


Development Spotlight – Brazil

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ABSTRACT

From the point of view of organisation, the development of athletics is a global success story. Europe has played a dominant role, both in terms of governance and competition results but with the end of colonialism and, later, the break up of the Soviet empire, the distribution of top performers has changed. The author, an IAAF Council member and a former national federation president, outlines the positive development of performances and their spread around the globe. He also notes that in many aspects the sport is still a patchwork of positive and negative stories. However, there are a number of shining examples that should be learned from. One of these is Brazil, where since 1987 the federation has developed its governance and management structures, been a catalyst for the creation of new tracks and other infrastructure, staged many international events and led a phenomenal increase in performance levels. After detailing the country's various successes, the author concludes with the hope that the federation will continue on its path and profit from the staging of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

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Introduction

The International Associations of Athletics Federations (IAAF) was established in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1912. Only a few nations took part in the foundation assembly but when, in 2012, the IAAF celebrates its 100th anniversary, there will possibly be no country in the world that is not a member of this international organisation.

This means that from the point of view of organisation, the development of athletics is an unequalled global success story. Initially, athletics was particularly strong in its home countries, Britain and the United States, but also in some European countries, for example in Finland, Russia, Germany, Sweden and France. In fact, from the beginning, Europe played a dominant role, both in terms of governance and competition. Its competitive power could be seen in all the athletics disciplines, running, throwing, and

jumping and walking, to a more or less equal extent. Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, whose sport traditions are very much influenced by Britain, also played an important role from the start and they have regularly achieved competitive success at the highest levels.

With the end of colonialism and, later, the break up of the Soviet empire, there has been an extensive rearrangement of the world and the foundation of many new states. The distribution of top performers in all sports has also changed. In athletics, this process can be seen very clearly. During the last thirty years, countries around the world have tried to catch up with Europe. In all IAAF Member Federations, the people responsible are trying to keep up with the world class, to build new infrastructure, to train coaches, to guide athletes to reaching the top, and to develop sustainable athletics structures. The IAAF has supported this work by investing millions of dollars each year in its multi-faceted development programme.

However, there are both bright and dark sides to these processes. In only a few countries has there been continuous improvement of general performance levels and in fewer still has athletics developed in such a way that the sport on the national level is self-sustaining and international success can be secured on a long-term basis.

In this article I would like to briefly outline the long-term process of development taking place in athletics and focus on one country that has made great strides in recent years: Brazil.

The Globalisation of Top Performance

On the fringes of Europe, in the former Soviet republics of both Eastern Europe and Asia, international success has been achieved by newly developed structures, with the Ukraine being a prime example. But top performers are regularly emerging from Belarus and occasionally from the other countries of the region as well. Of course, Russia continues to hold a special status at the top of the performance rankings together with the USA.

Brazil Facts



Area:	8.45 million km ²
Population:	201 million
Capital:	Brasilia - pop. 2.1 million
GDP per Capita:	\$ 10,200 (2007)
Government:	Federal Republic, independent from 1822
Source:	www.infoplease.com

Further afield, Africa has increasingly enjoyed success in top-level competitions since World War II. At first this was particularly true of the Kenyan middle and long-distance runners but later, Ethiopia, Morocco and other nations appeared on the scene too. However, it was not just in the endurance events. From time to time sprinters from Nigeria, Ghana and Namibia have attracted attention.

And with Jamaica's Usain Bolt as the latest and greatest in a long line of stars from his region, few people need reminding that as the nations of the Caribbean became independent, their sprinters and jumpers have shone brightly on the world stage.

Asia and South America have also played their own roles. In the case of Asia, it was mainly athletes from Japan and Korea who were initially successful. These countries have also contributed to the running of the sport on the international level and, importantly, staged successful major events. India, on the other hand, with its population of over one billion must be called a negative example, at least from the performance perspective.

But in all the cases mentioned, the number of strong, well-run federations capable of managing and marketing the sport in such a way that it achieves its full potential is limited. Many times we see that top performers are actually developed abroad, at training centres and universities in Europe or the USA, or with such extensive coaching and resource input from other countries, the IAAF, the IOC or other sources that it is impossible to call them home-grown.

The sport of athletics is truly a worldwide phenomenon and increasingly top performers are representing countries from every corner of the globe. But development of the sport is still very much a patchwork. Which means we should take notice and learn from these places where real progress and success have been achieved.

The South American Giant

One of the most remarkable countries in international athletics is in South America. Here, during the past thirty years, Brazil has been able to develop structures that are particularly

notable and become a leader in the region. Under the guidance of federation president Roberto Gesta de Melo, a strong sport structure has been developed it and in many respects it can be regarded as a shining model.

