

IOF President Sue Harvey: **Orienteering is facing a crucial route choice**

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The retiring IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch addressed the ARISF federations at their recent meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. The ARISF board pictured together with prominent guests (left to right): Sue Harvey, Gerald Koenig (Bowling), ARISF President Ron Froehlich, President Samaranch, IOC Executive Board Member Denis Oswald, IOC Sports Director Gilbert Felli and Susie Simcock (Squash).

Orienteering is facing an important choice: between visibility and invisibility. The choice we make now will affect our sport's future for a long time to come.

What do I mean by visibility?

Visibility for a sport means: do people in general know about it? People's knowledge comes from taking part, from reading about the sport and from watching it, either in person or on TV. The last of all these is by far the most influential. A very significant generator of media coverage is high profile events like the Olympic Games. Visibility is closely linked to media coverage.

Why do we need visibility?

The money paid by participants is not enough to allow a sport to grow and develop fully. Money must come from outside the sport itself, principally from commercial partners and from local and national governments.

There are lots of sports wanting money and there is tough competition for the money which is available. To get the attention of the people with the money the sport has to be known, and the better known the better. Media coverage is a way to become known, to become visible.

What happens if we choose invisibility?

Without visibility, the sport will not get the money it needs to continue to develop.

The national federations will not get money to pay for athletes' travel, for the costs of organising events, for prizes that can support athletes' training, for training for youngsters who will form the teams of the years to come, for maps and equipment for everyone to use, for coaches to train and lead teams, and for officials and administrators to support activity. If we choose invisibility, we risk ending up with a sport available to rich older people only.

In this issue: "A crucial route choice", says Sue Harvey; The history behind the EEP proposal; Council's proposal to the Extraordinary General Assembly; Echoes from the federations; Time for a bold step into the future; Sönke Bandixen: "Open EEP discussion rewarding".

If we want visibility, what must we do?

A Council-appointed working group, the Elite Events Programme (EEP) group, has carried out extensive work over the last year in order to suggest answers to this question.

There has been wide consultation and the results have been published. Council is now putting forward proposals to an Extraordinary General Assembly to be held in conjunction with the World Championships in early August. These proposals, if approved, will implement the EEP's suggestions.

The full text and background to the proposals are detailed elsewhere in the O-zine. I would like though to highlight a few points.

- Over a 2 year period, the proposed new programme will have roughly the same number of races for national team athletes. However, the new programme will have

1. More sellable titles (which is of key interest to the media and sponsors).

2. For the athletes, every race will really count - either by itself, or as part of a series, or both.

3. Each year there will be only 3 venues, limiting stressful travelling for the athletes.

4. The number of countries involved in organising events will not be more, and may be less, than before.

- The programme of races at each venue will always be the same. This is important for media and spectator understanding. The better the media understands, the better will be the reporting, and the greater the viewer's enjoyment.

- There will be no loss of status of our Championship if it is held every year. Neither Wimbledon, nor the Tour de France is diminished by being held every year. Quite the reverse.

If we accept the proposals at the Extraordinary General Assembly, we shall provide ourselves with the tools to increase visibility. But having tools will not automatically provide the result. A lot of hard work by all of us will still be required, and we will need to make use of the tools too. I urge you to support these proposals. This is an important route choice. The race could be won or lost at this stage.

The EEP process:

Five years of discussions and decision-making

The Elite Events Programme (EEP) process started already in 1996. Then, the delegates at the General Assembly in Jerusalem, Israel, once again reconfirmed that Olympic inclusion is the overall goal for the IOF.

Laying the foundation

During the Congress period 1996-98, the IOF Council brought the Olympic issue to the fore by forming an Olympic project group to co-ordinate the federation's efforts in this respect. The group identified a number of key areas requiring improvements:

- Increase in the number of IOF members; since then the membership has increased from 48 to 59.

- Higher profile for the sport; as a result of the efforts to achieve this, orienteering has now been included in the World Games and the World Masters Games, and the IOF has increased its participation in the work of international supra-sport bodies.

- Improvement in event programme quality and development of a new discipline format suitable for multi-sport games.

Focussing on the event programme

Two years later, in 1998, the General Assembly in Sintra, Portugal, approved an Olympic Action Plan targeting the development of a new events programme, including new discipline formats suitable for positioning our sport for Olympic participation. The General Assembly once again identified "raising the profile of orienteering" as one of the most important routes to further spread the sport and to get it included in the programme of multi-sport games.

