

Rationale for combining IAU world best performances into one list

Upon the proposal of IAU statistician Jürgen Schoch to combine the 3 surfaces (road, track, indoor) for IAU world and world age best performances the technical committee of the IAU discussed this and the majority agreed. Based on this, the IAU executive committee in January 2014, decided to follow this proposal and freeze the current list of 3 surfaces.

Unfortunately this was not communicated clearly enough. Hence in June 2014 the IAU EC decided to extend the deadline for introduction of this rule to January 1st 2015.

Freezing means:

- 1) The current WBP/WABPs will not be invalidated but be kept on a separate list which will not be extended after 2014.
- 2) Performances achieved till end of 2014 and earlier years can still be sent in for ratification following the previous rules, if not yet done.
- 3) A combined new list of WBPWABP will be created which contains the best performance per age category no matter what surface it was achieved on. Beginning with January 2015 new WBP/WABPs have to be better than the current best performance of the combined list.

The background of this decision will be explained in this document by Jürgen Schoch:

World records vs. world best performances vs collections

In athletics, only the IAAF, the international governing body for athletics, keeps lists of world records. Beyond marathon they do this for just one discipline which is 100 km road. This follows a thorough ratification process.

The IAU has world (age) best performance lists (WBP, WABP), not world records, for these default distances 50 km, 100 km, 100 mi, 1000 km, 1000 mi, 6 h, 12 h, 24 h, 48 h and 6 days which can be found here:

http://www.iau-ultramarathon.org/statistics/201412_WBP_WABP.pdf

Inclusion into these lists follows a formal ratification process which checks if all requirements are met:

- exactly measured course, course drop less than 1m/km
- correctly working timing
- all laps documented
- race is acknowledged by national athletics federation
- race is supervised by race referees
- correct age of athlete (for World age best performances)
- negative doping control results (for World best performances)

Beyond that there are people which collect results of some less common distances like 200km, 200 miles, 500km, 500 mi, 700 mi, 1300 mi, 5000km, ...7days, 8 days, 10 days, 12 days and many distances in between.

Some people like to call them world records even though this term is restricted to the IAAF. It is easy to invent a new discipline, e.g. 800 km, and claim a record for this. There are even people who introduce a fourth surface 'way' (or French 'chemin') because several road races are held on a mixed surface including gravel and crushed stones.

None of these collections have a ratification process which checks that all requirements are truly met.

A view back into history:

For long time running in standard athletics disciplines from 100 m to 10000 m was mainly done on outdoor tracks which means a man-made structure especially done for sports (as opposed to road). Usually these tracks are 400 m long and the competitions are mainly done during the warm season (summer).

In the second half of 20th century halls were built which could incorporate smaller versions of tracks, usually 200 m. The default IAAF indoor running disciplines range from 60 m to 3000 m, which have a speed from about 40 to 20 km per hour. To be able to run quickly on these indoor tracks some inclination was added in the curves. Despite this the performances achieved there are slower than on outdoor tracks because athletes have to deal with

- more narrow lanes
- narrow curve radius
- inclination/banking

Nevertheless the IAAF hoped in parallel to the lucrative meeting series in summer to be able to establish a second meeting series during the indoor season. To sell this better to the media and sponsors they introduced another category called 'indoor'. By this it was possible to have a performance which is inferior to an outdoor performance and still call it a world record.

As a consequence of this goal, indoor records were invented as a compensation for a malus, i.e. because a sprinter/middle distance runner can not achieve his full potential indoor (see reasons above). These indoor records only refer to tracks of a length of 200 m.

Nonapplicability of indoor records to ultra-distance running

There are several reasons why this does not apply to ultra-distance running:

1) The speed of ultra-marathon races is considerably slower e.g. max 13 kph for the 24h world best performances, but in most cases around 10 kph or less. With this slow speed it is not a problem to run a narrow curve radius.

2) Ultradistance races on indoor tracks are usually ran on the innermost lane which is mostly flat (no inclination) or in a fair hall (Brno) which has no inclination.

