



Denver (right) relaxes and ices down after competing with Bob Richards (left) during the 1989 World Amateur Trade Games in Eugene, Oregon.

Denver Smith:

Career always remained on the right track

By John Hartsock

Denver “Junie” Smith regards decathlon competition as a “survival of the fittest” endeavor, and he has survived quite well.

The 65-year-old Smith, has a wiry, athletic presence that would be the envy of most 40-year-olds.

The 1943 Tyrone graduate, who now resides in Louisville, Ohio – within a 15-minute drive of the National Football League Hall of Fame at Canton – has been ranked first in the

country among decathletes in his age group consistently.

Smith still competes in the Masters Track Athletic Congress (TAC), a supplement to the Senior Olympic Games.

The decathlon is a grueling two-day event, with five events held on each day.

“On the first day, you run the 100-meter dash, participate in the long jump, shot put, high jump, and then try to gut out the 400-meter race,” Smith said.

“The second day is for the tougher events – the 100-meter hurdles, the discus throw, the pole vault, the javelin, and the 1500-meter run,” added Smith, who has a touch of gray around both temples but can still finish a mile in six minutes.

Smith adheres religiously to a daily regimen – “my middle name should be ‘stretch’ because never a day goes by that I don’t do my stretching exercises,” he said – but still knows that the human body has its limitations.

“When they reach the age of 50,

everybody is running hurt," said Smith. "It's survival of the fittest – people only do as well as they are able to extend themselves on a certain day."

The Senior Olympic Games are open to competitors ages 55 and over, while Masters competition is for athletes ages 40 and over.

"The Senior Games were started in 1969, but the Masters competition actually began five to seven years before that," Smith said.

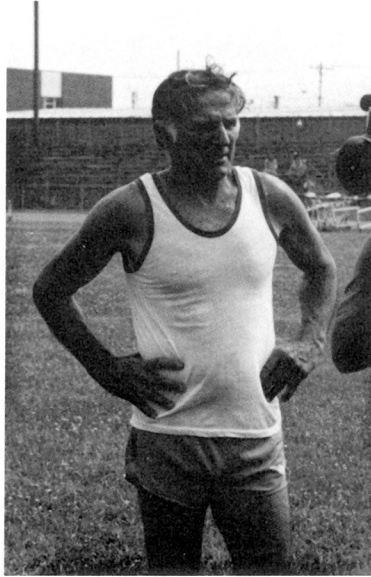
"The Masters competition involves much more rigorous events than the Senior Games, which are more of a social event.

The Senior Games involve something for everybody – everything from tennis to shuffle-board. They're open to every person age 55 and up, regardless of their ability or any limitations imposed by illness."

The Masters competition features some big-name former or current professional athletes.

"I feel honored to compete in the same circle as some of these guys – the old pole-vaulter, Bob Richards,

Denver Smith



Age: 71.

Sport: Track, football.

High School: Tyrone.

College: Fairmont (W.Va.) State College.

Hall of Fame achievement: Six-time national amateur decathlon champion.

Current occupation: Retired.

Current residence: Louisville, Ohio.

who was on the front of those Wheaties cereal boxes; he was my idol," Smith said.

Now the retired Smith – who earned a college football scholarship to Fairmont State University in West Virginia before teaching phys ed and coaching track and field at high schools in West Virginia and Ohio for 35 years – probably has idols of his own.

"I'm a jumper first and foremost, then a thrower second, and a runner third," Smith said. "I'm more of a specialist in field events than running events. But to me, track and field in general is a beautiful sport. It's the world's oldest sport, and it has never changed. It's one-on-one, either you or the other guy."

The "other guy" has usually taken a back seat to Smith, who, gets better with age.

"I don't really know what has kept me successful," Smith said. "But I'm an old believer that heredity – the nature of the brute – has had a lot to do with it. It has just been a wonderful experience, a wonderful opportunity."

(This story was written in 1990).

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Congratulations to “Junie” Smith