



# from the editor

*E. Garry Hill*

TO MODIFY A LINE from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, "All track & field events are created equal—some are just more equal than others." While we like to pretend that all events are equal, in the simplest sense the haves and have-nots of our sport are well delineated by the simple ampersand that separates them.

Track comes first; field comes second. Unfortunately, most jumpers and throwers have come to accept this as a basic fact of life, and even a huge field fan like me will grudgingly admit that for the uninitiated it's much more exciting to watch people racing head-to-head against each other than it is to watch a seemingly endless progression of throws or jumps.

**Sadly, field-event presentation hasn't kept pace with the technological revolution**

The "seemingly endless" nature of field events, however, is as often as not a function of how poorly the events are presented, not some inherent flaw in the disciplines themselves.

In this regard, perhaps the most important picture that will run in *T&FN* during the year 2001 was on p. 36 of the January edition: the one showing Stanford's incredibly instructive

field-display boards. Boards inspired by *T&FN* Founding Editor Bert Nelson that were in use in the late '50s but had disappeared by the early '70s. There were no such things as running clocks at the finish line in those days; no big scoreboards. Technology has greatly improved presentation for running events, but, sadly, field-event presentation hasn't kept pace with the technological revolution. Nobody has a field-indicator board that presents a tenth of the information those Stanford ones did, and virtually nobody ever presents such data on the main board.

Forget a mainstream manufacturer: how much would the time and material cost for a university track program to construct their own simple field indicators along the lines of the ancient Stanford model? Almost nothing. And they could be much simpler and still enhance a field-event competition. Before the competition, stencil the names of all the competitors on a piece of cardboard. During the competition, have a stand which allows the insertion of the names of the current top-3 placers. Then, even though the announcer is either too busy or too incompetent to keep you updated, at a quick glance you'll always know the standings of the top 3. Don't even worry about the mark at that point; place is more important during the competition.

And here's another invention that's needed. You may have heard of it, it's called a "fraction." Ever noticed that the commercial field-event indicators make no provision for fractions? Part of the curse of our foolish dependence on the metric system. I announced a major-major U.S. track meet last year in which the pole vault indicator never indicated the true height. Why? Because the progression was chosen in nice round metric units: 5.40, 5.50, 5.60, 5.70, 5.80. Round metric meant non-round English of 17-8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, 18-1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, 18-4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, 18-8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, 19-1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>. Since the indicator didn't give fractions, all night I gave the fans' ears heights that didn't match what their eyes were telling them. Is that any way to help fans—or, more important, potential fans—enjoy a sport?

Even more damning is that from meet to meet you get different ways of handling the missing fractions. Most times the operator simply leaves them off, but I've also seen meets where everything is rounded up to the next height, or where the person has some math training and the quarter gets rounded down, the half and the three-quarters up! Can somebody please invent a simple clip-on device (think magnets, or velcro) that will give the fractions?

I think too many people have become blinded by the importance of the running events. Even accepting the fact that they take primacy it can't be overlooked that a good 50% of the action at just about every meet revolves around the field events. Doesn't it only make sense that something that occupies such a huge part of the program should be presented in the best way possible?

And don't get me started on how field competitions themselves are actually run.

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