



Jeff Adams photo

# Bob Teel has run a strong race, now he is passing the **BATON**

By PAUL HOEMANN

After completing his 16th season as Missouri men's track and field coach in May, Teel, BS BA '49, is retiring. Overall, it was his 28th season of coaching at Mizzou, where he began his track-and-field career as a long jumper for Coach Tom Botts in the 1940s.

In fact, when Botts retired in 1972, he handpicked Teel as his successor, with former Athletic Director Don Faurot's blessing. And for good reason, Botts says.

"Bob's talented and has worked hard. He's always stood for honesty and integrity, and those are not always highly prized attributes in today's athletics."

Those qualities translated into success for the 64-year-old Teel and his

athletes. At MU, he coached 25 all-Americans, 11 Olympic athletes and six NCAA individual champions.

Under his guidance Missouri won the 1979 Big Eight indoor title, and in the past decade, finished sixth twice in the NCAA national indoor meet. In 1982, he coached the U.S. national indoor track squad. In 1983, Teel was voted NCAA National Indoor Coach of the Year.

Yet, when he graduated from Mizzou, coaching track and field was the farthest thing from his mind. An animal husbandry course taken his senior year sparked an interest in cattle farming. Teel and a fraternity brother bought a spread near Montgomery, Ala., and went to work.

However, athletics has always been

high on Teel's priority list. As a youngster growing up in Webb City, Mo., he learned sports at the feet of Walter Wheeler, "a man who had a profound influence on my life," Teel says. Wheeler was the physical education instructor at the Joplin, Mo., YMCA. Three days a week after school, Teel would ride a streetcar six miles to Joplin to participate in organized sports under Wheeler's direction. When Teel was 12, Wheeler took him to the Drake Relays in Des Moines, Iowa, to see Olympic record-setter Jesse Owens compete. "That's when I first began to appreciate track and field," he says.

Teel set some records himself as a member of the outstanding 1947, 1948 and 1949 Mizzou track-and-

field teams, which won five of a possible six indoor and outdoor conference championships. In 1948, he long-jumped 25-1 $\frac{1}{4}$ , a school mark that stood until footballer Mel Gray broke it in 1970. Teel qualified for the 1948 Olympic trials at Northwestern University and came within a whisker of making the team. He finished seventh in the long jump.

He also proved himself a capable football halfback, earning a letter in 1946, a year in which his 43.7 yard punting average led the Big Six.

Not surprisingly, Teel joined a city league basketball team when he moved to Montgomery, Ala. Word of his athletic background spread, and when Teel was asked to coach the offensive backfield part time at a small Catholic high school in the city, he accepted. He did such a good job, he was recruited to coach the school's basketball team.

"The funny part is I never intended to become that involved with coaching," Teel says.

He enjoyed it so much that he earned his teaching certificate, sold his farm and applied for a job in Montgomery's school system: He was assigned to Sidney Lanier High School, where he coached the Poets' football, basketball and track teams for eight years, the latter by default. "I became track coach because no one else wanted to do it," he says.

In 1961, Botts felt it was time to hire a full-time assistant, so he asked Faurot to offer Teel the job.

"I was flattered, but I told Don I didn't think I wanted to move," Teel says. "I thought I had the best high-school job in the world. But he was persuasive. He said, 'Come up and look it over.'"

Teel liked what he saw, but it was not an easy decision for him and his wife, Shirley. They were rearing a family and loved life in Alabama. What it came down to, Teel says, was a chance to help his alma mater.

"Most everybody wants to serve the university they graduated from," he says. So he told Faurot yes.

The modest, low-key Teel believes that he was a less-than-adequate assistant to Botts in those early years. "He was far from demanding of me," Teel says. "Of course, he was quite capable of handling all of the events himself. He realized I had a family and encouraged me to spend as much time as possible with them."

Botts refreshing outlook contrasted with the win-at-all-costs atmosphere often found in college athletics. It is a philosophy Teel never forgot. "There's more to life than track and field."

That's why he never discouraged his athletes from joining a fraternity, or participating in student government and other Campus activities.

However, that way of thinking never curtailed Teel's competitive spirit. He likes to win, and his innate ability to inspire his athletes was one of his best coaching qualities, Botts says.

"He was able to motivate them to perform at their highest possible level."

Freshman sprinter Adeyemi Alade'fa of Lagos, Nigeria, says Teel was a demanding coach who seemed omniscient at times.

"He told you what you were expected to do each day. His eyes were always on you, whether you knew it or not. If you did something incorrect, he'd point it out to you and tell you how to do it better."

Alade'fa, one of three Nigerians on the 1988 roster, is a product of the Nigerian pipeline Teel uncovered at the 1973 Drake Relays. There, he was given a tip about a Nigerian hurdler named Godwin Obasogie. Teel wrote and offered Obasogie, BES '79, the chance to compete for MU. He accepted, and whenever Obasogie returned to Nigeria, he told his countrymen about Teel and Mizzou's program. This unorthodox recruiting method brought nine Olympic-class Nigerian athletes to MU during Teel's tenure.

Assistant coach Yussuf Alli, a "pipeline" recruit and holder of the school's indoor and outdoor long-jump records, wonders if the tap will remain after Teel's retirement.

"Coach Teel will be missed. When we went home, we told other athletes, 'We have a good indoor track, no outdoor track, but a great coach.' He is why I stayed here. I wanted to learn from one of the best."

American athletes express similar loyalty to Teel. Hurdler Victor Moore, BS '88, ran track in 1985, but football injuries prevented him from running in 1986 and 1987. Though healthy this spring, Moore considered skipping track. But he changed his mind.

"He kept me in the program," Moore says of Teel. "He cares about you."

Many of his athletes say he is like a father to them, but Teel avoided a mistake he saw a colleague make—

losing the team's respect by getting too close to the athletes.

"If you're fair, honest and concerned with their well-being on and off the track, there's no need to be pals," he says.

When Botts handed the coaching baton to Teel, he knew Missouri's program would continue running full throttle. Teel's goal was to get Missouri in the Big Eight's first division as often as possible. Indoor and outdoor finishes combined, Missouri placed in the conference's first division 17 times under Teel. His teams were especially strong in the hurdles and sprints.

"My disappointment is that we didn't win as many conference championships as we wanted."

Another of his disappointments was not getting new outdoor track-and-field facilities. Missouri has not been host for an outdoor meet since 1979. In the spring, the team trains on the antiquated Faurot Field track or at Lincoln University's facility in Jefferson City.

"Schools recruit against us based on that," Teel says. "My biggest challenge was trying to remain competitive in a competitive conference."

The University was host for the state high-school meet until 1979 when it moved to Lincoln University. That didn't help recruiting, either. "At least through it, kids got exposed to the University and the city," Teel says. "Once we got them here, 90 percent of the kids loved the Campus and Columbia. But some Missouri kids will not even visit."

As he and his wife retire to Flat Rock, N.C., Teel will be watching with interest to see how the outdoor track issue is resolved. He'll also take more pleasant memories of Mizzou with him.

"When you've had such a close attachment to this place, it becomes an integral part of your life," he says.

Like his sentiment for the University, Bob Teel continues to run strong. □

Retiring track Coach Bob Teel has a reputation for producing great sprinters. At the 1988 Big Eight meet, his 440-meter relay team won its sixth straight conference title.