3) IAAF indoor records only apply to tracks of 200 m. Any other course length is not covered and has to be treated as either road or track. Unfortunately some of my predecessors in the position of IAU record keeper did not observe this and ratified performances achieved on much longer courses as indoor:

- Milton Keynes and Lohja: 890m stone floor in a shopping mall (The statistician of USATF correctly counted these as road.)
- Espoo: 390m Mondo track flat
- Brno: stone floor in a fair hall, no banking
- La Rochelle: length and surface unclear
- Only Moscow is a standard 200m indoor track

4) During the last couple of years huge halls were built (mainly in Scandinavia) which incorporate much longer tracks up to 500 m. If we would adhere to IAAF competition rules they should be considered as track and not indoor. Same would be true for the 413 m indoor track in Anchorage, Alaska.

5) For ultra-distance runners an indoor race is definitively not a malus (disadvantage), probably even a bonus because the climate is controlled:

- no heat, no cold, always similar temperature
- no wind, no rain

Hence I see no reason for keeping indoor separate.

6) Lack of competition.

Even though there are now several big halls, there was no 6 days indoor event for almost 20 years (La Rochelle 1995 vs Anchorage 2014)

In former times IAAF thought, only performances achieved on tracks are truly records. Road was long set aside. But with the increasing popularity of road races and the advancement of courses measurement, mainly the introduction of the Jones counter, it was possible to measure a road course with a cheap tool and accurate enough. AIMS did some pioneer work in this field. So IAAF followed and now also has road records on 10km, marathon and 100km. The latter two are almost exclusively run on road with a few rare exceptions.

Some principles for world records:

A world record or world best performance is an extraordinary performance which is very close to the physical and physiological limits. A set of rules and prerequisites have to be met in order to make this performances comparable across space and time.

They should be realistic:

The list of world best performances (WBP) across disciplines (from 50 km to 6 days) and the list of world age best performances (WABP) from juniors, seniors to the high ages (80 years and older) should reflect the true limits what can be achieved with a certain age.

Unfortunately this is not the case with ultra WABP. The performances there just reflect the probability with which a certain discipline is run on a certain surface. Two examples taken from the most recent list of the IAU WABP: http://www.iau-ultramarathon.org/statistics/201412_WBP_WABP.pdf

1) 24h men indoor: several older age categories have performances which are better than younger (M45 vs M40, M60 vs M55)

2) 100 mi women W40: 15:05h (road), 16:56h (track), 14:43h (indoor)

The reason for this is not that running on a track is so much more difficult that it takes 2:13h more to complete it. This is just due to the fact that 100 miles is usually run on road (uncertified) or trail and rarely on track.

If we take the WABP 6h men and the 6 days men, a range which comprises pretty much the whole range from the shorter to the longer distances over which ultra-marathon is run, then we see that in most cases the road performances are the best, simply because the majority of the race is done on road. But there are some cases e.g. M45 6h, where the best performance comes from an indoor race. 6 days are much less frequent and two runners set some quite extraordinary performances in indoor races. Nevertheless the overall WBP was achieved on a track.

If we compare all ultra distance WBP/WABP we do not find that indoor is always, to a certain degree, slower or faster than road or track. This is opposed to sprint and middle distance running due to above mentioned reasons. In summary these observations do not justify to have separate categories for these types of surfaces/ambience.

If you take the speed for a certain discipline and plot all WABP per surface you get a zigzag curve (See charts for all IAU disciplines at the end of this document). But if you just take the best performances per age categories regardless of surface (the curve labelled 'overall' in the charts) you get a smooth line which shows the decline of physical capabilities over age. If we compare ultra-distance running with other shorter running disciplines or other endurance sports (e.g. cycling, cross-country skiing) the form of the curves should be similar even though its parameters (slope, offset, rate) may differ. A zigzag curve is not acceptable. We don't do our sport a favor if we proclaim ordinary performances as records.

Consequences

In summary this means for athletes:

There is no 'cheap' world best performance. It needs a first class performance and not just a good performance to achieve a world best.

For race directors this means:

There will be no niche anymore and there will be more competition among races for attracting athletes. It will be not enough to be e.g. the only indoor 6 days race in the world and athletes have to come there if they want to beat an indoor record. The surface and ambiance of the course and venue is one fact, but there are other factors for the success of a race: food, starting fee, prize money, referees, other facilities, friendliness of helpers, scenery, etc. Hopefully this raised competition among race will lead to more races and races which fulfill higher standards.











