

Enough, Already!

by John Farrow

As a general proposition, a race is supposed to determine who the fastest runner is on a given day. Nothing more, nothing less. Yet earlier this year there was the case of the high school girl in Georgia who finished second in her state cross-country meet, only to be disqualified because her shorts were too short. And this even though she had worn the same thing all season.

Now comes a report out of Ohio (*Sports Illustrated*, June 23, 1997) where the Meadowdale High girls 4 x 400-meter relay team was disqualified in the semi-finals of the state track meet because (gasp!) the colors of their sports bras didn't match!

Now granted, a little coordination is a good thing, especially in relays. (Yours truly once suffered the indignity of finding himself coming out of the first turn of his leg of a 4 x 400-meter relay *sans* baton.) But give me a break. Bra color?

And what about the boys? Did they check their jock straps? I mean, let's get real! The sartorial splendor of uniforms, or the lack thereof, shouldn't have anything to do with deciding a race after the fact.

Anglo-Saxon law certainly has ample authority for such a rule. Called ye olde Doctrine of Estoppel, it basically says that if you know something and don't speak up, and somebody else does something that you could have prevented had you said something beforehand, then you can't bitch later on. Sort of speak now or forever hold your peace.

And this principle has worked just fine in sports. A few years ago, George Brett of the Kansas City Royals hit a home run against the Yankees. After Brett rounded the bases, Billy Martin, the Yankees manager, complained that Brett's bat had too much pine tar on it, was therefore an illegal bat

and the home run should be disallowed. (The rules require that pine tar be at least 14" from the fat end of the bat.)

The umpire measured the bat, found that the pine tar was indeed too close to the end, called Brett out, and disallowed the home run, whereupon Brett went ballistic with his best imitation of Mike Tyson. But the commissioner of baseball (they had one then) promptly reversed the umpire, saying that as long as there is no unfair advantage, you have to complain about something you can see on a bat before the bat is used in the game.

That's only fair, and the same concept should also apply to running. Once a race is run, it's done and it shouldn't matter what anyone wore or didn't wear. Otherwise, no one could ever be sure that someone behind him wouldn't find something technically wrong with his uniform and try to get him disqualified.

Can you imagine Michael Johnson worrying about his Olympic medals because maybe his gold shoes didn't match his uniform? The last thing we need is to have some committee trying to decide if gold shoes do in fact go with red, white and blue uniforms.

Let's leave the non-performance stuff out of the race results once the race is run. If you don't like someone's dirty socks or mismatched singlet, don't wait until later to squawk. Race officials shouldn't tolerate all this whining from those getting left behind.

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