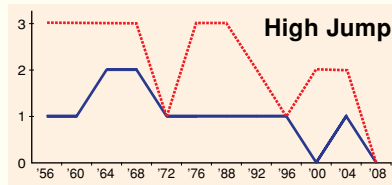




# from the editor *E. Gary Hill*

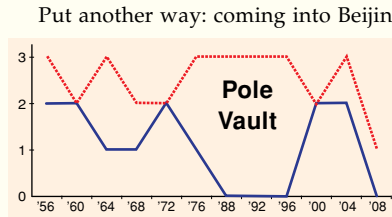
Forget the dropped batons! What about the ongoing men's field-event meltdown?

**OF COURSE THE 4x1 IS IMPORTANT TO THE U.S.** The short relay has long been a source of immense U.S. pride, and the two latest Olympic drops were harder to swallow than a fried scorpion at a Beijing street market. But guess what folks, that was just a couple of medals that went missing. When is somebody going to notice that half of the men's program, the jumps and throws, went through an almost complete meltdown?



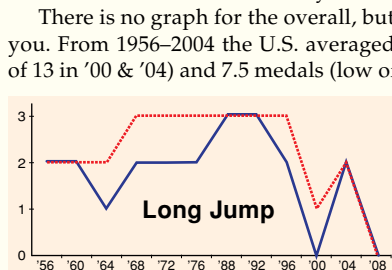
The 8 graphs which litter this page lay it out for you clearly. Uncle Sam's male field eventers kinda stunk up the joint. Here's the overall numbers first: there were maximally 24 spots available in the final for Americans. Only 4—and only 1 outside the shot—was filled!

Put another way: coming into Beijing, the U.S. had never failed to have a finalist in the high jump, long jump, triple jump or discus. In Beijing there was a gruesome quadrifecta—no finalists in any of those events.



Here's what the graphs show you. Each Olympics since '56 (when the Soviets became a major power and most of the world was back on its feet after WW II), except for the two big boycott years, with a red line showing number of U.S. finalists and a blue line showing the number of medalists. Obviously, the possible range for each line is from 0 to 3 for each year.

There is no graph for the overall, but let me put that into words for you. From 1956–2004 the U.S. averaged 17.3 finalists per Games (low of 13 in '00 & '04) and 7.5 medals (low of 4 in '00). This year's numbers were 1 and 4. Almost incomprehensible.

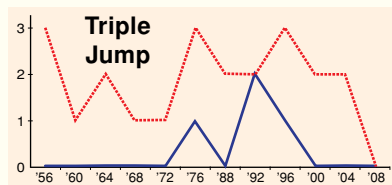


Except that it's not a new trend. Here are excerpts from my column of October '03, following that year's World Championships:

*How many members of the U.S. team got seasonal bests in Paris? For the biggest meet of the year you'd think the number would be high, but in reality, of the 92 American athletes who competed in individual events at the WC, a mere 14 (7 men, 7 women) reached high-water marks [names followed]...*

*Did you notice what major characteristic each of those athletes has in common? They're all track performers; not a field eventer to be found. How pathetic is that? Of course, given that the U.S. had one of its most feeble field-event showings ever—a grand total of 2 medals, the lowest ever—the effect-and-cause relationship isn't too hard to figure out.*

*For those who might want to argue that the Paris conditions weren't conducive to*

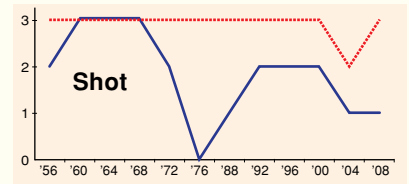


*maximal performance in the jumps or throws, allow me to jump up and throw this gem at you: of the 46 out of 48 field-event medals that non-Americans won, no fewer than 21 of them (46%) came courtesy of the athlete producing a seasonal best.*

For the record here's this year's honor roll of Americans, not including marathoners, who got a seasonal best in Beijing (\*=mark was also a lifetime best):

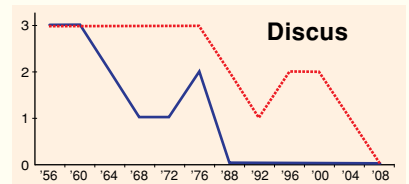
Men—\*Walter Dix (100), \*Anthony Famiglietti, Leonel Manzano, \*LaShawn Merritt, Bershawn Jackson, David Payne, Galen Rupp, \*Angelo Taylor;

Women—\*Jenny Baringer, Jill Camarena, Joanne Dow, Allyson Felix, \*Shalane Flanagan (10K), Flanagan (5K), \*Kara Goucher (10K), \*Dawn Harper, \*Marshvet Hooker, Chaunté Howard, \*Lolo Jones, \*Muna Lee (200).



See any field-eventers in there? Just two, and both on the women's side. I guess nobody was listening in '03.

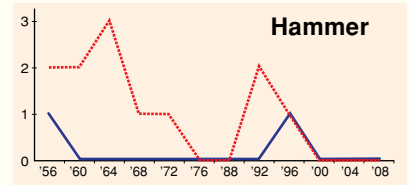
As we did for Paris, let's check and see if the conditions weren't there for peaking well. Of the 45 medals left after you take away the three that Americans won (none with seasonal bests), we find that 22 were won with a seasonal best by another. That's 49%, a number eerily reminiscent of Paris's 46%.



There are many reasons that can be raised for others being better than us in the peaking department, but I would point the finger—just as I did in '03—at the scheduling of the U.S. qualifying meet. With a 6-week gap between the end of the Trials and the start of the Games too much can go wrong.

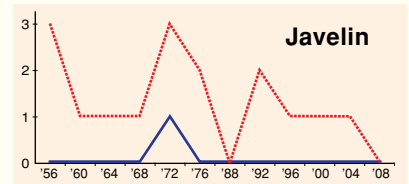
Again, drawing on '03, I said this about the gap

*... if you're a typical U.S. team member, ... you're either very good (so you spend the interim trying to make money on the Circuit and can't tailor your training for the WC) or you're just average (which means that you can't find any competition, domestic or international, so even though you're free to train at will, you can't sharpen).*



Now I understand that in Olympic years the USOC sets the timetables and making the gap any smaller means fighting with them. But if their desire is medals, they need to be made to realize that a tighter time frame is required in this modern era. And for World Championships years, where USATF runs the ship, the gap *must* be tightened.

For Berlin next year we're looking at 7 weeks, one worse than this year. Be prepared for similar results because even if new CEO Doug Logan can work miracles, can he effect a date change in the Nationals with so much planning already in the tank?



Unless he can, we're stuck with more of the same echoes of '03 (although, to be honest, no batons hit the track that year):

*The way the system is currently working, USATF goes out and builds the best looking damned car on the block in June but when August rolls around there just isn't much gas in the tank and the body definitely needs a polish-job.*