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from the editor

E. Gary Hail

LET'S TALK EXCITEMENT! On the *T&FN* messageboard recently, the topic was *The Most Exciting Vertical Jump Competition Ever*. There were plenty of wonderful nominees, but I had to ask anybody if they could imagine a much better high jump than one which led to this chart:

	6-10	7-0	7-2	7-4	7-6	7-6	7-4	7-6	7-4	7-6	7-4	7-2
TW	o	o	xxo	o	xxx	x	o	x	o	x	x	x
DS	o	o	xxo	o	xxx	x	o	x	o	x	x	o

That's a 16-jump competition, with 7 of the attempts coming in a jumpoff situation. Made even better, of course, by the fact that the World Record at the time was 7-5¾ (2.28) and there were no fewer than 12 attempts at a WR 7-6 (2.29). But no matter what the heights were, it's the back-and-forth nature of the whole thing that made it a spine-tingler.

TW, by the way, was Tom Woods, and he eventually lost to DS (Dwight Stones), this at the '76 LA Times Indoor.

Track could use more moments like that, many more. But the IAAF "recently" kinda took it away from us. It isn't really a *new* protocol, having come into play in the '10 edition of the international rulebook, but it wasn't until this year's World Indoor that we saw the full effect of the insidious 181.8(d). That's the one that says jumpoffs are no longer mandatory. So at the World Indoor this year we were treated to the sight of two women high jumpers agreeing to each get a gold.

It grated on me when this first started happening in invitational meets 4 years ago, but I figured that nobody would ever back down when the chance for solitary WC (or heaven forbid, Olympic) gold was on the line.

OK, so concerns for the health & welfare of the jumpers and not wanting to overwork them have some basis in fact, and the international circuit can be a grind. Let them tie there. But at a World Championships or Olympic Games? There should be no choice when there's a real podium involved. Given that the sport existed just fine for a century-plus with jumpoff rules and there was no general hue and cry about it

This strikes me as another example of a rule being created to solve a problem that didn't exist (or is it really all about time-management concerns being whispered in the background by TV interests). I don't recall either Louise Ritter or Stefka Kostadinova complaining when they staged their epic jumpoff for the top spot on the podium in Seoul in '88.

"We can't make them jump," one IAAF insider told me, even though the rulebook is all about making athletes do things one specific way. My first thought was that you simply refuse to pay 1st-place money, but that's perhaps too draconian. How about this? The only way you get the gold is to break the tie; if you opt not to, then you share a silver.

Anything but depriving the fans of one of the sport's great must-see moments.

Of course, the IAAF has made other rules changes I consider ill-advised when it comes to the excitement department. One of them was the creation of the 3-turn stagger in the 4x4, meaning that the race is a good one-third over before any real head-to-head racing begins. Let 'em duke it out, just as they did for many years.

Thank goodness they at least quickly saw the light on the thrill-killing 2-turn stagger in the 800.

In the same vein, I'm really looking forward to the first World Relays at the end of the month and fully expect to see a WR in the 4 x 200 by Jamaica (even sans Bolt). The problem is, a few decades back the IAAF killed virtually all the excitement in that one too by mandating that it be run in lanes all the way. I'm not sure there's a more deadly-dull event on the program than that.

I realize that in many cases we're talking big bodies here, always moving at high speed, and collisions may not be simple bumps. And I don't want us to turn into short-track speedskating, but isn't it amazing how quickly that sport turned into an Olympic favorite? Food for thought.