

Olympic Sailing Competition - Strategy

A submission from the Yachting Australia

Proposal:

1. ISAF develops, agrees and promotes a comprehensive vision and overarching strategy for the sport of sailing in the Olympic Games. All future decisions, including those on events and equipment, will then be made in line with this strategy.
2. The terms of reference and title of the existing Olympic Advisory Commission should be reviewed. The Commission will be responsible for the development the strategy for the sport of sailing in the Olympic Games in consultation with the relevant Committees, Sub Committees and Commissions. The Commission will oversee the development of sailing in the Olympic Games, monitoring and providing input to ensure that all decisions taken are in line with the agreed strategy.
3. The Executive Committee should reconstitute the Commission as soon as possible, with the terms of reference, associated processes and implementation schedule agreed at the ISAF Mid-Meeting in May 2009.

Current Position:

There is no overarching strategy. The current ISAF Yearbook does not list the Olympic Advisory Commission as one of the Commissions, nor are its' members listed. Despite the importance to our sport, no single group within ISAF is dedicated solely to the development of sailing in the Olympic Games.

Reasons:

1 The Need for a Strategy

- 1.1 In order to strengthen the position of sailing in the Olympic Games it is essential that ISAF set a strategy that is transparent and widely understood. The decisions taken in November 2007 on the Olympic Events for 2012 are an obvious example that ISAF is simply not working to a clear strategy.
- 1.2 In September 2004, ISAF was asked to complete a questionnaire and return it the IOC Sports Department. It is based on the information provided by ISAF that the “*IOC Olympic Programme Commission Report – 24 May 2005*” in discussing “**Increasing the Appeal of the Sport**” states:

“With a view to presenting its sport in a more interesting and attractive manner, the ISAF has taken the following steps....Equipment innovation introducing faster and more spectacular boats, on-board cameras and sound and GPS responders displaying boat positions.”

- 1.3 This was in 2005. In November 2007, ISAF made two decisions that moved sailing in the Olympic Games in a different direction. Both the removal of the Multihull and the choice not to introduce a High Performance Dinghy for Women are examples that would be considered contrary to the direction indicated to the IOC just 2 years previously.
- 1.4 Our vision and strategy for the Olympic Games must be future focused. The sport is becoming more professional. More than ever, the decisions taken by ISAF are effecting the lives of our young, elite athletes. Sudden, unexpected changes in strategy can have a major impact. ISAF has a responsibility to set and maintain a clear direction. This will allow sailors, coaches and administrators to plan accordingly. Certainty is a key to our future success.

2 The Value of the Olympic Games to Sailing

- 2.1 ISAF must have in place a strategy that strengthens our value as a sport in the Olympic Games. This is a matter of sound, pragmatic business sense.
- 2.2 ISAF has a product, Sailing. We have one key partner, being the IOC. We promote our product to the IOC, as do other sports.
- 2.3 The IOC packages a number of sports together to 'sell' to the global market. Collectively and under the brand of the Olympic Games, the IOC generates considerable sponsorship and rights revenue. The greater the audience interest, the more valuable the rights to the various sports that the IOC is selling and the greater the revenue that can be generated. Over 50% of the IOC income is generated from broadcast rights.
- 2.4 We share in a portion of the revenue from these broadcast rights. In fact our sport relies on the IOC for approximately 65% of the income of ISAF¹. The IOC is therefore a very important partner for ISAF.
- 2.5 ISAF Member National Authorities (MNAs) also benefit significantly as a result of sailing being an Olympic sport. Governments, National Olympic Committees and sponsors support many MNAs because, and only because, our sport is in the Olympic Games. This support is estimated to be more than half a billion Euros every 4 years. Both ISAF and the MNAs therefore have a collective interest in ensuring the IOC is as satisfied as possible with the performance of our sport in the Olympic Games.
- 2.6 The IOC publishes tables that show that on the ladder of hours of broadcast from the Olympic Games, our sport sits at 26 out of 28¹. Set against this, the television coverage of our sport is very expensive by comparison to other sports, as are the facilities for hosting it. The IOC also notes a number of other significant facts, such as ticket revenues for our sport account for around one 1/4 of one percent of the total from the Olympic Games¹.
- 2.7 There are a number of other sports that would very much like the IOC to adopt their sport in preference to ours. Other sports lobby the IOC for inclusion and are prepared to be flexible and adapt their sports to make them more attractive to the IOC needs.

¹ IOC Olympic Programme Commission Report – 24 May 2005

- 2.8 The IOC has made it clear to ISAF for a number of years that there is concern over the level of public and media interest that there is in sailing. They also express some concerns about the costs of staging the sport. Are there ways we can perhaps make sailing more attractive and less expensive?
- 2.9 ISAF has responded by making some changes to our sport. We run more races around shorter courses; we introduce a medal race, an effort to provide a 'final' in each event; we set out to establish a World Cup to ensure more regular exposure for our sport outside the Olympic Games. But are we doing enough quickly enough and do we have a clear plan to further strengthen our position?
- 2.10 Strengthening our sport in the Olympic Games not only helps to protect our current position, but provides the platform to improve that position. A higher profile for sailing means a stronger argument to the IOC for a greater share of the marketing revenues and better support for MNAs from their funding partners. This in turn means more money to invest in the development of sailing at all levels.
- 2.11 The Olympic Games is the major part of the business of ISAF and its' MNAs. The implications of not taking steps to secure this part of our business are enormous. The future of sailing in the Olympics is far too important to all of us to be left to chance.

