



from the editor

THIS MONTH'S HOT-BUTTON TOPIC is the news that we now have the potential to experience the erasing of some/many classic World Records. See the facing page for a story detailing how a proposed European Record rewrite could spill over to a similar treatment of World Records.

17 years ago I too was in favor of modifying WRs, but not in the way that's being proposed now. By the time the millennium changed, it had long been recognized that many—too many—of the sport's all-time best marks were simply unapproachable.

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For a sport whose life blood is a steady flow of WRs to sell to the press and public, that dearth of action in many events was (and still is) a horrid situation.

Thus it was that as we entered the 2000s, the German federation came up with a proposal to start anew. I welcomed that suggestion with open arms, but the IAAF did not; it died a quick death. Indeed, at annual IAAF Press Commission meetings, noted Italian journo Gianni Merlo and I were the only ones in favor of the concept, and the negative response from everyone else on the panel was of, well, WR proportions.

"You want to take away Hicham El Guerrouj's 1500 and mile records? Ridiculous!"

"No more Mike Powell? Preposterous!"

"Erase JJK? Insane!"

On the insanity of erasing some of the sport's biggest names I agreed completely. Which is why my suggestion was—and still is—that there should be two record lists: one for the 1900s, another for the 2000s (we won't get into the silly debate about when new centuries start).

Yes, that would clearly be a smoke & mirrors approach, but I can't think of a better one.

I can think of a worse one, and European Athletics has come up with it. With its provision that there can be no records from before '05 (when IAAF sample-storage began), such a system guarantees that every one of the previous recordholders are guilty by association. Even such a strident anti-doping warrior as Paula Radcliffe would be banished to a syringe-filled corner of history.

The tarring-everybody-with-the-same-brush aspect of the "new millennium" proposal was one of the Press Commission's biggest fears. Not only would valuable history be devalued, but people around whom no hint of evil-doing was ever suggested would get the Scarlet D, for doper.

Under the new proposal, every time somebody sets a new record that's inferior to the voided ones and somebody asks, "Didn't Athlete X run faster/jump higher/throw farther than that?" The knee-jerk reaction will be, "Yeah, but they were back in the drug era."

Just what our sport needs. Every record accompanied by a drug comment.

I'm also concerned somewhat by the proviso that WR setters must have had x number of tests in the preceding year. Why? Because of what it might do to brilliant breakout athletes. The two examples off the top of my head are ancient ones, but in looking at seasonal records, I'm pretty sure that when John Akii-Bua set a WR in winning the '72 Olympic 400H and Edwin Moses did the same at Montréal in '76, neither would have been in any testing pool long enough.

So what are our options? Unfortunately, the "new millennium" ship sailed long ago and any attempt to tie WRs to two different centuries this deep into the new one would be ridiculed.

Which leaves us with either a ham-handed approach like the EA one, which I think would run the risk of providing the hammer to pound in the last few nails in our sport's popularity coffin or sticking with the status quo.

As inconsistent as it may sound, I vote for leaving the records as they are, at least until somebody comes up with a better idea.

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