



Safeguarding the future of athletics

by Arthur Gold,

President of the European Athletics Association

Changing conditions of eligibility for athletics competitions has been the object of considerable debate within the Olympic movement in recent years. In a report issued earlier this year by the British Amateur Athletics Association (AAA), under the name of its chairman Mr. Bill Evans, a series of sweeping reforms was proposed, among them the sanction of cash prizes and allowances for advertising fees. Mr. Arthur Gold, President of the European Athletics Association tells us below, in an article sent to us by Lord Exeter, doyen of the IOC, why he feels that such proposals would be to the detriment of the sport.

May I begin with some general observations on the "amateur position" in our sport before considering some of the possible effects of implementing the "Evans Report" in its entirety.

Equally, because this paper may be widely circulated I shall be circumspect and, even where it would strengthen an argument, avoid any references which might involve or embarrass any of our colleagues.

My concern is not to re-introduce the Victorian concept of the gentleman amateur but the pragmatic practicalities and hard economics of the situation. We must take a hard look a long way into the future and think the problem right through to a possibly bitter end.

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Stars in athletics do not descend from the heavens. They evolve from extensive and expensive competition and coaching structures. Although some part of the finance required for these structures is generated within the sport in the form of subscriptions and similar methods of raising funds much of the money has come from Government grants and the shortfall is largely met from the income made from major competitions and matches which

are liberally sponsored. Were that money to be diverted from the Governing Bodies to the pockets of individual competitors and their agents the existing competition and coaching infrastructure could collapse.

The proposals for "open athletics" or even "controlled prize money" seem to be based on the assumption that considerable sums of appearance money are paid to a handful of stars as an inducement to appear in certain spectacular meetings and that, rather than take sanctions against the offending athletes and promoters, the rule books should be rewritten to legitimize the illicit actions of a minute proportion of our sport-in effect a Promoters' Charter. Proposals from the BAAB accepted at the IAAF Congress at Montreal in 1976 made it possible for amateur athletes, under IAAF rules, to receive very considerable financial aid for preparation, equipment, coaching, travelling and acclimatisation in 'warm climates. As a result, in the period leading up to the 1980 Olympic Games, British athletes received-via the BAAB—a total of £133,956 from the Sports Aid Foundation for these purposes, in addition to many thousands of pounds of direct aid—again via the BAAB—from other sources.

Under its terms of reference, incidentally, the Sports Aid Foundation can only grant-aid bona fide amateur athletes who are eligible to compete in the Olympic Games and similar competitions.

Our sport is not for a score or so stars, it is for the thousands who compete in it at Club level and for the millions who compete in it at school level.

Professional athletics, unlike certain other sports, has always failed to make the grade in the past because, instead of requiring just a few competitors and three or four officials, any worthwhile sort of meeting has a hundred plus entrants and a hundred plus officials. Are they all to be paid? And if they are how big a share will be available for each of them?

Let us look at another sport which is professional-Association Football. It has reached the stage in which almost every League Club in the country, with possibly five or six exceptions, is running at a loss and thus many of the men who gain control of the Clubs, and therefore control of the sport, are those who can underwrite a Club's overdraft. As a result the Directors of Football Clubs are seldom the men who were active in the game in their youth but those who have acquired sufficient wealth to be able to gain control of a sport in which they themselves had played no seriously active part. Do we want this to happen to Track & Field Athletics?

The Football Association makes no distinction between amateur and professional footballers: as a result Britain is no longer able to enter a football team for the Olympic Games. In other sports where certain competitors can receive prize money those competitors are not eligible to compete in many major tournaments. In badminton, for example, players who compete for prize money are not eligible for the Commonwealth Games.

If some competitors wish to be paid then it is quite reasonable and proper to have a separate category for professional athletes, as in other sports. The Governing Body must then decide whether it wants to set up separate governing bodies for the 2 groups or to have one governing body controlling both amateur and professional competition.

At this point I must refer to the apparent assumption in the "Evans Report" that the IAAF is likely to pass enabling legislation which would allow English and Welsh male athletes to compete internationally. I say English and Welsh male athletes because it is by no means certain that Scotland and the Womens AAA would follow the AAA into a possible wilderness of open domestic athletics.

Although the IAAF have set up a small working party to look at their amateur rules it is by no means certain that they will recommend cash prizes as such and if they were to do so it is even less certain that such proposals would obtain the requisite two-thirds majority at a World Congress since, apart from any other considerations, currency restrictions alone would prevent some major Athletic Federations from being able to offer cash prizes at their long-established international invitation meetings.

Thus, if the AAA were to legitimize cash prizes ahead of the IAAF then AAA athletes would become ineligible for international competition under IAAF rules.

The corollary is that, as far as cash rewards are concerned, the AAA should not only wait on the suggestions of the IAAF working party but on the decision of the full Congress of the IAAF. If that Congress authorises cash prizes the AAA will be free to adopt similar constitutional changes but precipitate action by the AAA could exclude English and Welsh male athletes from the international arena.

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In specifically considering the "Evans Report" it will be noted that the number of letters sent to the Sub-Committee was significantly small and this, perhaps, reflects the syndrome that the satisfied silent majority usually remains silent until it votes.

A. G.

