

ATHLETICS OMNIBUS – SAFETY IN ATHLETICS

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is a basic need of athletes to participate in a relatively safe environment. The responsibility to provide a safe environment where athletes can participate in is not limited to a few individual only.

Providing a safe environment where athletes can participate in, is a joint effort between Athletes, Coaches, Technical Official, Officials, Event Organizers, Spectators, Media, Medical Staff, etc.

The following areas are high risk areas, where safety precautions must be kept in tact, and where everybody involved must be safety conscious at all times:

2. SAFETY ON THE TRACK

- 2.1. Athletes warming on the track should maintain good lane discipline by always staying in one lane while warming up
- 2.2. Treat changing lanes as if you are changing a busy road
- 2.3. Stay out of the “fast lanes” while warming up at a slow pace
- 2.4. Avoid social gatherings on the track
- 2.5. Always be considerate of the needs of others while using the track
- 2.6. Tracks with grass or cinder surfaces become slippery when wet. Avoid over-striding or sudden changes of direction while running
- 2.7. Do not shuffle your feet on synthetic surfaces. Pick up your feet when walking. Synthetic surfaces do not give way when stumbling. When falling on a synthetic track try rolling rather than sliding on the synthetic surface
- 2.8. Hurdles must be crossed with the hurdle feet pointing in the same direction as the approach.
- 2.9. The edges of the top bars of the hurdles must be rounded and smooth with no sharp objects sticking out.
- 2.10. The top bars must be attached to the uprights on the approaching side of the upright.
- 2.11. The counter balance weights of hurdles must be set in accordance with the height of the hurdle.
- 2.12. The sliding surfaces of the upright bars of hurdles must be well greased.
- 2.13. Relay batons must have smooth surfaces and rounded ends.
- 2.14. Run through the finish line. Do not dive or stumble across the finish line.
- 2.15. If injured, move immediately to the outer field. Do not remain on the running surfaces or inner field.

3. SAFETY IN THE INFIELD OF AN ATHLETICS TRACK

- 3.1. Heavy implements are flying around in the inner field during a Track and Field Meeting. The only people allowed in the inner field of an athletics track during a Track and Field Meeting is participating athletes, Technical Officials and Officials on duty. Nobody else, including Team Managers and VIP's is allowed in the inner field during competition.
- 3.2. Manhole covers must be closed and all holes in the infield must be covered. It should be closed every time after it was used during the cause of the event.
- 3.3. All objects such timing clocks, lap counters, uprights on finish line, advertising boards and electric cables must be at least 1m away for the running surface of the track.
- 3.4. Hurdles not in use, must be neatly stacked with feet facing the start, at least 1m away from the inside line of lane 1, directly across the place on the track where they will be used. Hurdles not stacked in the inner field reduce free moving space in the inner field and increase safety risks.
- 3.5. Flags indicating the inner curve of the track must lean away from the running surface towards the inner field.
- 3.6. Standing behind the safety lines/nets or outside/behind the throwing sectors is no safety guarantee. Keep the eyes on moving objects at all times while in the vicinity of competition areas for throwers.
- 3.7. Never cross the infield of an athletics track or sector lines of throwing areas during an athletics meeting. Always walk around the infield of an athletics track or landing areas for throwing implements. Throwers throw javelins, discus shot and hammers around in the infield while warming up or competing. These objects can kill anyone crossing the path of an implement in mid flight.
- 3.8. Athletes and Technical Officials must never turn their backs to the throwing area while in the infield.
- 3.9. Place Judges must, where possible, do duty on the outside of the track on the same stand as the Time Keeping Judges to limit people movement in the inner field.

