USATF Youth Drama - 8 Takeaways

by former USATF volunteer Becca Peter

This link is a PDF transcript of the hearing that was held in November relating to both the suspension of the memberships of the 13 members of the Youth Executive Committee (YEC), and the grievance filed by the National Office against Lionel early in 2016: http://www.polevaultpower.com/annualmeeting/07315696306.pdf

This became public record when it was entered into evidence in the separate Federal lawsuit that the National Office filed against the YEC. This document was downloaded from Pacer.gov Many other (but not all) public record documents related to that case are posted here: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B7iTfs3Z19abNG53UU40Y3R3bTA

If you have no idea what is going on, this isn't for you. I'm going to make a really thorough post explaining the entire situation another time. This is a quick summary of my takeaways from the transcript.

1. Both sides suck



Let's just get this out of the way. Lionel sucks. The National Office sucks. The rest of the former Youth Executive Committee is OK and never should have been dragged into this.

First, both sides were operating on way too short of a timeline to make major changes to either the Meet Registration provider or the Meet Management software if they needed to be up and running by the indoor season, given the unique complexities of running these youth meets.

Both sides should have started the process, and started talking with their constituents, much much earlier in the year.

Second, both sides utterly failed to make any meaningful effort to engage with the broad base of constituents that would be profoundly affected by their decisions.

While these are business decisions that the National Office needs to play a large role in, this isn't a simple sponsorship that you keep under wraps until all terms are finalized! These are major decisions that affect the operations and the finances of every single Association/Meet Director/LOC.

Third, the petty power grabs suck.

2. The National Office staff making these decisions have NO IDEA how this works.



Desiree and Renee do not have track backgrounds. That's fine… it's not imperative that everyone at the National Office really be a track person. It's clear from their testimonies that neither one really understands the interaction between meet registration, meet management software, and the timing system.

BUT that's WHY we have the volunteer structure we do. We have an amazing organizational structure of volunteers who have a tremendous amount of expertise in these issues. Ideally the National Office would have worked in harmony with a group of expert volunteers to determine their needs, including members of the Youth Computer Committee but also representatives from Open and Masters because ultimately this will affect those groups too.

But that's not what happened, and almost every single problem that happened this year was the result of that LACK of engagement and communication in the early parts of the process.

Likewise, Lionel also desperately needed to engage a broader base of constituents when it came to the issue of MeetPro vs Hy-Tek. The complaints about Hy-Tek are valid, but MeetPro was not able at the time to handle age group events, and it's definitely questionable to make the major indoor meets the guinea pig for what would have been a lot of new features.

3. Why is no one talking about the National Office's in-house registration system?



This is just mind-blowing… the National Office has their OWN in-house registration system, powered by SimplyRegister, yet it was mentioned ZERO times in any of this. All Open and Masters National Championships are required to use it.

Why? Because it's a POS. It is SO TERRIBLE that no one engaged in either side of an extremely expensive lawsuit would even consider using it.

Yet Open and Masters are still being tortured by it to this day!!

I spent many hours and emails back in 2012 trying to explain to the folks who were then the IT staff at USATF what wasn't working with the current system, and how they could be made better. At the 2012 Associations Workshop in Pittsburgh, I sat down with them and showed them Athletic.net and how significantly superior it was when it came to registering a team for a meet.

And I'm still salty AF that no one ever listened to me or took any of my concerns seriously because fixing USATF's in-house system (or replacing it) could have prevented all of these problems.

4. The National Office is cool with eavesdropping



Are we back in Junior High?!

Calling in to a call you maybe weren't invited to, and failing to identify you are on the call is eavesdropping.

But as long as your bosses are OK with it that's cool?

5. Who really harmed Athletic.net's reputation?



This isn't based on the hearing, but the complaints I've heard over the past year.

Yes, the YEC's initial complaints about Athletic.net lead to a reluctance for those involved to embrace it. But once it was forced upon everyone, and everyone was actually using it, there were problems. There were kinks to be worked out.

And you know what caused most of those kinks? It wasn't Athletic.net, it was the way that the National Office insisted they set things up for USATF.

For example, a MAJOR complaint was that parents on a team could not pay for their child's entry, only representatives for that team could. That's fine if your team normally enters and pays for everyone, but many clubs, especially smaller ones, have the parents register and pay for the kids themselves.

This wasn't any limitation that is inherent to Athletic.net, it is a limitation that was set by the National Office.

This, and most of the other kinks, could have been resolved in advance if Desiree had actually made the effort to engage with experienced people during the process. But she didn't. And now a lot of parents and clubs are still salty about being forced to use a system that they perceive as "sucky" because it wasn't set up in a way that best met their needs.

6. This is out of hand



The number of legal matters surrounding all of this is insane.

Each of the 13 suspended members currently owes over $17,000 in legal fees for their defense in the Federal Case, the one where USATF is seeking millions in damages from each of them. Millions that clearly none of them have, since they spent their lives VOLUNTEERING for this organization.

That's over $220,000 in legal fees for the defendants. How much do you think USATF has spent on their end? How many hundreds of thousands of dollars will USATF spend on this that should be going to our athletes?

And USATF is seeking LIFETIME BANS for all 13 of them?!?!?! A group of people who spent their life giving away their time for free for the sake of the sport and the kids in this sport. They can't coach, they can't officiate, they can't work with meet management, they can't do anything.

All because of a pissing match over registration software.

Meanwhile, the National Office is cool with paying convicted dopers to coach our relay teams at the Olympics. But they draw the line at youth administrators who don't like their decisions. That's what #WeAreUSATF means. Fall in line or GTFO.

7. Lionel's Oops Factor



From Robin Brown-Beamon's testimony:

8 A Let me tell you a story about oops. I learned
9 a very valuable lesson and I learned this lesson from
10 Lionel and I will be honest and admit that I use this
11 in my own personal life. It is called Lionel's Oops
12 Factor, and I have been calling it that now for
13 probably 10 years. I want to get something done, I
14 get some pushback, I am going to do it because I think
15 it is the right thing to do, when you question me
16 about it, oops, sorry. I didn't know I wasn't
17 supposed to do that. And it works.

This is by far the most entertaining part of the transcript.

8. This isn't over



Do you feel like it ended in a cliffhanger? That's because it did. Will we ever see the rest? The rest hasn't happened yet, and whether or not the rest ever becomes public depends largely on the future of the Federal lawsuit and any settlements that may or may not be reached.

For the love of track and field… USATF please settle this case!!! Stop draining hundreds of thousands of dollars away from our athletes into this pissing match!!!

