

2011 Athletics Facts

ABAC Fact File 6.

Track and Field Club Participation

Introduction. In previous Fact Files we have recorded the very small number of participants in track and field competitions in 2010. The numbers for senior men and women (see FF5) were determined on the basis that each athlete took part in at least 6 competitions during 2010.

It is accepted that some athletes may well have been injured for part of the season and not included in the last survey. So we have relaxed the criteria to count every athlete between the ages of 20 and 34 years of age who competed **at least once** in the year.

This extended survey is on-going. But for senior men the numbers have been crunched to include everybody with a recorded mark right down to Power of 10 levels. This extended study has shown that in the male 20-34 age category the number of athletes who competed at least once in track and field in 2010 was **2511**.

The question now arises - can this number sustain those clubs participating in track and field? To judge that we first need to determine the number of clubs providing track and field competition.

Track and Field Clubs. It is widely claimed that 1500 clubs are affiliated to the NGB's in Britain. If these were all track and field clubs then the average membership would be 2 senior men per club. This is clearly not the case so it must be that most of the affiliated clubs are not involved in track and field. So how many track and field clubs are there?

Clubs providing senior men and women's competition

We have gone through all of the 2010 recorded performance statistics to determine how many clubs provided competition for senior men and women in League and Cup events in England only. The following Leagues have been analysed : BAL, UKWL, Northern League, Midland League, Southern Men's League, Southern Women's League and the newly formed Southern Athletics League.

This study has shown there were 234 clubs providing competition in senior men's and women's track and field events in England in 2010. However 13 of these clubs were combined clubs (i.e. Two or more clubs combining as partners to compete. These are not counted as prime clubs). 20 clubs were single sex clubs and not included in the population under consideration.

Therefore the total number of track and field clubs in England competing in senior men and women's Cup, National, regional and area league competitions in 2010 was 201.

Quality of teams

Although we have identified 201 track and field clubs providing senior men's and women's competition it is noted that the standard of performances is poor below the top 60 clubs. In the area leagues many clubs field mainly veteran athletes. For example in a match in Division 5 of the Midland League (male teams) one club team comprised 3 senior athletes, 2 vets (35-40), 1 vet 50, 1 vet 60. In other senior events athletes as young as 16 years were used. It is noted that many clubs participating just in the lower leagues form a significant proportion of the track and field clubs identified in this study. If quality standards were applied the realistic number for credible track and field clubs would be well below the 201 figure identified in this survey.

Clubs providing junior competition

Earlier ABAC Fact Files 2 and 3 have detailed the rapid fall off in participation from the ages of 13 to 19 years. We have looked at the number of clubs who do provide competition opportunities for athletes in the junior age groups.

Although the National Junior League (NJAL) is intended for under 20 age group athletes the lack of competitors in this age group means that almost 50% of the athletes are under 17 years of age. There are 62 clubs with junior track and field teams and a further 49 composite teams formed from clubs combining their junior resources.

Clubs providing competition for 13 to 17 year olds

We have looked at the number of clubs providing competition in the National Young Athletes League (NYAL). In 2010 there were 200 clubs in England putting out teams. There are a few clubs who compete in the Eastern YAL and not the NYAL. Many of these clubs did not have senior teams nor do they put out teams in all of the younger age categories.

All Ages

If the three age groupings in this sector are combined there are only 60 clubs in England which put out teams in all three age groups under their own names in the leagues examined.

Seamless Pathway Clubs

With the information gathered on all those clubs providing competition in the various age groups we have determined that **there are less than 100 clubs providing a seamless development pathway from the age of 13 years to senior competition.**

Summary. The ABAC initiated studies have confirmed the views of many who believe the sport of Track and Field Athletics is imploding. Despite claims of a healthy population of 1500 athletic clubs in Britain of which 1200 are in England fewer than 20% participate in track and field competitions.

There are only 201 track and field clubs in England offering competition for senior athletes.

We have previously noted the sharp decline in participation in track and field from the ages of 11 to 19 years. This is partly due to the fact that not many clubs offer competitions for all these age groups. Our survey shows that in 2010 there were fewer than 100 clubs in England able to provide a seamless development pathway.

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