

# IOC's new move to introduce elitism

DOCTOR KNOW

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THE International Olympic Committee announced two significant changes to the operation of the Olympic Games last week.

The rationale for both is clear but neither will be easy to implement without political, emotional and logistical challenges.

The first concerns changes to the hosting arrangements, which will make it possible for a country, or even a region, to host the Games rather than a single city.

With South Africa's stated intent of bidding for the 2022 Commonwealth Games, an African bid for the Olympics is surely not far off, and the IOC policy change invites us to consider a joint bid with Southern African neighbours.

For now, I'll focus on the second change, a potential culling of events as the IOC attempts to juggle the demand to be inclusive without becoming monstrously unmanageable.

The change involves setting a cap on the size of the Games at 10 500 participants in 310 events. London had 10 568 in 302 events, and no Games has ever exceeded the planned 310-event limit.

However, there is considerable pressure to add sports — Tokyo hosts the 2020 Games, and baseball and softball, removed from the Olympic programme for 2012, are favoured to make their way back by virtue of their popularity in Japan.

The addition of Sevens Rugby and golf for 2016, along with the push for inclusion from other sports, such as squash and roller sports, means something has to give elsewhere in order to dip beneath the set targets.

Enter the guillotine. Late last week, it was revealed that the first batch of events in the queue for the cull are the 10 000m, 200m, shot putt, triple jump and men's 20km walk events.

The 10 000m may be replaced by a 10km road race (which rather defeats the purpose of finding space and numbers in the programme, and is, in my opinion, even less spectator-friendly).

Factors ranging from time constraints to spectator appeal and superfluous nature can be cited to justify why each might be excluded.

But the emotional push-back from within athletics is likely to be significant. When triple jump was first mentioned, somewhat casually,



BLOCKED: Olympic gold medallist Usain Bolt might not have a chance to defend his 100m and 200m crowns if IOC plans are approved  
Picture: REUTERS

as being on the block, Sebastian Coe responded by saying it was "sacrosanct" to track and field. Expect more of the same.

Consider for instance that two of London 2012's iconic achievements — the Usain Bolt 100m-200m sprint double, and the Mo Farah 5 000m-10 000m distance double, would no longer be possible.

The 200m and 10 000m events represent one of the few opportunities for track and field athletes to win multiple medals, so one could argue that their removal doesn't wipe an athlete entirely out of Games eligibility.

It does, however, seem a shame that the great athletes in Olympic history (and Bolt and Farah were by no means the first to double up) would have no opportunity to become so in future.

Worse, in my opinion, would be the removal of events that completely deny athletes even one chance, as would happen to shot-putters, triple-jumpers and walkers. If the same were to happen in

swimming (though there are significantly more possibilities to win multiple medals in swimming — ask Phelps, Thorpe and Le Clos), and other events, expect major political rumblings.

Another solution might be to limit the size of the fields in the current batch of events.

In London, for instance, 100m track and 50m freestyle (the most populous events), had 62 and 132 participants, respectively.

More stringent qualification standards could cut these numbers in half, meaning fewer heats and participants.

That would, however, mean more elitism and reduce opportunities for developing nations to experience the Olympics.

The optimist would say it is a good problem to have — better than a shrinking Games.

Whichever way it is done, the logical decision to limit growth creates a zero-sum game where somebody's gain will be another's loss.

## Unjolly hockey sticks

INDIA'S field hockey chief yesterday demanded an apology from the Pakistan team for what he called "uncouth behaviour" after their 4-3 win over the hosts in the Champions Trophy semi-final. As the final hooter sounded in Saturday night's thriller, excited Pakistani players took off their shirts and made rude gestures towards Indian fans. — AFP

## 'Don't be a dope'

KENYA'S Olympic 800m champion David Rudisha has warned fellow athletes they are risking the reputation of their East Africa nation by doping.

Kenya, whose distance runners are a source of national pride, has

been shocked by the revelation that Rita Jeptoo, the world's leading female marathoner, tested positive for banned drugs. — AFP

## Clarke 'not finished'

NATIONAL coach Darren Lehmann said yesterday he doubted injured skipper Michael Clarke has played his last game for Australia. A disconsolate Clarke was forced off with a torn right hamstring after Australia's 48-run win in the first Test against India.

"There's a chance I may never play again," he said. — AFP

## Arsene feels the love

ARSENE Wenger hopes he can

continue to silence his critics after Arsenal's 4-1 win over Newcastle lifted the pressure that has been steadily building on him.

Displeasure with the Gunners boss this season turned to chants of "there's only one Arsene Wenger" at Emirates Stadium near the end of a dominant Arsenal effort on Saturday. — AFP

## Chalmers in epic win

AUSTRALIAN Greg Chalmers won the Australian PGA Championship after a dramatic seven-hole play-off against world No 3 Adam Scott yesterday.

Scott had four birdie putt chances to defend his title during the marathon play-off at Royal Pines but failed to convert them. — AFP