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USATF Convention Report: The Trials of the Trials

By Phil Stewart

When current USATF CEO Max Siegel was unanimously selected by the Board of Directors to lead the organization in the spring of 2012, he was touted as a savvy marketer who had a long history of success within NASCAR and the auto racing industry, skills he would undoubtedly apply to USATF in an attempt to further the organization's decades-long evolution from a rule enforcing to a marketing and promotions organization. At the opening session of the organization's annual meeting in Indianapolis, December 5-8, a line of speakers, ranging from Olympic gold medalist Jackie Joyner Kersee, to Nike's John Capriotti, to NBC TV Executive Peter Diamond all spoke highly of Siegel's accomplishments during his 18 months on the job. The numbers looked rosy as well – 2012 featured the most income ever—\$23.4 million dollars in revenue—with a net income of \$1.36 million. Sponsorship income rose to 55% of total income, while dependence on USOC funding dropped to 14%.

It was only after the tenth or so consecutive speaker extolled Siegel (not USATF in general, but specifically the CEO), and Siegel himself voiced some apologies for "mistakes made by the national office," and stated, "I have enough battle scars. . ." that the whiff that all was not quite so rosy in the minds of the rank and file within the organization began to permeate the assembly hall. The conflict, as it sharpened over four days of constituent group meetings, is over Siegel's (and the Board's) power to make key marketing and promotional decisions and their accountability to the constituent groups within the organization.

The Marathon Trials: Front and Center

Long Distance Running (LDR) activities are generally pretty much a sideshow at the convention, which is dominated by track and field and youth interests. This year, however, the selection of the 2016 Olympic Marathon Trials location became the flash point that ignited the broader battle for control between the

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IN THE NEWS

Collegiate Running Association Announces Prize Money for College Runners

A recent change in the NCAA rules that allows NCAA Division I athletes to receive payment of prize money in amounts to cover their "actual and necessary expenses" has opened the door for the new Collegiate Running Association (CRA) to stage a collegiate road racing championship at the Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10K in Richmond, VA on March 29, 2014. The event will offer \$10,000 in prize money for college students who belong to the CRA. The CRA is looking to set up an expanded schedule of prize money road, trail and mountain races in the months ahead. The NCAA's policy mirrors that of the original TACTrust system of the early 1980s. Details at www.collegiaterunning.org.

Prolific American Marathoner Mary Akor Receives Two-Year Doping Ban

The 37-year-old from Nigeria, who became a U.S. citizen in 2004, was a member of the 2005 and 2007 U.S. World Championships marathon teams. She tested positive for Clenbuterol at a marathon in Mexico in December 2012. She continued to race – and win – marathons after the positive test.

RRCA Recognizes Four New Runner-Friendly Communities

Chattanooga, TN; Sarasota, FL; Kalamazoo, MI; and South Lake, FL are the 2013 designees, honored by

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USATF

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CEO and Board, and the membership. During the last six months, three cities, Cincinnati, Houston and Los Angeles, submitted bids to host the 2016 Trials. All three bids called for hosting the Men's and Women's trials at the same venue, as was done for the first time with the 2012 Trials in Houston and was generally considered to be a successful format.

During USATF's restructuring process, which was completed prior to the selection of the 2012 Trials in Houston, a bevy of new legislation was approved by the organization as it streamlined the Board of Directors from 100 down to 15 voting members (and three non-voting members including the CEO) and redefined some of the roles of the Board and the CEO. Among rules passed was "Regulation 18" regarding the selection of Championships. [The Olympic Trials have traditionally served as the USATF marathon championship.] One provision of the rule states, "The CEO should approve awards of USATF championships at annual meetings, when feasible."

In the weeks leading up to the convention, the exact selection process and the timetable for the marathon trials remained somewhat shrouded. Just two weeks before the convention, the bid from Cincinnati was dropped from consideration. Cincinnati's Iris Simpson Bush told *Road Race Management*, "We were told that we were one of the finalists, but were not invited to Indy. [USATF Director of Events] Jim Estes called [in] late November and said that although [USATF was] 'very impressed with our marketing and community support' that [USATF] didn't feel we had enough experience in handling elite athletes. He was very

complimentary and said that he strongly recommended that we get experience with some smaller trial bids and come back in four years. . . Disappointed, but [we] felt that we gave it a good run and I was very proud of what we were able to present when they made their market visit."

The two remaining bidders, Houston and Los Angeles, made their pitches to a five-member committee consisting of the chairs of the Men's LDR Committee, the Women's LDR Committee, the LDR Division and one athlete from the men's and women's committees. At the time, representatives from Houston thought the decision would be made at the convention; representatives from Los Angeles did not.

Although specifics of the two bids were not made known to delegates at the meeting, the Houston bid called for the trials to be held in January 2016 in conjunction with the Chevron Houston Marathon weekend, and the Los Angeles bid called for the race to be held in March 2016 in conjunction with the Asics Los Angeles Marathon. There was some discussion among delegates about the timing of the two marathons – Houston's January date would permit athletes not making the marathon team to regroup and be ready to attempt to qualify at 10,000 meters at the track and field trials in June; Los Angeles' March date would severely truncate that process. In 2012, both fourth place marathon finishers, Dathan Ritzenhein and Amy Hastings, secured spots at 10,000-meters.

