

## ***QUALIFICATION FOR OLYMPIC GAMES OF THE 21ST CENTURY***

by Bill Mallon

The Barcelona Olympics were wonderful but Dan O'Brien should have been there. His absence was a loss for sports fans, television spectators, for the organizing committee, and for the IOC. It was a loss that is easily preventable. But preventing such problems goes much deeper into an analysis of the goals of the IOC for the Olympic Games and probably entails a complete re-structuring of how athletes are chosen to compete at the Olympic Games.

Multiple inconsistencies abound in the IOC's approach to athletes being chosen for the Olympics. The IOC has insisted for years that the Games are to be contests between individuals, not nations. Yet in 1976, in the face of the African boycott, James Gilkes of Guyana attempted to compete as an individual, yet was denied. In 1992, the IOC showed that its compassion to individual athletes by allowing athletes from war-torn Yugoslavia to compete as individuals in the face of a United Nations edict.

Rule 49.3 of the Olympic Charter states that "The NOCs shall send to the Olympic Games only those competitors adequately prepared for high level international competition." Yet many nations flaunt this rule flagrantly. While I have no problems with all nations being allowed at least token representation, how can the IOC allow Lebanon 12 athletes at Barcelona, none competitive, while keeping out a Dan O'Brien or the 4th best Russian hammer thrower, who is in the top ten in the world in his event?

Several questions must be addressed: 1) Does the IOC want the best and only the best athletes in the world competing in the Olympic Games? 2) Which of the two Olympic Mottos is more important in the 1990's to the IOC - "Citius, Altius, Fortius" or de Coubertin's message that the important thing at the Olympics is not winning but taking part? 3) Does the IOC want to continue to allow all nations to compete, virtually in any event they desire, even if their athletes are not of international calibre? and 4) In the face of Olympic gigantism! how can the IOC accept more than token representation from nations which are not competitive at the Olympics?

I will attempt to discuss each question in order. First, it is obvious that the IOC wants the best athletes in the world. Whether you like amateurism or not, Juan Antonio Samaranch has brought the Olympics into the 20th century by allowing the best athletes in the world to compete in many sports. "The Dream Team" in basketball at Barcelona is the best example. In football (soccer), professionals may now compete, although an age limit does exist. Tennis professionals are now allowed almost unrestricted entry to the Olympics. In 1996, cycling professionals such as Miguel Indurain, Gianni Bugno, and Greg LeMond may appear at Atlanta. Baseball, figure skating, ice hockey, and boxing are other sports which are considering unrestricted entries. Football (soccer) may also rescind the age limit on its professional entries.

In the 1990s it costs a lot of money to run the Olympic Games and the IOC. That money now comes from international corporations and those corporations are not going to put out money to watch American college basketball players after they have had "The Dream Team." When Reebok wants Dan O'Brien and gets Homelo Vi of Tonga, the flow of money can not be long in continuing. The IOC realizes this and realizes that by bringing in the best athletes, more money can be realized to carry out its affairs.

But much more importantly, the Olympic Games, among their other goals, are supposed to be the greatest athletic competition on the planet. Restricting the entries to prevent the best athletes from competing makes no sense. It makes no sense unless the IOC

decides that its goals do not include conducting the greatest sporting event in the world. The IOC must establish its exact goals.

Now which of the two IOC mottos is more important - "Citius, Altius, Fortius" or "The important thing at the Olympics is not winning but taking part?" The first stands for swifter, higher, and stronger, and seems much more consistent with allowing only the best athletes to compete, neglecting smaller countries' entries unless they are competitive on an international scale. The second motto seems more supportive of allowing all nations and all athletes to compete, with less emphasis given to their performances.

John Lucas, in his new book *Future of the Olympic Games* (to be reviewed in the next issue), argues that the second motto is by far the more important and that he would prefer that Citius, Altius, Fortius be forgotten. (As an ISOH member, he has graciously not criticized the name of this journal.) Lucas argues that this promotes the Olympian goal of promoting international competition, understanding, and goodwill. It is very difficult to argue with such lofty ideals and I do not.

However, I think the two mottos tend to be somewhat mutually exclusive at the Olympics. Letting every nation free admittance must dilute the quality of the competition, or it must contribute to gigantism and make the Games so big as to be unwieldy. Again, the IOC must decide what its goals for the Olympics are. I don't think the decision is difficult, but it seems to me that the IOC has never sat down and elucidated its goals for what it wants the Olympics to become in the next century. The Olympic Congresses are supposed to help with this and perhaps Samaranch can push for this to be done at the the 100th Anniversary Olympic Congress in Paris in 1994.