4. SAFETY IN THROWING AREAS

- 4.1. Athletes must never throw implements towards people or towards solid objects in the inner field. Look and ensure that the throwing area and surrounding areas is clear before throwing.
- 4.2. Throwers must always warn everybody in sight before throwing an implement especially if the person is not facing the throwing area.
- 4.3. Only collect implements after everybody have thrown, and only then collect the implements together.
- 4.4. Never run with a Javelin in the hands or approaching a javelin pecked with the sharp end pointing towards you. Approach a pecked javelin from the side.
- 4.5. Always carry a Javelin in a vertical position, pointing towards the ground and in front of the body.
- 4.6. When removing a Javelin from a pecked position, first pull it upwards and then out of the ground. Never pull the Javelin towards when removing it from the ground
- 4.7. Never throw implements in bad light.

5. SAFETY IN VERTICAL JUMP AREAS

- 5.1. Individual foam landing areas for Pole Vault and High Jump must be covered with a cover sheet and roped together to avoid the landing areas from moving apart when the athlete lands on it. A cover sheet alone will not stop the landing areas from drifting apart during landing.
- 5.2. The density of the landing areas must be according to specifications. Too soft or too hard landing areas will cause injuries.
- 5.3. The size of the landing areas must be according to specifications. Too small landing areas will result in the athlete missing it during landing.
- 5.4. Athletes jumping higher, have a longer trajectory through mid air than athletes jumping at lower heights. The placing of the landing mats must likewise be adjusted, taking in consideration the trajectory from take off to landing.
- 5.5. The cross bars in high jump and pole vault must be able to slide freely off the cross bar supports to ensure that the cross bar slides easily off the cross bar supports in case an athlete collides with the cross bar during an attempt to jump.
- 5.6. The cross bar in high jump and pole vault must be round. Triangular and square shaped cross bars cause injuries to athletes when they land on them or collide with them.

6. SAFETY IN HORIZONTAL JUMP AREAS

- 6.1. The Run-up of the horizontal jumps must be outside the running surfaces of the track events to avoid athletes in competition colliding with each other.
- 6.2. The sand pit in Long Jump and Triple Jump must be silicone based sand that easily gives way when the athlete lands in the sand pit. The grain of the sand should be approximately 1mm in size. Too fine sand will cause the athlete to suffocate during landing and too rough sand will not give way fast enough during landing.
- 6.3. The take-off board must be at the same level as the run-up area to avoid foot injuries during take-off.
- 6.4. The width of the sand pit must be wide enough to avoid the athlete from landing on the edge of the sand pit when landing sideways.
- 6.5. The length of the sand pit must be wide enough to avoid the athlete from landing on the edge of the sand pit during record braking attempts.
- 6.6. The sand pit must be deep enough to ensure that the sand in the sand pit can absorb the shock during landing.

7. SAFETY ON THE ROAD

- 7.1. Roads are for the use of vehicles. Road Runners and Officials must be mindful of this fact at all times while using the road.
- 7.2. Roads should be blocked off and traffic should be rerouted while Road Races is taking place. If it is not possible to reroute the traffic, and Road Runners and cars have to share the same road, the Road Runners must face the oncoming traffic while running. This safety precaution also applies for training sessions on the road.
- 7.3. The crossing of roads and intersections should be limited during road races and where possible the Road Running course should be laid out running back roads where the intensity of road usage is low.
- 7.4. The Road Running course should remain on one side of the road for the duration of the race.

- 7.5. The running surfaces must be clearly marked and easy to see even in bad light. The use of traffic cones, chevron coloured ribbons or flags with bright colours should be used to indicate the running areas on the road.
- 7.6. The start must be as wide as possible to allow for as many athletes to accelerate without bumping each other.
- 7.7. The route must be as wide as possible to allow for as many runners to pass without pushing.
- 7.8. Sharp corners and bumpy areas must be avoided for at least 1000m after the start of the race. The "field" of runners should be allowed to spread out after the start of the race. Athletes are more likely to see sharp corners and bumpy areas in the road once the "field" of athletes have spread out.
- 7.9. Always wear at least one garment with bright colours during Road races to ensure that the athlete is visible to approaching traffic. If the athletes must wear dull coloured representative clothing, wear a bright coloured sweat band, cap, shoes or socks.

