

THE DECATHLON ASSOCIATION

DECA Newsletter

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New IAAF Rule- Improvement or a “Bag of Wind”

Hello Again....I want to use the Newsletter to alert the American Combined Events (CE) community to a recent IAAF rule change which is problematic to athletes, coaches and officials. The rule (260-27) deals with allowable wind readings for CEs.

In the existing rule a performance was valid in case:

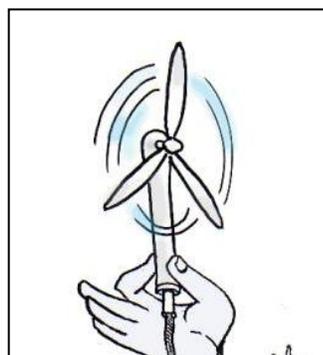
1. the wind assistance was 4.0 mps or less in all the appropriate events

Or

2. if the average of the 3 events was 2.0 mps or less.

In the new rule item 1 does not exist anymore and a performance now is only legal if the average of the 3 events is 2.0 mps or less.

The change in the rule came as a surprise and I can find no one who was alerted or even asked about it!! I was not even aware it was being discussed. Today there are any number of popular and widely disseminated web sites out there (e.g. Estonian Decathlon 2000, and Britain's Team Decathlon UK) but none have a hint of discussion of the CE wind rule. The last time I checked (which was in 2008) we had 2 million annual visitors to our site (www.decathlonusa.typepad.com) and wind speed was never an issue. Wind *direction* in



at times, been contentious, but not *speed*.

I fear that this new rule is misguided and will create some problems for athletes and coaches...just what we need....more problems.

First, there is the problem of *Record Keeping*. Oh, I'm sure all of us record keepers can adjust to the new rules. That's not the problem. The issue may be in making athletes and coaches understand. Dutch statistician Hans van Kuijen did some quick figuring on all-time and 8000+ and 6000+ scores and found that the number of wind-aided scores now more than doubles...that is, ***there is more than a 100% increase in wind-aided scores using the new rule.*** Did anyone check this before the rule was adopted? 100% increase!!! Saying it another way, *ceteris paribus*, there have been (for record keeping purposes) and will be twice as many wind-aided scores than before. You'd only change the rule if one felt that the old guidelines were

unnecessarily generous or loose. I don't think that anyone felt that. And how are we to explain to athletes who originally (under the previous rule) had a "legitimate" score, and now have a "tainted" one. I'm being dramatic here but I can't blame the coach of athlete for crying, "can't these guys (read IAAF) make up their mind?"

But, in fact, this is not a big deal and the statisticians will be able to deal with this. The real problems lay elsewhere.

Second, I fear that athletes will drop out of CE meets if the wind readings tell them that their total score will not serve as a qualifier for some major meet. CE athletes *already* have enough reasons for dropping out...injuries, not doing as well as expected, bad weatherofficials don't need to give them another reason. They will simply discontinue competition. I ask you, *what kind of rule in sports encourages athletes to drop out?* And the ruling will put CE athletes at a severe disadvantage because they just do not have many opportunities to compete and obtain qualifying scores. It's not like other events where athletes can compete continuously throughout the season. For CE athletes their motto may become "faster, higher, stronger.... as long as the wind is OK."

I have a bigger fear...that meet officials will attempt to get around the new rule with clever practices. Why not use several wind gauges and select the one which has the most favorable reading per event. I would not put this past a lot of officials and this practice is at least as legitimate as measuring the wind for only part of a race when the race is run in different directions (200m), a practice that borders on the meaningless, even absurd.

