



Athletes' fury at Team GB 'farce' sparks selection overhaul for 2016 Olympics

Minister pledges more transparency as just one of 11 appeals decided this weekend succeeds

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Olympic selection policies are to undergo a major overhaul after the embarrassing controversies that have hit the build-up to London 2012, with the sports minister, Hugh Robertson, among those calling for a change. This follows the large volume of appeals by disaffected athletes overlooked for Team GB in several sports, and has been triggered by the exclusion from the Taekwondo team of world number one Aaron Cook in circumstances that brought allegations of bias, because he opted out of GB Taekwondo's training system.

The British Olympic Association chairman Lord Moynihan has told The Independent on Sunday of his "disquiet and concern" at the present system. The BOA, although nominally responsible for the 550-strong Team GB, has no power to overrule selections made by individual sports bodies, only to request them to "think again". He says the BOA will conduct a review after the Games, and that: "We want to have a new process set up in time for the Rio Olympics in 2016."

This could include the right to reinstate athletes if it was felt they had been unfairly omitted, or introducing a "wild card" system that would allow them to be added to the team.

The BOA review will be backed by UK Sport, the government agency responsible for distributing Lottery funding, and by the sports minister, who says: "There has to be a change and it is a challenge for all of us. There will be a new set of funding agreements where we will be addressing that and having much more transparent and accountable selection procedures."

UK Sport chair Baroness Campbell adds: "We will have a much stronger line on governance – there will be sports that need to improve on this."

The latest appeals decided this weekend saw 11 athletes challenge their non-selection for the squad. Only one, Welsh 800m runner Gareth Warburton, was successful. The Warburton decision has added to questions about the consistency of the selection policy of UK Athletics, the governing body, because he did not achieve the two required "A" standard qualifying requirements. Sprinter Richard Kilty, who did have the required A standards in the 200m, had his appeal rejected.

This follows hard on the heels of the decision to select Scottish athlete Lynsey Sharp for the 800m, despite the fact she only achieved B standards, while others, with A standards, were overlooked. The decision sparked fury; with 2000 Sydney games heptathlon gold medallist Denise Lewis labelling it a "farce".

Commenting, UK Athletics boss Ed Warner, chairman of the appeals panel, said: "We appreciate that this is a difficult time for athletes who were not selected to Team GB. Appeals are heard on a matter of process and facts and not opinion."

Former 3,000m runner Zola Budd said urgent, radical change was needed. "I wish there was an international system like in tennis and golf... in addition to national selection. It would give athletes more opportunities to qualify."

Additional reporting by Sunniva Davies-Rommetveit

'All I can do now is prove to everybody that I should have been in the team'

Emma Jackson, 800m

"Not too surprised the appeal was rejected but I had to try... Thanks so much to my family and coach for getting me through this month."

'This proves they have a personal problem'

Richard Kilty, 100m/200m

"They accepted an athlete's appeal who has only one A standard, but dismissed mine and I have two A standards."

'Athletics is my life. I'm pretty low at the moment'

Jemma Simpson, 800m

"Given the chance, I would have peaked at the time of the 800 metres, but it's gone now."

'I appealed because there was space. Never mind'

Laura Turner, 100m/200m

"I was 'selectable' for the Olympics, but a foot injury meant I hadn't raced since 28th April."

'Sometimes life doesn't go as it's "supposed" to go'

Marilyn Okoro, 400m/800m

Selected for the 4x400m relay but reportedly threatened to quit when not picked for the 800m (she ran the fastest time this season). On Friday, she tweeted: "Sometimes life doesn't go as it's 'supposed' to go and if that's the lesson here then so be it!"

'I am absolutely delighted to have been selected'

Gareth Warburton, 800m

Missed out on getting the second qualifying time he needed, by just 0.2 seconds, at last month's European championships in Helsinki. "Gutted", but appealed successfully. "I am joining a fantastic team... and we're all focused on doing Britain proud."