



from the editor

E. Garry Hill

WHEN THE DIAMOND LEAGUE concept was unveiled late in '09 for a rollout the following season, all the hoopla was about the big-name stars—think Usain Bolt & Yelena Isinbaeva—who had signed on as “Ambassadors” for the new circuit.

And much fuss was made about how the 14-meet series would bring to the sport something it sorely needed (and still needs): high-end head-to-head competition. (We all know how well that has turned out, but that’s another matter.)

In The Diamond League, All Events Are No Longer Created Equal

Little attention was given to the revolutionary concept of treating all the events in the series equally. It didn’t matter if an event was a sprint, distance race, jump or throw. Or man or woman. Each of the disciplines was guaranteed a spot in half of the meets. And the payoff was equal for each of them.

Then, as now, there was nothing that said the meets couldn’t add other events to their

schedule, but that proved difficult to do on many occasions because of the financial obligation now required to fund the mandated DL events.

Moreover, the new protocol created a classic two-edged sword. While it was wonderful that athletes in the less popular events (in general, think throws and women’s events) achieved parity, that wasn’t something thought of as wonderful across the board by those charged with putting the meets on. But let’s face it, the viewing public has never viewed all events as equal, and never will.

I think you’d have to look far and wide to find a major-meet promoter who didn’t lament not being able to have a men’s 100 every year since ’10, even if Bolt has been rarely available. And a 1500, and probably a pole vault. To be told that it wasn’t their turn for a must-have event had to be galling. Particularly where instead they had to take an event (you fill in the blanks) they didn’t feel would put butts in the seats, or eyes on the tube.

Welcome to 2017 (see p. 15 for details on this year’s event-split), where promoters—who talked long and hard in the off-season—no longer have to take as many events that they didn’t really want as in the past. We find that instead of having 16 mandated events, the requirement is now for just 14 (and in some cases, 13, to make the math work). Only 8 events (just 2 of them field events) will be contested 7 times; the other 8 (5 of them field events) get only 5 appearances.

On the upside, hopefully this will give more promoters room in which to tack on some high-end non-DL events that will improve their overall product. And it also makes it easier to squeeze the meet into all-important TV windows, and while in-person audiences remain crucial, the future of track, like all sports, lies with the broadcasting of the affairs.

On the downside, those in the have-not events, who are already marginalized when it comes to making a real living from the sport, will see their opportunities for paydays reduced even more. And so long as the sport’s Olympic and World Championships program contains an event, some form of it needs to be presented to the public on a regular basis.

But that, dear reader, brings us back around to one of the most contentious subjects that fans bandy about: would the sport be better served if some events were stricken from the program? It’s a subject I’ve raised in this space multiple times through the years and the reaction is pretty predictable. Most people are dead-set against any such move, primarily because they have some kind of attraction to events x, y or z. There is little consensus.

But I also find, in talking off the record, that for people whose interest concerns the sport as a whole, and the health thereof, some thing(s) have to go.

It’s a horrid choice to have to make, but I think the sport is moving towards it.

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