In the two years following the Congress in Sintra, the IOF Council continued the work on developing the event programme. As a result of this work, Council presented to the XX General Assembly held in Leibnitz,

Austria, in 2000, a proposal called "IOF Elite Events - A Concept For Development". The General Assembly endorsed the main principles of the proposal, including a new basic structure, i.e. a series of World Events for the top elite athletes, and a series of Regional Events allowing a wider international participation. It was also agreed that the number of competition days in the World Events series should not normally exceed 20 days per season.

The General Assembly in Leibnitz also underlined that orienteering events need to become more attractive to spectators and the media, and that the visibility and the excitement of the events must be improved. This view was further confirmed by the unanimous adoption of the so-called Leibnitz Convention.

The endorsed Council proposal concluded that new events and new forms of competitions will have to be developed. Furthermore, the General Assembly asked Council to develop a detailed proposal for the future World Championships and other World Events programme.

Concluding the development process

Immediately after the Leibnitz Congress, Council formed an Elite Events Programme (EEP) group with the task of developing this new programme. After nine months of hard work, including several intermediate reports circulated to member federations, athletes, coaches, event organisers, media representatives and other interest groups for comments, the EEP group presented its final report to Council on 1 June 2001.

On the basis of this report, the IOF Council now presents, for decision at the Extraordinary General Assembly in Tampere, Finland, its proposal which can be seen as the final step of a development process spanning five years of discussions and decision-making (1996-2001) and involving three Ordinary and one Extraordinary General Assemblies.

Council proposals to the Extraordinary General Assembly

Following the IOF General Assembly's decision to work towards inclusion of orienteering in the Olympic Games, and in order to respect the Leibnitz Convention, the Council commissioned an Elite Event Project working group (EEP) to propose a framework for the way forward.

After broad consultation of member federations, athletes and coaches, the working group has submitted its conclusions to Council.

Their final report was sent to all member federations.

On the basis of this report Council formally tables the following four proposals for decision by the Extraordinary General Assembly to be held on 3rd August 2001 in Tampere, Finland.

1. To work toward a higher profile for international orienteering with a view to the inclusion of orienteering in the Olympic games, a reformulation of the foot-O discipline formats for world elite events is proposed so as to include a format that meets the requirements of multi-sport games.

Proposal 1

WOCs and World Cups in foot-orienteering shall be run in the following four discipline formats:

| Format | Characteristics |
|---------------|---|
| Sprint | An individual competition, short in time, based on high speed running in any environment. |
| Middle | An individual competition with the highest possible level of technical orienteering (based on the characteristics of today's "short distance"). <small>This format is to be used in Multi-sport Games.</small> |
| Long | A very physically demanding individual event with "classic-style" course planning, open to new competition models to meet the criteria of a limited event time-window. |
| Relay | A three-leg relay event, separate for men and women. |

2. We must strive to obtain the maximum added value from our world events. Though the profile of orienteering will be enhanced by Proposal 1, sustaining media and sponsor interest requires continuity.

Proposal 2

WOC and WorldCup in foot-orienteering shall be run annually. WOC will count as a World Cup round.

3. To crystallise media interest at WOC it is necessary to group all the finals together in as short a time as is compatible with the needs of the athletes. This means that all qualifications must be decided before the finals commence. As orienteering grows world wide, the long-term objective is to entirely dissociate qualifications from the actual WOC.

Athletes will then fill start slots in the finals according to allocations to their federation, which will be based on results in other major events such as World Cup or possibly continental or regional qualifications. This will reduce costs by shortening the WOC period and lessen the technical load for the organiser.

Council proposes a first step in this direction.

Proposal 3

There shall be two routes to the WOC finals in foot-orienteering:

1. Results in the World Cup round preceding the WOC in the same year will give start slots in finals to member federations
2. Qualification events run in conjunction with, but prior to, the finals will give start slots to qualifying individuals. The number of athletes from any member federation in a final will be limited.

4. If the second proposal is adopted, its implementation needs to be anticipated.

Proposal 4

The new calendar of World events will be introduced as follows:

1. The WOC and World Cup will be run annually from the year 2004 onwards.
2. The Extraordinary General Assembly mandates the Council to appoint the organiser of WOC 2004.

