IAAF Kids’ Athletics - A Team Event for Children
(Part 1: The concept)
by Harald Müller

This article is based on the manual “IAAF Kids’ Athletics - A Team Event for Children” written and edited by Dieter Massin et.al.

Introduction
Since time immemorial children have been interested in competing with each other and in seeking comparison with others. Track and field athletics, with its variety of events, provides an excellent forum for this type of peer interaction. Yet, if track and field athletics is to be an attractive activity for children, the keepers of the sport must devise programs that incorporate the essential elements that motivate children to play.

Against the background of the opportunities Athletics offers to children in general, it has to find new and attractive ways to maintain the interest. Björn Wangemann stressed (NSA 4, 2001, p. 11) that “… kids are being carried away by other sports …”. Kids’ Athletics provides great opportunities to establish the essential ideas of athletics together with means that are very different from the performance oriented athletics.

Most of the time, children’s competition in this sport resembles a miniature version of the adult program. The drive towards standardization of event conditions, as undertaken in the context of adult athletics, has often led to undue focus on a child’s mastery of a single event. Clearly, this ethic interferes with broad-based, developmentally appropriate opportunities for children in track and field athletics, as it yields experiential outcomes that are unattractive to most of the children involved. Only one wins; the others do not.

After numerous research initiatives, discussion panels and pilot events it has become apparent that there is an urgent need to develop a new type of program for children. The challenge, thus, is to formulate a new concept of track and field athletics that is uniquely tailored to the developmental needs of children.

Any activity strategy, of course, must take into account the features of enjoyable movement experience that tend to best motivate children. For example, track and field athletics has to be offered as an attractive team experience. Furthermore, the physical demands of each task must not be too high, thus enabling each child to take part from rudimentary movement beginnings up to the stage of advanced motor efficiency. Finally, the activities should be easy to grasp and quick to realize.

In short, the novel movement experience envisioned has to provide, at the very least, basic and varied movement challenges staged in an atmosphere of spontaneity and fun. This requires a change or modification of the traditional roster of movement forms that currently exist in the areas of sprinting, endurance running, jumping and throwing.

In the spring of 2001, the “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” Working Group (Ch. Gosoli, E. Locatelli, D. Massin B. Wangemann) took the initiative and developed just that: an event concept for children that features a distinct departure from the adult model of track and field athletics. The concept will, henceforth, be labelled, “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS”, and is described in the remaining pages of this document.

Concept of “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS”
“IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” offers excitement; new event exercises and varied movement
tasks that have to be managed within a team context at different locations within the event venue. Moreover, this event makes it possible for a large number of children to take part in the closest possible area and within a calculable period of time.

With “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” basic athletic movements (sprinting, endurance running, jumping, throwing/putting) can be experienced and practised in an atmosphere of play. The physical demands are easy and make it possible for each child to readily take part.

“IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” events provide the opportunity to demonstrate and inspire fascination regarding athletics in just about any public place: recreational centres, shopping centres, pedestrian precincts or indoor sport areas. Thus, the sport can be promoted in ways heretofore unimaginable, offering children at large a completely new and favourable impression of athletics.

Objectives

These are the organizational objectives of the concept of “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS”:

◆ That a large number of children can be active at the same time
◆ That varied and basic athletic forms of movements are experienced
◆ That not only stronger or faster children make a contribution to a good result
◆ That skill demands vary according to the age and requisite coordination abilities
◆ That a character of adventure infuses the program, offering an approach to athletics that is suitable for children
◆ That the structure and scoring of the event is easy, based on rank order of teams
◆ That few assistants and judges are required
◆ That athletics is offered as a mixed team event (boys and girls together)

The content objectives of the “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” events are:

Physical activity - “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” is excellently suited to motivate children of schools, clubs and other institutions or groups to get involved in physical activity and to find out on their own the advantages of regular exercise.

Health promotion - One of the main objectives of all organizations involved in sport must be to encourage children to play in order to promote long-term health. Sound physical health is accomplished through active living, which is, in turn, achieved by a populace grounded in fundamentals of movement and eager to participate in a variety of sports throughout the lifespan. There is no sport more suitable for the establishment of a sound physical activity base than track and field athletics. “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” is uniquely designed to meet this challenge by offering varied, age-related and coordinative tasks.

Social interaction - Team building and social interaction are promoted by the “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” program. This is a program in which a high value is placed on each member of a team. To promote athletics emphatically as a team event stimulates children to work together and to realize the importance of cooperation. That the event is also conducted in such a way as to emphasize the virtue of “fair-play” only adds to the educational values associated with “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS”.

Character of adventure - A key attribute of the “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” competitions is the suspense generated regarding the final result. To experience this “adventure” is, in itself, a very special stimulus and can be motivation enough to take on the contest. But the eager anticipation of event outcome certainly adds to the excitement surrounding this competition. In contrast to the standardized children’s athletics competitions of the past, which primarily favour the physically early developed children, the “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” team orientation and scoring strategy conspire to keep things unpredictable and, therefore, exciting until the end.

Principle of team

Teamwork is a basic principle of “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS”. All running events are per-
formed as relay- or team-races. Likewise, all technical events (jumping and throwing/putting disciplines) are scored as the overall result of a team effort.

Because all participants must necessarily compete as part of a team, even less talented children get an opportunity to take part. An individual’s unique contribution to the overall team result reinforces the concept that the participation of each child is to be valued.

In accordance with the demand for versatility, all team members have to compete in several disciplines of each event group (sprinting, jumping and throwing) and in the endurance running event. This strategy helps to prevent early specialization and supports a multi-varied approach to the development of athleticism.

### Age Groups and Event Program

“IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” is carried out in three age groups:
- **Group I:** children at the ages of 8 and 9 years
- **Group II:** children at the ages of 10 and 11 years
- **Group III:** children at the ages of 12 and 13 years

In the “IAAF KIDS’ ATHLETICS” program mixed teams are formed (always 5 girls and 5 boys). Generally speaking, the same regulations apply to all three age groups:
- All events are carried out as a team-event.
- All children have to compete several times in each of the event groups.

#### AGE GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE (in years)</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sprinting/Running Event Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sprint/Hurdles</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sprint/Slalom</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Formula-One”</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endurance Running</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jumping Event Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pole Long Jumping</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rope Skipping</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Forward Squat Jumping</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross Hopping</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladder Running</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Throwing Event Group</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Target Throwing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>KIDS Javelin Throwing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knee Throwing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overhead Backward Throwing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotational Throwing</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total events</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The event venue is divided according to a fixed scheme, so that in all three areas the different disciplines of the event groups sprinting, jumping and throwing/putting can be carried out at the same time. Endurance running is carried out together at the end.

One person per team should be designated as a substitute in case a regular member of the team should succumb to injury. Once substituted, however, a participant cannot be brought back into the team.

(To be continued, the following Article will illustrate the events, the organization and the scoring system)