



# from the editor

*E. Garry Hill*

ARE TRACK'S FANS GETTING TOO OLD? As Seb Coe works to save us (see p. 13), the new IAAF head has said more than once that our sport's average fan is too old (you know, like you and me).

In early January he said, scoring a bull's-eye, "My vision is to have a sport that attracts more young people. The average age of those watching track & field is 55. This is not sustainable."

Our problem—one which is difficult for the true fan to accept, and even the brilliance of modern marketing may not be able to overcome—is that our sport has *always* been difficult for the man in the street to follow and even harder to present in an exciting fashion.

We all know well by now the litany of complaints: there are too many different events; there's typically either too much or too little going on at once; the average meet lasts (way) too long.

All of those things could be fixed, but of course I'm not sure the end product would be one that I (or you, dear reader) would want to watch.

One of the problems, of course, is coming up with fixes for the sport that at the same time both make it more televisable and something you want to see in person—the two concepts are far more alien than you might suspect.

Other sports have done a good job of radical changes, why not track? How about these thoughts?

- Make a 50-meter dash part of the Olympic/WC program. You can never have too much speed, and this is the ultimate expression of wham-bam (given the import of the start, maybe one false-start is allowed?). Swimming has had great success with this being a crowd-pleaser.

- Replace the 400 with a 500, breaking for the pole after the first 100. Speedskating created legions of new fans when it went to its roller derby-like version of the short track. To keep the mayhem to a minimum, reduce the field to 6. And if you're really a traditionalist, keep it as a 400 (again, with 6), but breaking for the pole after one turn.

- As a corollary, get rid of the 3-turn stagger in the 4x4, which means that for almost 40% of the race, the average fan has no idea what the relative order is. One of the IAAF's dumber moves ever.

- If you're not in the bowl proper, what provides the biggest aural clue to what's going on in the stadium? The "oooo!" and "awwww" that lets you know when a vertical jumper has a miss or make in the high jump or vault. Work with that—why not 4 attempts at each height?

- Riffing off the vertical-jump format—which is far more crowd-pleasing than any of the horizontal jumps or throws—why not make those other field events specific-distance dependent? i.e., instead of 6 attempts you have to jump/throw beyond a certain marker to stay alive, with the field constantly being winnowed down. Create some damn drama!

- If you don't go to a specific-distance model, instead up the drama by constantly cutting back the number of contestants still alive. Forgetting for the moment that the talent level between 1 and 12 is far too large to begin with in any big-meet setting, too much of the competition is taken up with mediocre jumps/throws that bring nothing to the presentation. No final should have more than 8 contestants and you cut that to 6 after two rounds, then to 5 after three, 4 after four and 3 after five.

- As was done at this year's World Relays, add the distance medley to the OG/WC program.

- As has been done at the Youth Olympics, consider mixed-sex relays. That was suggested for the World Relays, but when he was head Lamine Diack said, "not while I'm alive." He later amended that to, "not while I'm in charge." His opinions aren't worth much now, are they?

Bring on change! The kids will come and we fogies will still enjoy the proceedings.

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