

ISAF Half Yearly meeting - a Multihull perspective

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The International Sailing Federation is a funny beast, and no more so than when the boats are selected every four years to represent sailing at the Olympic Games. Classes and National Federations spend years positioning themselves, getting their supporters appointed to Committees, perhaps elected as Chairman where they see it may be useful, all with a view to influencing the outcome in their favour. And when it comes to making these decisions, you have no friends, strange bedfellows frequently arise and knives in the back are not unknown.

As much as the individuals would like to "put the sport before our national or personal interests", National Federations have so much to win or lose by getting their favoured boat into the Olympic Games that it is impossible for these forces not to come in to play. In many large countries where the national body is funded significantly by the government, the sole definition of success, and therefore indirectly it's funding, is the number of Gold Medals at the Olympics. They don't care about World Championships or Olympic Silver medals - just Olympic Gold medals.

In Brazil their number one sports stars from the Olympic Games across all sports are Torben Grael and Robert Scheidt. With the 2016 Olympics being sailed in Brazil, the event was guaranteed to generate huge public interest in the selection between the two leading up to the Games and then at the Games itself. So in your own country, think of your highest profile Olympian across all sports, think of a home Olympic Games, only to have the International Federation pull your number one athlete's event from the lineup - front page news in Brazil and an international scandal.

So with this level of importance we all headed for St Petersburg to decide the disciplines, and in some cases the equipment (read "boats" in non-Olympic terms). The Olympic Commission had presented their report, made a little tweak between November and May and all submissions were locked in by ISAF some weeks ago. The great news for multihull sailors was that every submission had at least one multihull on the slate, so barring any last minute political manoeuvring, we were assured of being back for 2016 in one form or another. Hindsight is a wonderful thing and in reality we were probably always going to get back, but stranger things have happened in the past, and we couldn't really take anything for granted. We had to turn up to all the meetings, put our case to various groups and clearly state why we should have a multihull in the Olympics. It wasn't until a vote in November where the multihull gained overwhelming support around the table that I was personally confident that we would get back in, and after the submissions were in, almost certain that we would get back in. However, last minute changes to submissions and voting procedures have happened in the past, so it wasn't until the announcement by the President that submission number 10 had achieved a majority vote could we relax for 2016.

In particular, the Star lobby has a long history of using their considerable influence, and this was again in evidence when they managed to have the Executive support a proposal that was more outlandish than anything anyone had thought possible. A submission that got zero votes at the Events Committee to make only one change to the lineup to remove the 49er of

all things, and replace it with the multihull was voted by the Executive as their preferred solution. As much as I am keen to have a multihull back into the event, it would have been tragic to do so at the expense of the 49er. Suffice to say that it was highly unlikely that the support of this submission was unanimous with the Executive. Other websites have posted names of those on the Executive they believe were in support of the Puerto Rican submission, but it was very obvious which "camps" would have voted in support. As well as the obvious Star lobby, the 470 Class must see that if the Olympics has two skiffs, there are then under threat for the 2020 Olympics.

So the sequence of events at the meeting in St Petersburg went as follows:

Thursday - Events Committee meeting

Committee members debated the various submissions and all but one came out in support of keeping the keelboat discipline in one form or other. The Women's Match Racing was mentioned repeatedly in that countries had just purchased new Elliots, and some were still on order to be delivered to countries starting their programmes for the 2016 Olympics. Dumping the discipline before they had even sailed in one Olympics was certainly going to be tough.

A working party had recommended a voting procedure for the meeting and this was the subject of a submission. Given that everyone knew that the multihull was discarded only after a late minute change to the voting procedure three years ago, the Committee were careful to have this thoroughly researched and any last minute changes would be viewed with considerable suspicion. The Committee agreed on the voting procedure that was as follows:

- Submissions had been checked prior to the meeting and some were ruled invalid, e.g. Some had "mixed single hander" and yet "mixed" is defined as one man one woman.
- Each submission in turn would be identified, and called for a proposer and a seconder. This was to weed out submissions that had no chance of getting through. Each Committee Member could propose or second multiple submissions, and about a third of submissions were rejected at this stage.
- Voting then started. Each member cast one vote for their preferred submission. Any submission not receiving any votes in the first round was eliminated as was the lowest scoring submission. In the event of more than one submission receiving the same lowest vote, a runoff vote was taken and the lowest was eliminated.
- This process was repeated until one submission had more than 50% of the vote.

