

THE SPORT-FOR-ALL MISSION OF THE IAAF IN THE RUNNING MOVEMENT

Alessio Punzi, Road Running Manager

European Running Business Conference

Frankfurt (GER), 28.10.17

Seeing so many new faces is refreshing.

The room's full of people I've met for the first time yesterday, which to me is testament to how much we needed an event like this. There was **hunger** for an event like this, from both sides. Executives of national athletics federations often need to understand more about the running markets. Race organisers, brands and companies variously involved in "**the running industry**" are probably puzzled by all these acronyms we governing bodies throw around... IAAF, AIMS, EA, DLV...what's all this?

We "federations people" talk a lot about bridging the gap between athletics, with its traditional apparatus of clubs and multi-level governing bodies, **and** the broader running ecosystem – what we call "the running industry".

Indeed my role at the IAAF is essentially about this. Keeping these two worlds together, finding common grounds, and ways to sustain each other.

I've been invited today to share with you today some thoughts on the "sport for all strategy" of the IAAF.

Now: strategy papers can be boring and ours makes no exception, so stay with me while I try to answer to an apparently-simple question. Fine, you race organisers might think. You get that for the elite races, the records, the course measurements, the anti-doping, the judges and all the rest – for this stuff you need a governing body. But what has the IAAF got to do with the running phenomenon? Similarly, national governing bodies might ask themselves – what should we do with mass races? What do we mean to the millions of recreational runners that are making of our sport arguably the world's most popular sporting activity?

To frame our answer, we need to go some steps back.

The IAAF is the sole competent international authority for the sport of Athletics worldwide and is recognised as such by the IOC.

The sport-for-all mission of the IAAF in the running movement

The mission and role of International Federations within the Olympic Movement are defined by the Olympic charter

Among them:

I.1 to establish and enforce, in accordance with the Olympic spirit, the rules concerning the practice of their respective sports and to ensure their application;

I.2 to ensure the development of their sports throughout the world;

We can simplify by saying that the first is the “technical authority”, the “regulatory monopoly” over the sport. The second is the **responsibility** to care for the global development of the sport.

The IAAF constitution, like those of all International Federations, captures these principles and makes them their own.

The article 4 of the IAAF Constitution lists the objects of the organisation..

Among them, –**To encourage participation in Athletics at all levels throughout the world regardless of age, gender or race**

and

to promote the sport of Athletics and its ethical values as an educational subject and life affirming and life enhancing activity.

From our constitutional principles stems the IAAF Development strategy.

Such Development Strategy has 8 areas of activity

- **Athletics Culture.**
- Member Federation Activities and Administration.
- Coaching.
- Officiating.
- Athletes Services.
- **Competition Opportunities and Organisation.**
- Facilities and Equipment.

The sport-for-all mission of the IAAF in the running movement

- Scientific and Medical Support.

Our “sport for all” activities unfold in two of these development areas.

1. Athletics Culture, and 2. Competition Opportunities and Organisation

So, to quickly recapitulate, we’re saying that the IAAF has a constitutional obligation to care in the sport-for-all space because it’s part of our development strategy, which in turn is dictated by our constitution, which in turn mirrors the Olympic Charter.

These two areas – athletics culture and competition opportunities – are what we talk about when we talk about running.

So you race organisers somehow are, without probably even being aware, relating to the IAAF Development Strategy.

You couldn’t care less of the IAAF, but you’re still helping us a lot.

Sure, you don’t deal with defining competition rules; you don’t deal with certification of javelin manufacturers. You don’t deal with the biomechanics of the hop in the triple jump.

You deal with races, often with road races.

Athletics Culture, and **Competition Opportunities** are the areas of the IAAF development strategy where we as “the world of athletics” become concerned by / interested with the running phenomenon.

Now, let me throw in another concept.

The Development strategy (the one with the 8 areas, remember?) is underpinned by **a development philosophy**, the central principle of which is

The co-operation between the IAAF, its Area Associations, its Member Federations and other partners

It means that we cannot deliver the strategy from our office in Monaco. Its neither advisable nor possible.

So we said, (1) IAAF, (2) Area Associations (3) NATIONAL Federations, (4) Other partners – right?

While we’re clear on 1, 2, and 3, what are these “other partners”?

The sport-for-all mission of the IAAF in the running movement

Well, race organisers can be seen one of the largest and most important sets of “other partners”.

