

The Flatwater Racing Rules - 8. The Competition Committee:

A basic guide to Duties of the Competition Committee

The International Canoe Federation (ICF) has published a very good and comprehensive instruction document entitled: ICF Instruction Manual on Organisation and Technical Utilities required for World Championship Racing (ICF Instruction Manual).³ Although international regattas do not need all the requirements set out in the manual, it serves as an excellent *aide-mémoire*.

This paper is not intended to duplicate any matters covered in the ICF Instruction Manual or the Racing Rules,² but is directed towards giving advice and guidance for the members of a Competition Committee (the Committee) to provide good and fair competition for the athletes. The aim is to give some explanation regarding the key responsibilities contained in Rules 10.3.1, 10.3.2, 10.4.1 and 10.4.3, and give some depth and advice on their application for good management of the Competition. However, there is no substitute for personal experience in the application of the Rules. Such experience cannot be found in any rulebook or manual.

The rules state, “*The aim of a canoe race competition is for people to race each other in kayaks and canoes over a clearly defined unobstructed course in the shortest possible time according to the rules.*” I would take this a little further by saying: the objective is to discover each athlete’s rightful place in an event pursuant to observance of the rules. The Committee has to work as a team to meet this objective.

The Committee’s responsibility is to manage the Competition. It comprises three persons:

1. Chief Official
2. Competition Manager
3. One other Official whose duties are at or near the finishing line at all times. Sometimes a Deputy Chief Official is appointed to fill this role.

At least two members of the Committee must be current ICF International Regatta Officials. They will also need all the appropriate skills of good management and to be effective in using them in a sporting environment. The Committee should make a point of meeting all officials, particularly those in key areas, well before the start of the Competition.

The **Chief Official** is the Chairman of the Committee. He (or she) is also responsible for making decisions on all matters which may arise during the Competition and which are not covered in the Rules.² To do this successfully he must be tactful, and apply discretion with justice.

The Chief Official has to interpret and apply all the rules appropriately. He needs to appreciate problems of the various Team Managers and their athletes, exercising courtesy

while at the same time maintaining his authority. He also needs to appreciate the problems of the officials in their various assigned roles and act with sensitivity to create mutual confidence, so that the Competition successfully meets all its objectives. All officials report to the Chief Official and are responsible to him for their actions/decisions. If an official fails to comply with the rules the Chief Official must replace them.

Sometimes he will need to meet the Press, acting as spokesman for the Competition Committee, to explain any matters or decisions made. To do this well he needs to be courteous, affirming that decisions and rules have been justly applied. In facing the Press, his role is vital in “selling” the Sport to the Media; his enthusiasm for the Sport has to “rub off” on members of the Press.

The **Deputy Chief Official** (if appointed) assists the Chief Official in his responsibilities. He (or she) is responsible for the continued smooth conduct of the Competition when the Chief Official has been called upon to deal with problems or to meet various people. On such occasions, he acts with the same authority as the Chief Official. From time to time he will assist the Competition Manager in the completion and checking of documents prior to publication. Either the Chief Official or the Deputy Chief Official must sign off all such documents.

The **Competition Manager** supervises the running of the Regatta Programme. He (or she) plans the organisation of the Competition before and during the event. Although all officials report to the Chief Official and are responsible to him for all their actions, the Competition Manager must ensure that they are in place before the start of each race so that all events are held on time in accordance with the advertised programme. He is also responsible for all the competition administration:

1. up to date programme
2. drawing of Lots
3. production and publication of results
4. provision of all technical documents (examples of which can be found in the ICF Instruction Manual)
5. keeping all completed documents
6. boat control administration
7. administration of protests, and notification of disqualifications as decided by the Committee
8. providing the Announcer and Press with all information concerning:
 - a) start order
 - b) competitors failing to start
 - c) results
 and ensuring the Announcer broadcasts all such information to the audience/spectators.

The Chief Official or Deputy Chief Official must sign off all results and draws as correct before they are released for publication, and sign all notifiable decisions of the Committee.

Delegation and Control

The members of the Committee must not try to do too much or the competition will suffer greatly. Except when watching races, the Chief Official must make himself available to anyone and everyone at all times. With each and every task the Committee may come across they must consider delegation, some of it total, while at the same time retaining control of the key elements. Delegation provides an opportunity for others to learn and gain experience. For example: the only papers the Chief Official should possess are the up to date programme and a pocket notebook. Even a copy of the Racing Rules can be held for him. Only in this way can the Chief Official and Committee be alive and alert to respond calmly to any eventuality.

