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**American Track and Field during the Depression:
The Saga of Allan Tolmich**

One of the remarkable figures in track in the decades before World War II, Allan Tolmich, was a world record-breaking hurdler and sprinter at Detroit's little known Wayne University, where trackmen trained in a gym so small that he had to jump one hurdle over and over again every year until the outdoor season. With money begged and borrowed by his coach, Tolmich was able to travel during the Depression to every major American meet, leaving Detroit on Friday, sleeping in his train seat, competing on Saturday, returning on Sunday, and appearing in classes on Monday. On the eve of World War II, though he was Jewish, Tolmich competed in Cologne, Rome, Tokyo, and in other European and Asian cities and experienced no anti-Semitism. Based upon archival material, interviews with Tolmich and with his surviving teammates, and on the remarkable collection of newspaper clippings and scrapbook items kept on his career in the

International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame, this paper will provide a sense of American track and field during the Depression period – the WASP coaches, the amateur conditions, the increasing number of field houses, and the growing dominance of the sport by California universities. It will interweave this background with the story of an inner city Jew of Serbian extraction who trained in substandard facilities but became a national and world record holder.
