



from the editor

E. Garry Hill

WHEN DID THE WORD “TACTICAL” TURN UGLY? Face it, when somebody speaks of a tactical race, they mean *slow* (running fast isn’t a tactic too?) and it’s always said with a tone of disdain. Well, excuse me if I swim upstream, but I love races run off a dawdling pace. Not as a steady diet of course, but if you want to appreciate the sport from all angles—to say

I’d rather watch a tactical—aka slow—race than an El Guerrouj WR attempt any day

nothing of avoiding a life composed mainly of disappointment—allow me to suggest that you too learn to embrace the occasional funereally paced affair.

Of the hundreds of world-class races I saw this year, I’m not sure any were more exciting than the men’s 1500 at the World Indoor Championships in Lisbon. The crowd whistled and booed the 70-second first quarter but shortly thereafter went berserk when home son Rui Silva unleashed an incredible 52.9 for the last

400 to grab gold. Would he have beaten the likes of Kenyans Noah Ngeny and Laban Rotich off a slower pace? Probably not. This was the better outcome.

And perhaps first on the list of races I didn’t see, but wish I had, would be the Goodwill men’s 5000, which at 15:26 was a straightaway slower than the women’s race. OK, they crawled along at 75-second pace for most of the distance. So what? I’d say it was worth it to watch a last lap covered in about 51 seconds, all seven guys finishing within 4 seconds and only 0.60 separating the first four.

I’d rather watch either one of those tactical races any day of the week than to sit through the mind-numbing parade that GP Circuit 1500s generally are. They read well in the papers, but aren’t really all that much fun to watch. You know, that’s where the rabbit du jour goes out in 55, 1:52, 2:48 and then (El Guerrouj, Morceli, Aouita, Cram, Coe, Ovett—whatever the flavor of the month is) sets off in pursuit of the World Record, usually not making it of course. Meanwhile, the rest of the field has been strung out in string-of-pearls fashion, all too rarely changing order after the first lap. Battles to the tape are infrequent and come too far behind the winner for most to really pay any attention. Death to all rabbits!

Well, almost all rabbits. For the wild & crazy thought of the day/week/year, allow me to suggest that USATF should consider having rabbits in the men’s 1500 at the nationals in years when the race is selecting the team for the World Champs or Olympic Games. Starting with ‘91, when the WC went to the every-two-years schedule, here’s the winning time in Trials years: 3:40.72, 3:36.24, 3:42.74, 3:43.90, 3:43.86, 3:45.85, 3:39.21, 3:35.90, 3:37.63. Only a hard-core freak would remember the names of some of those winners.

Virtually never (like this year) does the champion run at a qualifying-standard level. What then ensues is a month of mad—and often in-vain—pursuit of the magic Q. If the guy gets it, he’s so mentally and physically frazzled he’s useless at the WC/OG. If he doesn’t, whoever replaces him has also been destroyed by the uncertainty of his situation. So, since we must, call out the hares.

Nah... the much more efficient solution would be simply to say that the team is chosen at the Trials, period. If you don’t have the international Q at that point, you have absolutely zero chance of making an impact at the world level anyway, so fine-tuning the team is an exercise far past the point of diminishing returns. Death to all rabbits!

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