

Commonwealth Games in Perspective – Australian Athletics

Let me start by congratulating all those coach-athlete units (14 Athletes – 21% of the team) who set a season's best or personal best during these Games. Even more congratulations to those coach-athlete units (12% of the team) who achieved a lifetime best performance – the holy grail of the training journey. Creating such a performance in the second half of the year has often been a difficult assignment for many Australian track and field coach-athlete units. As time has unfolded there appears to be some improvement in how athletes are prepared for these tournament-style games as replicated in the Olympic and World Championship versions.

In most World Championships and Olympic Games, the following event structure prevails:

9 events happen as a straight final with no qualifying rounds.

25 events require a single qualifying round to get to the final

14 events require two rounds (qualifying round plus semi-final) to reach the final.

This means that it is likely that a season's / personal best performance will be required to progress in the 25 events with a single qualifying round. For the events requiring two rounds to reach the final, it is likely that a season's or personal best will have to be produced successively with the final demanding a possible further personal best. It is these characteristics of the tournament-type of events that demand some understanding when preparing the athlete, especially in those events that require a qualifying round.

The recent Commonwealth Games held in Birmingham, UK, were of a tournament-type configuration but a closer look illustrates some warnings. While Australia headed the gold medal count in Athletics medals and was second in the total Athletics medal table, some caution must surround this success when translating or predicting ongoing success in future Olympic and World Championship events.

Out of the 36 events contested by Australian athletes, 18 of them were straight finals which reduced the considerable effect of having to produce a qualifying performance.

The quality of the contest must also be considered when any comparison between World / Olympic championships and the Commonwealth Games is carried out.

In the Commonwealth Games of 2018 in Gold Coast, out of the 45 Australian athletes who had to navigate a qualifying round 76% of them progressed. In the

Commonwealth Games of 2022 in Birmingham out of the 65 total contests with a qualifying round, 86% of the athletes progressed.

When one examines the Tokyo Olympics of 2021 and the Oregon World Championships of 2022 the results are considerably different. In Tokyo out of the 45 athletes who had to navigate a qualifying round, 48% of them progressed. At the Oregon World Championships out of the 52 athletes who had to navigate a qualifying round, 42% progressed.

The message is that much vigilance is still required in the preparation for the Olympic and World Championships environments and those who achieved a season's / personal best at the Birmingham Commonwealth Games should realise that, while they are on the right track, they must keep on finding the answers to progression. Others might need some support from the sport's High-Performance mechanism to make the required progress.

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