Prior Experience

Preferably, all members of the Committee will have first shadowed at least two other Competition Committees at no less than two different international regattas. There are many International Regatta Organisers who would be delighted to help in this way, for they have a total commitment to the sport, constantly striving for excellence and perfection for the benefit of the athletes.

Prior to the Competition

At least 48 hours before the start of the competition the Chief Official with the Committee should meet the Technical Organiser to check the installations are correct.³ They must ensure the Regatta Course has been correctly buoyed and marked with flags. A full test of all equipment should be done at the same time. There will always be unexpected problems, some of them difficult to resolve or even insurmountable. At least one hour before the start of each day's competition, the Technical Organiser should confirm in writing to the Committee that all systems are working. If there are any deficiencies he should give the Committee an estimate on the time-scale for their correction.

The Chief Official normally conducts the meeting of Team Leaders to finalise teams' competitors in each event. The meeting is normally held in the late afternoon prior to the first day of competition. It is necessary to attend a number of Team Leaders' Meetings and take notes to become familiar with the process. All Team Leaders' Meetings will be slightly different but they will follow the same procedural format. After the meeting, the Competition Manager should conduct a roll call of officials to ensure that every job is covered. Any special instructions for Officials on duty times, transport, organisation or running of each area of responsibility can be given at this meeting.

International Events other than Championships

Except for Championship and World Cup events, all international regattas may be described as "friendly" competitions and can be likened to friendly football matches. Therefore there are some things the Chief Official or Committee may permit which

would not be acceptable in a championship. Teams use such competitions to provide their competitors with experience and sometimes evidence required for financial support at home. Where possible, and with agreement of all team leaders, the Committee should try to accommodate reasonable requests. However, the Committee has an overriding duty to all the athletes and the Sport itself to act with total integrity and fairness.

Umpires' Reports

It is most important that the Chief Official watches each race as it proceeds down the course and takes notes as necessary. At the end of the race, if not entirely satisfied with an umpire's call he must call him to account. Sometimes umpires may be reluctant to make a report, particularly if English is not their first language, and they may hold the opinion that an infraction did not affect the result of the race. Umpires must report all infractions as matters of fact. They should use their opinion solely in prioritising infractions when there has been more than one. Considerable difficulties occur when an umpire has failed to make a report and a protest is subsequently received.

Although the rules demand all reports be written in English, personally I do not mind in what language a report is delivered. It is nice to have it in English, but it is vital that a report is delivered in whatever language if any infraction has occurred. Translation is a management problem and must never be made an umpire's problem. After consideration of a report, the decision of the Committee should always be conveyed to the umpire together with an explanation if necessary.

Complaints and Protests

All members of the Committee must react to complaints and protests calmly but with firmness. The complainant should be sat down in a quiet area and encouraged to talk. Members must be sure they have grasped all the basics and true reasons for the complaint. Initially, the protester may be so frustrated, infuriated, or emotionally wound-up as to be totally incoherent. Members must be patient, deal with their own emotions in a mature fashion and not "add fuel to the fire". They must allow time for the protester to get all the complaint off their chest, question in such a way that they properly understand and above all listen, listen, listen. Only with proper understanding of all the facts can the Committee go forward with the decision-making process (as outlined below). If the decision-making process has been properly conducted the Committee can have total confidence in informing the complainant of the decision in a calm and firm manner.

Consideration of Reported Infractions or Protests

The Tower philosophy (after Oswald Tower) states that the purpose of competition rules is to penalise a competitor who, by reason of an illegal act, places an opponent at a disadvantage.⁹ This is generally acceptable because it permits a degree of judgment in the strict enforcement of the rules and ensures that the objectives of the competition are realised. For example: a boat submitted for scrutiny has a rippled hull. Therefore, it is concave in some parts. The cause of rippled effects is due to the method of manufacture /

materials used, and the cheaper the materials the more likely or greater the distortion. Such a craft may simply be described as a badly-made boat. Clearly the competitor would not be at an advantage paddling the boat and therefore, the craft should pass scrutiny.

However, the philosophy cannot apply to all the rules. For example: a competitor did or did not keep to their lane, or they were or were not coached from the bank, and so on.

No official must say or do anything before an appeal to indicate to the complainant or anyone else that an appeal may be successful. A complainant may express matters of opinion and be selective in the matters of fact to support that opinion, i.e. they have already reached their own conclusion and are selective of the facts to support it, even distorting them.¹³ Any decision is a judgment, a choice between two courses of action and rarely a choice between right and wrong. Most often there is a clash of conflicting points of view.

