Books on the Decathlon are rare. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the view of the Decathlon as the simple putting together of ten individual athletics events has not yet been completely replaced by the modern view of the Decathlon as an independent event with specific features of its own. Decathlon coaches and athletes are referred to the vast amount of literature available on the individual events if they need training advice. Of course this material is helpful, but a specific textbook on the theory of decathlon training is nevertheless badly needed.

The book dealt with in this review could serve as an introduction to such a book on decathlon training, in so far as it is a through history of track and field's most formidable event. Its purpose is to give athletes, coaches and fans an idea of the heritage and mystique surrounding the Decathlon.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the «anatomy» of the event. The requirement profile of the Decathlon, as well as the ideological framework are presented.

The concept of the combined event athlete is traced to the ancient Olympic Games in Chapter 2. It is shown that the similarities in nature and structure between the Greek pentathlon and the modern day Decathlon are no coincidence. Much like the modern Decathlon, the ancient pentathlon was power oriented. However, the climax of the Greek pentathlon was wrestling. In spite of this, the Decathlon perhaps most clearly reflects the ancient Greek ideal of all-around, balanced excellence in sports.

In Chapter 3, the reader learns that in the middle ages, combined event competitions almost completely disappeared. Athletics for the most part became recreational and local, and it was not until the 19th century that
athletics, and with it combined event competitions, regained popularity. The contributions of early American colleges, the organization and rules of the then contested all-around events, and the modern Olympic Games are detailed. The careers of several combined event greats are briefly presented.

Chapters 4 and 5 cover the history of the event decade by decade, from its first competition until the present. Mainly because of the implementation of the new IAAF scoring tables ("the fairest set of tables the event has known") just before the 1964 Olympics and the revolutionary concept of training the "whole" decathlete introduced by the West German coach Friedel Schirmer, the year 1964 is seen as a watershed date when the Decathlon turned the corner. In both chapters, 23 of the greatest champions in the history of the Decathlon, including the 1988 Olympic Gold Medallist Christian Schenk (GDR) are presented in portfolios.

Chapter 6 is a special attempt to describe Olympic Decathlon competitions. Here readers will find the drama of duels between Lovland and Hamilton, Bausch and Jarvinen, Johnson and Yang, Jenner and Avilov, as well as between Thompson and Hingsen at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

Chapter 7 is a highly interesting outline of the history and problems associated with Decathlon scoring tables. In this section the author tries to provide reliable information on how to score Decathlon competitions, as well as how to foul up scores.

The appendixes present the author's research. Appendix A includes World and United States rankings of decathletes by Track and Field News from 1947 to the present. It lists winners of major competitions and illustrates how the World and American Records have progressed from the early days of the century. All-time World, American, and collegiate lists are included. There is a record-by-event section, as well as a table of the first athletes to reach 100-point levels from 7000 to 8800 points and a table of best scores for place. The records section closes with a comparison of relative Decathlon scores over the years. The results can be used to start the age-old argument on who was the greatest athlete of all time. Appendix 8 is a list of modern Olympic Games competitors. Each Olympic competitor in the Decathlon, Pentathlon, and all-around is listed. In most cases, the athlete's birthdate, height, and weight are given along with his score and the year of the competition.

As far as I know, this book is the only existing history of the Decathlon. Its wealth of facts, which are interspersed with anecdotes, illustrations and tables make it a unique, entertaining reference book for all persons interested in the Decathlon. It is to be hoped that this book will be supplemented with a book on Decathlon training in the not too far future.

Jürgen Schiffer