

CLUBS OPPOSING UKA PROPOSALS TO CHANGE AGE GROUP RULES

Introduction

UK Athletics have proposed changes to their rules on Age Groups which are likely to apply to all sectors of the sport. The two main proposals are:

- Replace the present U20/17/15/13 age groups with U20/18/16/14 (not U13 or U12!)
- To change the operative date for age groups from 31 August to 31 December.

Similar proposals to change the age groups were put forward previously, but were successfully opposed by clubs - once following the discredited Buckner report and once in the days of the British Athletics Federation, when well over 100 clubs demanded an Extraordinary General Meeting.

The Case For

The main reason for the change seems to be to bring domestic competition into line with IAAF Rules and make selection simpler for World and European Youth (U18) Championships, particularly for hurdles and throwing events.

The Case Against

There will be many negative effects, both for clubs' and schools' athletics including:

- Young athletes in the same school year will be in different age groups for club athletics;
- School and club age groups will be out of synch;
- The cross country season will be split into two on 31 December (the UKA suggestion of holding leagues before this date and championships after is impractical and shows no understanding of how cross country actually works);
- The already small U20 group will become even smaller;
- Many athletes now in the U13 age group will not be catered for;
- There will be endless confusion between schools and clubs as to what equipment is actually used in events - difficult in respect of English Schools qualification standards;
- Coaches will have to try to prepare many athletes for different age group equipment specifications, particularly difficult in the hurdling events.

Reaction of Clubs

ABAC's approaches to clubs (both ABAC members and others) has, as yet, failed to identify any clubs in favour of the changes. As in respect of the previous proposed changes, clubs have pointed to the difficulties in relation to recruitment of putting school classmates into different age groups. They have also commented unfavourably on the prospect of 50% of young athletes changing age groups halfway through the cross country season. A number of clubs and groups of clubs have already sprung up to oppose the changes.

ABAC's View

ABAC feels that these changes will produce only a tiny benefit but will cause considerable disruption and disadvantage at club and school level.

The full details of the proposal can be found on: www.britishathletics.org.uk/competitions/rules.

Towards the foot of that site is a link to a template for clubs and associations to make comments on the proposals (**before 29 May**).

ABAC urges clubs to clearly state that these changes are not wanted.

Comments can also be made by email to: agegroupconsultation@uka.org.

Of course there is much less democracy in the sport than in the days of BAF and a AAA with real power. Both UKA and EA talk of clubs and individuals still being able to 'have their say'. It will be interesting to see whether the huge groundswell opposing these proposals actually results in their withdrawal.