

Placement of the NZ Secondary School Track, Field and Road Race Championships

Teachers in Charge of Athletics are asked to indicate their preference for the timing of this event when making their entries this year.

The executive has given an undertaking to the NZSS Sports Council that we would canvas opinion on their desire to have the championships moved to a late March /early April date in place of the North Island and South Island championships that would cease to exist. The Sports Council members are concerned that preparing for and competing in the NZ championships in December impact negatively on students' preparation and performance in their examinations and/or their athletics. They see logic in having a national championship come at the end of the season as a culmination to school and regional championships.

The NZSSAA executive is opposed to these possible changes for a variety of reasons.

We support the continuation of the North Island and South Island championships. Being a competition of qualifiers (school sports/zones/regional championships) they are relatively simple to organise, and being contained within each island are more easily accessible and affordable for athletes and their parents to attend at short notice. Accessing a national championships at that time, if we were to have the qualifiers model, would be much more problematic. At the AGMs of both associations this year there was overwhelming support for the timing and structure we have at present.

Since their inception, the NZSSAA championships have been a competition for individuals within a school team setting. Every school has the right to enter one athlete in every event if they wish and up to 3 if they meet the standards. The aim was to give young people the chance to take part in a national championship whether or not they have the ability to go through to the finals. The aim behind the concept was to both encourage and develop athletics and to give young people the opportunity to travel, meet other New Zealanders and see other parts of their country.

We contend that the best time, while not perfect, to hold the championships is still in December. It takes time to identify likely team members, prepare them and put the travel and accommodation plans in place. This can be done in a more measured way through the year. It avoids the rush and pressure during what is often a very busy, short term one and the inevitable clash with winter codes trying to hold trials, select teams and prepare for the beginning of term two (or earlier!). We think a championship at this later time would have a significantly negative impact on the numbers and quality in school teams competing. It also means competition with other major summer codes trying to complete their competitions at that time. We think that having the championships where they are gives a focus and vitality to local schools and club competition in October and November, which could be diminished to the detriment of athletics generally.

The issue of examinations is a serious one and we have always done our best to avoid clashes and to accommodate those athletes who are caught with a late examination. NCEA in some respects has made it less of a concern than in previous years with many students having achieved their academic goals prior to examinations. The reintroduction and timing of scholarship examinations did initially cause us a problem but we should be able to avoid clashes there in the future particularly with the longer term 4. The 2008 championships are set for December 13/14, which should be well clear of the final examinations.

Please consider the issues carefully, consult with your principal and discuss the matter with your colleagues and athletes before indicating your preference when submitting your entries for this year's championships.

John Tylden
Chairman NZSSAA