WMA PRESIDENT
Margit Jungmann
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Dear Margit:

The World Masters Athletics (WMA) failed to ensure the provision of safe facilities in several locations for jumping and throwing events at the World Masters Track and Field Athletics Championships in Malaga, Spain, which concluded on Sunday, September 16, 2108. In addition, the WMA failed to provide facilities that even remotely resembled the standards expected for athletes to perform.

This correspondence is designed to provide feedback to the WMA to ensure that improvements are made for future events. However, the WMA should consider the legal risk of the negligence involved in a) failing to write an adequate contract with the host nation b) enforce the specifications in the contract prior to the start of the event and/or during the event and c) holding pre-event expectations and then, signing off that facilities are known to be adequate.

I have attended WMA Championships in Porto Alegre, Lyon and Malaga and EMAC Championships in Izmir, Ancona, Aarhus and Madrid. Facilities in Porto Alegre, Malaga and Izmir ranged from unacceptable in meeting Championship standards to being grossly inadequate and unsafe.

Management questions arise for the WMA:

- Did contract lack the details necessary to specify the expected quality of, for example the surface of circles and jumping take off areas?

- Did the contract have a final inspection performance clause?

    - Several people have suggested that if on final inspection, 90 days (or X days) prior to the event, the facilities fail to meet the criteria specified in the contract, the host country would be fined €1000 per day until corrected. Conversely, if the host country passes final inspection a bonus would be paid.

    - The above contract strategy is flawed, however, as the WMA would have to get the host country to pay, which may be a problem. An alternate contract strategy, would be that when a host accepts a bid a deposit is held in a third party bank. This deposit would serve the function of a bond. If on final inspection, X days from the event (e.g. 180 days) the host country fails final inspection, the WMA can hire independent contractors, using the bond money, to bring facilities up to standard.

    - To execute the above strategy effectively, the WMA needs to have people who are expert in athletic facility design and facility standards.

- Did the WMA have a jumps and throws facility specialist who works with the host country and conducts final inspections? If such a person(s) exists, they failed, in Malaga, Porto Alegre and Izmir.

- The WMA has to have contractual leverage. Change is need. Continuing on the same path and expecting a different outcome will not work.

I have attached:

- A summary of my observations and concerns raised by many fellow competitors.

- A case study of an athlete's experience. It is important for the WMA not to lose sight of the athlete's sacrifices, material expenses and the impact of unsafe and adequate facilities.

Action Requested

- The WMA takes steps to minimize sub-standard and unsafe facilities:
  - Modify host country contracts with heightened specificity of all requirements
  - Increase expertise of WMA inspectors and host country event specialists
  - Place meaningful performance penalties and or bonus payments in contracts
  - Improve the templated documents provided to host countries to clarify what is expected
  - Improve time lines for facility preparation
  - The WMA will share these substantive and material changes publically:
    - Reflect these changes in the minutes of WMA meetings
    - Communicate changes to WMA member countries
    - Place changes on WMA social media sites
    - Communicate to participants that their interests are a priority and that the WMA's actions reflect an organization that is participant focused.

Thank you for attention to these concerns. I look forward to your reply. This topic has been of high interest on social media sites that reach several thousand participants in future WMA events. I intend to post this letter on the social media sites, but wanted to afford you the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

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Throwing Facilities

The throwing circle surfaces were no where near the specifications for an event on a global scale. Circles ranged from old surfaces that were too rough, circles with deep holes, circles with lifting and deteriorating concrete, painted concrete, and mixture of all the aforementioned on some circles. Circles at the Carranque and Torremolinos stadiums were dangerously slippery when wet resulting in multiple falls and injuries. The circles, especially for the more highly skilled throwers, were so bad that they could not execute the fundamentals of their technique. Years of training and thousands of hours of practice were lost in attempts to modify technique to handle extraordinarily bad conditions.

For the weight throw at Torremolinos, many age groups had to use a plywood circle. For an outdoor world championship this is unacceptable. The plywood was painted and unusable when wet, creating a dangerous environment for the athletes. When the circle was dry, moisture that had accumulated in the wood meant that the circle was sticky and slow making it difficult to turn the feet. Some athletes compete with knee pain from arthritis and ligament injuries. Some have artificial knee joints. For these athletes the circle was a health hazard. For others normal technique could not be executed.

