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## from the editor

*E. Gary Hill*

**I KNOW, I KNOW, IF IT AIN'T BROKE...** Oh, wait, that's how I started last month's column, but this time I do indeed have a different target, one which presented itself at the USATF Junior Championships (see p. 35).

We're talking that ongoing bone of contention, the no-false-start rule. I have long been a proponent of such a stricture, and warmly greeted it when the NCAA first instituted it for the '75 season (and the national high school federation followed suit).

### Is it time to revisit the no-false-start rule?

I mean, anybody who sat through the '74 NCAA in Austin—yes, I'm that old—and saw the 7 heats of the men's 100 produce no fewer than 18 (!) false starts and put the meet almost an hour behind schedule realized the wisdom

of a move away from the status quo. (Interestingly enough, even though those NCAA numbers are cited as the reason for the rule change, it was already in the works.)

The efficacy of the collegiate rule seemed to prove itself, as it took 11 years before anybody false-started out of an NCAA century final. And then it took all the way to '03 before it happened again. Coincidentally, that was the year that the IAAF (and USATF) finally adopted modified rules, which of course led to the infamous Jon Drummond lie-down strike at the World Championships in Paris that year.

At that point, though, it wasn't a NO-false-start rule. The IAAF had chosen a modified route, assessing the first falsie in any race to the entire field, and anybody who broke after that was then DQed. I preferred the harsher version, but thought the compromise worked well enough. The IAAF, though, wasn't satisfied, and starting in '10 adopted a zero-tolerance policy. Which led to Daegu '11 and the notorious bouncing of Usain Bolt.

While recognizing that that wasn't perhaps the best of theater, my reaction was that rules are rules and it was the right thing to do. That, however, was a judgment coming from somebody in a hermetically sealed booth, divorced from the reality of being out there with the people.

Fast forward to Hayward Field this July and the Juniors. Trentavis Friday stuns with a High School Record 10.00 in the heats, setting the table for a stunning matchup with World Junior Record holder Trayvon Bromell. The final was stunning alright, but in the most negative of senses, as Friday jumped the gun (I'll ignore the fact that somebody should have told him he was running to make the team at that point, not to beat Bromell, but that's a lesson for another day).

The announce booth at Hayward is *not* far from the action, and is not sealed off. And the sense of disappointment—as I now realize it must have been in Korea—was palpable. As somebody in the crew commented at the time, "If this were a domed stadium, the roof would have collapsed as all the air rushed out." The pall of gloom was brutal, and it lasted an extended time.

'Twas then and there that I had the epiphany: for a sport that is struggling to stay alive, casting aside stars—be it the biggest like Bolt, or an upcoming one like Friday—for a mistake that boils down to 100ths of a second of reaction in a time of uttermost stress, is absolute lunacy. That's being hanged for jaywalking.

No, I don't want to go back to the wild-wild west of everybody getting a free shot at trying to steal the race. What I do want to go back to is the one-on-the-field rule. The half-dozen years in which it was in play at the highest level (2 Olympics, 4 World Championships) showed us, I think, that it was possible to streamline the production—which was, after all, the main reason that the IAAF adopted the rule in the first place—without being totally draconian.

The IAAF may feel it is showing signs of weakness in backtracking, but given what's at stake overall, admitting they were wrong is the right thing to do. They need an epiphany too.