Echoes from the federations

Comments on the EEP draft final report

“The EEP report is a good document and will serve as a starting point for further discussions.”

“Our compliments for a good piece of work in a very limited time. We are also satisfied with the manner in which the group has invited the national federations to take part in the work.”

The national orienteering federations having expressed their views on the draft Elite Events Programme (EEP) report indeed represent a wide range of opinions. They have one thing in common, though: all of them have expressed their satisfaction with the way the group has involved all the stakeholders in the process, and the opportunity to review the EEP draft document.

Most of the comments below extracted from the federations’ contributions are related to the two main issues included in Council’s proposals to the Extraordinary General Assembly, i.e. the frequency of the World Orienteering Championships (WOC) and the World Cup, and the World Orienteering Championships qualification system.



Australia

“We request the EEP Group to give the matter of combined annual WOC and World Cup programme further consideration in order to develop a final model that will be fair to all Federation members.”

“The adoption of other qualification criteria such as world rankings, regional championships, etc., should be considered.”



Croatia

“We do not agree that WOC should only include final races, but believe that it should also contain qualification races for the individual events.”

“We agree that there should be only one WOC, and that World Champions for all disciplines should be crowned at this one WOC.”

Finland



“The appreciation of WOC will decrease if the WOC is organised annually. It will also be very difficult to put together the national competition calendar, especially for the biggest orienteering countries, such as Finland, if WOC and World Cup are organised annually.”

“Increased visibility can be attained by having finals only at WOC, through the new sprint distance and by shortening the time span of an event, and of course through media coverage.”



Belgium

“We suggest for the World Cup that slots for the WOC should be allocated to individuals instead of to nations.”



Czech Republic

“The Czech Orienteering Federation supports the idea that World Championships be organised every year. We propose not to include the sprint in the WOC week, but to organise sprint World Championships as a separate competition.”

Great Britain



“Annual WOC: We agree. Annual World Cup: We agree that the World Cup should continue, but not using special World Cup only events. Instead it should use established events (e.g. APOC) incorporating a designated World Cup class. We agree that WOC could form part of the World Cup series.”

“WOC programme: We disagree with the proposal for a finals week only. The only fair way to qualify for WOC finals is for all teams to compete at the same time in the same terrain. From the point of view of cost and logistics this can only be during the WOC week.”



Canada

“We found much to support. We recognize that increased visibility will be beneficial to orienteering in general, as well as increasing the sponsorship opportunities for the top rated elite. We have concerns about three topics: WOC frequency, ranking events, qualification procedure.”

Denmark



“DOF says YES to World Championships organised every year. “We agree that the World Cup, of which WOC forms a part, is organised every year, because we need more than a WOC to create a complete international calendar each year.”

“To keep the costs down, one of the World Cup rounds should be organised in relevant WOC terrain, so that the World Cup round can be used as a training opportunity for WOC.”



Hungary

“The Board of the Hungarian Orienteering Federation welcomes the approach taken and agrees with most parts of the proposal.”

“We disagree with one point, i.e. the proposed qualification method. We consider the system of regional qualification races, or even keeping something similar to the present system, to be reasonable alternatives.”

Japan



“We are reluctant to have the WOC annually. We can see the benefits, but an annual WOC may affect the quality of the competition.”

“We do not agree with the proposal to have the World Cup as a qualification for WOC. We would like to submit an alternative proposal: adding some slots for WOC in regional championships would improve the fairness between continents and stimulate regional orienteering activity.”



New Zealand

“We agree with the basic discipline format structure. We agree that the main discipline shall be a format that can be supported at a multi-sport Games, but are concerned with the actual format proposed.”

“We disagree that WOC should be organised every year, with a finals only WOC programme, and with the suggested qualification system for WOC.”

Norway



“The Elite Committee of the Norwegian Orienteering Association supports the proposed solution with two World Cup rounds every year and WOC in August.”

“We are still of the opinion that the sprint should be a series of competitions.”



Russia

“We support an annual WOC in foot orienteering. For ski orienteering it is not necessary to conduct a WOC every year.”

“We believe that it is very important to conduct world level competitions for young athletes (U23). It can motivate many athletes to continue their career also after the junior classes.”



Sweden

“We fully support the idea of organising the World Championships and the World Cup every year.”

“We are convinced that inclusion of the sprint in the WOC week is the most favourable solution. To increase the excitement, the sprint final could be split into two rounds run on the same day, and the runner with the best overall time becomes the World Champion.”