In consideration of an infraction or protest the Competition Committee must:

- make sure they have all the facts (all evidence being in writing)
- consider the facts against the rules. (All decisions must be based on the rules.)²
- determine what is relevant and what is irrelevant
- consider the objectives of the competition and if the infraction may have been enough to deprive another of their rightful position
- give the offender the benefit of any doubt
- be consistent if they choose to be flexible
- consider possible courses of action (disqualification, warning, notification, or no action) and compare the pros and cons of each
- consider the risks of creating dangerous precedents. People will see the result of what has happened in terms of their own position
- consider the impact of the decision on others
- decide the preferred course of action, implement and
- where necessary, inform the team leader of the decision of the Committee. The rules must be strictly observed in the notification of a disqualification.

The Chief Official should ensure that all members of the Committee participate in the evaluation and decision-making process. He must keep minutes of the proceedings, which are confidential to the Committee and should only be shown to the Jury in the event of an appeal.

Video Evidence

The official video used at the start is strictly for the Starter only, no one else being permitted to view it.² Video evidence, other than the official finish film (and that is no substitute for photo finish), does not form part of the rules. Any video evidence supplied to the organisation to support an appeal is totally unacceptable. The problem with such is that it is two-dimensional only and therefore distorts perspective. A successful appeal based on such evidence would be grossly unfair to other competitors, by most likely depriving them of their rightful position. How often has it been shown in a recording of a

football game a tackle shown from one angle looks very innocent but when seen from another it is a serious offence? Video evidence requires views from more than one angle so when viewed together they build a three dimensional picture.

Judgments

Development of good judgment is a continuous process. It requires study of the rules, practice and experience in their interpretation, lots of reading, and discussion and argument between officials in other sports as well as our own. This continuous process builds a sound structure in the mind. It also adds to your enjoyment and performance in the job. Having been an athlete or coach provides a good initial framework but is not enough.

There will be times in the Finish and Committee's areas when there are pressures that may cause tensions. It is vital that members maintain personal control and lead by acting calmly.

One of the worst effects on competitors can be the feeling of inconsistency in decisions made by officials. If each and every incident is judged accurately according to correct interpretation of the rules, decisions will be consistent.⁹

It is most important that members of the Committee are well rested prior to each day's competition. They need to be sharp and alert to make good judgments. If they are tired they will fail in meeting the requirements of the job.

Officials Don't Cheat!

No, officials don't cheat but I admit they will make mistakes for they are human. You may have the impression that only athletes are allowed to make mistakes, for that is their view together with their coaches and team management. I have never known a race to be rerun and know of no precedent for it to be done. Therefore, it is vital that we as officials get it right. We must be careful out there. If we are all well prepared, alert and totally dedicated, there is a chance we will get it right. Perhaps this is a good reminder for the Officials' Meeting.

Where there has been a mistake it is vital to be honest and not try to cover it up. As a simple example: through an error a time has not been recorded against an athlete. What must never be done is to record the same time as another competitor or to estimate the correct time. In the record it must show "NO TIME", for that is accurate and true.

Good and well-qualified officials are hard to find in this age which demands the very best from a growing professional sport. Results should depend entirely on the athlete's preparation, ability, and sometimes a little luck. Rules must be applied consistently and with good judgment.⁹ Often the key to this is the selection made in assigning the various tasks/duties to Officials available or allocated to a Competition. Where selection and allocation is to be made, as in a major competition, the Chief Official and the

Competition Manager should be allowed a fair degree of input into the process. The success or otherwise of the competition could well depend on it.

Inquiries from the Media

If questioned by the media, on no account must members of the Committee discuss an actual incident or the contents of a report that relates to an incident. Neither must they pass any comment on anything surrounding a decision of the Committee. These are solely matters between the Officials. Politely and courteously, it must be made clear that as a member of the Committee you are not prepared to state the contents of any report. The Chief Official should be the only spokesman for the Committee (as listed in his responsibilities above).

Please remember that the Media is not in the news business. It is in the entertainment business. Athletes in all sports make good newspaper copy. Officials are not supposed to.¹³

Disciplinary Matters and Integrity

It is vital for the honourable nature of the Sport that officials are not subjected to any act that may compromise their position. Officials must not be persuaded to take an action which is contrary to the honourable nature of the Racing Regulations.¹³ Although such occasions are very rare in our Sport, the official must be aware of the action they should take in such an incident.

