To All Track & Field League Providers

Birchfield Harriers feel the current league system is failing the sport and its athletes through a structure that is outdated and no longer in the interests of everyone. The current system is putting pressure on an ageing and reducing cohort of Officials, challenging athletes and parents with long travel times to competitions and having a league system that promotes mediocrity rather than top level competition and development.

The current system means at all levels there are 2 athletes per event resulting in many technical events populated by untrained athletes entering just for the point! We would request that all leagues review the structure of inter Club matches, so it meets the needs of the sportas it is today and not hold onto a format which no longer fits the size of the sport.

We would like the Leagues to consider the ideas suggested below: -

1. Leagues to be even more Local - with a Grand Final to ensure exciting competition goes to the end of the season.
2. Consider ways to shorten the length of all matches.
3. The NAL currently is an 8-hour meeting with very long travel times often requiring costly overnight accommodation. There is a reducing pool of venues with outside throwing facility able to host, adding another constraint to the fixtures scheduling. This league should be a showcase event for the sport, but it is not in the current format. We acknowledge with some ideas later how others can help this league to flourish.
4. With regards to younger athletes, we have developed a multi-event, inter-club competition with two local clubs for U10s and U12s this season. We saw high numbers from each club and a meeting completed within 3 hours. This has been a big hit with all the athletes, parents and officials. It is innovative approaches such as this which can help keep youngsters in the sport.
5. YDL Lower should remain U14/U16 as it creates a good environment for development. However, consideration should be given to one athlete per club for technical events, OR the Match should have fewer clubs in order to shorten the meeting. Overall, we believe this league is working well but travel time is our main concern. This league might benefit from initial meetings being more local league leading to a regional final culminating in a national final.

6. YDL Upper should be a competition for U18 only. Possibly reduced to one athlete per event plus more guests to give athletes competition opportunities but stop "competing for point" syndrome.
7. Regional leagues should adapt to cater for the U20 and senior. League structure should have a much shorter programme and reduced travel time. This would encourage more in the U20 age group to compete and would help keep them in the sport. Not everyone can be an international athlete, but they can still enjoy the sport and compete.
8. Athletes, particularly in field events, steeplechase and some hurdles feel disrespected and undervalued by the Leagues which allow Clubs to enter athletes "just to get a point". Set standards to maintain the integrity of the competition.
9. We appreciate hosting the European and Commonwealth Games this year has been a challenge for all Competition deliverers, but we hope you can ensure dates work for all in the sport in 2027 and beyond. For example: -

- do not position Premier League against Event specific weekends.
- do not position leagues on both days at weekends as this puts far too much pressure on officials. For example, in 2026 11th July is English schools and NAL and 12th July are YDL Upper. This is expecting too much from coaches, athletes and officials.
- all YDL Lower dates this summer were positioned against school holidays-this is not encouraging a new generation to enter the sport.
- there is very little competition for U18s and below from the middle of July so there is no reason why the fixtures cannot be spread out.

We are sure you are reflecting upon the sport and how best to provide Inter Club competition. We hope you receive our ideas in the spirit it is intended, to help make our sport more attractive to athlete's officials and spectators. Having spoken to many other clubs we understand they have similar views, so we feel it is important that changes are made sooner rather than later

Kind regards,

Birchfield Harriers