Does the IOC want all nations to compete? Certainly, I would not propose eliminating smaller, less competitive nations from the Olympic Games, and the IOC obviously does not want to do this. Whatever else I say in this article, I want it emphasized that I do feel the Olympic's greatest good comes from its promotion of international understanding and cooperation among nations.

The IOC already eliminates weak nations in many sports, notably the team sports. It is not practical for 50 nations to attempt to complete a football or basketball tournament in 16 days, so multiple qualifying tournaments are held around the world to limit the fields to a manageable number. The same could be done in multiple other sports. The IOC is already beginning this in individual sports, where it has legislated against athletes such as Eddie "The Eagle" Edwards, the British pseudo-ski jumper who became such a media sensation at the 1988 Olympic Winter Games.

Olympic gigantism is a big problem which also relates to the above questions. If all nations can compete, and their entries are relatively unlimited, the Games will only continue to grow. The best way for new sports to gain international acceptance is for them to be admitted to the Olympic program, leading to a proliferation of new Olympic sports. Golf and triathlon are currently pushing on the Olympic door. If this continues, the result will only be more sports. The size of the Games can only be limited in a few ways - limit the number of sports, limit the number of nations, limit the number of entries in each sport, limit the number of entries from non-competitive nations. I would propose that the last two are by far the best methods of limiting the size of the Olympic Games.

Now, having said all the above, I will propose a series of new and slightly different methods of allowing athletes entry into the Olympic Games. To do so, I will establish my own "ground rules" which should guide my methods. This, to me, is where the IOC has failed to date. By setting up guidelines for what it wishes to achieve, the IOC can move into the 21st Century. I am less concerned that the IOC's ideals differ from mine than I am that they have not established any guidelines at all. You cannot hit a target you cannot aim at. The great American football coach, Vince Lombardi, was once asked the difference between average and great football coaches. He stated, "The difference is knowing what you want,

knowing what the end is supposed to look like. If a coach doesn't know what the end is supposed to look like, he won't know it when he sees it."

The rules I would have for allowing entry into the Olympics would be as follows:

- 1) All the best athletes in the world should be allowed to compete in their events, without having to qualify, if they have demonstrated obvious ability by certain past performances.
- 2) There should be no limit to the number of entries allowed from any country in any event, provided all the athletes have met certain qualification standards.
- 3) Each International Federation (IF) should set up guidelines in each event in each sport to allow the qualification of only a certain number of athletes in each event. The number of competing athletes allowed (save for the extras from category 2) should be stringently set to avoid over-populating the Olympics. In most cases, this will require regional qualifying tournaments to gain entry into the Olympics, Qualifying would then be on a qualifying basis, rather than a national basis, with regional Games, such as the Pan-American Games, possibly used for this purpose. Further, to allow nations the possibility of competing in the Olympics, all IOC members are encouraged to compete in these regional Games, both to stimulate sport in their countries, and to attempt to qualify more than the minimum number of athletes.
- 4) All nations who are members of the IOC should be allowed to send athletes to the Olympic Games, even if none of their athletes are of international calibre and meet qualifying standards. In that case, however, each nation is limited to either one individual male and female entrant or one team male and female entry.

I will now attempt to use these guidelines and set up the qualification method for one sport which has no such system to date, track & field athletics. Before doing so, I will discuss each in detail.

*1) All the best athletes in the world should be allowed to compete in their events, without having to qualify, if they have demonstrated obvious ability.* In my own background, I was a professional golfer on the PGA Tour before going to medical school. This was how the major golf tournaments in the world qualified their entrants and it makes a lot of sense. For example, in the U.S. Open, the U.S. Open champions of the past 10 years do not have to qualify. Neither do the top players in the world, such as Nick Faldo, or Greg Norman. The United States Golf Association realizes that they have already qualified, based on their performance throughout the year and their career in other tournaments.

There are multiple ways to qualify for the U.S. Open without going through a qualifying tournament. The top finishers from the previous year's U.S. Open are automatically qualified. The top money winners on the U.S. PGA Tour and other world-wide tours are exempted from qualifying. This method ensures that **all** the greatest players in the world may compete.

At the Olympics, a similar method could be used to ensure the qualification of all the top athletes. For instance, Dan O'Brien would have qualified easily had one method been to allow in all the world champions from 1991. A more specific set of guidelines will be discussed below.

*2) There should be no limit to the number of entries allowed from any country in any event, provided all the athletes have met certain qualification standards.* Many will criticize this as being an American bias, because in so many sports, Americans have the deepest fields.