In the end, the proposal put forward was for the removal of the two keelboats, gaining 60% of the vote, with two other proposals, including the 5/5 solution with two multihulls received 20% of the vote. This was really a vote to retain the keelboats rather than a vote for two multihulls, but it would have been excellent for multihulls. For anyone who felt that the Olympics should represent all disciplines of our sport, this was always put forward as the "logical" solution. However the practicalities of it were that it would pit the Laser against the Finn in a runoff in November next year, as well as the 470 Men vs 49er, and 470 Women vs Women's skiff. This was just too big a leap for many people to take, and especially the 470 vs skiff would probably result in the skiff losing out in both cases. Losing the 49er would not have been good for the sport.

So at the end of day one, all looked good and in line with expectations. With this out of the way, everyone headed off to the regular Finn party at a local hotel. Part way through the evening a rumour went around that at the Executive meeting, they had voted to support a Puerto Rican submission to make only one change to the current lineup - to remove the 49er and replace it with a multihull. Groups of people then started talking and looking very serious, while others including myself thought "what a load of rubbish, it's just a rumour".

Friday - Day 1 of Council Meeting

"Shock" was the word most in vogue the next morning on picking up the submissions to be considered for the day. Sure enough the Executive had recommended that the Council support for the Puerto Rican submission to drop the 49er, replace it with a multihull and just keep everything else the same. The skiff mafia had turned up to the meeting expecting to just support the women's skiff not expecting that they would have to be there defending the 49er - a boat that is perceived to be relatively inexpensive to campaign, sailed by fit, athletic sailors with a huge amount of media appeal. This was going to be the same mistake as removing the multihull - removing the most media friendly boat from the lineup, despite everyone saying we need to improve our media exposure.

Obviously the Executive had a couple of people who had pushed it through and some other members of the Executive were not at all happy about the decision, as someone "talked" to the media and the list of those on the Executive supporting the proposal was quickly posted on various websites.

And it wasn't just the various lobby groups that were upset. The Executive had setup their high powered Olympic Commission to research and make recommendations on overall strategy for the Olympics, World Cup and World Championships. They had taken the report to the IOC and discussed it at length, getting support for it's findings from the highest level. To then throw this out the door was a huge slap in the face to people like Phil Jones, Dick Batt, Chris Atkins and Co who had put so much work into the report. It will be a brave Executive member to ask them to take on any new role in the future.

However, once the Council meeting started, some sense of order returned. The Executive had also devised a voting scheme in the event that they had to cull the 36 submissions down to one. They had come up with a proposal that was straight out of the Wimbledon Open with a knockout voting system, with byes for any unmatched submissions. This was perceived by many to be a system that could easily be manipulated to favour a preferred submission, and viewed with considerable suspicion. Some very pointed comments were made between members of the Executive and members of the Council and the Council voted down the Executive submission soundly, sending a very clear message - the Council was not going to blindly follow the recommendations of the Executive.

Saturday - Day 2 of Council Meeting

With the Council voting the previous day to adopt the voting procedure used by the Events Committee, the first order of business was to request a proposer and seconder for each submission. This immediately reduced the number of submissions to seven. The proposer of each submission was then given the opportunity to speak the merits of their proposal, followed by an open forum where each member was allowed to speak once. Many of the comments were recurring:

- We should not remove the "discipline" entirely as we are just repeating the mistake of removing the only multihull
- The Women's keelboat has not even been run yet and we are already damning them
- We need to protect the investment in current equipment (a 470 argument)
- Media appeal is about how we present our sport, not about the boat (another argument for 470 over skiffs)
- Moving the sport forward (introduction of skiffs)

To my mind, the best line came from Phil Jones rebutting a previous speaker's comment that "Sailing is a sport for life", in support of keelboats that allow older sailors to continue to sail in the Olympics. Phil's comment was "Sailing is a sport for life, but the Olympics is not an event for life" which pretty much sums up the reason for dropping the keelboats. The Olympics is about youth and athleticism.

So after a couple of hours of recurring themes, and I suspect with no-one changing their vote at all, a first round vote was called. Ballot papers handed out, votes were counted and to the surprise of everyone, a winner was declared after the first ballot. The Chairman read out the votes as follows and it all ended with a whimper.

Submission	Source	Votes	Pctg	Board M Eval	Board W Eval	1P M Laser	1P W Radial	1P M Heavy Finn	2P Skiff M 49er	2P Skiff W Eval	2P Dinghy M 470	2P Dinghy W 470	2P Dinghy Mix 470	2P Mhull Mix Eval	Multihull M Eval	Multihull W Eval	Keelboat W Elliott	Keelboat M Star	Keelboat M Eval	2P Keelboat M Eval
M05	GER	1	3%	X	x	x	x		x	x			x	x			x			x
M10	JAP	19	51%	X	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x						
M12	EC	0	0%	X	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x			x			
M16	BRA	2	5%	X	x	x	x	x	x				x	x			x	x		
M23	IRL	1	3%	X	x	x	x	x	x	x				x			x		x	
M29	PUR	9	24%	X	x	x	x	x			x	x		x			x	x		
M39	NED	5	14%	X	x	x	x		x	x					x	x	x		x	

This was a ringing endorsement of the work of the Olympic Commission and the Events Committee sending a strong message to everyone. The disconnect between the Executive and the Council has the potential to go far beyond a simple mismatch on submissions. The term most heard in discussions was about the amount of "lost credibility" on the part of the Executive. To come out supporting a submission that was so far removed from the expectations of the vast majority of members was just astounding.