For example, the infrastructure has been optimised in favour of athletics and training centres have been established. Prior to 1987 there was only one synthetic track in the country and it was in poor condition. Currently there are five tracks with the IAAF Level I certification, 11 with the IAAF Level II certification and 10 others in good condition.

Table 1: Brazil's success in international athletics competitions prior to and since 1987

OLYMPIC GAMES	
1924-1984 (60 years and 14 editions): 3 gold, 1 silver and 4 bronze	Total: 8 medals
1988-2010 (22 years and 6 editions): 1 gold, 2 silver and 3 bronze	Total: 6 medals
YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES	
until 1987: Event was not stages	
Since 1987: (1 edition): 1 gold and 1 silver	Total: 2 medals
Remark: another gold medal was obtained in the America's medley relay team	
IAAF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN ATHLETICS	
Until 1986: (1 edition): 1 bronze – Total: 1 medal	
Since 1987 (11 editions): 5 silver and 4 bronze	Total: 9 medals
IAAF WORLD INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS	
until 1987: Event was not stages	
Since 1987: (13 editions): 2 gold, 5 silver and 5 bronze	Total: 12 medals
IAAF WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS	
until 1987: Event was not stages	
Since 1987: (11 editions): 2 gold, 1 silver and 4 bronze	Total: 7 medals
IAAF WORLD YOUTH CHAMPIONSHIPS	
until 1987: Event was not stages	
Since 1987: (6 editions): 2 gold, 2 silver and 4 bronze	Total: 8 medals
IAAF CHAMPIONSHIPS TOTAL (ALL EVENTS AND CATEGORIES)	
Until 1986: 5 gold and 2 bronze	Total: 7 medals
Since 1987: 15 gold, 24 silver and 24 bronze	Total: 63 medals
SOUTH AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIPS TOTAL (ALL EVENTS AND CATEGORIES)	
Until 1986: 620 gold, 517 silver and 433 de bronze	Total: 1570 medals
Since 1987: 1132 gold, 865 silver and 685 bronze	Total: 2682 medals

In the same 34-year period, the national competition structure has been revamped and at the same time the federation has aimed to organise international athletics events more and more frequently in Brazil. Since 1987 there have been 49 international meetings in the country (there were only two before then). Among these events have been many South American championships, international Grand Prix meetings as well as the IAAF World Half Marathon Championships. The efforts to play a strong role in the international system no doubt enhanced Brazil's standing and contributed positively to the efforts to secure the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

Since the election of de Melo in 1987, the country's athletics network has been systematically improved and it has become possible to draw more and more young people, male and female, who want to compete against the best athletes in the world into high-performance athletics. The achievements of these athletes are reflected in the fact that in the senior category a total of 316 national records have been set in 46 of the 47 Olympic programme events since 1987 (the only event where a national record has not been set in this period is the men's 800m, where the 1984 record of 1:41.77 by Joaquim Cruz remains the 4th best time on the world list).

On the world level, top performances by Brazil's athletes have become more and more common. In 1986, Brazilians featured in the world top 50 in 10 events (six individual and four relays) with no women in this group. From 1987 to 2009, an average of 21.8 Brazilians made the world top 50 each year and from 2000 to 2009 the average was 29.2. In 2009, Brazilian athletes were in the top 50 in 25 individual events and four relays and this figure includes 11 women.

Brazil's performances at international major events are summarised in Table 1.

The list of the special performances by Brazilian athletes could be continued. These clearly show that positive national developments in athletics are possible and Brazil seems to be a particularly strong example.

Building on this raising of the national performance level, the federation has also assumed the leading role for the South America Area Group, including responsibility for the IAAF Regional Development Centre and the IAAF High Performance Training Centre, where athletes from other countries come to train and take advantage of Brazilian expertise.

On the basis of a solid financial foundation, the sport of athletics has been systematically amplified, democratic structures have been strengthened, supporting structures have been newly developed, and the participation of children and youths at grassroots level has been continuously increased. All this is accompanied by a positive development of the infrastructures and sustainable support. The work of the federation is exemplary, especially as far as charismatic leadership and systematic management are concerned.

It is to be hoped that Brazil and its athletics federation will continue in this way. In any case, one can be sure that the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro will be a helpful support for the further development of Brazilian athletics.



National Athletic Federation Facts

Official Name:	<i>Confederação Brasileira de Atletismo</i>
Area Group:	South America
Foundation:	1914
President:	Roberto Gesta de Melo
Member Federations:	27
Clubs:	471
Athletes:	60,371
Coaches:	882

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