But this guideline directly correlates with #1, as it ensures that all the greatest athletes in each event in each sport are allowed to compete.

If the goal of the Olympics is to have the greatest sporting event in the world, it is sinful that only three American sprinters are allowed in the 100 metre dash, or that only three Soviet hammer throwers were allowed to compete from the former Soviet Union. In both of those events, the annual top ten often included seven or eight athletes from those countries. So, in a competition supposed to be the world's best, you eliminate half of the world's top ten?! And in swimming, by allowing only two swimmers from each country, many of the top swimmers are not present at the Olympics while many second-rate swimmers are.

Going hand-in-hand with this, however, I do not think the United States should be allowed to enter an athlete in every event, simply because we are a rich nation and can afford to do so. That simply promotes gigantism and will be dealt with in #3.

*3) Each International Federation (IF) should set up guidelines in each event in each sport to allow the qualification of athletes of only a certain number of athletes in each event. The number of competing athletes allowed (save for the extras from category 4) should be stringently set to avoid over-populating the Olympics. In most cases, this will require regional qualifying tournaments to gain entry into the Olympics. Qualifying would then be on a regional basis, rather than a national basis, with regional Games, such as the Pan-American Games, possibly used for this purpose. Further, to allow nations the possibility of competing in the Olympics, all IOC members are encouraged to compete in the regionals, both to stimulate sport in their countries, and to attempt to qualify more than the minimum number of athletes.*

In 1992 at Barcelona, there were 80 entrants from 67 nations in the 100 metre dash, who contested four rounds of the sprint. Of this number, fully 38 sprinters (about ½) did not better 10.80 seconds in the first round. While still quite fast, that is hardly of international calibre. A better method would be for the IF to state that, for instance, we will have only three main rounds of the sprint. This would allow six heats in the first round or 48 competitors. That would be the maximum number of competitors allowed in the 100 metres.

This would accomplish several things: 1) there would be less competitors eliminating Olympic overpopulation, 2) most of them would be internationally competitive, 3) most of the early rounds would then be truly competitive, but 4) there would be less rounds for the athletes to contest, making for higher calibre competition in each round.

The problem is how to limit the number of competitors to 48. The way to do that is the same way that basketball and football (soccer) do it for the Olympic Games. **Athletes qualify in all sports where fields are limited.** This would be done by regional contests, not by national qualifying.

This would serve several purposes. First, a certain number of places would be reserved for pre-qualified athletes who have proved themselves worthy as mentioned in #1 above. Second, all the others would prove themselves in competition. Third, all nations could compete at the regional contests with "relatively" unlimited numbers. This would promote international competition among the smaller countries and give them the incentive to qualify their athletes for the Olympics. (Surely there will have to be some limit on the entrants at the regional games or even these events may grow too large. The USGA has solved this problem by a two-tier qualifying scheme for the U.S. Open. There is both a local and a regional qualifier. Golfers can be totally exempted or exempted through the local qualifier into the regionals. A similar scheme could be enacted in some Olympic sports.) And finally, fourth, such regional qualifying could possibly help to promote the regional competitions, such as the Pan-American Games, which in recent years, have had diluted fields as many top athletes have skipped them. (This will entail changing the dates of many of the regional Games to the same year as the Olympics.) In sports which are measurable, such as swimming and track & field athletics, the entries in the regional Games should still have to meet certain minimal qualification standards to compete there.

It should be noted, however, that to ensure all the best athletes have a chance to compete at the Olympics, that the number of athletes at the qualifying, or regional, Games should not be limited by nation, provided all their athletes have met qualifying standards. See guideline #2 above.

4) *All nations who are members of the IOC should be allowed to send athletes to the Olympic Games, even if none of their athletes are of international calibre and meet qualifying standards. In that case, however, each nation is limited to either one individual male and female entrant or one team male and female entry.* This rule will ensure that all nations and members of the IOC may be represented at the Olympic Games. However, to avoid Olympic gigantism and over-population, it severely restricts the number of athletes allowed to nations who have no athletes of truly international calibre. As entering a team would allow more competitors, it is possible that nations will attempt to circumvent” this rule by doing that. This should be prevented, possibly by allowing the IFS to screen each nation’s entries and accepting only those from the “highest calibre athletes.” Thus, if a nation has one fairly good competitor in a sport, such as archery, they cannot enter a team solely for the purpose of increasing their participation, and thereby including their top individual on that team.

I will now give a proposed scheme, based on the above, for track & field athletics, specifically in the 100 metres. This will follow all of the above rules. Some analysis of the current situation is in order.

