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from the editor

E. Gary Hill

I HAD A THOROUGHLY WONDERFUL TIME at the World Juniors (see p. 6) but this has nonetheless been a far-less-than-satisfying summer for me. Blame part of that on my being an admitted elitist who draws the most personal enjoyment from watching the athletes at the pointy end of the pro pyramid doing their thing.

Thus it is that in the so-called “off-year” without a World Champs or Olympic Games, my thrills quotient tends not to get filled at the international level. I realize my taste may be far from the norm, and I don’t remotely mean to criticize those whose appreciation is elsewhere.

But I do think that all fans who are concerned about the future of our sport do need to be worried when the sport’s biggest stars aren’t hooking up in a frequent and consistent manner.

In this space in October of ’11 my thoughts were headlined *19 Days In August... Track Goes*

Into Stealth Mode. The thrust of the column was that there was an unacceptable gap between the last pre-Daegu Diamond League meet and the start of the WC: 19 days.

There was no WC this year, but there was a credibility gap yielding much larger numbers.

Check out some for-real figures as they relate to DL competition. If you were in the men’s LJ, for example, you competed in Monaco on July 18, then waited until Stockholm (August 21) before seeing DL action again. That’s 34 days. Brutal for a sport trying to stay relevant with a dog-eat-dog, what-have-you-done-for-me-lately modern media.

But it gets worse, as that’s the shortest gap anyone faced. If you had a Monaco to Birmingham (August 24) hiatus, that was 37 days, and it wasn’t uncommon. It’s exactly what hit those in the men’s 200, 400, 1500, steeple, HJ & DT and the women’s 100, 800, 5000, 400H, PV, TJ, SP & JT.

But we’re not through climbing the ladder yet. If you competed on the second day in Glasgow (July 12) and then sat out until Stockholm, that was a 40-day zinger. Congratulations to those in the men’s 800 & JT and the women’s 200, steeple, 100H & HJ.

First-day Glasgow people who waited until Birmingham were, of course, at 41 days: men’s 100, 5000, 400H & SP and women’s 400, 1500, LJ & DT.

If you’ve been counting events here, you’ll have noted that we’re only at 29 of the 32 events on the program, meaning we’re finally down to those who make the podium in the will-I-ever-get-to-compete-again sweepstakes. Tied for silver: the men’s PV (from Paris, July 5, to Stockholm) and TJ (Glasgow II to Zürich, August 28) at 47 days. And your dubious winner, at nothing less than 49 (!) days (Monaco to Brussels, September 7): the men’s 110 hurdles.

There was a good reason for the big gap, of course, the staging of the Commonwealth Games and European Championships. Both were fine meets in their own right, but they’re not as good as DL competition for bringing the biggest names together. Each simply excludes too many big stars from nations that don’t fit under their umbrella.

I can’t think of any other sport that would have its biggest names almost completely go without head-to-head competition in the middle of its prime season. And don’t think for a moment that the media and advertisers, the key to the sport’s continued high-end health, don’t notice such things. I just don’t see them getting a lot of bang for their buck.

There’s an old saw that says you shouldn’t complain about something if you don’t have the solution, but that’s where I find myself. I’m not sure what the solution to this scheduling hiccup is, but the sharper brains at the IAAF surely must see this disconnect.

Hopefully they’ll be able to find a way around it in the future. It’s crucial.