Switzerland



“We agree that the international event pattern be changed in order to have a WOC every year. Having the World Cup every year is a good idea. When orienteering is Olympic we do not think that it is possible to have both WOC and Olympic Games in the same year.”

“Regional events for all levels (junior and elite) is a good idea which we support.”

South Africa



“To make the WOC an annual event is likely to place an even higher financial burden on the smaller orienteering nations if they wish to take part in the most prestigious event in the world.”

USA



“We are strongly supportive of the goals of promotion, growth, and Olympic inclusion. We are amenable to most of the specific proposals, but would like to see WOC qualification criteria which would ensure the inclusion of developing orienteering countries.”



The EEP process involved a dialogue with all interested parties, including the athletes. The Norwegian elite runners evaluated the proposal and declared their support for an annually-organised WOC and World Cup.

Time for a bold step into the future

BY ÅKE JACOBSON

In most countries, orienteering is still a minority sport. The 1970's and 80's saw a period of fast growth for the sport. However in the past few years, in most established orienteering countries, even those where the history of the sport dates right back to the beginning of the last century, the level of orienteering activity has begun to decline.

This has affected not only participation in events, but also the economy of the federations, including the IOF.

Only the World Championships has managed to attract any wider exposure of our sport in the media, and this fact has been seriously limiting our possibilities to build up an image capable of attracting new recruits, media and sponsors.

The Leibnitz Convention paved the way

The present provision of orienteering is evidently not attractive enough. We therefore have to find ways of making orienteering more interesting without losing the essence of the sport, just as many other sports have done in recent times.

Improving the image of orienteering is a prime objective of the IOF. Recognising that the image is very much a reflection of the sport's exposure in the media, the IOF has initiated a series of measures to increase the attractiveness of the individual events.

As a result of these measures, the national federations which attended last year's General Assembly in Austria adopted the so called Leibnitz Convention, which summarises some of the requirements.

One more thing still remains to be done – the future package of events, the elite events programme, must be shaped. Based on last year's Congress decisions, the IOF Council appointed a working group to develop a proposal for the IOF Elite Events Programme. The group has been working in close co-operation with the main stakeholders, the federations and the athletes, in a process involving an intensive exchange of views and ideas. The open EEP forum on the Internet was visited by a large number of viewers.

In addition to the comments posted on the site by athletes, coaches, and representatives of the federations, the group had an extensive e-mail discussion with various interest groups, in particular with the athletes.

Before submitting the final proposal to the IOF Council, the group circulated its pre-

liminary conclusions to the national orienteering federations for their comments. On the basis of the feedback received from sixteen federations, one national team and one future WOC organiser, the group made a number of modifications to its final report.

The group's conclusions are widely known since its report has been circulated to the federations and published on the IOF homepage. The IOF Council, having carefully assessed both the report and the opinions expressed by the federations, is now proposing:

- the introduction of a new discipline format suitable for multi-sport Games
- a changed frequency of World Events, and
- a partly changed model for qualification to World Championships

The need to develop a new discipline format was already identified a number of years ago when participation in multi-sport Games became a reality. In both the World Games, where orienteering is now included, and in future participation in Olympic Games, we have to adapt to a number of requirements imposed upon us.

The experience from preparing our participation in this year's World Games in Akita, Japan, and a careful assessment of the requirements of the Olympic programme have guided us in establishing the new format called "Middle".

Increased opportunities through continuity

The proposed change in frequency of World Championships and World Cups is basically a matter of increasing the exposure of the sport, thereby providing an opportunity to build up an image that can attract external attention.

The main driving force behind the proposal is the need for increased media and sponsor interest. Our sport, be it at national or international level, can only develop successfully if sufficient resources are available.

By and large, these resources must come from external sources. Exposing our most attractive events more frequently will ensure that continuity can be achieved. Continuity assists in maintaining attention which, in turn, provides increased opportunities for sponsorship.

The economy of the IOF is a matter of concern for all national member federations. At the Congress in Austria, the members expressed their concern about the issue of declining income and decided that one of the main objectives for this Congress period should be to improve the income of the IOF. The proposed change in frequency of World Events is one important step towards fulfilling this objective.

First step towards regional WOC qualifications

In future, the only reasonable method to

select runners for the World Championships is to have regional qualifications. Orienteering is currently spreading to more and more countries, and the number of teams who feel ready for WOC participation is steadily increasing.

