

2008 MIDDLE & LONG DISTANCE REPORT TRACK & FIELD COMMITTEE REPORT

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The above committee members attended a number of meetings to grapple with numerous issues that affected track and field in general and to bring forth the issues that concerned distance running specifically.

A major issue that numerous hours were committed to concerned how to construct a BC Track and Field Championship that is a viable, high-level competition. In this regards it was decided to stage a major meet that brought together the various age categories encompassing 15-year olds, juvenile, junior and senior divisions. It was the belief of the committee that by providing one meet at which four age divisions take part makes the competition financially viable for those that take part and for the host track club. It was thought that by doing this the younger athletes would have contact with older athletes a number of who are high-level competitors. In addition, it was hoped that this competition would offer the older athletes a more inspiring competitive situation as the meet would take place at an excellent facility, be a well organized competition featuring high-quality officiating, and offer good competition all of which would afford those athletes taking part the opportunity to obtain high level performances.

It's unfortunate that the Canadian Senior Championships particularly, and sometimes the Canadian Junior Championships, take place so early in the season (late June or early July) that scheduling the BC Championships becomes a particular problem. If the BC Championships are held before the Canadian meets, it would mean that we would have to hold our own provincial championships in early to mid June. To hold championships in June means that they would most likely conflict with meets that are traditionally held during this month. In addition, the Pacific series of meets usually takes place in June and holding those high level meets, meets that are traditionally held during this month, plus staging BC Championships would indeed be an overload. In addition, holding the 15-year old meet and juvenile championships in June would mean we would have to select a team for the Canadian Legion Championships almost two months before the national competitions take place. The same situation would apply to selecting teams for either the Western Canada or Canada Games competitions that traditionally are held in mid to late August.

The issue of awarding BC Athlete Assistance funds was another topic that necessitated considerable discussion and time. These funds are actually designed to be distributed to athletes that show the promise to become either federally carded or have been selectable as members of Canadian teams. In addition a small sum of money (\$500) has been awarded to BC federally carded athletes (except for the carded athletes that are prohibited from receiving BC funds because they are in the top tier of federal carding). The committee determined that athletes receiving BC Assistance funds must show that they are supportive of the BC program, particularly by participating in BC Championships. That some athletes determine that their time would be better spent competing in meets other than the BC Championships may make sense for them, but they, and their coaches must realize that they are giving up their claim to BC Assistance money. Where this decision may become crucial is when a federally carded athlete in one year is not carded in the following year—if that athlete has not competed in the BC Championships then he/she may well have forfeited a significant amount of money, possibly as much as \$3,000.

Now we will add a few lines to middle/distance running in particular. Once again Gary Reid was the leader of the distance discipline as in Monaco on 07/29/08 he once again broke his Canadian record this time establishing it at 1:43.68. In addition, Gary went on to place fourth in the Olympic Games and just missed the bronze medal.

Of the nine BC athletes that are federally carded, four of them (Gary Reed, Geoff Martinson, Rebecca Johnstone and Meredith MacGregor) are from the middle/distance discipline. At the Canadian Championships Reed (men's 800m) and Johnstone (women's 800m) won gold medals

2.6 & 2.7

while MacGregor (3000m SC) and Diane Cummins (800m) took silver medals. Records are difficult to come by in the distance runs as these events have been highly competitive for many years and the standards established are quite high.

However, BC seems to have lost ground in the distance events in relationship to athletes from particularly Ontario and other eastern provinces. Of course it takes high quality athletes to establish high quality performances and perhaps that is part of our problem. There is fierce competition between a number of high profile sports in the struggle to recruit excellent athletes, and at times I believe Athletics is losing ground to other sports. We have to make track and field attractive to young athletes of talent by providing excellent coaching, an interesting program and have the athletes realize the possibilities that exist in the sport, particularly in relationship to securing an athletic scholarship, travel and the possibility of representation at both the national and particularly at the international levels. In this regards we need more highly qualified and motivated coaches at the club level, and club, regional, provincial and national organization that can offer them the support that they need. To wear the Canadian uniform is still indeed a carrot that is attractive to young athletes and that cannot be ignored. We must paint a vision for young athletes and then do our utmost to help provide them with the various supports needed to bring this vision to fruition.

Retaining athletes at the post secondary school level and particularly at the post university level is indeed a challenge. Many athletes seem to feel there is little hope for advancement so they leave the sport of athletics to pursue other options. There are some excellent exposure opportunities for athletes 22 years or younger that include the Western Canada and Canada Games competitions. As coaches it behooves us to communicate to our athletes the advantages of taking part in these competitions and to do their best to win medals. It is our feeling that these competitions are very important in the development of high-level athletes and a stepping-stone to even better things.

We have enjoyed working with our fellow committee members and striving with them to raise the stature and profile of the sport of Athletics. We still are involved in a sport that is the hub of the Summer Olympics, Commonwealth and Pan American Games. Athletes that succeed in our sport are recognized internationally, probably more so then they are provincially or nationally. It is our view that BC Athletics is striving to advance our sport and that we have in our organization the coaches, administrators and athletes that can help us achieve at a higher level. If we all work together towards the common goal of advancing the sport of Athletics we will indeed advance as a sport.