

TIPS TO IMPROVE CHANCES OF GETTING SELECTED TO OFFICIATE AT THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

By Rob Buzaitis

Disclaimer: This article is based on my own observations and thoughts and conversations with other officials. It is not, however, adopted by the selection committee nor a guarantee of being selected.

(In this article, I use the term “national championship” to mean the USA Indoor Track and Field Championships, the USA Indoor Combined Events Championships, the USA Junior/Senior Outdoor Track and Field Championships, and the U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials.)

Like athletes, the goal of many officials is to make it to the national championships. For an athlete, the path is clear: achieve the qualifying time, distance, or height or be in the top X places at a district or regional meet. For an official, the path is not clear. Below are some suggestions on how to improve your chances of being selected to work the national championships.

Your application should reflect what you have worked. If you put your event preferences as (1) High Jump, (2) Umpire, and (3) Marshal, your meet resume should reflect that you have worked as a high jump judge, Umpire, and Marshal. This should include a variety of levels, including collegiate conference and national meets. Experience as a referee, while valuable, does not show the selection committee you have recent, hands-on experience working a particular event.

It is a numbers game. If you polled the officials working the national championships, probably two-thirds of them are starters at local high school meets. However, only about ten officials are selected as starters at both national championships each year. So, if your goal is to work the national championship (instead of “be a starter at the national championships”), consider other areas to apply. Umpires and marshals are two of the largest crews at the championships. Wind gauge operator is a necessary position, and often not many officials apply for it. However, there are usually at most two positions.

Work your USATF Association and Junior Olympic Regional Championships. This is important for two reasons. First, the chair of the USATF Officials Committee has stated that this is an important consideration for selection (and he is also chair of the selection committee). Second, it is a meet which applies USATF rules – the same as the national championships.

Work the USA Youth Outdoor Track and Field Championships, USA Junior Olympic Track and Field Championships, or USATF Masters Track and Field Championships. The best analogy is the baseball feeder system: Players play in the minor leagues until they have the experience or the team has a need for that position – then they are “called up to the majors.” Working at least one of these meets is pretty much required to work the national championships. These meets, like USATF Association and Junior Olympic Regional meets, use USATF rules. Also, these meets are generally evaluation meets: the chief event judge evaluates the officials on his or her crew and that information is provided to the selection committee when you apply. This provides

the selection committee valuable information on your abilities on which it can make selection decisions. (Note: The same evaluations are done at the national championships.)

In Olympic years, apply to work the Junior Outdoor Track and Field Championships. While not impossible, your chances of getting selected to work the Olympic Trials as your first national meet are very slim. However, in Olympic years, the USA Junior Outdoor Track and Field Championships are held separately from the Olympic Trials. That means there is an additional national championship meet needing officials. While experienced national championship officials are selected to ensure the meet runs well, this is a place to give new officials a chance to work a national championships. Those who do well get selected in subsequent years.

Travel outside your Association to work a few meets. This is important even if your geographic area hosts a number of major meets, including national and international meets. It first shows a willingness to expend time, effort, and expense to travel for meets that are not the national championships. Also, and just as important, is the experience to work with other officials, most likely not as the chief official -- your first selection to a national championship will not be as chief official. It gives you the opportunity to possibly learn a different, but equally effective, way of running the event.

Continue to apply each year. The old adage “if at first you don’t succeed, try, try, again” is also true here. In different years, less people may apply for the same events area, which may increase your chance of being selected. Also, you will have an additional year to hopefully expand your experience and meet resume.