

“What does USA Track & Field do for trail running.”

A point-counterpoint with



Bill Roe
USATF President



Matt Carpenter
Runner

Format: A point-counterpoint with Bill Roe and Matt Carpenter each submitting a 500 word (or less) statement answering the question, “What does USA Track & Field do for trail running.” Neither will know the other’s response until both statements have been submitted. Both will then be given an additional 100 words (give or take 10-20) to respond to the other’s statement. Again, neither will know the other’s response to the statement until after they have both been submitted.

What Follows: On the next two pages is a scan of the story as it appeared in the May, 2007 *Running Times* on pages 68 and 69. The text from the story appears on the two pages after that.

hit the trails



Matt Carpenter

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We posed this question to Matt Carpenter, one of the most accomplished trail runners in the U.S., as well as a consistent voice for trail runners, and to Bill Roe, President of USATF.

Matt Carpenter: What does USATF do for mountain, ultra and trail running? Not a lot. The 1,402 word "About USATF" page on their web site does not even mention one of these sports! True, a separate council has been established within USATF called MUT (Mountain/Ultra/Trail) — an appropriate moniker since USATF treats these sports like mutts and feeds them bones. The annual budget allocated to MUT by USATF is only \$4,500. This does not even scratch the surface of what it takes to put together and support a team to represent the United States at international competitions. The airfare for the 2006 U.S. 100km team alone was nearly \$15,000.

So lacking has been USATF's support for MUT teams that for many years the size of runners' wallets was just as important as how fast they ran, since they often had to pay their own way to represent our country. The 100km team resorted to setting up a nonprofit organization to accept donations to help with expenses. The 2003-4 MUT annual meeting minutes reveal how the team has splintered, with some of our best ultrarunners citing USATF's lack of funding and leadership as the reason they

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The above only touches on the lack of USATF support at the team level. However, that is about the extent of USATF involvement with MUT sports and, likewise, the extent of MUT sports' use for USATF. Yes, some will be forced to join USATF in order to receive prize money that USATF does not provide, or to qualify and run on teams that USATF does not fund, the effect being that a USATF membership becomes a tax against the very people USATF claims to support. Otherwise, the "Why Join USATF" webpage offers nothing compelling from a MUT perspective, and that was before the membership fee was recently increased. Perhaps while going to the expense to add pretty wings to their logo, had they changed their name to something more inclusive, more MUT runners might feel a connection. It's well known that the "T" in USATF does not stand for trails, and although the "U" stands for United there is nothing united about the way USATF treats the sports which it governs. MUT sports would be better served if we all spent \$29.95 on products from MUT sponsors who are the sport's real supporters — even if they are not mentioned on the USATF sponsors page. At least that way we would be getting something of value in return.

Bill Roe: I think the first question which must be answered is "What is USATF supposed to do for any sport group under its umbrella?" Our primary governance document, written in 1978 and revised in 1998, is the Amateur Sports Act, legislation enacted by Congress to answer the concerns of many U.S. sports groups about the competency of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and dissension within the Olympic movement. The primary focus of the ASA is to ensure the viability of Olympic and Pan American Games sports, and for world championships within the sport.

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the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), the international governing body for track and field, long distance running, and race walking. Within its definition are included many "disciplines" of our sport, and specifically cross country running and mountain running, the only "cousins" of trail running with world championships at this time. There is a proposal to hold an international trail running championship; when that happens, the IAAF will assume some role for that event, much as it does for ultrarunning and mountain running where it is a patron and offers limited funding.

Anything defined by the IAAF falls under USATF's umbrella, as we are the national governing body recognized by the IAAF and the United States Olympic Committee (USOC). As part of governance, we assume the role of defining legal competition, and put together the structure for making rational, defensible decisions when any discipline of the sport meets to determine athlete and staff selection for international teams. In most cases, we also conduct the trials events and/or selection procedures.

As part of the governance function, we can and do conduct or authorize national championship events for all disciplines under our purview. In almost every other sport, it is a given that, in order to compete in national championships and be eligible for such benefits as awards and prize money, an individual must be a member of that sport's governing body.

Additionally, USATF has been proactive in recruiting events to host USA Mountain/Ultra/Trail Championships that will provide U.S. athletes with the opportunity to earn a total of \$35,000 in prize money in 2007.

I know that one of the reasons for this point-counterpoint is due to USATF's inconsistency in its relationship with a championship event. In 2005, USATF membership was required of all entrants in the Vail 10K Trail Run, while in 2006, only those persons who wished to compete for the championship had to be members. We are fortunate to be able to offer this option to races and participants — in almost every other sport, just to be able to compete from week to week, you must be a member of the governing body. We have long held out for the recreational runner's ability to choose individually whether to support us by joining, and have constantly beefed up our membership program to make it attractive to any runner or jogger.

Carpenter's reply to Roe's statement: If USATF put up the \$35,000 in prize money, this discussion would be moot, as that would be doing something for MUT sports. However, that is not the case. USATF is merely targeting prize money races to make its championships relevant.

Yes, USATF spends plenty of money. According to their 2005 990s, they spent \$10,390,482. Of that, almost 25 percent, \$2,392,356, was spent on compensation, salaries, benefits and pensions. PENSIONS! Some of our best runners are worried about their next entry fee and USATF spent a quarter million on pensions. Talk about causing "dissension." Perhaps as was done with the AAU, it's time to be concerned about USATF's "competency" in making "rational, defensible decisions."

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Wild Things



For a trail runner's paradise weekend, consider the 2007 Teva Mountain Games, held June 1–3 in Vail, CO. The Games offer something for everyone . . . well, everyone who enjoys mountain sports with altitude. In addition to trail races, there are mountain and road biking, kayaking and rafting, fly fishing, dog challenges, rock climbing competitions, and plenty of X-Games-type adrenaline to get the blood flowing in the early season.

The Mountain Games really shake things up, including nightlife such as the Everest Awards Dinner and concerts that get athletes of all types writhing on the dance floor. The weather is typically warm during the days and chilly at night, although there was a surprise snow storm in 2005, making it feel all the more mountain-like.

For 2007, there are two separate trail races. First up, at night on Saturday, June 2, is the X-1 Mud Run, a relaxed 5K that will take place in conjunction with the "Zest Mud Village Party." The soap company, recognizing that trail runners are often dirty, will host the race, including mandatory mud puddle/bog running and a post-run Zestful shower-and-foam party.

At 9 a.m. on Sunday, the 10K Spring Runoff will head out and up the ski area. The double helix route traditionally climbs, traverses, descends and eventually crisscrosses the resort to drop the runners back in town after extracting much more life than a 10K should. The footing is often challenging, with fresh snowmelt running down the trail to make for some shoe-sucking and traction-defying mud, and the level of competition has historically been outstanding. - A.C.

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Hit the Trails

Edited by Adam W. Chase

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