give a guy 15 million; he turns around and gets arrested or nailed for adultery," Guy said. "Nike isn't getting a huge return on their investment, so what they decided to do was give back more to the kids."

Origins of Nike Cross Nationals

Nike always wanted to have a national championship for cross country. Enter Nike Cross Nationals (NXN) in 2005, the only sport that puts aside those paper rankings and crowns individual and team champions.

NXN started the regional concept in 2007—eight regional championships will qualify both teams and individuals for the big dance in Portland, Ore. at Portland Meadows in December 2010.

The top two teams and top five individuals from each region automatically qualify.

Guy oversees the Southwest Regional, which is comprised of Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah. Out of all the regions, his had the highest volume of participants.

"We definitely have room to grow as far as participants, not so much in the championships as the cut-off is at 25 teams, but the open and citizens' race can grow and participation can increase," Guy said. "They run in that race and it motivates an athlete to think, 'Hey I want to get good enough so I can qualify for that national meet.'"

In 2009, Guy had a budget of about \$40,000 (in accordance with Nike guidelines) to put on the meet at Kiwanis Park in Tempe

"The whole thing is very well run and organized; not only the championship race, but the community

racers as well," Guy said. "It gives everyone the chance to experience that Nike atmosphere; a chance to run on the same course as the top runners in the southwest."

Starting them young

Creating that "Nike atmosphere" is also a large goal of NXN—and let's not forget about branding.

"The kids are treated extremely well in Portland," Guy said. "All expenses are paid, and Nike outfits them with sweats, backpacks, uniforms and training flats. They're very well taken care of."

Thus branding kids for life—they'll continue wearing Nike apparel and shoes, and perhaps their children will, too.

Changes, Changes, Changes

Arizona Track also had the opportunity to discuss the AIA's recent overhauling of the format for individual and team state tournaments with Guy.

"It's going to be like the NCAA Indoor Championships with the automatic and provisional qualifiers," Guy said. "All of the individual sports are going to a sectionals format."

For Cross Country (192 boys teams, 188 girls teams), the sport will reduce from six meets to four. Each division will have three sectionals, and the top 50 percent and top five individuals not on one of the qualifying teams.

Track and Field (220 boys teams, 208 girls teams) was reduced from five state meets to four with automatic and provisional qualifiers (similar to the NCAA Indoor Championship system), varying by division, to select a field of 24 at most.

While acknowledging that the AIA proposed this system for financial reasons, Guy anticipates the state meet to be more competitive than in years past.

"This definitely elevates the level. Now we've improved the quality of the meet because it's more difficult to get in," Guy said. "It's going to be very competitive; if you make the state meet, you're a stud."



Rumor has it...

Guy is going into his twenty sixth year coaching. He coached nine years at Corona Del Sol, and going into his sixth year at Desert Vista. During this time, he has had 24 state champions and 11 runners up.

Last year was a historic year for Guy's female vaulters.

"Last year was really special, I know everyone thinks about Shaylah Simpson breaking the state record, but we had five girls over 12'1"," Guy said. "The last time that happened was three in 2003. Five of those girls graduated, and I have two back this year."

Guy is anticipating a young team this year, but doesn't expect anything but great things from his athletes.

"Rumor has it I will have over 50 athletes this year," Guy said. "We're kind of young, but we will definitely be pretty deep."