So what next?

The immediate task is for the Equipment Committee to come out with a spec for a multihull and a plan for evaluating potential boats. This will include a trial of some type, probably in Europe and most likely in conjunction with the evaluation for the Womens skiff. We need to make sure we get the right boat in the Olympics, and by "right" this means a boat that will

not leave us in the same position as we are now, where a fantastic boat was voted out of the Olympics because not enough countries were willing, for whatever reason, to campaign at the Olympics. We need to look at two things:

1. What were the characteristics of the 2008 Tornado that meant that it wasn't embraced around the world, and we need to be brutally honest in this assessment
2. What are the characteristics of the Laser and the 470 that means that they are embraced around the world

We also need to keep in mind the ISAF Youth Worlds and make sure there is a clear stepping stone from the Youth to Olympic boat.

And even now we have to start working on getting a mens and womens boat in for 2020. The view of several of the multihullers in St Petersburg is that what will happen over the next couple of years is that initially, we will have a majority of men skippers and women crews, but gradually the women will become the drivers on the boat. Then in four years time, we will have a bunch of male skippers running around saying "we want our own event".

To make this a reality we need as many countries sailing a multihull as possible in all of the World Cup events from 2013 onwards, as this more than anything else provides ISAF with it's demographics. This is going to be difficult as we will not be choosing a boat until November 2012 and it will immediately cause a flood of orders for one lucky manufacturer but a backlog for potential campaigners. However, we need to work out a way to make it happen.

Dick Batt was to discuss the plan for evaluations with the Executive on Sunday, including people to include in the writing of the spec, hopefully this group will put out a spec within the next couple of weeks with an evaluation probably soon after the Olympic Games in 2012.

Transition

Between now and the decision on the new cat, there is a period where potential multihull campaigners will be in limbo, wanting to get started but having to hold off until the boat is decided. And the immediate period after the new boat is announced there will be a backlog of orders.

My advice to any young sailor thinking of doing an Olympic campaign would be to get yourself a team, preferably with a woman helm even if they have no cat experience, with an all up weight around 150kg, but with the flexibility to go up or down 10kg. Then go an buy the cheapest F18 you can find and campaign it for the next two years with a view to putting in an order to buying a new Olympic cat the day the boat is announced in November 2012 and then expect a delivery time of at least six months.

Any Olympic cat is most likely to be the same configuration as an F18, but it is no use trying to second guess which boat will become the Olympic boat as it may not have even been designed yet. The F18 has the best class racing and with many ex-Olympic sailors in the fleet has an excellent standard at the top end.

Youth Boat

The selection of the Olympic boat will also have an impact on the Youth boat. There should be a clear pathway, and preferably just an incremental step from Youth to Olympic boats. The 420 to 470,

Laser Radial to Full rig are clear examples where a Youth Gold Medallist can make the step up and be competitive in the next Olympic cycle.

Summary

We're back, not quite the way we would like it, but back is back. Having had to sit out one Olympic cycle causing such huge disruption, ending careers and leaving people with boats that they can't sell, we have to make sure that for the 2016 Olympics we put in a boat that every little country in the world wants to have a crack at, making it impossible for ISAF Council members to even consider dropping us for future Olympic Games.

The objective is to be as successful as the Laser or the 470 in attracting countries to have a go at the Olympics. Multihulls are popular in areas where other forms of sailing are not such as Africa and Oceania, and we should be working at getting countries like Oman, Tanzania, UAE, Fiji, Papua New Guinea campaigning for 2016. The big countries will look after themselves and will campaign if the boat were two bathtubs strapped together, but we need to make sure that whatever we choose for 2016 is accessible, affordable and achievable for these other countries to campaign and have a shot at qualifying.

And finally, thanks to the multihullers who have put in their support over the years. At this meeting - Roland Gaebler, Carolijn Brouwer, Darren Bundock and the person who attracted the most attention, Bundy Jnr, 9 weeks old and already has a wetsuit and trapeze harness. It always sounds wonderfully exotic flying off the places like St Petersburg, but like most of us going to regattas you get to see the airport, the road to the venue, a couple of different restaurants and in the case of an ISAF meeting, the inside of a meeting room. And a personal thank you for financial support from Nick Dewhurst, Will Sunnocks, Brian Phipps, Don Findlay and Simon Morgan.