The throwing rings for the hammer and discus at the Universidad site were installed incorrectly. In one throwing cage containing two rings, the discus ring is supposed to be closest to the front of the cage and the hammer ring at the back according to IAAF standards. The discus was at the back. As a result, the cage blocked the right side of the sector for right-handed discus throwers and the left side for left-handed discus throwers. Furthermore, the wings of the cage were never adjusted for right and left-handed throwers, causing an even greater blockage of the sector. The wings are supposed to fully extend into the sector on the side opposite the side of release and be adjusted outward on the throwing side. The throwing side adjustment is determined by whether the discus or hammer is being thrown. As a result, when the right-handed discus throwers were throwing, the runners on the track were in mortal danger and the sector was dramatically reduced on the right side. (Finally, although not a facilities or safety issue, the officials were not deployed properly.) All of this is explained in the IAAF rules which were ignored.

Jumping Facilities

At Carranque, the Heptathletes were one of the first groups to use the long jump pit. The sand was hard packed. No one, including the officials at the event on the day, and/or health and safety officials, had checked that the sand was soft enough to safely jump into the pit. After several women had jumped onto the solid, compressed sand and found it dangerously hard, did anyone attempt to use a spade to turn over the sand. That individual was not an official but a coach who had seen the problem from the stands. A day or two later a grounds person was seen using a mechanical roto-tiller on the pit at the other end of the runway as spade work was too difficult to resolve the safety issue.

At the University Track, the surface of the high jump take-off area was Mondo, (a prefabricated synthetic **rubber track surface**, composed of two different layers vulcanized together. The formulation of the top layer is different from that of the bottom layer). The Mondo was so old that it was rotten. The rotten material at both the pivot point of their “J” and the point off take off for the jumpers approaching from the left of the pit was so crumbly that the material had become granular and was swept up by the officials!

The rotten, crumbly granules meant that a jumpers take off foot moved, like on ball bearings, when planted. Jumpers approaching from the right side had an advantage in that their jumping surface was more intact. A Danish female athlete had to withdraw from her high jump event and receive medical attention on the high jump area for an injured lower leg muscle. Other athlete’s under-performed pre-meet expectations, directly as a result of a sliding take off foot.

While the Spanish hosts were reprimanded, the fault lies with the WMA. The WMA failed a) to specify in detail the standards and requirements to the host nation, Spain, in the contract and b) they totally failed to inspect the facilities with any level of managerial competence. Worse, if the WMA did inspect the facilities in detail and they were grossly negligent in signing off on Spain’s product offering. The latter opening up levels of legal risk that the WMA should be acutely aware.

A Case Study

Much of the above dialogue is technical and regulatory in scope. What is lost is the human impact. A case study of just one athlete is a useful tool to explain the effect of inadequate facilities. The WMA should not lose sight of what their failures cost an individual participant.

An American W55 high jumper ranked in the World top ten decided to leave her job six months ago to train for the World Championships in Malaga. She paid her 200+ Euros entry fee, her round trip airfare from the USA to Malaga, rented an apartment for the duration of the event and paid for her food and incidental expenses. In total, a cost of approximately $4000.

Prior to arriving in Malaga, she had set an age group PR even though she is 59 ¾ years of age. All was set for her to test herself against other world class performers.

Her high jump event was at the University track. As noted above, the jumping surface was rotten and dangerous. Even a Masters athlete generates several times his/her bodyweight at takeoff, but not when the force is being dissipated by a moving granular surface. She jumped well below any normal level of expectations. In a short, period of time her participation ended. Done. Game over.

Maybe she just had a bad day. Most likely not. The facilities at that track, on that day, did not meet any kind of athletic or safety standard. For this athlete, the dollar per centimeter cost was high. But those financial costs paled by the emotional costs and the energy and commitment made in preparing for and participating in the Championships. She also injured her takeoff leg. Injury for the masters athlete are many times career ending or changing. I hope the Danish athlete, mentioned above, is able to come back to her former levels.

Footnote (add in real numbers if the WMA has them available)
Rough calculations would suggest that the WMA has a significant responsibility to WMA Championship participants:

8000 athletes X ~ $200 entry fee = $1.6M

8000 athletes average expense to attend a WMA Championship: 8000 x $2000 (est.) = $16M