

by Mary Helen Sprecher

And you thought this was going to be easy. Well, not easy, exactly, but you'd hoped there might be at least *some* cut-and-dried decisions about building a new track. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way.

Today, you're trying to decide something that sounds simple on the surface, but is more complex than anticipated -- the level of track certification to specify in the bid documents for your new facility.

Why Certification?

Certification of a track gives the owner and end users assurance that the track was built and marked correctly. In short, it is a guarantee that your 400-meter track is, in fact, 400 meters, and that other aspects of the track (slope, etc.) are also in compliance. Accuracy is essential, and no governing body will permit any minus tolerance (no matter how small) in the distance of a racecourse. Having your track certified serves to guarantee the accuracy of all events so that a record achieved at that facility can be submitted to a governing body without additional verification.

While not all tracks need to be certified (the need for certification will depend upon the intended use of the track and the likelihood of records being set), it is generally desirable (where a choice exists) to have a track that conforms to the standards of the applicable governing body. Which, of course, is what you wanted -- until you learned that the level of certification you choose can dramatically affect the total cost of your project.

Levels of Certification

Through research, you have learned that there are five (yes, five) levels of certification available to track builders. The question, then, becomes almost a Goldilocks-style conundrum: What's too high? What's too low? What's in the middle? What's just right for your facility?

For years, the IAAF standard (Levels I and II certification) was used in certification of many facilities. But, say many track professionals, IAAF certification is applicable to the highest levels of competition, including the Olympics and the Pan-Am Games. It is an exacting standard to build to. And in most cases, it's not necessary for the common market, which includes high schools and colleges.

"The IAAF Certification is overkill for nearly all track venues in the U.S. market," says Sam Fisher of Fisher Tracks in Boone, Iowa. "In addition, it is very expensive."

Use of the IAAF certification persisted, however, mainly for lack of other standards, he notes. "Because of the lack of any certification process in place, many track owners were spending needless sums of money trying to meet an IAAF level of construction that was simply not necessary. Because there was no certification in place, for example, at the high school track market, oftentimes architects and engineers would request an IAAF Certification for no other reason than it was the only measuring stick available."

To help address the problem, the American Sports Builders Association (ASBA) has developed a new set of documents, the use of which can allow for the certification of running tracks at high school and collegiate levels of competition. These documents are now available free of charge on the Association's web site, www.sportsbuilders.org.

While IAAF certification remains the standard for facilities at the highest levels of competition, ASBA saw the need for a level of certification that would address the requirements of high schools and colleges who were building new track and field facilities and wanted quality venues, but not necessarily at the international level. ASBA members, including track builders, strippers, design professionals and others, worked to create a set of track certification documents that would meet these needs.

According to Kristoff Eldridge of Cape & Island Tennis & Track in Pocasset, Massachusetts, the documents, which are intended to serve as verification to the owner of the facility that their track meets the requirements of the appropriate governing body, "have been recognized by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) which governs college-level athletics, and by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) which governs high school level athletics."

The five existing levels of certification are applicable to various levels of competition. "Classes I and II are those of IAAF," Sam Fisher points out. "Class V is for the typical practice track and small high school or middle school meet facilities."

The remaining two classifications can be found on the documents set forth by ASBA, and are relevant to high schools and colleges. The certification documents are "Class III: Markings and Slopes Certification for Running Tracks" and "Class IV: Markings Certification for Running Tracks."

All levels of certification (Meaning Classes I through V) are meant to be addressed as an integral part of construction; Classes IV and V are to be completed as part of the striping package. Class III also includes a section on track and event area slopes, which must be completed before the track surface is installed.

The certification documents for Levels III and IV are available on the ASBA web site, www.sportsbuilders.org, and can be found under the subheading Construction Guidelines/Buyers' Guides, from the menu on the left-hand side of the page. The documents can be printed out from the page, or a downloadable .pdf file is also available. The documents are available free of charge, and should be completed by a track professional who is able to perform the necessary calculations. ASBA's membership search feature, also found on the web site, can help track owners locate a qualified professional to help with track certification, as well as marking, construction, surfacing, repairs, maintenance and more.

According to Fisher, the new track certification documents are a part of ASBA's continuing efforts to promote quality construction of athletic facilities. The use of

documentation, he notes, contributes to "a completed project that meets everyone's expectations with no surprises. A happy and satisfied owner is good for the industry."

Ah, certification. Too much, too little or just right? According to Fisher, the choice should be made by an informed owner who has studied the options, discussed the needs of the users, and had good dialogue with the track installer.

"The important thing, in regard to each level, is that the appropriate steps are laid out ahead of construction so that everyone knows the steps necessary to meet the owner's expectations and/or the bid specification documents. This means a completed project meeting everyone's expectations and no surprises."

Sidebar 1:

Track Markings and Certification:

The markings on any track are the single most important feature when the track is used for competition. They guide runners and represent distances that are essential to both athletes and governing bodies. For this reason:

- **Choose a knowledgeable specialist.** Doing markings and calculations should *never* be a do-it-yourself job.
- **Know that more than one person may be required.** It's not uncommon to separate specialists for calculations, layout and painting of markings. A high degree of skill is necessary for each job.
- **Select specialists based on credentials, past performance and proof of ability.** References, years of experience and knowledge of the rules of various governing bodies are basic qualifications.
- **Cost-efficiency in this case means only having to do it once.** Measurement certification is based on your track markings. Trying to cut corners or going for a low-budget fix isn't going to help if it ruins your facility's chances for certification.

Sidebar 2:

Guidelines for Governing Bodies:

Does your track need to be certified? Basically, it depends on the use of the facility, and whether records may be set there. Check with the following governing bodies for specific recommendations and for requirements regarding documentation, signatures from surveyors, etc.:

- **For state high school records:** Local governing bodies can provide guidance, since requirements vary from state to state.
- **National High School records:** The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) (www.nfhs.org)
- **NCAA records:** The National Collegiate Athletic Association (www.ncaa.org)
- **Collegiate records:** Collegiate records are the best statistically acceptable performances as recognized by the Federation of American Statisticians of Track (FAST). Since these records are mostly set in NCAA Division I championships or at major national or international meets, the issue of track certification would be covered by those sections.

- **USA Track and Field records:** USA Track & Field (www.usatf.org)
- **IAAF records:** International Amateur Athletics Federation (www.iaaf.org).

Sidebar 3:

Get the new documents

To download the new ASBA documents for Class III and Class IV certification:

- Go to www.sportsbuilders.org
- From the menu on the left-hand side of the page, click on Construction Guidelines/Buyers' Guides
- Documents can be printed out from the page, or are available as a .pdf
- For more information on certification, marking and track calculations, order the ASBA publication, *Running Tracks: A Construction and Maintenance Manual*, by going to ASBA Publications, also on the left-hand side of the ASBA website, www.sportsbuilders.org.

Note: The American Sports Builders Association (ASBA) is a non-profit association helping designers, builders, owners, operators and users understand quality sports facility construction. The ASBA sponsors informative meetings and publishes newsletters, books and technical construction guidelines for athletic facilities, including those dealing specifically with track and field facilities. Available at no charge is a listing of all publications offered by the Association, as well as the ASBA's Membership Directory. Info: 866-501-ASBA (2722) or www.sportsbuilders.org