

CHILDREN ATHLETICS : STOP THE SLAUGHTER !

Children or juniors athletics strategy in New Zealand is certainly the most dangerous silent killer of talents . Statistics shows that 90% of children and juniors so called "athletes" will disappear before they even reach the teenagers "critical" ages (14 to 19) when you able to make your own decisions. At the last Auckland and New Zealand champs , participation in U18 and U20 age groups could sometimes be counted on the fingers of one hand in some events groups.

Of course , this has a consequence on the senior athletes who should be the goal and the foundation for a large practice base for our sport in this country.

In fact , senior athletes have nearly completely disappeared from Auckland champs and are on a critical drop in number and quality at the NZL champs. 95 to 99% of junior athletes will never reach the senior ranks !!!

Of course , we have a handful of brilliant elite athletes and a few potential young athletes who somehow managed to survive the system . But these are the trees which hide the early burning of talents and the always more extending desert of our competitions. A yearly increasing disaster like are the fires in some parts of the world.

But nobody cares as this system is running since years and some people have made it their exclusive territory and keep luring parents and young people in the smoke and mirrors of early shiny medals , fancy titles and meaningless competitions and records.

Every body can now see the empty stadiums , the boring competitions, the disenchanting officials (also disappearing) , the lack of volunteers , the move to other sports , and can compare to the past years of NZL athletics glorious times ...

Instead of trying to identify the factors and causes and have a chance to cure the patient , one has so far taken only measures to hide the disaster : The Auckland champs are skeletal ? OK, let us incorporate the juniors from age 7 to make the numbers . (Yes age 7 !!! why not age 5 or 3 , so long that we are at it !). The teenager participants numbers are dropping , OK, let's call the masters and the para athletes to help !

A cowl on a wooden leg !!!

But now there is nobody left to call for help , unless we would have to call or buy overseas athletes , like some other sports do with Pacific Islanders?

The system is not only early burning and boring the poor would be athletes/children , it is highly dangerous for their health and ignore the physiological consequences on the young bodies , it does also superbly ignore the recommendations and rules of the world athletics , the international authority which has recently suppressed the World U18 championships and don't want to recognise internationally age groups of 16 years and under Not talking of age 7 !!!

Many leading athletics countries in the world have considerably reduced competitions for U16 , U14 , U12 , to local and club level , and don't even consider any official competitions for U10 ... Still not talking of age 7 !

Of course , even in this case , the events and implements are not those of the senior athletes . They are adapted to the physiology , the morphology , the motricity and the mental development of the young people.

A 400m race for a 10-12 years old is a sure short term "killer" . It does not say that a 10 years old cannot run 400m , yes it can . But the competitive situation plus the necessary "preparation" of multiple intensive training efforts that so called "coaches" will recommend , added to the multiplication of competitions between Club nights , schools comps , ANZ comps (+ often participation and training in other sports !!!) , turns to be a complete destructive side effects system.

When we look seriously at how many trainings and competitions young athletes are asked (Forced ?) to do , it is too often evidence that most of them are more loaded than professional athletes , without the possibility of proper recovery and assistance. They are sometimes doing things that no professional athlete would accept to do and no future conscious coaches will propose.

Under the pretext of talent development and no early specialisation , we are in fact early burning generations of potential talents.

I have myself as a teacher , then international coach , been working at all levels of the development of successful athletes and cannot accept to be only a silent witness of this massacre.

Please , we need to open our eyes , swallow our pride and the stupid search for early ephemeral successes and build a completely different system, caring for the health and for long term better careers and performances !

As officials , coaches , parents , managers or organisers WE are responsible

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Examples :

-Not rare to see young athletes competing 3 times a week during several months (+ trainings !)

-The "pentathlon" last week in Auckland had athletes 10 -11 years old competing in 5 events in 2 hours (No senior athletes would do that) with the following crazy programme : Long jump – 800m – Shot – discus – 200m . How can you throw shot discus after running a 800m ? How can you have a 200m race after already running a 800m in the same afternoon? How can organisers say that they are following the World athletics recommendations when IAAF rule 166.7 indicate a recovery time of "minimum" 45' to 90' between 2 rounds of an event ? When IAAF rule 200.6 specify the need of minimum 30' in the pentathlon when going from an event to the other , when the official pentathlon order (rule 200.1) say that the 800m should be the last event ,

And these are the rules for SENIORS well prepared athletes !

There are many other examples where you see the same children running 200m , 400m and more (doubling 800m with 1500m etc...) the same day.

-The "Top ten" competition this week end is another example of a "killing" programme.

-Many young athletes are in a constant state of exhaustion , no surprise that there are so many early injuries usually specific to over training and insufficient recovery. (Tendinitis , stress fractures , burning out ...)Until they give up !

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Thank you.

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