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**GO LIKE NEVER BEFORE.**



# from the editor

*E. Gary Hill*

**STOP ME IF YOU'VE HEARD THIS ONE BEFORE:** I've got good news and I've got bad news. The good news is that with the new IAAF qualifying protocol (see p. 37), fans, athletes and administrators no longer need to figure out how a byzantine A/B qualifying system is going to configure an American team at the Olympic Games or World Championships... The bad news is that there's a new IAAF protocol...

On the surface, the new single-standard scheme seems simple enough, and while one can't do a proper analysis until the actual standards are revealed, my take going in is that this new setup will

only make things even more complicated in the already tricky business of picking Team USA.

For marketing reasons that make complete sense to me, USATF has long said that the winner of the Nationals (assuming he/she has an ironclad qualifier) is on the team. (How can you tell the ticket-buying public that the winner didn't earn a team spot?)

**If we thought A/B  
was confusing, might  
A-only be worse?**

Those in lesser places have always been subject to the vagaries of the A/B qualifying system. There's the key word: "vague." Now, more than ever, when the WCT/OT ends, there will still be questions as to who else fills the team, even though an A will apparently be easier to achieve than it used to be (see chart on p. 37).

In the last couple of WC cycles USATF has allowed the top 4 in each event to chase qualifiers if they need them (no chasing has been allowed for the last two OTs). But U.S. athletes have been at a disadvantage in this department, with a window that closes earlier than everybody else's. This year, for example, the IAAF gave people until 10 days before the WC began to get qualifiers, but the USATF window closed 9 days earlier.

In '08, the OT ended on July 6 and the IAAF window closed July 23. That's 17 extra days for the rest of the world. With some 25% of the fields to be determined from the yearly list, that's a lot of time for things to change. So any American without an A could face a very long wait before knowing if he/she is actually on the team.

With no changes in protocol, here's what happens in Beijing in two years: the World Champs begins on August 22. Plug in the traditional end of qualifying and that means August 10 before non-A's know if they're headed to China.

Meanwhile, the USATF Championships will end on June 28. That's right, 6 weeks before the Q stops. That's an awfully long time to leave people dangling.

Which leads me to something I've been saying for years: in a modern world, with qualifying standards getting tougher and tougher, the Nationals shouldn't be in June in the first place. It's just too early. Too many athletes are forced to reach a peak long before the OG/WC and aren't able to get back to that form when August rolls around.

USATF ended on June 23 this year. By way of comparison, Germany wrapped it up on July 7, Kenya July 13, France & Britain July 14 and Russia July 25. That's right: a 4½-week advantage to the U.S.'s biggest rivals.

The answer seems simple to me: the USATF Championships needs to be staged in mid/late July, about a month later than now. It wouldn't surprise me if that made for a smaller meet than it is now, what with many collegians not equipped to stay competitive for more than a month after the NCAA meet. But for the majority of the sport's top-enders, it will put them in a much better position for the Worlds/Olympics. And most importantly, it'll remove a month of anxiety and mark-chasing for those who didn't get an A, although adding in that extra time should be a generator of more A's in the first place.

Goodbye June, hello July!