

Cancelling a competition: clarification of rules 26.12 and 26.13

26.12 The organiser must stop, and postpone or cancel a race if at any point it becomes clear that circumstances have arisen which make the race dangerous for the competitor, officials or spectators.

26.13 The organiser must void a race if circumstances have arisen which make the race significantly unfair.

1. As requested by IOF Council, as a way forward to clarify in what circumstances a competition should or should not be voided, we considered the list of hypothetical examples included in the appendix to this report.
2. In the following document, reference is generally made to a race. In a “single-race competition”, the results of the race are the results of the competition, so if the race is voided, so is the competition. However, in a “multi-race competition”, if one race is voided, it may be deemed acceptable to base the results of the overall competition on the remaining races. In a “qualification-race competition” there may be some flexibility to deal with problems that occur in the qualification race by giving affected people automatic entry to the final race.
3. This document gives examples based on Foot Orienteering, but most of the document will be equally relevant to MTBO and SkiO. For TrailO, the overall time is less important and a problem with one unfair control can easily be resolved by removing that control from the competition.

Competitor safety

4. The safety of competitors, organisers *and spectators* is paramount. The image of the sport would suffer irreparable damage if organisers gambled with people’s safety, even if the threat did not eventually materialise.

The applicability of Rule 2.7

2.7 Sporting fairness shall be the guiding principle in the interpretation of these rules by competitors, organisers and the jury.

5. Sporting fairness implies that the competitors and the public should be prepared to accept that the races cannot be 100% fair. There will always be an element of luck, especially in a sport such as orienteering taking place in an outdoors environment. In fact a winning margin of a second in a Long Distance interval start race is equivalent to just 3 metres running distance (or 0.2 mm on a 1:15000 map).
6. Orienteering is a complex sport to organise and there will sometimes be slight imperfections – for example with the map or the control descriptions. A race should not be voided just because of a minor technicality.
7. All those concerned (athletes, organisers, spectators, sponsors and the media) will have invested a large amount of time and money in order to prepare for and participate in a race. It is most unsatisfactory if much of that is lost when a race is voided.
8. However, as orienteering increases in status, the consequences of missing out on a gold medal may be very significant (in financial and prestige terms) and hence competitors may be more determined to challenge any perceived unfairness.

Reason to void a competition

9. There can be no hard and fast rule determining when a race should be voided and when the results should be left to stand with those adversely affected by a problem regarded as unfortunate. However the key considerations should be:
- Has the problem affected the results so badly that the race is no longer perceived by the competitors, the public and the media as reasonably fair with credible results?
 - Is it probable that the results will be challenged and the challenge upheld?
 - Does the perceived unfairness outweigh the requirement to declare a result and celebrate the winners?

Who can void a race?

10. The organiser should declare a race void if circumstances have arisen which make the race significantly unfair. If the organiser does not void the race but a competitor feels it should be voided then a complaint can be made to that effect. If the complaint is rejected but the competitor still feels that the race should be voided, then a protest can be made. The jury considers the protest and (if the protest is upheld) may instruct the organiser to void the race.
11. In certain circumstances it is possible for an appeal to be lodged with the IOF and a competitor might even take their case to the Court of Arbitration for Sports (CAS) or a civil court.

Factors when considering whether to void a competition

12. There are a number of factors which the organiser (and if necessary the jury) must consider.
- How many and what proportion of competitors were affected? A problem that adversely affected 10% or more of the field could be taken as an indication that the race may no longer be fair.
 - Were the affected competitors potential medallists?
 - Is it likely that the problem has seriously affected the placings of the leading competitors?
 - How large and serious was the effect of the problem? A few seconds are more significant in a sprint than in a long distance race.
 - What is the status of the competition (from WRE up to WOC)?
 - What type of race is it (qualification, final, interval start, mass start, sprint, relay etc)?
 - Is it *fair* to competitors not affected by the problem to void the race?
 - Which outcome would do least harm to the image of the sport? How do the negative consequences of voiding the race compare to the negative consequences of not doing so?
 - Could the competition be rescheduled at a time *fair* to the competitors, organisers and IOF?

- Was the problem an organiser error or was it something outside of the organiser's control? There may be a greater willingness to allow the results to stand if the problem could not easily have been prevented.

13. The above factors must be considered together. Often more than one is relevant and a balanced judgement has to be made.
14. Sometimes the relevant factors will be very finely balanced and there is likely to be criticism whatever decision is made.
15. In some cases, it may be worth consulting the most-affected teams and discussing with them the pros and cons of the alternative options. It is not a good outcome if the winners refuse to accept their medals.

Anticipating the worst

16. Competitions can be structured in manners that provide safeguards in cases where serious disruptions to competitions might arise. For example, with multi-race competitions, if one of the races is cancelled the rules should allow for the competition to be decided on the basis of the other races.
17. Another approach is to schedule spare days appropriately during the event so that there is time available for a postponed race to be rescheduled instead of cancelled. For orienteering, ideally this means that reserve courses must have been planned in advance as is recommended for WOC competitions.

