Discussion within the Dutch Athletics Federation about competition rules for Masters.

In November 2012 the Dutch Athletics Federation has set the competition rules for 2013. The rules for masters cover two area of interest.

- Interclub competition
- National Championships

The competition rules are modified in a number of places.

Club competition:
In 2012 the Athletics Federation introduced age grading in the interclub competition for masters in the Netherlands. In this competition club teams compete with other club teams. There is an average of ten events, all athletes get credits for their performances (Hungarian table), the credit points are added up for the team total.

There is one competition in April, a second one in May. The twelve top teams, after two competitions go to the final competition in September.

In the past the younger masters generally received more points than elder masters, so they were more valuable for their team. The result was that elder masters lost interest in this interclub competition. As this competition was meant to be for athletes of all ages, age grading was introduced to offer them equal opportunity to score for their club. [http://www.atletiekunie.nl/oud/uitslag.php?id=1539](http://www.atletiekunie.nl/oud/uitslag.php?id=1539) you will see that, although someone lost his/her 100 m series nevertheless he/she might receive more points (last column) than faster athletes, because of his/her age category.

Before the national federation decided to use age grading a small study group studied the appropriateness of age grading. The study group consisted of representatives of the National Masters Platform (an advisory board for the federation), referees and technical delegates. Weia Reinboud did part of the statistical work, resulting in many graphs which you will find now on her athletics website – the work is still in progress: [http://home.xmsnet.nl/weiatletiek/AgeGradingsEng1.html](http://home.xmsnet.nl/weiatletiek/AgeGradingsEng1.html)

The conclusion of the study group was that with today’s masters records, anyone would design a similar age grading system as the current international system of age grading designed by Bernd Rehpenning. It is the best system we have so far and therefore we advised the federation to use it in our interclub competition for masters.

In fact, this competition seems to be a test of the age grading system on a scale not yet done, as far as we know. Looking at the results of the first year we can conclude that they are pretty good in what they were intended to do: to give masters in all age categories a chance to be valuable for their club team. Nevertheless, unsubstantiated reports are coming in that the elder athletes are overrated in this system. That could be the case, but the data of the first year are insufficient to draw this conclusion.

Weia Reinboud is W60 high jumper and javelin thrower.

National Championships:
At the national championships in the Netherlands the older age categories are often poorly represented. Under the old regulations: To speak of a national championship one needed to have at least 5 entries in an age category and three masters had to appear at the actual
competition. If the minimum number of subscriptions is not reached, the event of the championship will be cancelled. If there are not enough masters present at the start of the event, different age categories will be merged (the actual category and the next younger category). The weights and measures customary used in this younger category will be used then. It frequently happens that athletes all over the country are asked to register in order to achieve the required number of at least 5 registered masters. Many ways are used to slightly bend the rules but it does not enhance fair play in a competition.

The Masters Platform has diligently tried to find solutions. The Athletics Federation (advised by the study group) choose for merging categories namely, 35-49, 50-59 and 60+ with the restriction that the weights and measures of the original categories might not be used. A group of masters objected to this rule. The Masters Platform consulted The Athletics Federation to state the objections. The Athletics Federation and the Masters Platform decided in consultation that the regulations needed amending.

The new regulations required adaptation. In consultation with the platform and the group of dissatisfied masters, the Athletics Federation changed competition rules. The 5-year categories will remain and the weights and measures customary to the own age category will be used. Clustering is still possible in case that in a certain age category there is less than five athletes registered or less than three athletes at the start of the event. In that case, the athletes are passed on to the next younger age group, until the required numbers are achieved. In case of merging, the athlete is allowed to continue to use the weights and measures belonging to his own age category. The results will be published in five years categories (in case of any record recognition). In case of Hurdles clustering the specification of the youngest age category will be used. To prevent improper registrations as mentioned before, the registration lists will not be published before the closing of registration period.

Non stadia events
Age clustering in these National Championships has recently been abandoned. Generally there are ample participants per age category in these championships, so merging of categories is not necessary.

2014, and the near future
For future editions of championships inquiries will be made whether it is possible to adopt a more open system of subscription: a system in which every athlete will be able to compete in his own five-year age category and medals are awarded based on performance limits.

The Netherlands is currently considering whether it is possible to apply age grading to National Championships. In 2013, however, age grading will not be applied in the National Championships. The Masters Platform will take this subject into account as one of the possibilities for future application examine this subject as one of the possible future applications, but further research and development is still needed.

Within EVAA a committee of Coaches and Athletes has been created. This committee at European level might give strong impulses to new developments within the masters’ athletics