



from the editor

E. Garry Hill

MAJOR PASSIONS ARE BEING SPURRED by the proposed IAAF rule changes I discussed at some length in this spot last month. Interestingly, it seems to be the athletes themselves who are most distressed by the prospect of a no-false-start rule, while the hue and cry regarding fewer attempts in the field events is apparently wearing most heavily on statisticians and historians.

I would suggest that both groups need to do some thinking "outside the box" and consider what's good for the sport as a whole rather than just in their own little bailiwick. The sport needs to appeal to a broader range of people, pure and simple. There aren't enough hard-core fans to support it as it currently stands, Penn's amazing crowds notwithstanding. Tightening the presentation is not a bad thing. If you're reading this, it means that like me you could sit and watch field or track all day every day, but unfortunately we're small in number.

Are sprinters cheating when they try and second-guess the starter?

Some big-name athletes are convinced that the NFS rule will cause irreparable damage to sprint times (see p. 35). If that's truly the case, with 100 times suddenly getting slower, en masse, it's a tacit admission that the world's

great dashmen have been "cheating" for many years.

I hasten to put quotes around that nasty c-word because what constitutes "legality" in the starting department remains very much open to interpretation in many people's eyes. I was brought up with the school of thought—and have never left it—that a sprinter is supposed to tear off down the track *after* he hears the gun. And that he should be waiting for said bang. Many modern sprinters feel that *guessing* when the gun is going to go off is fit and proper. That means starting about 0.1 seconds later if there are false-start blocks in place, about simultaneously if there are not.

I've always thought the blue ribbons in the 100 should go to the fastest runner, not the best guesser. That doesn't mean I don't think somebody shouldn't be free to try and guess, but if they do, they need to be prepared to pay a higher price than they used to if they fail. No meet is well served by a steady succession of false starts caused simply by people trying to gain an advantage, whether they think that's part of the game or not.

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And, also as noted here last month, I think the idea of restricting vertical jumpers to two attempts is utterly ridiculous. As for cutting the throwers and horizontal jumpers to four attempts, while I agree that field-event presentation could be greatly improved by reducing the *overall* number of attempts, I argue that attempts should be cut only from the lesser performers, not those at the top end.

Many people have asked me why my analysis of Sydney last month talked about cutting the results of rounds 4 and 5 in getting an idea of what a 4-round system might look like. "Why not 5 and 6?" they query. Simple, grasshopper: the last attempt remains significant no matter how many rounds are contested. That's when the do-or-die adrenaline really kicks in. So any analysis coming up with the example that under the new system Al Oerter would only have won two Olympic golds instead of four probably doesn't hold water. Given the nature of Oerter's competitive fire, I maintain he likely would have found a way to win in a 4-round system, just as he did in a 6. The parameters would have been different from the get-go.

But those too hung up on history as it happened also seem to assume that every exciting competition we remember would somehow have been replaced by a dull one, which doesn't make sense. Would the sport be any the less if circumstances had conspired to make Jay Silvester a 4-time gold medalist instead of his arch-rival, Oerter? I think not.

I just hope that when the field-event proposals reach the floor at the IAAF Congress in August the verticals are treated separately from the other jumps and throws. If they're treated as basically the same proposal then I'd strongly support maintaining the status quo. All events are not created equal in the crowd-pleasing department and anything that would reduce the ability of the wildly popular verticals to deliver their punch needs to be avoided at all cost.

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