



from the editor

E. Garry Hill

THREE MAJOR RULE CHANGES are wending their way through the IAAF process. It would have been a bit of journalistic good fortune to be able to say that they're the good, the bad and the ugly, but in reality they're the good, the so-so and the ugly. The IAAF is well-intentioned, trying to improve presentation, but I don't think the proposals were particularly well thought-out.

•**First, the good.** That would be the no-false-start proposal. Just as U.S. high schools and colleges have done for years: break once and you're gone. In this day and age, when presentation—both in-person and for TV's sake—is so important, having meets thrown off schedule because of antics in the blocks just isn't acceptable. The all-time classic in that category was the men's 100-yard heats at the '74 NCAA Championships: 7 heats produced no fewer than 18 false starts, throwing the meet more than an hour behind. The next season the collegians went to the NFS rule (one of the few bits of meet conduct the NCAA has gotten right in the last few years) and has never looked back.

Proposed new IAAF rule changes range from the ridiculous to the sublime

There have been 26 men's century finals under the new system and only two sprinters have ever been bounced from the final for a false start. This is a good rule, and the IAAF has been long overdue in adopting it. And cutting back the multi-eventers—who will flat-out admit that the extra one they currently get is a license to attempt to steal—to just one false instead of two will also be a godsend.

My one caveat would be that at least in the beginning the NFS rule should not be used in conjunction with FS-detection blocks, at least not unless starters are given the latitude to be a bit more lenient on inadvertent motion. The jumpy blocks used at the '99 Worlds in conjunction with an NFS rule could produce some mega-ugly DQs.

•**The so-so proposal** is the one that would reduce the number of attempts in the throws and horizontal jumps from 6 to 4. In terms of making for a competition with more viewing appeal, I have to agree with it. In far too many major meets there's just a lot of jumping and throwing that really doesn't mean anything, and as often as not, it comes in the later rounds. In Sydney, for example, looking at the 96 jumpers and throwers who had a half-dozen attempts each, 17 got their marks in the first round, 13 in the second, 33 in the third, only 5 in the fourth, 18 in the fifth and 10 in the sixth. Throwing out rounds 4 and 5, that means that 86% of the Sydney people would have gotten the same mark even in a 4-round system.

On the negative side, this rule means that some of the big names will get less exposure, and that's not good for the sport. Tokyo '91—Lewis and Powell's memorable duel stretches out over only 4 jumps instead of 6? Bad idea. If they want to reduce the overall number of jumps/throws from 60 to 48, get rid of the bums, not the studs. There are all kinds of formulae that would work. For example, 12 athletes get two attempts; for rounds 3 and 4 you cut to 8, for round 5 it's 6 and for the final round—one exciting-as-hell-go-for-all-the-marbles sequence—just 4. Wow!

•**The ugly rule** is the proposal to restrict high jumpers and pole vaulters to only two misses at any height. Have the people who proposed this monstrosity ever actually sat in a stadium with the paying customers and given any attention to what's going on? With the do-or-die nature of each jump at a crossbar—no matter what height it's set at—the crowd as one goes "OOO!" or "AHH!" on each attempt, particularly in the vault. Even during running events. I don't think there are any other disciplines in the sport which spark such a visceral reaction. And no event holds a crowd long after the running is over as does a vertical jump. Why the heck would anybody possibly want to tamper with one of the few things in the sport to which Joe Sixpack can relate?

And let's consider the case of Stacy Dragila, famed for getting herself in trouble and needing three jumps at lower heights before she pulls it together and goes on to big things. OK, maybe if she only had two she'd get tougher sooner at a height, but why run the risk of shutting off the flow of World Records at a time when they're so hard to find and the women's vault is about the most popular one on the docket, with Dragila the No. 1 practitioner?

Bravo for the IAAF for trying to make the sport look better. But keep working on it.

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