Unacceptable alternatives to voiding

18. It is important that measures (tempting though they may be) are not taken which may simply aggravate the unfairness.
19. Many, probably the majority, of hypothetical situations involve problems with a single control or course leg. Rule 24.15 ("The results must be based on competitors' times for the whole course. *No changes may be made to these times on the basis of split times.*") prohibits a result being declared on the basis of *part* of a course only. This rule has been introduced because analysis of what happens when you remove one or more legs from the times shows that it usually introduces as much unfairness as it solves.

Implementing the decision

20. It is important that decisions made by the organiser or jury are clearly explained to the competitors and the public. If it is recognised that there was a problem, even though it may have been deemed not to have affected the outcome of a race significantly enough to warrant any action, the problem should still be acknowledged.
21. In some cases, the race may be part of a league or ranking scheme. The organiser or jury should consider this and may make appropriate recommendations. For example, if a World Ranking race has to be voided, but the times of those runners who completed the course are valid, then it may be that it is still reasonable to calculate and issue World Ranking points.

Conclusions

22. Voiding a race is an option that should be avoided if at all possible. Organisers should be very careful to avoid mistakes. They must try to prevent problems arising, check everything thoroughly (for example using pre-runners) and anticipate and plan contingencies for unusual circumstances.

23. However, an organiser must be aware that if the race is obviously unfair or unsafe and the results are not credible, then it must be voided or postponed.

David Rosen & Barry McCrae for the Rules Commission, October 2010.

Appendix: Hypothetical examples (though many are based on actual incidents)

1. Halfway through a race, a wildfire starts that is likely to affect the competition area.
Stop the race on safety grounds and void the race.
2. The competition area is a high mountain plateau and an intense lightning storm is predicted.
Postpone or cancel the race on safety grounds.
3. In the WOC long-distance final, a control is put on the wrong boulder, 30m from (and not visible from) the correct boulder. Many runners lose between 1 and 10 minutes, although a few runners find the control without any problem because it is on one of the approach routes to the correct boulder.
This renders the competition unfair. The competition must be voided.
4. In the WOC sprint final, a large old gate to a park that is usually permanently locked is just shown as (part of) an uncrossable fence. On the day of the race, unknown to the organisers, it is suddenly opened before any runner has reached that point. It is passed on one of the two obvious routes and 30% of the runners go through it since the control is just near it and this saves 200m of extra running.
The map was effectively incorrect so the runners who went through the gate cannot reasonably be disqualified. At the same time, they should not be ranked ahead of competitors who obeyed the map symbol. In a sprint race, 200m is almost a minute and so makes the results completely unfair. The competition must be voided.
5. In the WOC middle-distance final, a gate in a high fence which should be open is unexpectedly locked. Some runners say they lost up to 30 seconds because a) it confused them and b) it took quite some time to climb over it.
This is unfortunate but the results should stand.
6. In one of the qualification heats for a JWOC final, a control is missing when early competitors reach that point. It is in place for subsequent runners.
Let any affected competitors run in the final in addition to those who qualified properly.
7. When planning the WOC middle-distance final, an extra control was added at a rather late stage in the planning process. The last starter in the final is mistakenly given a map from a previous print run which doesn't show the extra control.
This is very unfortunate but the results should stand since there is still a worthy winner. A public apology must be made to the affected competitor.
8. In the WOC sprint final, two of the leading runners lose a minute because a narrow alleyway is completely obstructed by a party of tourists.
This is unfortunate but the results should stand.

9. After most of the starters have set off in the WOC long-distance final, there is a sudden downpour and a stream near control 1 which the runners must ford becomes very dangerous so the organiser prevents the last six runners from starting for their own safety.

The last 6 runners will be the fastest in the heats and therefore contain the likely medallists. 6 runners is 13% of the field. However, the problem is outside of the organiser's control and the remaining runners had a fair competition with a reasonably worthy winner. The results should stand with due recognition that some competitors were deprived of the opportunity to take part.

10. In the WOC long-distance final, the map printing for many of the runners starts to rub off and, in at least 10 cases, for some controls the runners are just left with circles but no underlying map features.

The map is the essence of the sport. 10 runners is 22% of the field. The competition must be voided.

11. In the WOC Relay with 38 teams, there is a leading group of 4 runners and one suffers a serious injury. The other three abandon their race to help.

This was a problem outside of the organiser's control and the three runners made their own decision to abandon the race. Although those affected were potential medallists, the number affected was 3 out of 38 (8%). The results should stand. The organiser should consult the affected teams (both those whose runners abandoned their race and those who will now be medallists) to ensure that they will accept this decision. The three competitors acted according to rule 26.3 and are commended for their sportsmanship.

12. In the WOC sprint final the temperature rose quickly during the morning. It is discovered that there is temperature-related drift in all the start and finish clocks which means that the times can only be guaranteed accurate to the nearest second.

The results are degraded (by rounding down) to 1 second accuracy (instead of 0.1 seconds) and the medals awarded on that basis. Of course there may be more ties as a consequence.

13. In the second WMOC qualification race, the control codes in the loose control descriptions given out at pre start for M50A did not match the course descriptions printed on the map.

For M50A competitors, qualification for the M50 finals should be decided only on the basis of the first qualification race.