



from the editor

E. Garry Hill

HERE'S A TRICKY QUESTION FOR YOU. Does track & field have too many events or too few? Sorry, "It has just the right amount" isn't an acceptable answer. The correct one, from where I sit, is, "d, all the above."

Huh?!

That's right, our sport—much as I hate to say it—has both too many and too few events at the same time. Really.

The too-many side is easy to explain. The average meet lasts too long, and—worse—too much

of what is going on during even a streamlined timeframe simply doesn't resonate with the fans. The 3-ring-circus model may have worked for Barnum & Bailey a hundred years ago, but I don't think it flies anymore.

If you have high fliers risking death up at the top of the tent, who cares about the dogs

jumping through hoops on horseback? Modern sports presentation demands nothing but A-list acts.

So being purely pragmatic and translating that kind of thinking over to our sport, it's clear that not all events are created equal, and much as I give kudos to the IAAF for creating a Diamond League circuit that assigns equal value to almost all the events on the program (and has surely boosted the women's side of things), I fear that Monaco is helping kill the sport with its a-place-for-everyone thinking.

Without pointing any fingers at the "loser" events (because your definition thereof may well differ from mine), if I were a DL meet director I'd be losing sleep nightly over having to stage events that I know that aren't putting a single butt in the seats, and, worse, staging them at the expense of knowing that only every couple of years—unless I have unlimited resources—can I stage such marquee events such as... fill in the blanks here, but here's a hint: how can you claim to be staging a real track meet if you don't have a high-end men's 100?

The first thing the IAAF needs to do is conduct a far-reaching survey which rates all the sport's disciplines in terms of popularity, and—as I said last month, you might not like this—simply axe the bottom-feeders. It's one thing, in the context of an Olympics/World Championships that runs through two weekends, to have enough events to fill the program sufficiently to sell all those seats, and it's totally another to sell what keeps the sport alive from day to day and that's a nice concise televisable program lasting a couple of hours.

What about the "too few" side? I alluded to that in this space last month when I suggested that track would benefit from the addition of a 50-meter race. That would be a classic example of addition through subtraction. Get rid of x number of other events (and there are many candidates) and replace them with what would be guaranteed crowd-pleasers and it's a win-win.

At this juncture, I also need to go against almost a half-century of dogma I've been espousing, which is that if our sport has to resort to gimmicks, it's toast. In this case, "gimmicks" being World Record attempts in events that aren't on the official list.

I was wrong. And with WRs in standard events being so hard to come by, let's open up the field. It works for the Guinness people, why not for us? As a reductio ad absurdum, did you realize that during his indoor barnstorming U.S. tour of 1926, Paavo Nurmi set "world records" in the mile, 1.25M, 1.5M, 1.75M, 1.875M, 2M, 2.25M, 1500m, 2000m, 3000m and 4000m?

Do you think the ticket-buying public (or headline-writing press) felt remotely cheated by the not-regularly-run nature of most of those events? Heck no!

It was Barnum & Bailey at its best, and who doesn't love a good circus?

Allow me to now don my flameproof suit, my traditionalist brethren.

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