3 Establishing a Strategy

- 3.1 This paper does not attempt to set out the strategy but some of the issues that must be considered include:
- (a) What the environment will look like in the short to medium term and how can we align with it? What will future generations be looking for, be they participants or spectators, and what drivers will capture them?
 - (b) How will people consume reports, results and information from events? ISAF established itself as a leader in the early use of internet technology. Is there an opportunity to do the same with on-line coverage? What will our business model look like?
 - (c) What is the vision for sailing in the Olympic Games? Are we leading, are we following or are we trying to do both? What types of sailing should we be catering for? Should the events be the same for both genders? Do we have a focus on youth participation or are we trying to cater for a range of ages?
 - (d) What are the limiting factors? If sailing was more popular as an Olympic sport, would we still be under pressure to reduce the number of athletes and the number of medals, or would we have a case for greater participation?
 - (e) What are the strengths and weaknesses of sailing now and what are the opportunities and threats for our sport in the future. How can we differentiate ourselves from other sports to add value in the Olympic mix?
 - (f) What are the implications on other parts of our sport to changes at the Olympic Games? What alignment should there be with other events, such as the ISAF World Cup and ISAF Sailing World Championship?

- (g) How can we best use our participation in the Olympic Games to attract more people and countries to our sport? What links should there be between our strategy for growing sailing, our strategy for youth development and events, and our strategy for the Olympic Games?
 - (h) How can we better present our sport and our athletes to both the live and remote audience, reflecting all that we have to offer in an attractive and positive way? How can developing technologies help us?
- 3.2 Once these and other questions have been addressed, we can then build strategies and outcomes to help strengthen our position as a sport in the Olympic Games.

4 The Decision Making Process

- 4.1 Various Committees, Sub Committees, Commissions and Working Parties currently provide input to a range of decisions about the Olympic Games. However there is no single group within ISAF responsible for the planning and coordination of sailing on the Olympic Games. As a result of the lack of coordination, a number of things occur:
- (a) **Poor setting of priorities** - There is a focus on some issues and an almost complete disregard for others. This is mainly due to the interests of those within the ISAF family. Events, Equipment and Format tend to dominate because we are all sailors and these are things we understand. Set against this our focus on TV, media, marketing and promotion is limited and yet this is what we are being asked by the IOC to address. Our expertise in these areas is limited.
 - (b) **Focus on Processes not Outcomes** – Our focus and time is on the processes and not the outcomes. The lack of strategy means that the outcomes are not clearly defined and understood. It is too easy for our Committees to become focused on the process, particularly when so much of what we do and the decisions we make are driven by the ISAF Regulations. The Regulations become an outcome of themselves.
 - (c) **Decisions are not effectively implemented and promoted** – Good decisions are often poorly executed. As one example, when the Medal Race was introduced, there was a lack of detail as to how it should be run at the major Olympic Class Regattas. Each did it slightly differently. This was confusing and unfair. Also we have failed to promote the advantages of the Medal Race to the media. No decision is good if it is poorly executed, nor can the benefits be properly assessed.
 - (d) **Lack of consideration of the impact of decisions** – The decisions that we make about the Olympic Games have impacts on other events and areas within our sport, yet there is very little consideration of these impacts when decisions are made. What, for example, will be the wider implications of the decision not to include the multihull at the 2012 Olympic Games? Conversely, we need to ensure that the decisions we make in other areas are consistent and not in conflict with our strategy for the Olympic Games.
 - (e) **No analysis of decisions made** – Research and feedback systems should be in place to allow a proper analysis of the impacts of the

decisions that we make. This should be considered as part of the decision making process. Instead it is an afterthought, undertaken in a spasmodic and piecemeal way.

- 4.2 The establishment of a strategy and reconstituting of the Commission is seen as a way of addressing these issues.

5 The role of the Commission

- 5.1 The strategy, once established, must be actively implemented and reviewed. The role of the Commission would be to both develop the strategy in consultation with the Committees and Commissions within ISAF and to then ensure that all decisions are made with reference to the strategy once agreed.
- 5.2 Importantly, all Committees, Commissions and the Council would be involved in establishing and agreeing the strategy and for any subsequent review. With all parts of the organisation working to a common strategy and only making decisions in line with it, there would be more consistency in the outcomes.
- 5.3 Given the enormous importance of the Olympic Games to ISAF and the sport, it is hard to understand why we do not already have a group in place that has this key area of our business as it's sole focus and responsibility.
- 5.4 The terms of reference and processes through which the Commission will operate should be agreed in May 2009.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 As the custodians of our sport, with the responsibility for building and securing the future, we should be doing all we can to make sailing more attractive to the public, the media and the IOC. We have a responsibility to the next generation to strengthen not weaken our sport in the Olympic Games. ISAF must work to put in place and actively implement a strategy to address this fundamental issue.