

THROWERS CIRCLE

By Jerry Bookin-Weiner

Afterthoughts

This summer I've heard a lot of grumbling among members of the throwing community. Some have half jokingly and half seriously proposed that the throwers separate from USAIF Masters and form our own organization. "If we are an afterthought," the argument goes, "maybe we'd be better off on our own."

What lies behind this is the feeling, pervasive amongst throwers, that we are not given our due in the masters community. Of course there are plenty of arguments to the contrary, starting with the fact that last year our own Nemi Lewis was recognized as USATF Masters Athlete of the Year. But there is plenty of evidence that we are an afterthought.

What is that evidence?

Frequently, and more frequently of late, the throwing events at our national outdoor championships are held outside the stadium. The last time any throwing events were inside the track was in Spokane in 2008. The last time we were adjacent to the track was in 2009 in Oshkosh.

In Sacramento this year and Berea last year, the throwers might as well have been in a different city from the rest of the event. Last year I only saw the track because I had a college teammate running and I watched the clock carefully so that I could go see him run. This year he's injured, so at the Worlds in July the one and only time I saw the track was when I went to pick up my packet. Of course we saw plenty of runners on the practice track, but not one running or jumping event through the entire meet. In fact we couldn't even hear the announcements in the stadium, which was more than a quarter of a

mile from the main throwing areas. At least the throwing venues were all close together and they provided pretty good facilities for spectators for all except the hammer.

The same was true in Berea, only it was worse because the venues were spread all over the place so you couldn't move easily from viewing one to viewing another. In Berea the two shot circles were outside the stadium on the east side, the discus and javelin on a separate field on the west side, and the hammer and weight throws completely off site at the Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds about a mile away with sporadic shuttle service.

After the nationals in Sacramento last year, throwers virtually unanimously conveyed the message that the circles, which appeared to be brand new last year, were too slick and should be treated to be made a bit rougher. Nothing was done and this year it was throwers from around the world complaining about the same conditions we had noted last year. I made the US throwers think no one was listening.

My views on the announcers at meets, who routinely act as if the throwers aren't there, are well known. This year in Sacramento and Berea I had no idea if we were mentioned in the stadium because I was never close enough to hear what they were saying. At least there was an announcer at the throwing venue in Sacramento and he did a good job at covering one event at a time.

The worst, however, was the hammer/weight venue in Berea. If anyone did a site inspection (which is supposed to be done by the Games Committee), no one in that team was thinking about safety or the legality of the landing area. For those who



Finland's Esa Kiuru, M60, fires the winning throw of 57.52 meters (188' 8 1/2"). The USA took second and third with Joseph Greenberg taking the silver medal throwing 53.83 (176' 7") and Buzz Gagne just two inches back, 53.82, for the bronze. Photo by Judi Carroll

weren't there, the cage was a chain link fence cage with gaping holes. The insert used to convert a discus circle into a hammer/weight circle didn't fit properly so one segment was simply not inserted, and the field sloped down from the circle, particularly on the left side, out to at least 50m.

As a witness to a fellow thrower being hit in the head by a hammer that ricocheted off a chain link cage, I am acutely aware of the dangers of chain link fence cages and strongly support their replacement wherever they are found. The Rules of Competition specify that a hammer/weight cage be made of "netting" to ensure the safety of competitors and spectators alike. The cage in Berea was not in compliance with this rule.

The rules also specify the maximum slope in a field—a slope that is not apparent to the naked eye. It reads:

Inclination of the Sector

The area within the sector on which the implement lands shall be on approximately the same plane as that of the circle or runway with a maximum allowance of 1:1000 in the throwing direction.

Anyone who looked at the hammer/weight sector in Berea knew it was not in compliance. It should never

have been approved by the Games Committee. As a result, Carol Young (W70, Hammer and Weight), Jennifer Stephens (W35, Weight) and Ruth Welding (W55, Weight) had performances that exceeded existing American records that should not be ratified.

When Berea was selected, we were assured that it was a great facility that had hosted the NCAA Division III Championships. As we have learned, there are big differences between a collegiate championship and a masters championship. A landing sector that is in compliance for throws beginning at 55m but not for shorter throws is not a great facility for a masters championship. It is a grossly inadequate facility. Having venues scattered all over town may be fine for a collegiate championship, where athletes specialize and rarely, if ever, qualify in running and field events, but it is a detriment to the competitors in a masters championships where we have competitors in the throwing events who are also jumpers, sprinters, and even middle distance runners. It can be disruptive to a competition and is not fair to the athletes in question.

Next year in Tisler, Illinois, the national outdoor championships will be held at a facility with none of the throwing events in the stadium. It's a

Continued on page 50

THROWERS

CIRCLE

Continued from page 39

great facility and we had our Throws Championships there last year, but unlike the jumpers, we won't know that anything else is going on.

In 2013 the nationals are headed to Olathe, Kansas. Reportedly they do not yet have a facility for the hammer and weight throws. After the fiasco in Berea (and for the hammer and

weight throwers there is no other way to label it), the powers that be need to make sure that the facility is up to true national championship standards. They also need to make sure the proposed location of the new cage is in close enough proximity that athletes don't require special transportation arrangements to get there. ♣