



from the editor

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THEY SEEMED LIKE SUCH SIMPLE CHANGES. But the IAAF and the Diamond League served to unite fans, athletes, managers and meet promoters in high dudgeon this year after instituting streamlined field event protocols at the World Indoor and the 16-meet outdoor circuit.

The simple changes were similar. At the Indoor, the number of performers who received all 6 attempts in the LJ, TJ & SP was restricted to the top 4 after 5 rounds. At that point, everyone else was cut off. On the DL Circuit (with the DT & JT added to the mix) the winnowing process was far stricter, with only the top 4 receiving attempts 4, 5 & 6.

Are field event rounds 4 & 5 really necessary?

The most common tactic from those criticizing such a protocol was to dredge up historical examples where people rose up from minor places to score surprise wins.

My reaction to that is that that's cherry-picking numbers and that the number of such instances—without actually being able to prove my contention—is that for every exciting comethrough that is cited, there are many times more competitions where little/nothing of excitement happened in rounds 4 and 5 and if the powers-that-be want to streamline, perhaps 4-attempt competitions are the way to go.

Let's explore that premise. But first, I'd note that the naysayers are always quick to cite round-6 miracles that have been historic. My response to that is that the miracles didn't occur because one needs 6 rounds. No, it's because the *last* round, and whichever number it is, will have a high percentage of eye-bulgers simply because of the athletes' do-or-die, adrenaline-induced final chances.

Rio Field Event Bests	
.....R4.....R5	
mLJ.....1.....1	
mTJ.....0.....2	
mSP.....0.....2	
mDT.....0.....0	
mHT.....0.....3	
mJT.....0.....1	
wLJ.....1.....4	
wTJ.....3.....3	
wSP.....0.....1	
wDT.....0.....1	
wHT.....1.....3	
wJT.....2.....2	

So at the risk of cherry-picking of my own, allow me to use Rio as a decent-sized sample of what I think tends to happen at a major championships with 6 rounds for the top 8.

The accompanying chart shows the number of athletes who got their best mark of the day in round 4 or round 5.

So 12 events times 8 athletes (including those who passed), there are 96 attempts in each round 4 and 5. In round 4, 8 (8.3%) got their best of the day; in 5 there were a significant 23 (24%). Combined, 31/192 (16.1%).

But how *really* significant were those bests-of-day? Not very. In only 3 events did they result in a medal change: the golds in the men's JT (round 5), women's LJ (round 5) and women's JT (round 4), plus the women's JT bronze.

Now let's examine round 6 in Rio. While it represented fewer improvements than round 5 (15 vs. 23, for 15.6%), the number of medal-changing marks was far superior: golds in the men's LJ & DT and women's SP; silvers in both LJs; bronzes in the men's DT and women's HT.

My overall takeaway (since I have the impression that Rio isn't out of the ordinary in what happened) is that if streamlining is needed, 4 rounds of competition may indeed be enough. But...!

Be prepared for the smell of smoking rubber as I now come to a screeching halt and burn a quick U-ie. As I've mentioned in the past on multiple occasions in this space, the solution is simple. I like having 6 rounds! Solution? Avoid having so many attempts by no-hopers and increase the drama by having more cutdowns.

There are all kinds of formulae I'd sign off on (if I were king) for the OG/WC but my current favorite is 10 to the final (instead of the current 12). After 2 attempts—allowing for a foul—cut to 8; after 3 cut to 6; after 4 cut to 5, after 5 cut to 4. You've then got a nice 4-person field for the final round (just as we had in Portland) and it can be programmed into a window in the schedule where it doesn't conflict with any running events.

Field needs/deserves all the center-ring time it can get!