In 1992 at Barcelona, 1,733 athletes competed in track & field athletics - 1,104 men and 629 women. They were distributed by events as follows:

*1992 Athletics at Barcelona*

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Nations</b>	<b>Rounds</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Nations</b>	<b>Rounds</b>
100 metres	54	41	4	80	67	4
200 metres	50	39	4	80	66	4
400 metres	41	25	4	68	53	4
800 metres	36	28	3	59	49	3
1,500 metres	43	31	3	50	39	3
3,000 metres	33	21	2	--	--	--
5,000 metres	--	--	--	56	42	2
10,000 metres	48	28	2	56	38	2
100/110hurdles	37	22	4	39	27	4
400 hurdles	27	18	3	47	35	3
3,000 steeple	--	--	--	32	23	3
4 x 100 relay	57	14	3	103	25	3
4 x 400 relay	62	14	3	102	24	3
Marathon	47	31	1	110	72	1
High jump	41	27	2	43	31	2
Pole vault	--	--	--	35	26	2
Long jump	35	23	2	50	37	2
Triple jump	--	--	--	47	32	2
Shot put	18	11	2	26	19	2
Discus throw	28	16	2	32	24	2
Hammer throw	--	--	--	27	19	2
Javelin throw	25	17	2	32	21	2
Decathlon	--	--	--	36	24	1
Heptathlon	32	22	1	--	--	--
10 km. walk	44	21	1	--	--	--
20 km. walk	--	--	--	42	23	1
50 km. walk	--	--	--	42	21	1

Note: 292 athletes (176 Men, 116 Women) competed in more than one event, Thus a total of 1,733 athletes - 1,104 men and 629 women.

This is a tremendous number of athletes. Track & field athletics is the most populous sport at the Olympics. By setting up strict qualifying standards and by conducting regional meets, the number of the competing athletes can certainly be diminished while markedly upgrading the quality of the competition.

I have conducted a study of the best finishes by each nation in the Olympics for the book done by Erich Kamper, *The Golden Book of the Olympics*. One thing that was obvious in that study was that smaller nations invariably enter their athletes in only a few sports. Most of these countries are poor, so fencing, equestrian and yachting are not possible. Most of these competitors, usually far from international calibre, are in the sports of track & field athletics, boxing, judo, and occasionally shooting. Thus, track & field athletics has a problem with a proliferation of lesser quality Olympic competitors which it should recognize and deal with in advance. Smaller nations usually choose either the sprints or the marathon for the athletes to compete in at the Olympics. This is probably not a problem in the marathon, with one, large round of competition. But in the 100 metres it may "over-populate" the event.

I would propose that the 100 metres consist of three main rounds of competition - a final, a semi-final, and an opening round. The semi-final would consist of two heats of eight runners each, or 16 competitors. The opening round would consist of six heats, with the top two advancing to the semi-finals from each heat. The next four fastest runners would also qualify for the semi-finals. This would allow 48 runners to compete.

The 48 would be chosen as follows: a certain number would be exempt based on rules set up by the IAAF - a proposed set follows; the remaining would qualify from regional contests.

The following athletes would be exempt into the 1996 Olympics and not have to qualify:

- 1) The 1992 Olympic medalists (Linford Christie, Frank Fredericks, Dennis Mitchell)
- 2) Olympic champions within the past 12 years (1984-92) (Carl Lewis)
- 3) The 1995 World Championship medalists (to be determined)
- 4) The 1993 World Champion (to be determined)
- 5) The World Record Holder (Carl Lewis)

Note that one athlete may be exempt in several ways, as in the case of Carl Lewis. These exemptions will likely exempt about 6-8 athletes for the 100 metres, leaving 40 positions open for the first round. The question may arise: what if these athletes are injured or not of championship calibre at the time of the 1996 Olympics? The answer is: they have earned the exemption, if they choose to compete, they may do so. If they choose not to compete, their position is filled from the regional events.

What about in the long jump? Should Bob Beamon have been allowed to compete in the 1988 Olympics, had these guidelines been in effect? Certainly. He was still the world record holder and if he wanted to compete, he had earned the right to do so. In addition, from a promotional point of view, he would have been welcomed by the IOC and the other athletes for the effect his presence would have brought to the long jump. It is likely in such a situation that the athlete would have too much pride to embarrass him/herself when they were well past their prime.

