

Development of women's events within the athletics programme and the future of combined events

by Ilse Bechthold

“ This is a brief account of the progress of women's athletics from the beginning of this century to the present day, with special emphasis on the rapid progress made in the last 15 years. It is argued that, since women athletes have now reached a stage that enables them to undertake the same training loads as men and participate in the same types of events, it is a logical step to introduce a decathlon for women in place of the present heptathlon. ”

In the early days of track and field, the emphasis was directed almost exclusively towards men's athletics. Women's athletics has gradually developed step by step and is only now approaching the 'full' athletics programme of their co-competitors on an almost equal basis. Nowadays, women are able to compete in 20 events.

The IAAF President and Council have been very helpful in adding events to the Women's Programme, but it was, and still is, a difficult and sometimes lengthy procedure to integrate a new event, so that it attains its proper place within the Championship Programme. It is essential that these aspects are recognised and worked on at National and Area Levels. The IAAF must lead the way, thus enabling the Member Federations to prepare athletes for a new event. There is also an important role for the IAAF Regional Development Centres to play, in order to prepare coaches and officials for new events in the women's competition programme.

Although the last fifteen years have been very successful with regard to obtaining further equality for women within the IAAF, some areas still require attention, in particular the combined events.

Some countries (i.e. Great Britain, France, Germany) initiated athletics for women as early as 1907, but the real breakthrough came with the acknowledgement of women's events in the IAAF Programme in 1926. This example opened the way for women to compete in the 1928 Olympic Games, although, of course, only a few events were included at that time: 100 metres, 800 metres, high jump and discus throw. 1928 was also the first year in which the IAAF registered women's World Records for combined events. At this time, the pentathlon consisted of shot put & long jump (first day); 100 metres, high jump and javelin (second day). The first registered World Record was 3349 points (10.28m, 5.88m, 11.9sec, 32.90m).

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From the early days of the pentathlon, many changes have come about in the composition and succession of events (see *Table 1*). After January 1, 1981, the pentathlon was replaced by the heptathlon, which is still valid today.

During this long period from 1928 to the present day, the names of many outstanding women athletes have been registered on the World Record lists:

- Gisela MAUERMAYER (GER)
3 World Records, 4155 points in 1934,
Olympic Champion discus
- Alexandra CHUDINA (URS)
6 World Records, 1947-1955, 4750 points
- Fanny BLANKERS-KOEN (NED)
1951, 4692 points
- Irina PRESS (URS)
1959-1964, 8 World Records, 5246 points
- Heide ROSENDAHL (GER)
1960, 3 World Records, 5155 points,
Olympic Champion long jump, 4x100m
relay
- Liese PROKOP (AUT)
1969, 5352 points
- Mary PETERS (GBR & NI)
Olympic Champion, 1972 4901 points
(new table)
- Burglinde POLLAK (GDR)
1973, 4932 points (new table)
- Eva WILMS (GER)
1977, 2 World Records 4623 (new table)
- Nadeshda TKACHENKO (URS)
1980, 5003 points (new table)

Thereafter came the initiation of the heptathlon, and the following prominent names must be included:

- Ramona NEUBERT (GDR)
4 World Records, 1983, 6938 points
- Jackie JOYNER (USA)
4 World Records, 1988 Olympic Champion
(following 1985 scoring table change).

The developments and changes within sport in general, and hence in athletics, have come about through the changes in the lifestyle of

women, principally from a social point of view and referred to as the emancipation of women. Women now want to decide how their lives are organised and, at the very least, participate in the decisions made concerning them. Taking into account all the fields of sport science (medicine, psychology, training science and sociology, etc.) women and their coaches have gradually improved training methods to such an extent that they can now cope with as heavy a training load as that undertaken by male athletes! Bearing these *things in mind, it is simply a logical conclusion* that women athletes should also want to face the challenge of competing in the decathlon.

However, before this step can be made, many things have to be taken into consideration. First of all, sufficient time should be left for all levels of athletics organisations (clubs, Member Federations and Area Associations) to prepare for such an event at 'IAAF level'. This means that the events could eventually be introduced into the IAAF's competition programme in 1997. Prior to this, however, athletes, coaches, organisers and other experts must meet to discuss such questions as time-tables (order of events within the decathlon for women), scoring tables, programming for the introduction of the decathlon for women into the championships programme, whether or not the heptathlon should remain part of the *programme for junior women and at what time the event could become part of the IAAF Championships - 2001 or 2003?*

Of course we do understand the opposition standpoint of some experts in men's decathlon - nobody likes to lose an exclusivity within our sport, but if women wish to participate in a decathlon event, there is no reason to impede them from doing so, and there are many positive aspects in the idea of men and women competing together.

Table 1: Disciplines in women's combined event

Year	Events day 1	Events day 2
1928-1948	shot put, long jump, javelin	100m, high jump,
1949-1961	shot put, high jump, 200m	80m hurdles, long jump
1961-1964	80m hurdles, shot put, high jump	long jump, 200m
1964-1970	100m hurdles, shot put, high jump	long jump, 200m
1971-1980	The scoring table for the combined events was changed, but the order and succession of events remained the same.	

