

LC track coach to help Olympic team's performance

By Nat Newell

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Lawrence Central High School boys track coach Mike Holman described his role on the U.S. Olympic track team's support staff as a "tiny piece of the whole thing."

Of course, at that level of competition, a hundredth of a second or fraction of an inch can be the whole thing.

Holman will be a member of the video analysis crew during the team's workouts in China in preparation for the Olympics and during the events.

He will operate a computer program that allows athletes and their coaches to analyze every angle and velocity of their performance off video in search of the tiniest improvement.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to play a small part in the Olympic Games; it's not something you turn down," Holman said.

"At this level, a hundredth of a second is all that's between standing on the podium and watching someone else's flag go up. For an athlete to see their performance (immediately) helps tremendously."

Holman was on the national team staff for the World Indoor Championships in Moscow in 2006 and the Junior Pan Am team in 1999 and has been running camps for junior athletes and coaches in San Diego for the past 12 years to improve the talent base in the United States.

In workouts leading up to the Olympics at the U.S. training center in Dalian, China, Holman will record athletes in action and process that information through a video analysis program called Dartfish.

After the workouts, athletes and their coaches will have Holman call up specific moments or information provided by the software in search of ways to improve their performance.

"In Moscow, (shot putter) Reese Hoffa went through a series of (practice) throws, and when he looked at the video, he stood up, pumped and said, 'I've never been that fast,' " Holman said.

"He could look at it and immediately communicate with his coach . . . then he went out and won a gold medal."

During the Olympics, Holman can download the NBC feeds -- "They have a million cameras," he said -- and the athletes and coaches will have access to the information between rounds of competition. His coaching experience helps isolate the information the athletes are looking for.

Holman, who also spent time with the team at the Olympic training camp last week, planned to leave for China on Wednesday and travel to Dalian. There will be two weeks of preparation there, and then the team goes to Beijing on Aug. 13 and he returns to the United States on Aug. 24.

"I'm excited and humbled by the opportunity to be one little tiny piece of the whole thing," Holman said. "It'll be exciting to be around that, and I'm looking forward to it."