

On the development of world athletics

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22:1; 7-11, 2007

By Helmut Digel

Whoever attempts to describe and evaluate the current situation, development and future prospects of athletics would do well to make the effort to view the phenomenon of the sport in a very differentiated manner. Generalising judgements are frequently not substantiated by empirical facts and are therefore unsatisfactory for serious discussion. Sometimes, they may be characterised as polemic or even defamatory.

Those who want to get a precise picture of the situation must also take into consideration that the development of athletics is primarily a local phenomenon and recognise that in the various societies and nations in which the sport exists there are extremely different processes at work. In this respect, we can observe substantial differences not only between but also within the various countries. In some cities of a country athletics may be flourishing, while in other towns of the same country it is in decline. Some athletics clubs are enjoying enormous growth rates, while others are losing large numbers of members. As in any city, region or country, there may also be considerable differences at continental level. In some continents the sport is facing difficulties, while in others the sport can boast undiminished growth for years.

An assessment of the work of the International Association of Athletics Federations over the last four years raises the questions of what successes and failures the organisation has experienced and what its leadership body, the IAAF Council, and its President Lamine Diack, have accomplished or failed to achieve in their mandates. Such an assessment can only be made from a whole-world perspective. A global analysis is essential as the IAAF has 212 Member Federations and owes the same

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degree of loyalty to each of them, even though recently world athletics has far too often been viewed from a European angle or from the perspective of the United States.

With the above said, I can state that the present situation of world athletics is very positive. We certainly lack empirical facts and consequently cannot really reconstruct a precise line of development but on the basis of available data and considering various expert opinions as well as my own observations of relevant development aspects, the status of the core Olympic sport can be assessed as good if not extraordinarily good.

In this context, I think six areas are of particular significance: (1) active membership development, (2) competition development and the spectators attending athletics events, (3) audiences for televised athletics events, (4) marketing of sponsorship rights, (5) investment and (6) the fight against doping.

Membership development

Over the last decade, athletics has succeeded in connecting with more and more young people throughout the world, more than during any previous period. The same is true for veteran or master athletes. In terms of active membership, the sport is growing, especially in Asia, Africa, and South America. European Member Federations are reporting a mixture of growth and decline in membership figures while in North America, Central America and the Caribbean participant numbers have remained nearly constant in recent years.

Looking at the global running movement, where the IAAF is indirectly responsible for development, we can also report positive figures. Year after year more people are becoming integrated through participation at half-marathon and marathon events, the number of which is increasing every year.

Competition and spectator development

Athletics is, above all, a competition sport. Therefore, the extent to which the sport's events succeed in finding a place within the

activity programme of the various nations is of particular significance. A glance at the figures reveals a qualitatively improving competition structure and that many federations are succeeding in developing their national championships, organising other events as national or international competitions. The result is that they are connecting with an increasing number of spectators. The number of spectators who go to the stadiums to watch athletics competitions has grown continually over the last decade with increases in some continents more than compensating for acknowledged losses in others.

Asia, for example, has managed to stage its continental championships regularly and introduced a grand-prix system. The Super Grand Prix of Shanghai, China, has attracted more than 40,000 spectators in each of the last two years. The same is true for the meetings in Daegu and Yokohama, Japan. No less successfully developed is the meeting in Doha, Qatar.

The same trend can be seen in Africa and South America where events with over 20,000 spectators have also become common. In

Table 1: The IAAF World Championships in Athletics (WCA) is a globally established and relevant property

The WCA is Globally Established & Relevant Property				
	1999-Seville	2003-Edmonton	2003-Paris	2005-Helsinki
Event Period	Opening Cer.: Aug. 20 Aug. 21 - 28	Opening Cer.: Aug. 8 Aug. 9 - 12	Opening Cer.: Aug. 29 Aug. 29 - 31	Opening Cer.: Aug. 7 Aug. 7 - 14
Venue	Seville, Spain Isla de la Cartuja Olympic Stadium	Edmonton, Canada Commonwealth Stadium	Paris, France Stade de France	Helsinki, Finland Olympic Stadium
Participating Countries	202	200	203	198
Participating Athletes	1,318 46 Events	1,706 46 Events	1,302 46 Events	1,351 46 Events
Stadium Spectators	N/A	400,000	350,000	475,000
World Record	M 400m: Ed. Is. Michael Johnson (USA)	None	None	W Pole Vault W javelin W 200m Stag.
Major Gold Medalists	M 100m: M. Greene (USA) M 400m: M. Johnson (USA) W 100m: M. Jones (USA)	M 100m: M. Greene (USA) W 100m: T. Edwards (GBR) W 200m: M. Jones (USA)	M 100m: S. Laine (FIN) M 1500m: H.D. Garmag (MAR) W 800m: M. Nutele (KEN)	M 400m: J. Walker (USA) M 1500m: B. Rango (MAR) W 100m: S. Nishikawa (JPN)