8. SAFETY IN CROSS COUNTRY

It is in the very nature of Cross Country Running to vary running pace, running direction, running surfaces, etc. If Cross Country Courses are not laid out with the safety of the athlete in mind, Cross Country has the potential to destroy rather than build the athletics career of a young promising athlete.

If Cross Country Courses are well designed, Cross Country can be an exiting alternative to develop the concentration levels and fitness levels of athletes.

The safety precautions used in Road Races also apply for Cross Country. The following guidelines should also be kept in mind to provide a safe environment for the athlete to participate in:

- 8.1. Lose running surfaces must be restricted to sand. Stones, sticks and other lose objects should not be in the path of the running athlete.
- 8.2. Narrow foot bridges, foot paths and other forms of narrowing the width of the Cross Country route must be avoided for at least the first 1000m of the race to allow for the "field" to spread out. Athletes running in a spread out "field" will notice restrictions and obstructions on the route earlier and will be able to avoid injuries while running in the narrow stretches of the Cross Country Route.
- 8.3. Slippery and muddy areas must be restricted to areas on the course where athletes can not change direction and have to pass through.
- 8.4. Cross Country races normally takes in laps of which the distance of the laps vary from 1km, 2km to 3km distances. To avoid confusion and the subsequent safety risk, the entire area of each lap must be clearly marked or cordoned of.

9. SAFETY IN NON-COMPETITION AREAS

9.1. SAFETY IN THE EQUIPMENT ROOM AND ASSIZING ROOM

- 9.1.1. Implements should be kept clean, safely stored and orderly packed on shelves not higher than shoulder height. Hammers should be hung on hooks, and spindles kept well oiled.
- 9.1.2. The surfaces and rims of throwing circles must be smooth and without sharp edges or rough surfaces.
- 9.1.3. The surfaces of throwing equipment must be smooth but not slippery. The equipment must not have jagged or sharp edges.
- 9.1.4. Javelins and pole vaulting poles must be stored lying down. Pole damaged during storage can result in serious injuries when breaking during competition.
- 9.1.5. Pole vault poles must not be dropped on the ground put placed softly on the ground to prevent the poles from cracking.
- 9.1.6. Equipment must not be stored on top of each other but rather next to each other or on different shelves and preferably in individual protection tubes.
- 9.1.7. Floors and alleyways leading up to the equipment and assizing rooms must be kept dry and covered with non-slippery carpets. Carrying heavy implements on slippery areas will lead to serious injury, not only to the person carrying but to unsuspected bystanders.
- 9.1.8. No equipment must lie around on the floors and in alleyways leading up to the equipment and assizing rooms to avoid tripping over it.

9.2. SAFETY IN WARM UP AREAS, CALL ROOMS, HOSPITALITY AREAS, MIXED ZONES, ETC.

Spectators and fans would like to meet their heroes. The soft target areas are the areas where the athletes are in preparation for competition or recovering after the competition. Such areas are warm up areas, call rooms, hospitality areas and mixed zones.

The mentioned areas are also the places where athletes are the most vulnerable as they are very tense, agitated and/or focused. Unexpected disturbances can lead to ill tempered reactions and create negative images of the sport and its participants.

The mentioned areas must be properly cordoned off and security guards must control incoming and outgoing visitors to the mentioned areas.

9.3. VIP AREAS, VICTORY CEREMONY AREAS, MIXED ZONES, HOSPITALITY AREAS

A high concentration of important people will always be found in VIP areas, victory ceremony areas, mixed zones, hospitality areas, etc. They are often targets of extremists such as terrorists, strikers and stalkers. Access to areas where important people gather, must be restricted and controlled by well briefed and strong-minded security guards to protect them from people with extreme views.