Officials, like all human beings, can be influenced by pressure, pressure that may compromise their position or may be considered by others to have done so. Where pressures of harassment, intimidation or abuse are applied to an official with a view to persuading them to take an action which is dishonest or contrary to the official's code of ethics, the Sport itself is in danger of disrepute.¹³ When I worked in the legal profession, there was a saying that we had always to work with "Clean Hands". Therefore, I strongly believe it is incumbent on each official to report all such acts.

Because of the close friendships or affiliation in our Sport, great courage and personal confidence are required for an official to act with absolute integrity. The Sport must come first. Regardless of the circumstances, the official must be completely honest in all phases of the job, especially in applying the rules, and also in relationships with fellow officials, competitors and team management. If a report is not made, ask yourself what about the next time, and the next? There will be a next time, and the problem can only get worse. Officiating integrity is a product of personal honesty and reliability.

In preparation of the written report the official must not submit a digest of his or her own experience or achievements. A properly completed report submitted to the Committee should:

- ensure the unsportsmanlike acts complained of are set out unemotionally and without any exaggeration or commentary
- not indicate the official takes a defensive position

- show that the official has taken the proper officiating mechanics
- indicate the official has enforced the letter and spirit of the rules.¹³

Above all, the report must stick to the facts.

On receipt of a report the Committee must give it due consideration. If disciplinary action is deemed to be necessary, they must act in accordance with the procedures set out in Rule 29.7 and the Organising Federation must follow this by abiding with Articles 42 and 43 of the ICF Statutes.¹ A warning must be in writing and is a reportable disciplinary action. Any complaint against an official follows exactly the same procedure.

All the above precludes statements which may be considered “fair comment”. Criticism and opinion may be described as commentary upon a competition or event. Officials must endure such criticism and comment, not necessarily educated, accurate or justified, upon their work.¹³

The Law and Responsibilities for the Wellbeing of Athletes / Coaches / Officials / Spectators

In addition to acting reasonably in enforcement of the rules, the Chief Official with the Committee is also responsible for the physical safety of participants by ensuring the competition is held in a safe environment.¹³ For example: to continue a competition in a thunderstorm or high winds as a result of which a contestant is injured, may be viewed as negligence. It could invite a legal action. Rule 10.3.2 b) allows the Committee to stop or postpone a competition in any unforeseen circumstance.

Another example is a case where boats are stored on the tops of cars and as a consequence such boats overhang a cycle track, particularly where the track is alongside a Regatta Course. The scenario can only be described as an accident waiting to happen. A third example is given in the paper for Boat Measurers and covers safety of equipment.

Such incidents can expose the Organisation and the Committee to liability in a court of law for a foreseeable consequence of inaction, no matter what Chapter V of the ICF Statutes may state. It is therefore, most important that the Committee acts with all due care and consideration for the safety of all participants, and that the competition is covered by Officials’ Liability Insurance.

After the Competition

All paperwork, including reports, protests, and decisions or minutes of the Committee, should be filed and retained for at least 60 days. This is to allow time for the Organisers to be informed of any protest or complaint received by the ICF and for the Organising Federation to respond. If the Organising Federation does respond to the ICF notification, the paperwork must be retained until after conclusion of all Hearings or Arbitration.

(Rule 30 and Articles 43 to 47 of the I.C.F. Statutes refer.)^{2 & 1}

In the event of a Hearing, both sides to the dispute must have copies of any evidence intended to be produced at the Hearing. However, actual minutes of the Committee which give any information as to how a decision was made is privileged information and must not be produced unless intended for evidence. Either side is entitled to possess copies of any written information passed between the parties.

Keep a log for personal improvement. All members of the Committee should evaluate their own performance and other officials as well. Records should also be made of:

- any rule interpretations learned
- new techniques etc. observed in other officials
- any problems or weaknesses found in one's own knowledge, judgments or relationships
- questions required to be answered for the future
- the goals set for oneself for the future.

Naturally the values in keeping a log will be greater for an inexperienced Chief Official or Competition Manager but even the most experienced will find room for improvement.

Finally

Competitors spend so much of their time in training to achieve their aspirations, at whatever level that may be. It is very important that the official acts in a professional, competent, respectful manner to ensure fair play. The official serves the athlete by ensuring that those competitors to go through to the next round or their position in a final are entitled to be there. It is the job of the Chief Official, Competition Manager and the Committee to ensure all this is realised. That is what they have been appointed to do.

A good reputation as a Chief Official or Competition Manager has to be gained or earned over a number of years when athletes, coaches, team management and fellow officials have total confidence in them. In an instant, this can be completely lost through just one thoughtless, rash or senseless act or decision. Don't let it happen to you!

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