

2012 British Athletics Facts

ABAC Fact File 17.

Under 17 athlete participation in Track and Field Leagues. (and its effect on the proposed new Youth Development League)

Background

UKA has been instrumental in proposing changes to the structure of track and field leagues for young athletes. These changes have still to be finally ratified but are intended to be introduced in 2013. ABAC has commissioned Rob Whittingham to provide details of young athlete participation in 2012. Here are his findings based on his Tops database.

Under 17 athlete data for athletes competing in the YAL and NJAL

In 2012 1971 under 17 athletes competed **only** in the Young Athletes League (YAL).
 380 under 17 athletes competed **only** in the National Junior Athletics League (NJAL)
 988 under 17 athletes competed in **both** the YAL and the NJAL.

The NJAL in 2012 had 3 Premier Divisions and 10 lower Divisions. A complete analysis has been done for the 10 lower Divisions and included every match every club and every athlete. This analysis has shown that in 2012 clubs were unable to produce on average one athlete per event. That is fewer than 50% of event places were contested.

Effect of the new structure.

The proposal is to scrap the YAL and NJAL and replace it with a Youth Development League (YDL) consisting of an Upper Division for U17 and U20 athletes and a Lower Division for U13 and U15 athletes. It is a consequence of this structure that under 17 athletes will have competition opportunities reduced. Furthermore many old YAL clubs will not join the new YDL because they cannot produce sufficient under 20 athletes to make the competition viable. The problem of finding numbers of athletes is increased because the Upper Division will have 3 athletes per event thus increasing the number of events by 50% compared to the previous structure. Recognising the paucity of under 20 athletes the latest proposal is that each club will use one U17 per event and either age group for the next two athletes. So it is possible that clubs could field a team consisting of just under 17 athletes.

Clubs which have been happy to field U13, U15 and U17 athletes in the YAL are unlikely to sign up to the YDL format. Potentially up to 1971 under 17 athletes will find they have no national junior league competition opportunities next year. Indeed the number of disenfranchised juniors may well be larger because the Tops data base does not contain all YAL athletes as some are below the base standards set for inclusion.

Conclusion.

This analysis has shown that the proposed new YDL will remove the chance to compete for thousands of junior athletes. At the same time by increasing the numbers of events in the Upper Division the YDL will be providing opportunities for additional numbers in participating clubs. And these extra athletes do not exist.

16 Sept 2012