

Letter to the Olympic Windsurfing Community From the Events Committee
Windsurfing Format Working Party.

Dear all,

After two weeks of emails and rumours flying around, we feel that it is time to set the record straight and map out the work of the Working Party over the coming months.

As you all know, as requested by the IOC, the ISAF has been considering the best format for the Olympic classes since Athens. A special Olympic Format Working Party was set up and the outcome was the medal race format being adopted last year in Singapore. However, due to the fact that the RS:X was a new class and only getting underway last November, it was decided to give Olympic windsurfing an extra year to consider this issue and present a report to the Council in November 2006. The Windsurfing Committee was therefore asked by the Events Committee to set up a WP to consider this matter.

Jorunn, as the acting chairman of the Windsurfing Committee and a member of the Events Committee, was the obvious choice to set this work in motion. She invited other members of the Windsurfing Committee (Rich Jeffries, Bruno de Wannmaeker, Deborah Powell) to join the WP due to their involvement in the class and/or race management aspects, with Rich Jeffries being the obvious interface to the class as Class Director. Realising the importance of getting feedback from the sailors, Nicolas Huguet was invited to join the WP as the sailors representative.

However, we now realise that we had overlooked another important factor in the class: the coaches. Part of the reason for writing this letter is to invite all the coaches attending the Holland Regatta to meet and discuss the issue. We have initially contacted Barrie Edington to organise this meeting and we plan to appoint a coach to the WP to be an interface with the other coaches and act as a consultant to the WP.

It is fundamental for the world of Olympic sailing to make a strong presentation to the Events Committee, before the proposal is sent to the Council for the final decision at the ISAF Annual Meeting in November. It is an ideal opportunity for us all to highlight the strengths of windsurfing as an Olympic class (speed, action, technique, strategic & tactical skills, physical strength and athletes). This must be our goal, as we stated in our presentation to the mid-year meeting, to find the most “media friendly format, as we want and need to stress our strong points as an Olympic class, particularly as all the classes will be fighting to remain Olympic when one medal has to be dropped for 2012.

Unfortunately, emails that were really part of the brainstorming process, ideas that were just ideas being put on the table, got circulated around the world of Olympic windsurfing as facts over the last two weeks and not surprisingly, there was the resulting uproar. The first thing we must stress as a WP is that we do NOT plan to IMPOSE any format change on the class and wish to WORK CLOSELY WITH the class. We are fully aware of what is at stake in an Olympic campaign, but on the other hand, the testing has to be done and in such a way that we get the necessary information while causing the least possible upheaval.

The aspects we wish to test in ISAF graded events are:

Number of Races

Length of Races

Type of Course: - Trapezoid variant / Windward/leeward variant / Technical elements (e.g. zigzag close to finish) / Finish line as close to the beach as possible.

Other events are invited to test additional formats. Two weeks ago, the Council rejected the submission of a Slalom discipline in future Olympics, because it was too late for the 2008. Concepts are to be taken on board in the windsurfing WP. The testing needs to be carried out in order to be able to report our findings and argue for the best solution. The testing has to also be viable from the point of view of the race management and be as least disruptive for the sailors as possible and are considering possibilities such as working with the silver fleet, testing on alternate days, one day. We must also take into account the feasibility of any testing from the point of view of the organisers and remember the requirements that the ISAF laid down for the new board (planing and non-planing conditions).

TRUST is fundamental in this process. We need to work together with the class, sailors and coaches as a united group to put forward a strong proposal. The WP is therefore here to coordinate and drive the process and report to the Events Committee. If we, all the people involved in Olympic windsurfing, miss this opportunity to have a say about the future of our sport, then we will be in danger of having a format imposed on us from outside windsurfing. We would be delighted to receive any other relevant aspects/ideas that we have not so far considered and can be built into the WP's programme.

We are here to listen to you. We will ensure that a member of the WP or an appointed representative is at all the events to get feedback. We are going to design a questionnaire for the sailors to complete after sailing, and will ask the coaches and organisers to also give their opinions. You can be sure your opinion matters and will be a contribution to the discussion process. Our email addresses are listed below and you are welcome to send us your ideas, comments etc.

However, we must stress that our emphasis is on the Olympic windsurfing format as part of the ISAF's work and the ongoing dialogue with the IOC. This is separate from any other class issues emerging as the class goes through the consolidation process. That is not our role and we do not wish or intend to get involved in any other aspect than working with the class on the task that has been entrusted to us by the ISAF.

The organiser of the Holland Regatta has agreed to work with us on aspects of the testing. A meeting will be held with the coaches at the beginning of the race to explain what it is planned and how it will be implemented. As we have already stated, we are looking at the least disruptive process possible.

We look forward to working with you all over the coming months and again stress the importance of not missing out on this opportunity.

Jorunn Horgen, jorunn@vinnpartner.no (scandinavian, english)

Deborah Powell, deborahp@telefonica.net (English, Spanish, French)

Richard Jeffries, Richard.jeffries@comcast.net

Bruno de Wannemaeker, bruno.ifca@pandora.be (English, Dutch, French, German)
Nicolas Huguet huguetn@aol.com (French, English)