



from the editor

E. Garry Hill

MORE THAN A DECADE AGO (February of '05 to be precise), my offering here began, "If you're like most fans, you like track more than field." It was true then and it's true now, which in and of itself is no problem.

I continued, "The way 'athletics' is presented, it's certainly a lot easier to be enamored of running competitions. It's simple to appreciate a race—any race—because it really doesn't matter how far it is or how fast the people are running. Just watching them go head-to-head, running from point A to point B as fast as they can, is about as good as it gets in sporting entertainment.

Meets tend to be unkind to those who think of our sport as field & track

"And you can tune into the action in the middle of a race and still instantly know enough of what's going on. Would that appreciating jumping and throwing were so easy."

Fast forward to today and my next statement, sadly, remains the same.

I then said, "Can you imagine watching any of the popular ball sports without a scoreboard? No indication of the score, no idea how much time is left in the game? Anybody who tried to sell a sport with that kind of spectator aid would be laughed off the planet.

"Yet that's just what happens with field events, which not only make up about half the disciplines in the sport, but also dominate the landscape in terms of time of competition. But walk into a track meet at any level—even the World Championships or Olympic Games—and your chance of finding out what's going on in any of the jumps or throws is almost impossible. Even with all the marvels of modern electronics."

Those marvels have come so far since I wrote that—so far, in fact, that at that point the iPhone was still a couple of years away!—that you'd think there was probably no longer a problem.

But once again, see how true my original statements still ring, as I next said, "If you're lucky enough to be at a high-end meet, there will be high-tech indicators, yes, but they will tell you only what position the current performer is in before giving you the latest mark. So if your attention has been focused on the 1500 final for the previous 5 minutes and you turn to the triple jump you'll be thrilled to see that the guy currently in 9th is on the runway. No clue as to who is the leader, let alone who's in the medal positions."

Are today's modern field indicators better than the pre-iPhone ones? Sort of. They're easier to read and carry more data, but do you really want to see a national flag or a portrait of the next-up performer? The places & marks of those in the medal positions (or deeper) should be scrolling on a screen somewhere, or in a crawl across the top or bottom, just as big-league ball sports do with other-game scores and stat highlights.

I can understand that your everyday meet can't have all the bells & whistles, but how can the IAAF and USATF run the sport at the international- and national-championship level without ensuring that the fans know what is going on at all times in all events on the program? How long can IAAF equipment suppliers like Seiko and Omega remain tone deaf to such things? Even worse, how long can the IAAF go without demanding—not requesting—proper display protocols?

Portland's recent World Indoor Championships did take one nice step in improving the field-event situation by employing something suggested in these pages many years ago. That was having the final round of throws/horizontal jump competition (which was cut to a manageable 4 competitors) slotted into the run of show so that there was no track competition at the same time and everybody in the place got to focus on the final battle for podium slots as the announcers highlighted each attempt.

Long live field & track!

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