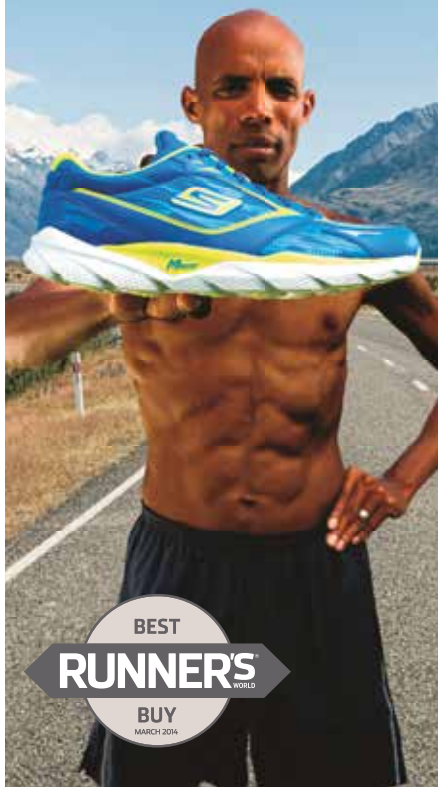




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from the editor

E. Gary Hill

I KNOW, I KNOW: IF IT AIN'T BROKE... I'm a firm believer in the concept of not tinkering with something just for tinkering's sake, but after seeing an awesome first edition of the IAAF's new World Relays (see p. 6) I feel compelled to say that it can be better yet.

And the good news is that I think the IAAF is prepared to make it so. This brave new venture was conceived as a way to break the mold of normal international championships, up and down the line, and I expect some fine-tuning to follow.

Going in, there were two events I had concerns about: the 4 x 200 and the 4 x 1500. Both were saved by World Record performances. The 4x2, from where I sit, is probably the most boring race in the sport. It played well in Nassau because a large Jamaican contingent was over-the-top-great at howling whenever the yellow & green were on the track, and with the much-publicized WR attempt on the men's side in play, they kept it up throughout the race.

Why would I call the event boring? Because of the lanes-all-the-way rule that came into play in '00, which makes for a huge stagger differential and no way to tell who's doing what, unless you have a runaway like the Jamaicans did.

The fix is to allow for a break to the pole; it worked well that way for decades. If you think the roller-derby factor is too high, make it a 6-team field to ease the crowding. Or even just 4, making the first-round heats races full of much more drama than we saw in Nassau.

As for the 4x15s, we were faced with small fields producing complete runaways absolutely devoid of any drama. And with Kenya having now made both WRs fairly respectable, I worry that future stagings of the event will just be a big boring hole in the middle of each day's program. If the IAAF feels compelled to keep a purely long-distance event, the next staging should then be a 4 x mile (something that will fly in a country like the Bahamas, since that's their unit of measure), basically ensuring another World Record run or two.

Instead though, I would heartily endorse a medley (or medleys) of the variety run regularly in the U.S. With the sprint medley (400-200-200-800) being the best. That's an event with some IAAF history by the way; it was part of the program at the '93 World Indoor.

I like it not only because it's an exciting race of only 4 laps—in which virtually everybody should still be in it when you get the anchor leg—but also because I believe it's an event in which a wider range of countries can be competitive. Kenya, for example, doesn't have lot of sprinters, but it has enough to keep close enough for its 800 talent.

Having mixed-sex races is another way to get more countries into the mix, but IAAF head Lamine Diack doesn't like that concept, although his stance has mellowed from "not as long as I'm alive," to "not as long as I'm president."

An overall problem with the meet lies with having too few competitive nations for the simple reason that those with smaller talent pools obviously have trouble coming up with 4 high-end people.

Since the meet is being viewed as a groundbreaker for new and exciting ideas, why not a relay that's only 3 members deep? Again, there's historical precedent. Until '68 the IAAF considered the women's 3 x 800 as an official WR event. In Nassau, Poland's men had by far the fastest last two legs in the 4x8. Had it been a 3x8 they would have seriously challenged Kenya.

The two races that must remain inviolate, of course, are the two 4x1s and 4x4s, not that anybody would think of toying with those. I just found it a shame that the timetable couldn't be configured so the men's 4x4—the current "national event" of the hosts—couldn't have been last. The noise the crowd raised there blew any Penn Relays woo-factor off the map. It was right up there with the Mo Farah din in London. And it doesn't get any louder than that. Bring on 2015!

The World Relays was awesome, but it can be awesomer