

Being a Meet Director

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The typical track and field coach has spent a lifetime preparing to compete and competing, then learning how to prepare students and colleagues for their own competitions.

It is one thing to coach athletes; it is something else again to put on a track meet. Yet many individuals, having become head coaches, discover that they must now act as meet directors.

This can be daunting. A track meet is a huge enterprise, involving at the minimum dozens of athletes; but quite often, hundreds, not to mention scores of volunteers, paid staff, and others to make it work on the field of play.

This document will be the briefest possible introduction to the issues a novice meet director needs to work out in order for the people running the meet to do their best (and enjoy themselves) and for the athletes to achieve their best results. It is written from the perspective of a field-events official.

Three questions

first question:

The first question you must answer is, why are you holding this meet?

There can be any number of answers: it's your turn in league rotation; it's a fundraiser; it's to serve the community, it's a tradition. From this answer flows...

second question:

Under what rules are we competing? High school (NFHS)? NCAA? USATF? possibly IAAF?

The rulebook you use will determine what events you offer.

You may also wish to make variations on the rules because of your facility or because of special opportunities or needs for competitors. Maybe you want to compete unusual distances or with unusual implements (super-heavy weights, for example). The rules allow you some—but not complete—flexibility. And you don't have to compete every sanctioned event.

third question:

what will your facility allow you to do? What will weather, or sun-set times allow or not allow? (For example, it is early March, you want to throw the discus and the hammer, but you have only one cage and sunset is at 6 PM. Do you start the first throws early? Limit fields or numbers of trials? Or only throw one implement? Or set minimum distances for measurements?) Do you have runways that cross or one venue that interferes with another?

People, gear, and procedures

You have determined the rationale, the rules, and the events

Now you must staff your meet, ensure that you have adequate equipment, and set up certain protocols.

Protocols:

Meet paper flow: Where do officials get heat and flight sheets? Where do they turn them in? Who processes them and where are results posted?

Who is allowed on the field of play and how do you control access?

Who sets up heats and flights? Do you do this beforehand with Hy-tek Meet Manager or some other way or leave this to clerks and heads of events when the athletes have signed in?

Do all competitors have to preregister, or do you allow sign ins on the day of competition? Do you use an on-line pre-registration service?

Make these plans, make them clear, make sure everyone knows them, and stick to them.

Staffing:

Again, you need a fair army of responsible individuals who will get there early, stay late and do their jobs right.

- ✓ Starter(s) *
- ✓ Clerks *
- ✓ implement inspectors (“weights and measures”) *
- ✓ Announcer
- ✓ Trainer(s)
- ✓ Referee(s), whose job is to certify and sign off on score sheets and resolve disputes about how events are run. Can be one meet referee (probably will be) or separate referees for running and for field events. *
- ✓ 4-6 people per field event venue. Some need to know how to run the event, read and properly records results. * Some need to do the physical work at event venues (putting up cross bars, carrying implements out of the sector, raking horizontal-jumps pits—probably the toughest job in T&F).
- ✓ Lap counters (if you have races of 5000 meters or longer) and finish line crew
- ✓ Results staff (often hired as part of commercial timing-and-results companies, such as Record Timing, About Time Associates, or Ready-Set-Go).
- ✓ Umpires especially to judge relay zones *
- ✓ Hurdle crews

Resources:

* we recommend USATF-certified officials for these positions. Contact your USATF association’s officials chair or officials certification chair for further information: <http://www.pausatf.org>

**You must start recruiting these people from the moment you decide to hold your meet.
Never leave recruiting officials and volunteers until the last minute!**

These volunteers are going to need P.A.F.--Parking, appreciation and food.

Equipment:

Again, a big list: hurdles; steeplechase barriers; vertical jump pits, crossbars and standards; *rule books* (!), measuring tapes at the venues; score-sheets and clipboards; enough sand in the horizontal-jumps pits, plus rakes, push brooms and shovels for the pits; water, both drinking water and water to wet the horizontal-jumps pits; flag lines or rows of cones to separate venues and control crowds; sector lines for the throws; a ring insert if you use the same ring for hammer and discus; hip numbers (!). And it all has to be in safe, working order—especially the netting on your throwing cage!

Also: you need toilet facilities (Port-a-potties?) and a plan to keep them clean, and a plan to police up the debris that always accumulates when you have dozens of humans at a site.

And don’t forget: emergency workers and vehicles must be able to get in, in case of a serious injury or illness.

Finally:

Are we intimidated yet?

The key is to delegate-delegate-delegate. Form a committee and assign responsibilities so this does not all rest on your shoulders, broad though they may be.

Good luck! A track meet is fragile beast—but a great and glorious thing, too.

Pull your first one off right, and people will want to come back to compete, to work and to support you.

Below are some real resources to help you do it right.

Event Management Monograph:

Track & Field & Cross-Country Event Management is a 119-page manual from which this document is largely drawn. It takes the meet director step-by-step through the planning and execution of meets at various levels on a time line from several months before the meet through the “day-of.” It is available on line at: www.usatfofficials.com/training/Event%20Mgm%208-2000.pdf

Meet Management Software:

Direct Athletics has become the standard for on line registration for track meets. This web site will allow registration of athletes into Hy-Tek meet management for easy seeding and flight setup. A must for Meet Directors. www.directathletics.com.

The Hy-Tek Meet Management program is available in several variations, either as a download or on a CD, from: www.hy-teklltd.com

Pacific Association Officials Committee gives clinics on use of Hy-Tek™ meet manager software, usually in January or February. Watch the PA website (www.pausatf.org) for clinics dates and locations.

Meet Safety:

An excellent monograph on meet safety—what to look out for, how to organize the field, how to avoid problems—is available from Bob Rush. Contact him at rushrunner@aol.com

USATF Officials Committee publishes a monograph on the legal issues of meet safety, by Texas lawyer and USATF master marshal, J. Shelby Sharpe. It's available on line as a pdf file at:

<http://www.usatfofficials.com/training/ProtocolstoMinimizeLiability-Rev09-2007.pdf>

Events Scheduling:

Mathematical models for determining how much time events should take to complete are available as an Excel document from George Kleeman. Contact him at george_kleeman@comcast.net and ask for “Event Times Model.”

Officiating in detail:

The national officials training committee website has links to a number of monographs, manuals, and dissertations on many aspects of track and field and cross-country meet operations, with a particular emphasis on officiating practices and issues: www.usatfofficials.com/training/index.html

To find Certified Officials:

Go to the USATF Officials Certification Chair's website at <http://usatfofficials.com/certification.html>. Contact information for all certification chairs appears on the page in alpha order by association name. Don't know your USATF association? Association areas are defined on the USATF website at: www.usatf.org/associations.

Train your staff, parents or volunteers to become Officials:

To get your team parents, volunteers, coaches, graduating athletes, and other supporters trained and certified as officials, contact PA officials education chair Shirley Connors at so.connors@att.net and watch the PAUSATF website for training-clinic schedules. If you are outside Pacific Association, contact national officials training chair Rex Harvey at rexjh@aol.com for more information and visit the national official's committee training website at <http://usatfofficials.com/training/index.html> for materials.

To find volunteers for “non-skill” positions:

For the physical work at field-event venues—retrieving implements, raking pits, put up bars, etc.--be creative! At informal meets, fans and parents out of the stands are often used, as well as coaches and non-competing athletes. But consider, too, using former athletes, teachers who have assigned duties as contractual obligations, students needing extra credit or work-study credits; other sports teams from your school; school or community service clubs; Scout troops....Remember to tell your volunteers: you're going to be up close and personal with great athletics, you're going to have a ball, and we're going to be grateful forever.