Qualification prior to WOC, and on a regional basis, is to be preferred, not least for economic reasons. However, we will have to develop a regional structure that can handle this new model before this can be realised.

As a first step, the IOF Council therefore

PHOTO:PIRJO VALJANEN



We need to find ways of making orienteering more spectator and media friendly. The so called Leibnitz Convention summarises some of the requirements.

proposes that qualification in conjunction with the WOC is maintained but, additionally, that some places be allocated on the basis of results in the first World Cup round in the WOC year. This will also add to the status of the World Cup and make it more attractive not only for the athletes but also raise the interest of media and sponsors.

Last year's Congress in Austria decided that the number of competition days for the top athletes in World Events should not normally exceed 20 days per season. In the past, the programme has often involved more days than that. The now proposed annual series of World Events fulfils the above requirement.

Increased WOC frequency not equal to increased costs

Several member federations have ex-

pressed concern about the cost implications of the proposed increased frequency of WOC and the World Cup, and have asked that a cost analysis be made.

It is not, however, possible to make such a general analysis. The cost effect will be individual for each federation and will depend on the actual elite event programme carried out. The programmes of most federations include not only the World Events, but also a number of other elite events.

The outcome of the analysis will thus be dependent on the extent to which the individual federations intend to maintain participation in these other events.

Just adding the proposed package of a yearly WOC and a series of World Cup

events will obviously result in increased costs. Such a solution seems less likely though, not least because of the athletes hardly being able to cope with such an extended programme.

If each national federation maintains the previous level of the number of competition days, the cost increment is likely to become reasonably moderate.

It is also important not to forget the income side. Participation in World Championships is normally more attractive to sponsors (as well as in gaining access to government and similar funds) and there are good reasons to believe that the higher frequency of such events also will generate higher income.

Open EEP discussion important and rewarding

BY BARBRO RÖNNBERG

The Elite Events Programme (EEP) working group worked very intensively for almost ten months before submitting its report to the IOF Council in early June. One of the group members was Sönke Bandixen, the person behind the launch of the expression "we for them" in relation to organising orienteering events. Like the other members of the group, Björn Persson, Ted de St. Croix, and Øivind Holt, Sönke has put in a lot of time and effort into this project. What did he get in return? What are his views on the future development of the sport?

– The transparent and dynamic process we have conducted allowed an open discussion with all the various stakeholders. The comments we received were very important and helped us to not drift away from the concerns and hopes that have been expressed by many interested orienteers from all over the world, says Sönke Bandixen.

Time to give a signal

– After a long time of internal discussions and often defensive reactions to challenges coming from outside the IOF, the time has now come to give a clear signal: if the member federations want to set the IOF on a pro-

active and dynamic route in order to consequently realise their strategic goals like the Olympic intrusion and the media orientation of IOF top events, their vote must be yes. An annual WOC will drastically accelerate the overall planning and the event rhythm within the IOF and will allow us to be more progressive in trying out new forms and venues on top level to develop our sport world wide, Bandixen continues.

– The value of a WOC is not only decided by ourselves, the orienteers, but primarily by the rest of the world (sponsors, suppliers, spectators, fans etc.) through the international media. It is easier to create a high profile of an annual WOC and to keep it throughout 12 months in the media when it is accompanied by annual World Cup series.

We have to move to be aboard

– The costs for the member federations will not necessarily have to increase as the overall number of top event days shall be kept below 20 per annum as they are today. The new event formats will allow to reduce the overall duration of a WOC for many federations.

The member federations will be given the opportunity to profit from the increased media orientation of the IOF World Events

through their national sponsoring projects. And it may well be that the new WOC profile will allow IOF midterm to reduce the costs for all participating teams.

– Personally, I hope that later on in Tampere also those member federations hesitating because of currently not being very strong, will allow the IOF and the stronger member federations to go ahead in building up the profile of our common flagship, the WOC.

– The international media and sports community are not waiting for the IOF, we have to move if we want to be aboard. And they are sailing fast, Sönke Bandixen concludes.

O-zine is an on-line newsletter published by the IOF 4-6 times a year. It can be downloaded from the IOF Internet home page at www.orienteering.org. Provide us with your e-mail address and we'll notify you every time a new issue has been released! Enjoy reading your O-zine!

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