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from the editor

E. Gary Hill

TWO MONTHS AGO in this spot I called the Olympic Trials “the greatest meet on the planet.” After the latest extravaganza, which dominates the pages of this issue, I still hold fast to that position. But with a modified grip.

I hasten to say that the weather has nothing to do with it. I’ll clearly take the set

Heresy coming from me, I know, but is it time to rethink the Trials format?

of gills I developed in Eugene over the Bridge-On-The-River-Kwai-like sweat-boxes we endured three years straight 1988–96 in Indy, New Orleans and Atlanta.

It’s the format. Like that one-time car-of-your-dreams that you probably only get to purchase once, the time has come to junk it. The ‘68 OT protocol (which is essentially what we’re still using 40-plus

years down the road) needs a new paint job. And a set of tires and mended upholstery.

The mimic-the-Games scenario that the USOC came up with in Mexico City’s year made a lot of sense. Not just the picking the team at altitude part of the equation, but also trying to mirror the Olympic rounds. Those were still the glory years when—at least on the men’s side—finishing in the top 3 was not only an automatic ticket to the Games, it was also a sign that you would probably make a decent showing while there.

No more. The combination of fewer people allowed into the Games and increasing standards as the sport truly spreads around the globe means that the OT is no longer pro forma. To be sure, the sight of people making standard at the last minute in Eugene added an exciting new parameter to things. There were 8 team members chosen from outside the first 3: five 4^{ths}, and one each in 5th, 6th and 7th.

I wouldn’t for a moment want to deny any of them a spot. That’s not my quibble. Where I do now take issue with the current format is in too much meaningless competition to get to those exciting finals. Fields need to be smaller, for pragmatic reasons.

By eliminating a handful of men in the 100 this year they could have avoided the deadly 3-round setup that required 3 semis (with the dreaded time-qualifying protocol to the final; wind affected events should *never* have a time factor involved). No more of this silliness like the women’s 1500 heats, where 28 ran to eliminate 4 to get to 24-runner semis. And what’s with this ignoring lanes 1 & 2 in the 200 heats?

As last suggested here in the April ‘09 edition, there’s a simple way to stage a 6-day, 2-weekend Trials. You can include one multi each weekend as well, but I’d prefer to seem them staged separately on 2 days of their own. Check out this doubling-friendly setup:

Weekend 1 Track:
m/w100—heats Fri, semis/final Sat; m/w400—heats Fri, semis Sat, final Sun; m/w1500—heats Fri, final Sun; m5K—heats Fri, final Sun; w10K—final Fri; m/w110H—heats Fri, semis/final Sat; 20W—final Fri.

Weekend 1 Field:
mHJ—Q Fri, final Sat; wPV—Q Fri, final Sun; mLJ—Q Fri, final Sun; wTJ—Q Fri, final Sat; mSP—Q/final Fri; wDT—Q Sat, final Sun; mHT—Q Fri, final Sat; wJT—Q Sat, final Sun.

Weekend 2 Track:
m/w200—heats Fri, semis Sat, final Sun; m/w800—heats Fri, semis Sat, final Sun; m/wSt—heats Fri, final Sun; w5K—heats Fri, final Sun; m10K—final Fri; m/w400H—heats Fri, semis Sat, final Sun; 20W—final Fri.

Weekend 2 Field:
wHJ—Q Fri, final Sat; mPV—Q Fri, final Sun; wLJ—Q Fri, final Sat; mTJ—Q Fri, final Sun; wSP—Q/final Fri; mDT—Q Sat, final Sun; wHT—Q Fri, final Sat; mJT—Q Sat, final Sun

It’s time to move on and bring the bestest of meets back into line with the realities of the modern state of the sport. We can make the best even better.