So we can then argue that when a running event, unsanctioned, no referees, no affiliation, no ties whatsoever with the national athletics federation of the country where it's held, no interest for the elite angle of the sport – when this running event takes place, this event, without even knowing that there exists such thing called “IAAF” or “German Athletics Federation”, is serving purposes that are also purposes of IAAF, Area Associations, National Federations.

These are fostering Athletics Culture and multiplying Competition Opportunities.

Remember? Two areas of our development strategy.

So we can argue that there is a whole development function of the IAAF that in most territories happens partially or completely outside of the remit of the traditional structure IAAF-Area Associations – National Federations – Clubs.

(Remember these words – “in most territories”. I'll tell you why in a second.)

That is thanks to road races

Alexander Bielefeld from Burson Marsteller, who spoke before me, works in the European Institutions space, where you have this “Principle of subsidiarity” that underpins EU law-making and regulations.

In a nutshell it means that there are some areas that are better left to the periphery. That for some policy areas, the calls must be made further down the pyramid.

It's like us in Monaco – in many areas, decisions and policies shouldn't be formulated in Monaco, as you have, further down the structure, organisations much better placed to do so. Such as area associations, like European Athletics, National Federations, regional associations, clubs.

Now – when it comes to road races, there's another principle that we can use. Not sure if it's captured in any wordy EU documents, though...

If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

If you have a network of running events, services, products, and together it works well, and you have always more and more runners... just don't mess about with it.

Players like NY Road Runner or SCC Berlin can reasonably claim that hundreds of thousands of people take up recreational running thanks to their events. Do they need help from the IAAF of their respective national federations to do so? Of course not. Sure, Berlin Marathon still needs our people to certify that a world record is valid, but they can take care of the other 44,999 people well enough even without us.

The sport-for-all mission of the IAAF in the running movement

If runners are not interested in affiliating to a national federation and your national laws allow them to do so... **fine.**

If a new player comes in and does a better job than a national athletics association in putting up an event... don't hinder them. The last thing we need is complicating life for people who just want to run a 5k. You're a national federation and you're legitimately afraid you're missing out on a market share? Team up with the organisers. Or develop a better product that runners will choose, in a free market. But let's not impose unnecessary regulations just to control something we cannot control. We don't have the monopoly of running.

If parkruns work fine... then let them be. Even if they're outside the remit of national athletics federations

Any efforts, concerted or not, that creates new runners should be cherished and welcome.

What's the job of IAAF and national athletics federations in mature running market then?

I'd say three things.

The **first** one – convert runners into fans of the sport. You have tens of thousands of informal runners pounding the pavements every Sunday? Go tell them how cool performance athletics is. How exciting an athletics meet is. Open the track for them. Stage a mass race in conjunction with an elite event. Sell them what you're good at producing. A great example here comes from FIDAL, the Italian Athletics Federation, which does a great job at attracting thousands of runners from Rome and around to their Golden Gala – Diamond League event.

The **second** thing is servicing runners and event organisers.

Suppose I'm a runner and I ignore there exist such things as "national athletics federations". But if this bizarre entity called "athletics federation" offer me access to great physio services that would cost me much more as an individual, maybe I'm going to enter a club and affiliate to a national athletics federation. Or suppose I'm an event organiser and you're a national athletics federation. Offer me an insurance scheme that has value for me, and I'm going to affiliate to your federation, and I'll explain my runners that if my event is slightly more expensive than the other one, that's because you have much better coverage in case you get injured.

By the same token, if I IAAF can help my national federations to better service their races and runners, I will have made a step towards fulfilling my constitutional "sport for all" duties.

The **third** – develop our "quality control" function to patrol the sport. Mass races take place on public spaces, which means permits must be obtained. Every time a city agency or park conservation authority receives a permit application, there's a judgment to be made – is the public good resulting from this race greater than the disruptions it causes to the non-runners? With the number of wannabe race organisers spiralling, and the number of Sundays available in the year stuck at 52, races compete for the same dates and for the same prime locations in cities. How can a public administrator with no sporting experience know which organiser is reliable and which isn't? Which

The sport-for-all mission of the IAAF in the running movement

competition has the magnitude to attract runners (and their families) from neighbouring regions or countries and which one is purely local? Given that the IAAF and the national federations are “the expert”, it’s fair to assume that a certification obtained by the IAAF or the national federation should reassure an administrator that the event is worth supporting.

In other words, IAAF and Federations can help the good events stand out in a crowded marketplace. If in a given city there are too many events, week in week out, and the local council decides to cut down the number, the “official”, certified ones may be in a better position, have an edge. Mass participation races will always result in increased traffic, challenges with waste management, arguments with shop owners, in some cases increased pressure on hospitals. An official event sanctioning may the administrators – we’re those who comply, we’re those who matter.