According to a source with knowledge of the vote by the five-member committee, the committee voted 5-0 to award the trials to Houston.

However, with the current version of Article 18 in place, the final decision would be made by Siegel, who was generally considered to want the trials to go to Los Angeles.

With the CEO on one side and the constituent sports committees on the other, the stage was set for the Sunday battle over Regulation 18.

The amended version of Regulation 18 approved by the Law and Legislation Committee and presented to the delegates on Sunday clearly removed the authority to make the final decision from the CEO, most notably by removing the language "the CEO shall approve award of USATF Championships" and replacing it with language staging "USATF Championships shall be awarded at annual meetings," and adding language that states, "USATF and its sports committees shall award bids for and conduct national championship competition."

The Board of Directors recommended tabling the amended rule, which would leave the current rule intact, giving authority to the CEO Siegel to select the marathon championship site (and other championship sites as well). The membership, buoyed by athletes and members of the youth constituencies who were alarmed about losing the ability to select their championship sites, overwhelmingly defied the Board and approved the amended rule.

In the aftermath of the convention, and with no timetable for making an announcement apparent, representatives of both bids put a positive spin on the process. Houston's Brant Kotch said, "We've played by the rules and put our best proposal on the table. We're still very hopeful. We are unaware of any firm deadline for

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the decision.”

Los Angeles’ Tracey Russell said, “Los Angeles has presented a very strong bid to host the 2016 U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials. We’re in regular communication with USATF and understand that a decision will come soon. Regardless of the outcome, this is an exciting time for long distance running with two great cities interested in hosting a very successful marathon trials.”

USATF spokeswoman Jill Geer indicated that the process for determining who makes the final decision may not be over, telling *Road Race Management* that the USOC rules state that the authority to select the Olympic Trials site rests with the CEO, not USATF’s constituent sports committees. “The Trials are a USOC event with a different set of requirements, financial considerations and other fiduciary elements. The CEO makes the ultimate decision and submits it to the USOC for approval,” she said.

Since Article 18 only refers to the selection of USATF championships, presumably the USOC rule would be given precedence (or the Olympic trials could be separated from the USATF championship).

The Men’s and Women’s LDR committees have set the qualifying times for the trials as follows: Men: 2:17:00 (B standard, no expenses, of 1:04:00 for a half marathon); Women: 2:37:00 (B standards of 2:43:00 and 1:15:00 for a half marathon). Men’s chair Edwardo Torres defended the toughening of the standard, “It [the Olympic Trials] is not a come one, come all race. . . we are there to select a team. . . it’s not a fun run.”

Other Convention Business

- **.US 12K Road Racing Championship:** Some of the same issues revolving around the Olympic Trials were raised in regard to the .US Road Racing Championship, an inaugural 12K season culminating championship event that was held November 17 in Alexandria, VA. Touted as USATF’s foray into the ownership of road races (CEO Siegel expressed pleasure that USATF “owns its own road race”), the event, called “USATF’s largest ever event sponsorship,” awarded \$100,000 in prize money to U.S. athletes, but attracted only 522 finishers. Members of the Long Distance Running Committees and the local Potomac Valley Association felt excluded from involvement with the event. Long-time LDR member and former head of the women’s championship selection committee George Regan expressed disappointment that USATF did not consult with the LDR committees about the event. There are two years remaining on the contract with Neustar to sponsor the race.
- **Discussion of Gun Times and Net Times:** The LDR Division is likely to take a step closer to the acceptance of net times as official times at next year’s convention. IAAF Technical Delegate David Katz said the IAAF has recognized “that there are runners out there other than elite runners,” and is looking at legislation aimed at making net times official. “We need to catch up the rules with the practice,” he said. Masters official Don Lein pointed out that the use of gun times results in masters athletes lining up in faster corrals, which presents a safety hazard.
- IAAF Vice President Bob Hersh said that the IAAF is concerned that **cross country is “dying” in Europe**. The World Cross Country championships, once considered the most competitive race of the year, drew just 15 teams in 2013, and only three from all of Europe. Hersh blamed the demise of the sport on the dominance of athletes from Africa.
- Organizers of USATF National Championship events of 20K and longer will be required to **provide customized fluid stations** for elite competitors. This will represent a significant new organizational challenge for the directors of these championship races. Athletes favored the idea of the stations at non-marathon championships of 20K or longer because it gives them an opportunity to practice obtaining customized fluids.
- Steve Taylor toured the LDR Committee meetings promoting his **Collegiate Running Association**, which will debut in 2014 and provide prize money to college runners in line with newly revised NCAA guidelines (*see News*). A report on the changes will appear in the February issue of *RRM*.
- At a special presentation about **drug testing for Masters**, Jennifer Dodd of USADA said that “Therapeutic Use Exemptions” were important for Masters athletes, who may be taking more medications than open athletes, and cited the dangers of unregulated vitamin supplements. She said there is little documentation about how widespread the use of performance enhancing drugs is among masters athletes. ■