Venues

- 1983 Helsinki, Finland
- 1987 Rome, Italy
- 1991 Tokyo, Japan
- 1995 Stuttgart, Germany
- 1995 Gothenburg, Sweden
- 1997 Athens, Greece
- 1999 Seville, Spain
- 2001 Edmonton, Canada
- 2003 Paris, France
- 2005 Helsinki, Finland
- 2007 Osaka, Japan
- 2009 Berlin, Germany

Africa the meeting in Dakar with a crowd of 60,000 people stands out. In South America, and especially in Brazil, there are several meetings that regularly attract 40,000 and 60,000 spectators. In the United States the downward trend of a few years ago has been stopped and, thanks to the very professional leadership of USA Track & Field, a national grand prix has developed and been given a lot of appreciation by spectators.

The "Golden League", which is predominantly European, has attracted larger crowds than ever before. A comparison of recent figures concerning spectators shows increases, especially for the big meetings in Paris, Brussels and Berlin. However, it must be recognised that in Europe some events have been lost. Meetings that were successful for many years have been cancelled and dropped as they became unprofitable. Closer analysis shows that these losses have been almost exclusively caused by national developments. Any decrease in the number of medals taken by athletes of formerly successful nations will directly affect the number of spectators attending competitions. However, if a nation's stars can be successful, spectator support is

certain, which, in turn, financially secures athletics events.

Turning to the biggest and most important event in the sport, Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the strong position of the IAAF World Championships in Athletics.

Development of TV audiences

The number of people watching television broadcasts of events is a decisive indicator of the quality and success of a competitive sport. In this regard, the development of world athletics is also positive. Thanks to a consistent policy and good co-operation between the European Broadcasting Union and the IAAF, a no less successful relationship with Tokyo Broadcasting System regarding rights in Japan and an extremely liberal marketing situation regarding all other worldwide rights, the IAAF has succeeded in ensuring that its events are watched almost everywhere in the world (see Table 3). Athletics has even made its way into the in-flight programmes of major airlines.

The TV ratings and statistics for the countries that broadcast the IAAF World Champi-

Table 2: The IAAF World Championships in Athletics (WCA) is one of the world's biggest sports events

The WCA is one of the biggest global Sports Events

The number of participating countries resonates the universality of the IAAF World Championships in Athletics as it leads all the major international sports events.

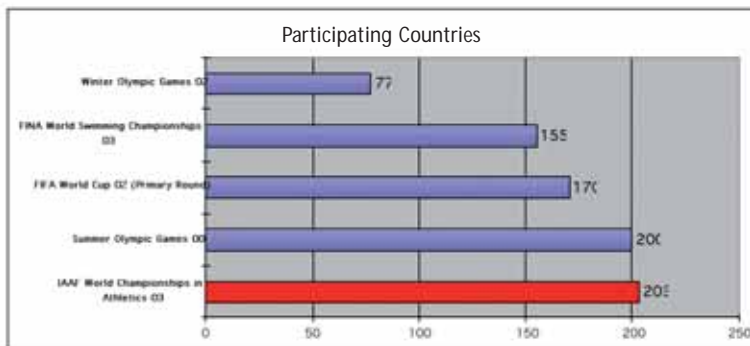
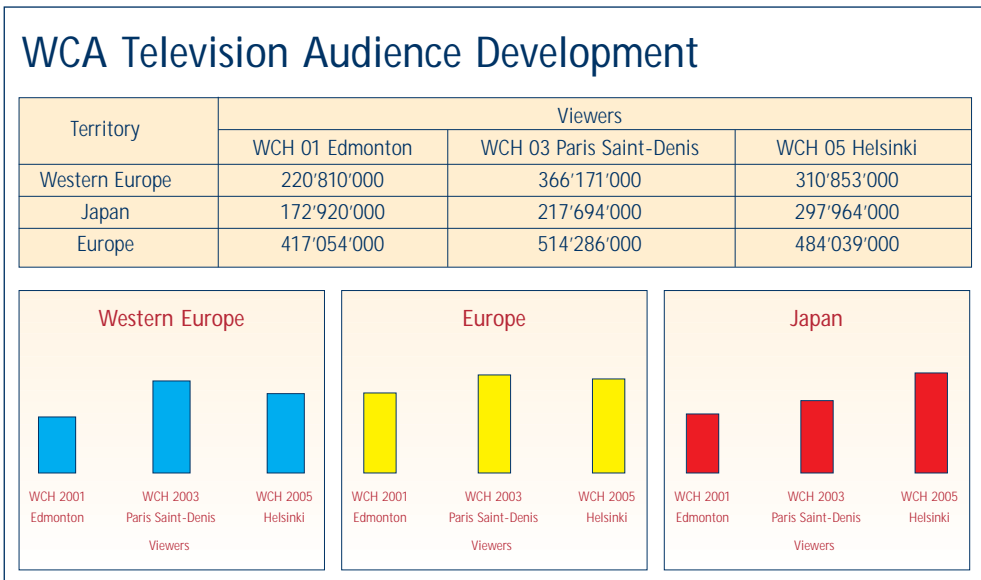