Now because of the problem of smaller nations entering many of their athletes in the 100 metres, I would propose only qualifying and exempting 40 runners for the 100 metres, thus leaving about 32-34 spots open in regional qualifying. I estimate that about 20 athletes will be entered in the 100 metres by smaller nations as their lone wild card entry. These

runners would then compete in three qualifying heats, with eight runners gaining entrance into the first round, thereby filling out the first round. Runners who are exempted or have qualified via a regional games would then be given a bye from the qualifying round.

Qualifying could be conducted as follows: there would be seven regional qualifying events, with perhaps the top 5 qualifying from two Americas and two European qualifying events, and possibly 4 each from an Asian, African, and Oceanic qualifying event. This would give 32 qualifiers - certainly the numbers can be adjusted as needed.

Thus the 100 metre breakdown would be as follows:

Exempt Athletes	6-8
Qualified Athletes	32-34
Wild-Card Entries	<i>ca</i> 20
<u>Total</u>	60

Qualifying Round	Three heats of 6-7 non-qualified runners, eight advance to round one
First Round	Six heats of 8 runners, top two + four fastest advance
Semi-Finals	Two heats of 8 runners, top four advance to finals
Finals	One heat of 8 runners

This method has eliminated about 20 competitors and, for the top athletes, eliminated one round of competition. At Barcelona there were 17 heats of competition in the 100 metres; using this system, there would be only 12 heats at Atlanta - a decrease of 30% in the amount of competition needed in an already crowded Olympic program.

After the qualifying round, the competition should be of a very high calibre, as all the athletes have proven themselves to be world-class by competing in regional qualifying events, In addition, the 20 wild-card entrants will have more chance to experience some Olympic success as they will compete initially only against similar sprinters. A qualifying round may not be necessary in all running events, mainly the sprints.

Using the above, and using similar exemption and qualifying schemes, I would estimate that approximately the following number of athletes would compete at Atlanta.

*1996 Athletics at Atlanta [proposed]*

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Nations</b>	<b>Rounds</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Nations</b>	<b>Rounds</b>
100 metres	40	25	3(4)	60	40	3(4)
200 metres	40	25	3(4)	60	40	3(4)
400 metres	35	25	3(4)	50	35	3(4)
800 metres	30	20	2(3)	40	25	2(3)
1,500 metres	30	20	2(3)	30	20	2(3)
3,000 metres	25	15	2	--	--	--
5,000 metres	--	--	--	30	20	2
10,000 metres	30	20	2	30	20	2
100/110 hurdles	30	20	4	30	20	3(4)
400 hurdles	25	15	3	30	20	2(3)
3,000 steeple	--	--	--	30	20	2(3)
4 x 100 relay	50	12	3	75	16	2
4 x 400 relay	50	12	3	70	16	2
Marathon	50	30	1	90	60	1
High jump	30	20	2	30	20	2
Pole vault	--	--	--	30	20	2
Long jump	35	20	2	35	20	2
Triple jump	--	--	--	35	20	2
Shot put	15	10	2	20	15	2
Discus throw	20	15	2	20	15	2
Hammer throw	--	--	--	20	15	2
Javelin throw	20	15	2	20	15	2
Decathlon	--	--	--	20	15	1
Heptathlon	20	15	1	--	--	--
10 km. walk	40	20	1	--	--	--
20 km. walk	--	--	--	40	20	1
50 km. walk	--	--	--	40	20	1

By estimating about 250 multi-event athletes (100 Women, 150 Men), this would give final competitors of about 1,300 athletes (785 Men, 515 Women). Comparing Barcelona to the estimates for Atlanta gives as follows:

	<b>Barcelona</b>	<b>Atlanta</b>	<b>% Decrease</b>
Total	1,733	1,300	25%
Men	1,104	785	29%
Women	629	515	18%

This system thus enables all the world's top sprinters to compete in the 100 metres, exempting those obviously worthy to be there, and still decreases the number of competitors by 25% and the amount of competitive heats by 30%.

Now I do not propose that this system is perfect. It is based on my own biases, naturally. But the system is consistent with the guidelines I set out above. All I ask of the IOC is that they establish some guidelines for what they wish the Olympics to become. If they wish to allow in all athletes from all nations, with no regard to whether or not the best athletes compete, that is their prerogative, though I would disagree with it. Such a system would possibly bring together only one athlete from each nation per event and ensure all nations were represented.

Whatever system is chosen, the IOC needs to sit down and do as Vince Lombardi has proposed. They need to envision the final result, and decide how they are going to achieve that result. I think the above system brings together the world's best athletes, allows all nations to compete, but actually combats Olympic over-population. I would welcome hearing from the members of ISOH and/or the International Olympic Committee with their critiques, criticisms, and, hopefully, support, of these ideas.