

MITCA President's Letter

Dear MITCA Members,

The Elemental Sport

While I enjoy basketball, and football, baseball and high school robotics, I find that the sports pitting human against human in head to head competition are my favorites. Key to this attitude is that such competition answers question that are as compelling today as they were when humans could first speak; for example, who is the fastest? who can jump the highest/longest? who can throw the furthest?

A World of Change

The world is a dynamic place. The life we witness daily are individual reactions to the ebb and flow of balances long established (with free-will thrown in for good measure). That is, everything is in equilibrium with everything else. Winds blow because there is area of high pressure and an area of low pressure and a new balance is sought by nature. An economy changes because a new industry enters the fray and causes change in other industries. A thousand other examples might be given, but the idea is that change is the nature of our world.

What is Time?

For those who have been coaching for at least four decades, such change has entered our sports of Track and Field and Cross Country. Spring wound stopwatches became digital timers with an ability to resolve time to a scale that exceeded our physical reflexes (hence the need for a formula converting digital times to hand times and vice versa). The measurement of performance has reached the point where video analysis is required to untie finish line results (think 2012 Olympic Trials and the 100 m tie between Felix and Tarmoh); even swimming pools must meet strict construction standards if touch pads are to measure times to the thousandth of a second (in the fastest swimming events swimmers can travel 2.39 mm in one thousandth of a second and so a fifty meter pool must be constructed for length within that tolerance).

Wait ... What?

It has been known for some time that the average attention span for a goldfish is nine seconds. A study from Microsoft (2015, <https://tinyurl.com/y9ocro8f>) has shown that the average attention span of people has fallen from twelve seconds almost twenty years ago, to eight seconds today. The thinking is that a largely digitalized lifestyle is the reason for the brain affect. As an anecdotal example, consider the consumption of sports content. Anyone with a teenager knows that their knowledge of game outcomes is the result web-based highlight reels – how many develop the pleasure of learning strategy, tenacity, and grit by watching an entire game? Distilling the entire journey to a few moments of excellence means that the big picture is lost – as is the demonstration of patience, persistence, and tenacity.

The Challenge

The point is to put forward the idea that as prime perpetrators of educational athletics, coaches must always have an eye on the horizon for change (if not directly creating that change ourselves) and balance that change with what is good for kids. As the ability to measure performance time has fallen, so has student (and maybe adult) attention span. Are there changes

that should be made to our fundamental sports that recognize each of these changes and so improve either or both sports overall – after all, who are we to battle the nature of the world? The next time you are on the track, or the long green line, consider how our sports might ‘look’ in fifty years.

Respectfully submitted,

Greg Miller
MITCA President