Table 3: IAAF World Championships in Athletics – Broadcast Territories 1997-2005

Event	Total Territories
IAAF World Championships in Athletics, Athens 1997	154
IAAF World Championships in Athletics, Seville 1999	168
IAAF World Championships in Athletics, Edmonton 2001	142
IAAF World Championships in Athletics, Paris 2003	182
IAAF World Championships in Athletics, Helsinki 2005	187

Table 4: Television audience development for the IAAF World Championships in Athletics (WCA)



onships in Athletics (live, delayed, and as a part of news programmes) are strong in the main markets (see Table 4). In this context, we must take into account that the TV market has diversified and that the figures of the 1980s and 1990s can only be compared with those at the beginning of the new millennium to a very limited extent. However, if we look at the relevant awareness data usually used in TV research, athletics may justly boast quite a positive development (Table 5).

Marketing of sponsorship rights

The work of the IAAF also has to be assessed in terms of the degree to which

this success has been marketed in the best interest of its members. A look at the facts in this context shows that, in comparison with other Olympic sports, athletics has indeed been successful. The IAAF, unlike most other international sports associations, has achieved long-term financial security as a result of its marketing policies. The revenues from the sale of sponsorship rights have grown annually. Importantly, the policy of putting emphasis on quality rather quantity – having a relatively small number of well-working partnerships with leading global corporations rather than a large number of smaller relationships – has proven successful.


Table 5: Awareness of the IAAF World Championships in Athletics (WCA) in selected markets 1999-2005

Awareness of the WCA in Athletics is High

"Have you ever heard of the World Championships in Athletics?"

	1999	2001	2002	2003	2005
All Markets *	84%	79%	83%	85%	95%
UK	80%	82%	81%	82%	-
Finland	-	-	-	-	99%
France	91%	73%	85%	95%	-
Germany	82%	93%	95%	98%	93%
Japan	79%	96%	95%	97%	99%
China	-	-	86%	90%	93%
Canada	-	75%	-	-	-
Spain	89%	-	93%	-	-

*Source: SPONSORSHIP INTELLIGENCE 2005
UK, Germany, France, Japan, USA, Canada
Finland: 1000 sample tests



Investment

The IAAF must be also evaluated from the point of view of what it has done with its earnings from the sale of broadcast and sponsorship rights. In this respect, too, it is my conviction that the IAAF need not fear any assessment. Most notably, it has invested very large amounts into its development programme. The support system for the Member Federations, the organisation of further training measures, the training of personnel, the establishment of an international training academy, the innovative introduction of new education and training tools are all considered to be models by other international associations. Yet despite this very

active policy, it has been able to increase its financial reserves four-fold since 1999 (Table 6).

The fight against doping

President Diack and the IAAF Council can claim a greater degree of success in the fight against doping in sport than any other association. The IAAF has developed and professionalised the fight in a way we have never seen before, tests and controls have become tighter, stricter and more severe, and more research projects have been initiated. The latest international anti-doping convention is a clear expression of this successful policy.

Conclusion

Viewing the assessment criteria we have discussed in this context from a summarizing perspective, we may definitely come to the well-founded conclusion that under the leadership of President Lamine Diack, the present IAAF Council can look back on four successful years of work.

Table 6: Development of the IAAF's financial reserves

1991:	US \$ 10 Million
1999:	US \$ 22 Million
2006:	US \$ 79 Million
2008:	US \$ 98 Million