

The Shot Put – Future Options for the Event

by Peter Taylor

“ The author discusses the shot event from the point of view of presentation to the public, he lists common weaknesses in contemporary presentation and indicates ways in which it could be improved. He also suggests some possible innovations, which might enhance the onlookers' perception of the event. ”

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1. Introduction

At most athletics meetings the shot put is the most difficult event to watch. This is because the shot circle is usually placed inside the track, in a position that does not interfere with other events, and a long way from the spectators. The area occupied by the shot event is quite small, in comparison with other events, and this leads to siting the event in many different positions.

Apart from the problem of poorly located circles, spectators of shot put competitions are often frustrated by details such as tents and seats being placed between the throwers and the onlookers, distance boards not being operated, sector lines not marked for distance and over-zealous officials standing so close to the circle that the competitor is completely blocked from the viewing public. All these unnecessary, frustrating annoyances add to a downgrading of the spectator value of the event.

When presented properly, the shot put is as exciting as any other field event. Let us, therefore, look at ways of ensuring that both spectators and competitors are fully exposed to the thrill of an explosive event, in which the difference between winning or losing can be just a few centimetres.

2. Planning the shot put as an event

2.1 Considerations

Of all the field events, the shot put is the easiest to stage at any level of competition. It takes much less time to complete and

is, therefore, included in most meetings. But that is where most planning ends and only on very rare occasions is the shot put treated as a really important event.

2.2 Programming

The shot put should always be programmed at times when there is the least possible interference from other events; for instance, during events of long duration, such as the 5000m or steeplechase or during set-up times for the hurdles. An effective arrangement, made at many major meetings, is to programme the shot put with the javelin, with the javelin approach and the shot put circle in close proximity to one another, so that spectators can focus on both events at the same time. Another successful arrangement is to programme the shot put to take place at one end of the ground, while the high jump or pole vault is going through the preliminary stages at the other end. Careful timing of the event is critical to spectator interest and the proper promotion of our sport.

A good example of the way in which good programming can enhance a competition may be found in an important annual schools' competition held in Sydney. For at least 50 years, the venue used had made it impractical to stage the shot on the finals day and it had attracted very little interest from either spectators or athletes. An enforced change of venue made it possible to stage the event on the morning of the main competition day. Seven shot put competitions were held, with two shot circles operating and no other events taking place during the morning. This has resulted in a crowd of 3000 to 4000 spectators watching the shot events each year, out of a total attendance of about 10,000. The shot put is now one of the most important events of the whole meeting.

2.3 Layout of the competition area

One of the most frustrating things about being a coach or an interested spectator at most shot put events, is the lack of communication. Proper communication

includes many details, such as the siting of the circle for viewing and competing, clearly visible line and distance marking and indicator boards that work and are not turned so quickly that the information cannot easily be read. It is essential to improve the way in which the progress of the event is communicated to the spectators.

It is important to keep the area adjoining the circle relatively clear. The event should be staged primarily for the athletes but the excitement and motivation provided by spectators should never be overlooked.

3. The future of the shot put as an international event

There is a genuine concern that the shot put, which has had many competitors banned for the use of illegal substances, will be discontinued from some competitions. This is a very controversial issue.

I believe that the event itself is not to blame but rather the inadequacies of testing systems in all countries. We will always have individuals trying to beat the system, whenever it is inadequate.

Of all the events in track and field athletics, the shot put is the most flexible because the competition is so compact. Portable circles can be provided, so that the event can be presented in whatever part of the ground offers the best exposure, perhaps even in front of the main stand.

The shot is also the easiest event to run, since the competition is usually completed in half the time taken by the longer throws. It is also possible to conduct a separate men's and a women's event in the same time it takes to run one hammer contest.

The shot put fits well into indoor meetings, where the spectators are very close to the competitors and everyone can experience the explosiveness of the event, intensified by the loud noise made by the shot as it lands.

Experiments are under way, using smaller fields of competitors and fewer puts, to present spectators with a narrower focus during shot put competitions. Quality fields make for great promotions. Perhaps some experimentation with a slightly larger circle would add more interest, as this would certainly enable most athletes to throw further with the spin technique. Competitions using slightly lighter or heavier shots may be a worthwhile consideration, particularly with smaller fields of athletes.

At international level the future is bright, as long as we promote the shot put in the right way. Athletes should be introduced to the spectators individually, the competition should be run smoothly, with fast measurement of each attempt and the distances relayed to the crowd as soon as possible and the updates of the placings in the competition

given at least at the end of each round. Athletes should be encouraged to wear bright, appealing and distinguishable clothing. At times brightly coloured shots might add to the visual effect, perhaps with a different coloured shot for each competitor.

4. Conclusion

There are many ideas that need following up and many changes that need to be made, in order to promote the shot put as a worth-while event. The present lack of concern for the proper presentation and development of the event is serious.

The bottom line is that, when an event is promoted and presented to a high standard, athletes always seem to perform at a higher level. Is not this the reason why athletes compete?