



Max Siegel

EDITORS' NOTE Max Siegel assumed his current post in May of 2012. He previously served as President of Global Operations at Dale Earnhardt Inc., and as Senior Vice President at Sony/BMG and President of Zomba Gospel, Tommy Boy Gospel, and Verity Records. He is also the owner of Rev Racing. Siegel is a former director on the boards of USA Track & Field and the USA Swimming Foundation. His additional Olympic-family experience includes work with USA Gymnastics, USA Skiing, USA Swimming, and the Goodwill Games while he was an attorney with Indianapolis-based Baker & Daniels in the 1990s. In addition to representing sports figures such as Hall of Famers Reggie White and Tony Gwynn during their careers, he has created literary, television, and film properties. Siegel also is the author of *Know What Makes Them Tick: How to Successfully Negotiate Almost Any Situation*. He is the first African-American to graduate with honors from Notre Dame law school.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF USA Track & Field (USATF; usatf.org) is the National Governing Body for track & field, long-distance running and race walking in the United States. USATF encompasses the world's oldest organized sports, the most-watched events of Olympic broadcasts, the number-one high school and junior high school participatory sport and more than 30 million adult runners in the United States. USATF is a not-for-profit organization with a staff of professional program administrators at the national office in Indianapolis. Since Siegel took over, the organization has increased its annual revenue from roughly \$19 million to more than \$30 million.

When this opportunity came about, what made you feel it was right for you?

I had served on the board of USA Swimming and USA Track & Field for several years, and had been around the Olympic Movement as a lawyer since the late '80s. One of the things that puzzled me was that USA Track & Field was a global brand and the highest medal producing federation or sport in the Olympic movement, but it never got the global recognition that I felt it deserved.

The Business of Track & Field

An Interview with Max Siegel, Chief Executive Officer, USA Track & Field

I started my career in the Olympic movement. The opportunity to lead this organization into the London Olympics was fascinating because it allowed me to use all of the skills I had developed throughout my career in that leadership capacity.

When you came in to run the organization, did it need transformation?

Absolutely. We had not had a new sponsor for 10 years and revenue was flat. The organization was sustaining its operations in spite of itself. The athletic performance was unquestionable – it was the number-one team in the world. We began a journey to have a world-class business that mirrored the performance of our athletes on the track.

We overhauled the entire organization structurally, and we brought in some new staff and retained our subject-matter experts. We worked with the dynamic people we had and set a new course with clearly defined goals, a unified mission, and a really aggressive approach in the commercial marketplace.

What has been the key to the success and what has driven the growth?

The first thing was to reignite the organization behind its purpose. This includes everything from filling in the athletic pipeline and getting people engaged in active lifestyles through sport to developing elite athletes.

Unfortunately, over the previous 10-year period, the federation lost a significant number of sponsors. Once we redefined what our purpose was, we looked at the assets that the organization had for the commercial side of the business: television, signage at events, grassroots programs, and the social/digital platform. We aggregated all of those assets, then went and re-presented the assets to the sponsors. We had to demonstrate that the organization had evolved from what they were used to over the years.

What do you look for when deciding to form partnerships, and do those partners fully understand the value of the brand?

The sports marketplace is crowded. People scrutinize the investments that marketers make, so you really have to demonstrate some kind of return on investment.

For us, it was about strengthening the relationships that we have with our existing partners – BMW, Visa, Nike – as well as finding new partners that were unique and provided a good fit, and for which we could add value.

We just signed a partnership with Rosetta Stone. Our teams travel internationally and engage in cultural training. Knowing multiple languages is

valuable, and allows our athletes to be excellent brand ambassadors. This is an interesting and unique partnership, and the first of its kind in the Olympic movement.

We also have a learning partner with the University of Phoenix. We know that our fans and our members want to continue to improve and continue on the education path. However, we also recognize that because of the demands of the travel involved and the need to turn pro early in our sport, we have some athletes who did not have an opportunity to finish their degrees. We have many others who would like to pursue graduate degrees.

These partnerships are the types that we re-ignited. Another example is the historic Millrose Games with the Army, which is a natural partnership where we provide television. We strive to make it a mutually beneficial endeavor all of our partners.

How would you describe your relationship with Hershey?

Ten years ago, before I was with USATF, I used to speak at the Milton Hershey School at the Hershey Company, where 90 percent of the students come from emotionally or physically abusive environments. I also spoke on diversity with the top corporate executives.

The Hershey's Track and Field Games had a 37-year legacy. They didn't really feel like they were maximizing their investment, but the legacy of the program and the mission of Milton Hershey is something that the company lives every day.

We talked to them about partnering to take over their grassroots track & field initiative. They also knew that I came from a very dysfunctional household and that gave them confidence that I understood and valued the mission of their organization. I gave the CEO my personal commitment that we would protect the company's legacy.

That partnership has been hugely successful over the past year. We transformed the Hershey's Track and Field Games from a competitive endeavor to an educational program called RunJumpThrow, which helps kids get active by teaching them the basics of track and field.

We will soon be announcing a couple of partnerships that will get us into a significant number of schools across the country. That will allow us to connect with over 150,000 kids a year through the RunJumpThrow program. We are very enthusiastic about what lies ahead. ●