

Going out on a limb

Commentary on the new Rules.

New Competition Rules (2016-2017) are in force, as of November 1, 2015. I am providing this commentary as a beginning point for discussion with other participants. Comments, questions, and opinions from other officials, coaches, athletes, gratefully received.

In most cases the literal meaning of the altered text is clear. However, in some cases the application of the Rule, and its interpretation for, especially, Age Class meets will “need a little work”.

For instance, the changes to Rule 230 (Race Walking) provide for use of a “Pit Lane” as an alternative to disqualification. This innovation “shall be used for any race where the applicable Regulations for the competition so provide and may be used for other races as determined by the relevant governing body or Organizing Committee”. Participants in World Cup Walks competitions, and other elite events may already have some experience with a “Pit lane”. Will we see the Rule used at Nationals this year? It’s possible. However, it seems likely that local Organizing Committees may hesitate to jump in.

Rule 115 (ITOs etc.)

The change in this Rule really jumped off the page for every certified Referee in the country. “The ITO shall be the Referee of each event to which he is assigned”. The initial reaction from most Referees that I have spoken to is negative. Most of them struggle up the long pathway to Referee certification with expectations of officiating at top class meets. This looks like it blocks them from “Worlds” and other IAAF or WMA sponsored events in the home country. On the other hand, a Canadian ITO was reassuring..... business as usual, ITOs will be Referees in name only..... you will still be able to do your job.

Rule 125 (Referees)

The change in this Rule allows for appointment of one or more “Video Referees”. The role of the Video Referee is not made very clear, other than that he works with the other Referees, and presumably has some expertise in interpreting video evidence, and in the setup and technical requirements.

Another change is the direction to Referees that they have the discretion to exclude (DQ) an athlete who has not previously received a warning (yellow card). This could apply in the case of an athlete receiving Assistance (Rule 144.2), or in the case of a serious instance of unsporting behavior. The Referee may move directly to disqualification.

Rule 127 (Umpires)

Umpires should still mark on the track any place where infringement has taken place in a relay exchange or in leaving the assigned lane, but are now permitted an alternative of recording “a similar notation on paper or by electronic means”. Another application for my smart phone? This is probably welcome news.

Rule 132 (Competition Secretary, etc.)

The new sections of this Rule give detailed instructions for preparation of results using a long list of standard abbreviations. DNS and DNF are pretty familiar to

most officials. However there are some new ones, such as “r” for “retired from competition”, and “NM” for “No valid trial recorded”. The instructions are intended primarily for Competition Secretaries, but officials in the field should be prepared to mark up their paperwork correctly, to make life easier for all concerned. Officials should also ensure (see new Rule 132.2) that in “mixed” events, the implement weight or hurdle height for each athlete is clearly marked on the results sheet. Common sense..... But now IT’S A RULE.

Rule 142.3 (Simultaneous Entries).

My interpretation of the new *Note*:

This change only affects athletes entered in Horizontal Jumps or Throws.

An athlete entered in simultaneous events may take his trial in a different order in any round up to and including round 5. In Round 6, he must take his trial in the order announced at the end of Round 3.

Rule 143.4 (Dimensions of Spikes).

This rewrite carves into stone a standard practice at meets. Whereas the Rule Book permits spike lengths up to 9mm (and 12mm for High Jump and Javelin), the track manufacturer or stadium operator has the right to impose a lesser maximum; which they have almost always done any way. 9mm for High Jump/Javelin and 6mm for everything else is a common meet rule.

Rule 144.1 (b) (Assistance to Athletes; Medical examination)

This is a very welcome new rule. Any meet can (and in my view SHOULD), designate a Medical Delegate, who now has the power to direct an athlete to retire from an event. This has been the practice at WMA Championships for a long time.

Rule 144.3 (e) (Assistance to Athletes.)

Officials are now included specifically in the “prohibited assistance” list. An athlete may be disqualified for receiving assistance from an official. Officials (and technical aides) are reminded more forcefully than ever before..... Leave the coaching to the coaches. Read this one carefully.

Rule 147 (Mixed Competitions)

This change tightens up the regulations for permitting Men and Women to compete together in Stadium events. Only to be permitted:

- When there are insufficient athletes of one or both sexes to justify conduct of separate races.
- **Not** to be used so as to allow pacing in a track event.

Rule 166.6 (Single Rounds)

This new para sets out rules and procedures for conducting “a series of races in an event rather than rounds and finals”. This appears (to me) to be the first recognition of the common practice we have of using “timed finals”.

Rule 168.6 (Hurdle Races)

The rewrite of this paragraph answers (at last) the recent puzzle caused by an athlete who jumped a hurdle in the lane next door. In most respects this should

be treated as a simple case of lane infringement. Only subject to disqualification if:

- it interferes with the athlete next door OR
- infringes on an inside lane on the turn.

There is also a new note that an athlete who directly or indirectly knocks down or significantly displaces a hurdle in another lane shall be disqualified.

Rule 180.3 (Markers)

There are several highly interesting changes here.

Athletes are now specifically warned about the annoying habit of tearing the markers they are given in Field events, and turning them into TWO MARKERS. Organizing Committees are advised to place distance markers beside the Pole Vault runway (for the benefit of coaches). This has been a long time coming. Until the time when these are permanently painted, PV officials should (in my view) cooperate with other participants to provide temporary markers. Standing markers and cones should probably not be allowed for safety reasons.

Rule 180.17 (Substitute Trials in Field Events)

Referees have long had the power to award an athlete a substitute trial when he has been hampered during his attempt. This rule is now expanded to allow a substitute trial in situations where the trial cannot be correctly recorded. Like when an over-enthusiastic raker wipes out the marks before you have recorded (☺).

Curiously, the Rule also now states that no change in order will be permitted. In other words we can't take pity on the athlete and move him to the bottom of the round

Rule 182.2 (c) (High Jump; Competition)

An athlete shall fail if (new paragraph c):

He touches the crossbar or the vertical section of the uprights when running up without jumping.

Presumably he will still be permitted to approach the bar prior to starting his run-up, and touch the standards or the bar. Some (usually young) athletes do this in order to check their run-up.

Rule 183.1 (note). (Pole Vault; Competition)

This little "refinement" requires officials to provide a visible extension of the zero line ON THE SURFACE OF THE LANDING AREA. And, in fact some pit covers have them woven in. This is a really nice idea, and makes it much easier to judge faults. The only problem is that the pit covers shift around, and usually are not even close to lining up with the zero line. Suggestions?

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