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from the editor

E. Gary Hill

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR? “The people running track & field in the U.S. are incompetent. They’re corrupt. They’re beholden to special interests. They’re trying to run a pro sport in an amateur fashion.” Much of that was the drumbeat taken up after the USATF Indoor, with its high-profile pairing of contentious DQs (see p. 25).

But turn the clock back 30 years. Oh heck, turn it back 40 while you’re at it, and if you were part of the sport then, this sounds only too familiar. Back then the enemy—and not without good reason—was the AAU.

After Albuquerque, is it time to start thinking about a separate federation for the pros?

Not that the AAU was full of evil/incompetent people. It was just an entity that was out of touch with the times and was charged—given that it basically ran all Olympic sports—with doing too many things.

So, with nudging from the demands of the IOC for sovereignty for various sports, the Amateur Sports Act Of 1978 (should I call it the “infamous” sports act?) was born. And the AAU ceded control of track & field to TAC (The Athletics Congress; great acronym, horrid

name for a sport in a country that doesn’t remotely comprehend the equivalence of “athletics” with “track & field”). And the USOC has control of selecting Olympic teams, which in and of itself is a bit of a 2-headed monster.

Fast forward to the present day, and TAC has morphed into USATF (terrible acronym, but USA Track & Field makes eminent sense). Have things changed all that much? Is the federation-by-what-ever name still incompetent/corrupt/beholden/amateur? The modern electrons-are-free paradigm which makes everybody an investigative journalist would have you believe in d, all the above.

The truth, of course, is far from that. There is no question that no end of procedural mistakes were made at the Nationals. And that Nike probably wielded too much influence, and that a passionate Alberto Salazar probably got too passionate and let his tongue get a step ahead of his brain.

The Track & Field Athletes Association (TFAA) has—rightly, methinks—asked to be made part of the protest process. That’s a start.

But here’s the mega-weight simian in the stadium: after Albuquerque, is it time to start thinking about a separate federation for the pros? I’m not the only one asking that question, and it isn’t the first time I’ve asked it.

Track & field in the U.S. is in a battle for its very existence at the post-scholastic level, even if high school and collegiate track remain healthy. But those are levels of competition that don’t involve spectators and don’t involve compensation for the high-end performers. Pro track performers continue to be Colonel Kurtz’s snails on the edge of a straight razor.

It’s well and good that USATF headquarters in Indianapolis has, by all accounts, a well-compensated CEO who is charged with keeping the sport (no pun intended) on track. But should that kind of high-priced talent be worrying about age-group competition, be it the kids or the senior citizens? Or road racing, no matter how lucrative the demographics might be? I don’t buy it.

Roger Goodell’s mandate is to keep the Super Bowl one of the most awesome sporting spectacles on the planet. Bud Selig ensures (even if the jury is out on his performance) that the World Series remains “the fall classic.”

Do either of them worry about the non-pros? Little League World Series? Pop Warner? Do they allow their big games to be officiated by well-meaning amateurs? Of course not.

Why should track settle for anything less? A separate federation is the only answer.