10. THE PEOPLE THAT PERSONIFIES ATHLETICS

10.1. Athletes

- 10.1.1. Athletes must check their equipment every time, prior to a start, jump or throw.
- 10.1.2. Athletes must not allow equipment and attire to lie around, or allow it to be without supervision, particularly in the inner field.
- 10.1.3. Athletes must always be polite to Officials and other Athletes during competition to avoid ill-tempered and uncontrollable situations.
- 10.1.4. Athletes must always move in groups immediately prior, and after competition, to avoid been mugged for souvenirs and mementoes.

10.2. Coaches, Technical Officials And Officials

Coaches, Technical Official and Officials are always in close contact with Athletes. They must always remember that the main focus of athletes is to perform and not to secure his/her immediate environment.

Coaches must on a regular basis sensitize the athletes to the potential dangers such as equipment lying around in the competition area. Equipment lying around can bring his/her career to an abrupt and unexpected end.

Ideal places for Coaches to develop a natural sense of safety among athletes is during training sessions, gym sessions or even during recreational periods.

10.3. Event Organizers, Announcers, Media And Spectators

Event Organizers, Announcers, Media and Spectators must always keep in mind that the dominant characteristic of athletes is to perform at a level that is beyond normal physical and psychological boundaries.

Event Organizers, Announcers, Media and Spectators must keep this characteristic in mind when a competition environment is created. The athletes must be able to test his/her physical and psychological boundaries in an environment where injury risks are limited.

Factors such as age, gender, temperature, humidity, weather, visibility, pollution, competition surfaces, venues, fluid replacement, etc. must be taken in consideration when a programme of events is compiled.

10.4. Medical Team, Doping Team, First Aid Team

During an athletics meeting, the Medical, Doping and First Aid Teams must be alerted and sensitized to the tendency of athletes to expand their physical and psychological boundaries during competition.

It is the responsibility of the Medical, Doping and First Aid Teams to advice Event Organisers of potential risk factors and influences that age, gender, temperature, humidity, weather, visibility, pollution, competition surfaces, venues, fluid replacement, food/fluids/supplement intake, etc. has on the safety and well been of the athlete.

11. CONCLUSION

An event where athletes will attempt to perform at levels beyond normal physical and psychological boundaries will attract large groups of people to the City or Town where the event is hosted. The increased volume of people brings about additional strains to, the social and infra-structural services of the local community as well as the visitors attending the event.

To provide a safe environment at an event where absolute excellence is the objective can not be left to Athletes, Coaches, Technical Official, Officials, Event Organizers, Spectators, Media, Medical Staff, etc. alone.

To plan and manage the expected strains on the local community and its infrastructure as a result of the event, a Joint Organizing Committee must be compiled to prevent or manage any form of disaster related to the event.

A Joint Organizing Committee (JOC) will ensure a disaster free environment in which the event can take place. The JOC will consist of the local Police Services, Traffic Department, Fire Department Representative, Security Services Representative, Emergency Services and Marshals Representatives of the Event

The Joint Organizing Committee (JOC) will:

- 11.1. Identify the areas that will be effected as a result of the event
- 11.2. Identify the possible treats as a result of the event taking place.
- 11.3. Define a operational plan
- 11.4. Implement a zero tolerance approach for the duration of the event.
- 11.5. Identify the policy in the cases where force must be used.
- 11.6. Prepare an execution plan
- 11.7. Identify reporting times and methods
- 11.8. Identify communication methods
- 11.9. Define the administration and control system related to any actions taken.
- 11.10. Compile a list of contact details of all members serving on the JOC.

The Members of the JOC must be citizens from the local community for logistical reasons. Jointly, the JOC must compile a Disaster Management Plan. Each member on the JOC has a specific function in the Disaster management Plan.

The Disaster Management Plan must be implemented and controlled from a Command Centre. The Command Centre must be close to where the main event will take place. The Command Centre must be fully operational at least 3 hours before the start of the event and can only close down once all Members of the JOC reported back to the Convenor of the JOC after the event.

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