Now - remember that a second ago I said that running “in most territories” has grown outside the family traditional athletics. This implies that in some territories, for historical reasons, for peculiar legal frameworks or because athletics federations were swift enough to see the wave coming and ride it, recreational runners still value a lot participating to an “official” races. In such places, runners **see value** in participating to sanctioned races. These are the territories in which the IAAF and the relevant national federation, can make a difference. Think of the highly coveted “IAAF Label” for road races. I’m not sure how many London Marathon finishers know that their event is an IAAF Gold Label. But rest assured that in some markets, the Label makes a massive difference to organisers in that it allows them to attract more resources (not only financial resources) from sponsors and organisers, and ultimately stage a better event for the participants. And a better race experience overall, one where I feel safe because all junctions are perfectly marshalled, thanks to the city’s Mayor who understand the value of an IAAF recognition ... well, that might cause the runner to give another try to the event. And then another one. And then it’s our job to convert him or her into a 360-degree fan of the sport. We might even argue that by creating audience for the elite events, then governing bodies can generate revenues to be reinvested into other areas of the development strategy... and the circle goes on again.

So these are the principles for national federations, this is how we can deliver what’s expected from us in “sports for all”... **1.** if it works, don’t try to fix it. **2.** Service the runners, create value. and – **3.** convert them into fans of the sport.

In addition, what other responsibilities should Governing Bodies take on? (World Governing Bodies, continental governing bodies, national, even regional in the federal systems)

I believe that the second part of our duties in the “sport for all” discussion is to influence public policymaking, to advance the physical activity agenda.

The sport-for-all mission of the IAAF in the running movement

So for example you'd have the IOC work with the United Nations and World Health Organisation. You'd have EA liaising with EU institutions (and they already do it, quite intensely, right Alexander??), the DLV with whichever the Bundesministerium in charge of sport is, etc.

And the IAAF? Who should we liaise with to advance the sport for all agenda like our constitution asks us to do?

I'm not sure how much the IAAF has had this in focus in the past, but NOW we're more than willing to team up with NGOs we share policy goals with. We'll be looking at creating an alliance with organisations that are active in the fight to non-communicable diseases, such as the World Heart Federation.

Also, we're exploring the possibility to work with global school sport associations to put athletics, and particularly running, back to where it belongs: to the top of the world's most practiced school sports.

We had certain governance issues to tackle first, but now have the right framework to be more active, with restored credibility.

Many other International Governing Bodies have successfully done so in the past. An example drawn from my experience at the UCI – world governing body for cycling. During my time there, we teamed with the Global Cycling Alliance and the European Cyclists' Federation, with the purpose to raise awareness (and, at some points, funds) around themes such as road safety, bike infrastructure, Physical Activity promotion, etc.

It's our turn now.

What else do we have that others don't? **Access to the champions.** Think how effective would it be for a Belgian kid to have Nafi Thiam saying hey, let's move. We should do that too.

Caring about "sport for all" isn't just social good – it's also a lot about our elite product. You want to nurture the pipeline that then allows the Roehlers and the Vettters to emerge. And you do so by allowing, for example, school and university sports to unlock funding.

Another theme – **Masters Sports.** We love European Athletics' motto, Your Sport for Life, and we're going to engage more and more with the ever-growing Master Athletics Community.

Linking International Championships and mass competitions is one of the things we do and will do more and more often in the future.

The mass races at the two most recent World Half Marathon Championships in Cardiff and Valencia were successful – and we're now ready to relaunch.

The sport-for-all mission of the IAAF in the running movement

We are going to open many of our properties to the Masters Championships. World Half Marathon and World Cross to begin with. This means that alongside the stars of the sport, our events will celebrate the sporting achievement of people of all ages, who will have a chance to compete for the crown of World Champions at IAAF World Cross Country and World Half Marathon Championships, the actual World Championships for these disciplines of sport of athletics, delivered in cooperation with our network of national federations and the World Masters Athletics. World IAAF Masters Championships in Mountain and Trail running will also be added, in cooperation with our friends at the International Association of Ultrarunners, International Trail Running Association and World Mountain Running Association.

Allowing road races to thrive, servicing runners and race organisers, using political leadership; lobbying, agenda setting and awareness-raising campaigns; official competitions for all ages. That's our commitment in running for all.

###