

Local Lesbians Compete in Senior Games

BY EUAN BEAR

Any softball dykes who might think their athletic careers are over after age 40 should think again. Think about Alverta Perkins and Fran Moravcisk, both of whom recently medaled in the Green Mountain Senior Games. Al (as she prefers to be called) competes in the 75-79 age group and earned 4 medals at last month's meet — one each in the 100 meter run, shot put, discus, and javelin. Al's time of 28.4 seconds in the 100 meters represented a new personal best, taking more than 3 seconds off her previous personal record.

Fran also medaled in her age group (65-69) in shotput, discus, and the 1-mile precision walk on one of the hottest days so far this summer.

"I love it," Al said in an interview shortly before the meet. "I wish more people would come out" to compete. "In a way it's political to me, in that, if I can do it — and I've never been an athlete, never played softball — then others can do it." Because she has

taken first places in four events, Al continues, "people might think I'm good, and I'm not. But the point is, I'm out here doing it."

Fran, who was participating in her fourth senior games meet, said she did not have an athletic background, either. "I was not a talented athlete when young, lacking grace, flexibility, and hand/eye coordination. Also unlike most lesbians I did not care for gym teachers, who seemed to me like unsympathetic marine drill sergeants. However, I enjoyed hiking, canoeing, cross country skiing, and such, and played informal team sports when available for social reasons and the joy of just running about like a Labrador with a stick." Her previous competitions included the Indoor Nationals in Boston last March.

Both Fran and Al remarked on the spirit of encouragement and cooperation that prevailed at the meets they've attended. "There's a nice spirit of connectedness, rather than cut-throat competition, said Al. "But there are always a few at the bigger regional meets who really want to win at any cost.

At my first meet about a year ago I got plenty of help from the other competitors. And my daughter and son came to see me compete. They said, 'Well mom, you always came to our meets.'"

"I do not particularly like competition, but it gives focus and purpose to these events," Fran commented. "The other participants are helpful. The competition is an internal factor that we all recognize is there, but the social part of the event is more festive and encouraging. The more the merrier. So far, there have always been three people or more in my age group who are better than I am, so I don't compete for cheap glory. They have been helpful to me, giving encouragement and tips on technique."

There are some modifications in style and technique from the classic Olympic forms. Al says she puts the shot from "the power position," a wide, balanced stance with knees slightly bent, rather than using either a glide step or an uncoiling power spin. Likewise, the equipment has been adapted. "The shot for older women is 3 kg (6.6 lbs), while it is 4 kg (8.8 lbs) for younger ones," reports Fran. "The older women usually do not use the spin or glide techniques, but they could if they wanted to and found it worked better. There are age-graded

tables to compare distances thrown by people in different age groups. At age 67 my best in the shot would be expected to be half the distance of a comparable athlete at her peak."

Fran says she's managed to connect with other lesbians through the Senior Games. "The people I recognized at the first meet were fellow lesbians, and my connection to these people has strengthened through this common interest. I imagine that there is a higher percent of lesbians in the athletic community than in the world at large, but it does not seem to be a situation where they make an effort to identify themselves to others. Try the Gay Games for that."

"I'm sure I've met other dykes competing — there's at least 2 others here in Vermont, and probably more," says Al, "but I don't know who they are." There are also staunch conservatives among the competitors, she and Fran agree. "One woman I train with," Al reports, "insists that I must be straight, I can't be a dyke, because I don't have an intimate partner right now. I just laugh." Fran says there's a woman in her age group who usually beats her best distances in training. "I know that Flo will be ahead of me in my age group, and she is not a lesbian; she is Take Back Vermont."

Fran takes the competition a bit more seriously than Al — she has recently hired a personal coach for the shot put. Besides the technique practice in the event, "I do some aerobic work like running, biking, kayaking or power walk, some weight workouts, and some agility/mobility drills. I also take Barb Jordan's exercise class for older (average age 71)

folk three times a week, but I would do that anyway. I may take some time off, but with the indoor as well as outdoor season the training pretty much going to be all year."

But there's something to be said for any level of participation by anyone over age 50. "There's the health benefit, and a kind of psychological strengthening — 'Hey, I can throw this, I'm stronger than I thought.' At the Dartmouth [indoor] meet, an old woman was keeping score for the long jump. I jumped not very well, about 4 feet I think, and she said, 'I wish I could do that.' So I felt better about my measly 4-foot jump. But I wanted to say to her, 'Well, lady, you could — just do it.'"

Fran says that she competes because, "I want to see what I am capable of, and I enjoy achieving a goal. I like to stay in shape and feel fit, and it is nice to find a place where the sturdy shaped woman is considered ideal."

Encouraging other women over 50 to train and compete, Fran continues, "I have heard many older lesbians say that if there had been sports for women in their day, they would have gotten a full scholarship to college, no problem. Well, here is your chance to show the world what it missed out on. If your aim is just to get in shape, a competitive sport gives you some focus and a chance to show what you have achieved. It need not be track and field, because they also have tennis, horseshoes, Frisbee, whatever in these games. This is a place where you can be as butch as you want, and get glory for it. Or show that femmes aren't all fluff. Or, if you have nothing to prove, just have a fun field day.

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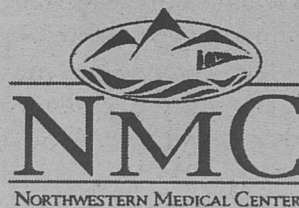
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The Scores

Al Perkins, 75-79 age group:

100 meter run 28.4 seconds (personal best)

shot put 16.11 feet

javelin 27.1 feet

discus 41.3 feet

Fran Moravcisk, 65-69 age group:

shot put 19.1 feet

discus 51.5 feet

1-mile precision walk: medal for exactly estimating her time.