



from the editor

E. Gary Hill

LAST MONTH'S COLUMN posed the question, "After Albuquerque, is it time to start thinking about a separate federation for the pros?" Developments in the month since all the hoo-ha at the USATF Indoor have only served to put an exclamation point on that query.

For more details on what has transpired, be sure to read Sieg Lindstrom's informative long story which leads off this issue of *T&FN*. The growing power of the TFAA (Track & Field Athletes Association) was a story well in the works when the whole landscape changed, thrusting the fledgling athlete's group very much into the spotlight.

You can disrespect the rights of the athletes for only so long

To quickly capsulize the ongoing drama as detailed on p. 10, TFAA asked USATF for some representation at future DQ/appeal processes. A teleconference was scheduled. USATF begged off at the last minute. And then Indianapolis went silent.

A couple of weeks later TFAA protested the sound of nothing but crickets out of Indiana and the federation response to that was to announce the setting up of a "working group" to look into the problems.

As I posted on the *T&FN* Current Events Forum at the time, "Even if one can accept the concept of checks & balances, and not rushing into a decision that one might regret later, USATF's stonewalling on the subject—and apparently blowing off a planned chat w/ TFAA and then going into radio silence—shows such utter contempt for the athletes that I have trouble fathoming how Indy could be so tone deaf."

In retrospect, "contempt" is perhaps too strong a word. Maybe "lack of respect"? The USATF position wasn't quite Marie Antoinette saying, "Let them eat cake," but it did suggest that the federation restaurant wasn't about to start serving a bunch of scruffy athletes.

Unfortunately, the timing of the printing schedule of this issue of the magazine was such that we had to cease our coverage of the situation just as it began to get *really* interesting. The TFAA issued a strong statement of its own, calling for solidarity from the athletes' sponsors not to take any punitive measures regards fulfillment of contracts.

In part, it said, "We further request that you not penalize your athletes for participating in collective action that may preclude them from competing in a sanctioned event, and that you agree to identify alternative events, if necessary, to satisfy any sponsor obligations."

The key phrase there is *collective action*, which is hard to interpret any other way than a call for a strike. That's one thing that unions do well. They do it best of all when the timing is right. The timing couldn't be much better than now, one could reason. There's a good cause to be fighting for (the ABQ situation), it's a year when there are no OG/WC teams to be made (making skipping the Nationals a viable option) and the NLRB has just ruled that NCAA athletes have legal recourse to unionizing. Is this the dawn of a new day in the empowerment of athletes?

Primo Nebiolo must be turning over in his grave. I remember well a press conference he gave in Monaco in the early '90s, to say how happy he was to announce some improvement in the lot of athletes. One member of the press had the temerity to ask the IAAF head, innocently enough, "Do you think this means we'll see an athlete union soon?"

Nebiolo's eyes bugged out, his face turned red and he thundered (I paraphrase after all these years), "There will *never* be an athlete union. Never! We are the IAAF, and they are the athletes."

So I ask you again, "Is it time to start thinking about a separate federation for the pros?" Or, has the time for thinking come and gone, and now it's time to start acting?

Stay tuned, because this is far from over.

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