

Australian Biathlon Association  
President's Report  
September 2009

Hello Biathlonites

The end to the 2009 season brought with it a barrage of interesting stuff and as with every year some of it was good and some bad but this year it was a little different, mostly for the good. I would like to start off by mentioning a few things that the ABA will be up to over the next 6 months and also describe what actually goes into running an association such as the ABA.

The committee members are in contact nearly every week by phone or email and generally when you least expect it, like Sunday nights when the wife gets cranky for not spending enough time with her and the family. As a committee member one of the most challenging things of all is learning how to make decisions that will appease everyone. The response to this of course is "NEVER" - There is never a time where a decision is made that pleases everybody so the best approach is to remain focused on core issues for each particular circumstance and use the best information available at the time. In a similar way to being a military strategist, each decision must be made and then followed for a definable time before refining it further or altering direction. Good leadership must be extended in a wise, firm and positive way without hesitation, or we face missing opportunities and passing poor judgment calls. A good committee must listen and act on behalf of all members and the future of the association, not just a few who criticize and make a lot of noise - which can at times be a tough call.

As president of the ABA for the past 4 years I wish to share with you a revelation I had during the last Australian Olympic Council AGM that Paul and I always attend for the all important networking, shaking of hands, waving the flag to try and catch more funding grants and also to see who's new in the zoo so to speak. Having participating in these meetings for a while now it originally started by observing a lot of boring bureaucratic fuss and bother and strict adherence to protocols and such. Having some experience under the belt now it is clear to me how a high-level organization has to be run, particularly due to the fact that the AOC is not Government funded.

Many people think that in this wonderful democracy of ours a ton of money gets thrown at Olympic development by our friends in Canberra but this is simply not so. The Australian Government pulled out of Olympic funding sometime after the 1956 Games but thanks to a small dedicated team of ex-athletes and lawyer types who developed what is now the AOC some 30 years ago, it has grown to an enormous size, completely independent and not-for-profit. After a few years of reading and hearing them tout funding figures in the order of 60+ million you start to realize that this is as serious as it gets in Australia. The passion that these guys share is truly admirable and it has taken me this long to fully appreciate it on a whole new level.

This all came together when they were announcing awards to various committee and media people for “Lifetime Achievements” and I saw many familiar sports-reporter type faces. One of the ultimate goals of the AOC of course was to bring the ‘Games’ back to Australia and with reference to the Sydney 2000 Games their winning line that they intimately shared between themselves was – “It’s taken over 30 years, but we did it”. A simple sentence but they ‘tear-up’ when mentioning it.

How much patience do some people have to have to get this far and what sort of guts does it take? Some of these men and women have given the best part of their lives, some well over 40 years to assist various sports organisations grow and prosper. So what can we learn from this and how do we apply it to biathlon? Well for a start we can all dispense with any tendency for petty territorial bitching and be more tolerant of what each of us are here to do – to enjoy and grow the sport of biathlon and by that we all need to cooperate. All of us learned the concept of “cooperation” during the first years of Sesame Street so it shouldn’t be a new thing.

If a small group of guys can get the Olympic Games back to Australia without much in the way of federal funding, we can at least all try to work together to build our sport to a self-supporting state with its own governance, capable of making decisions on its own with support by its members. We are not going to achieve this through any political back-stabbing and re-routing decision-making processes. Every member has equal rights – one of them is the right to attend each AGM and cast a vote for their nominated committee members whom they wish to take responsibility, to run the business and make decisions for the good of all. If there is a problem with this then they can also exercise other rights – the right to appeal through the correct channels, or the right to let the committee get on with their job.

With the welcome addition of the NSW biathlon contingent this year we saw some marked increase in athlete and spectator participation, all of which resulted in some exciting race results and we look forward to further increase in NSW athletes in the future. Along with this sudden growth in numbers however did highlight some minor deficiencies in race and range procedures. So to improve things further and ensure race days are run as smooth as possible the ABA will be addressing some key areas of concern with suggestions of new policies and procedures to be put in place well before the 2010 season. Whilst in the past we have always tried to follow official channels for obvious reasons of IBU compliance, we are never really afforded the chance to run events exactly to the letter since there are too many contributing factors interfering with the Australian race season – the unpredictable weather patterns and of course the limited number of participants to name but two.

We also have a real fear of appearing unnecessarily draconian and possibly losing some of our loyal but limited participant numbers. Should we be too heavy with the enforcement of procedures it may have an adverse affect, since for most of us race day is all about having some serious fun and catching up with friends. Hence a relatively casual and somewhat forgiving attitude has prevailed to date and as long as the elite-level athletes get the Full-Monty treatment for their IBU qualification everyone is happy.

The ABA would like to run official races with a similar flavour to IBU events, like having pre-race briefings and captains meetings the night prior etc. This would be a fantastic situation as it would give all of us time to discuss the course and make necessary preparations but with our current situation where people are still arriving on the mountain at 11pm the night before a race or worse yet – at 9.00am the morning of the race, this is simply not a possibility until membership grows significantly. With NSW on board and soon NZ, then possibly South America in the future, now is the time to have a careful inward look and we welcome suggestions from all financial ABA members for ways of improving how events are run and managed.

So from this day forth there will be much more attention given to special ABA documented procedures, not just IBU rulings. New ABA procedures will only be put in place so that IBU rulings can be followed closer and the job of race day gets done more efficiently.

Possible examples of changes will be; Clearer definitions of race categories, pre-race and post race protest periods, athlete/coach onus of start list information, 8-8.30am Pre-Race Registration, compulsory participation in State qualification races for entry into National races and compulsory participation in nominated ABA duties as part of ongoing membership. We should also be doing equipment and rifle checks at the start of every race and have all athletes marshaled and ready to go within a cattle yard, to give people a real taste of OS competitions. To get all this done everyone has to put in. It might sound tough but we need to jump to the next level or we are just wasting everyone's time and it will be up to all of us to read and understand any new ruling or policy introduced prior to the start of the 2010 season.

Watch this space

Greg Anderson

President

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