Even worse, the results of earlier wind readings may dictate how subsequent events are conducted. For example, in a decathlon, if the sum of the first two wind readings are

over (or close to 6mps) the decision may be to run the 3rd event (110m hurdles) into the wind. A dangerous practice for some athletes who are not expert hurdlers. Just imagine getting an athlete hurt because of yesterday's wind readings! Try explaining that to a coach! We all know this happens. When I first saw it at a European Cup a few years back I asked the meet referee why he chose to deliberately run all events into the wind he replied "because I don't want any wind-aided marks on my watch." That was right before I got my hands around his throat. Also, I don't think we want to return to the days of the Bud Winter wind screens at San Jose State. In the 1960s the very clever sprint coach Winters developed wind screens, like Venetian blinds that could be opened or closed dependent on wind readings.

Third, wind readings are the most unreliable numbers in all of athletics. This is because

(1) wind movement is not a "constant" even in the same place for long,

(2) winds can vary, not only in strength, but in direction in the same event. And, depending on the construction/surroundings they vary from one side of the track to the other.

(3) as well meaning athletic officials are, we just do not have the technology or ability to situate the measuring device "where the action is," that is, on the track and at the back of each athlete. When someone invents a "personal wind gauge" and attaches it to the back of the athlete we may (I say may) have reliable wind readings.

I offer this experiment, which I have tried frequently
-set three wind gauges side by side (vertically), 15 feet (@ 5m) apart and record readings as one would do for the standard events. They will be different in almost all cases. Try it time and time again. Do this again by arranging the wind gauges horizontally. Again, you will get different

readings (note: I've done this and the first arrangement verifies the winds vary by lane, the second arrangement verifies readings vary at different points on the track].

*Conclusion: the readings, within a decent range, are random numbers and the **reliance on random numbers for record or qualifying purposes is, well, silly.***

Fourth, some nations are more affected by wind than others, not because of their geographical location, but because of the season when athletics is conducted. This is important because in the US 95% of all CE meetings are held before the end of May, (in the spring) when winds are more blustery. The opposite is the case in Europe. Any meteorologist will tell you that seasons influence the wind. Shame on the IAAF for passing a rule that affects one nation more than another. Shame. One has to see an April combined events meet in Texas to believe it.

I just cannot imagine why this rule was not discussed, argued, or thrashed out before being put in the rule book. Look, one rule does not fit all. That is why it is reasonable (because all of the competitive opportunities are early) for some leniency in the wind rules for CEs.

Finally, there is a financial impact on decathletes and heptathletes who find themselves in various locations around the world. Does the new rule apply to the IAAF CE Challenge? As you know, sometime some of those scores are wind-aided but we always accepted them as official, since we could not legislate the weather. We accept them and it's just one of those things. I'd hate to see someone loose a payday because of a wind reading...and often an unreliable one at that.

Combined Events are just different, and have to be treated as such. They are a special case. **The fact is, in CEs, you live by the wind and you die by the wind.** In some events it may be helpful, but in others (high jump, discus, vault, 1500m) it may be harmful.

In summary, any rule that may encourage athletes to stop the competition or that may favor one part of the world over another should never be approved! This rule hurts Combined Events. I apologize if I've been windy.

Frank Zarnowski
Hanover, NH
Feb. 12, 2010

The 2nd week of February, 2010

The men's heptathlon field at the IAAF World Indoor champs in Doha is taking shape. Invited using last year's top decathlon scores are Trey Hardee/USA, Leonel Suarez/CUB and Alexandr Pogorelov/RUS, the top three from Berlin. The three top scorers from the current indoor season will also claim an invite and last week Russian Alexsei Drozdov posted a WL eye-opening 6300 score at the Russian champs, while Estonian Mikk Pahapill, the '09 Euro champ, won in Tallinn with 6156 points. (see Results Page). With Bryan Clay apparently getting an open invite, the 8 man field is nearly fixed.



NDSU junior Weston Leutz won in Fargo with an NCAA-I provisional mark and PR 5496.

Pat Woods, last year's Big-10 outdoor kingpin, won in Akron with a USA national 5489 qualifier. The weekend's top score came at Ames, Iowa where Arlington's Adolphus Jones/St Kitts, tagged a 5532 D-I provisional,

