

## 2011 Annual Report – Athletes’ Representative

As I stepped into the role of Athletes’ Representative at the 2010 AGM, I thought to myself “How hard can this possibly be?”. After all, others had fulfilled the role in previous years and had come through to the other side, unscathed, and not in need of any form of intensive therapy.

So I ventured forth expecting to attend a whirlwind series of cocktail parties and champagne dinners, whilst air-kissing foreign IBU dignitaries, and wearing my most fabulous jewels. Alas, it appears to have all been wishful thinking on my part.

As the position of Athletes’ Representative came with no job description, and thus, really no responsibilities, I decided to be a little pro-active and try to define what the role of the Athletes’ Representative should encompass. Well, that was pretty easy; the Athletes’ Representative.....represents the athletes!!!! More specifically, though, I considered the Athletes’ Representative to:

- a) be a person with whom individual athletes could share their ideas, concerns, and aspirations for the sport,
- b) act as an advocate for, and represent the views of athletes, as a whole, on issues relating to biathlon,
- c) be a person through whom information could be relayed between athletes and the Committee,
- d) represent ALL athletes, be it novice or elite biathletes, Masters biathletes, junior biathletes, female or male biathletes (the list continues).

Most of the year was quiet, with only my personal reflections on the role to contend with. After announcing my presence and position in the “Biathlon Newsletter”, I later had the opportunity to visit one day of the on-snow training camp at Whiskey Flat, Mt Hotham, and be introduced to some of the newer biathletes.

At the end of the Victorian Championships (held at the end of July), however, an issue arose that directly affected all athletes. It involved the sudden and unexpected change in race format for the following Australian Championship races, scheduled for mid-August (2 weekends after the Victorian Championships). It had been decided that the previously accepted and advertised race formats of Distance/Individual on the Saturday, followed by a Sprint on the Sunday, be changed to a Sprint on the Saturday, followed by a new and untried race format of a Pursuit (somewhat modified) on the Sunday. The implementation of the races, and the rules surrounding them were confusing, and the reasons for the change were unclear.

I considered this sudden change to be both unfair and unacceptable for athletes. It was heartening that the official I spoke with was respectful and appreciative of the views expressed by me on behalf of the athletes (though I had not had the opportunity to consult with all athletes). It was also encouraging that over subsequent weeks there were occasions where I was asked to contribute to discussions, in my capacity as Athletes’ Representative.

More recently, I have spent time with Committee members as they discussed the Protest put forward by Hulme-Morton-Walker. The Committee eventually rejected the Protest, and Hulme-Morton-Walker subsequently approached me (in my capacity as Athletes' Representative) to act as Mediator between them and the Committee. This was an offer I declined as I did not see it as the role of the Athletes' Representative to perform this task.

The initial event mentioned near the start of the Report highlighted some matters I thought were very important, and I have decided to focus on them for the time being. They are as follows;

- 1/ Athletes should have a VOICE , and should be consulted on issues that directly affect them.
- 2/ Communication between athletes and the Athletes' Representative was difficult due to the Athletes' Representative not having permission to access all contact details.
- 3/ Who is the right person for the role of Athletes' Representative?

With regards to the first issue, I have approached the ABA with the formal request that I be able to attend (via phone conference) the General Committee Meetings. Even though I would not have the capacity to contribute actively at these meetings (unless invited to do so), I would be able to stay abreast of developments and consult with the Committee. I shall also be asking athletes to express their views and comment on matters that do arise, such as the possibility of introducing new race formats.

As for communication between the athletes and the Athletes' Representative, an email has already been distributed by the ABA, requesting permission from each individual (and their respective parents/guardians) for me to access their contact details. A number of athletes have already responded positively, and I encourage all others who have not yet done so to respond as well. The Communications Officer is busy enough without having to forward my correspondence as well.

One thing I would like to see is the Athletes' Representative being elected by the athletes. After all, the Athletes' Representative is responsible to the Athletes rather than the Committee. At present, the Athletes' Representative is voted in at the AGM by those present who have the privilege of voting (and the proxies).

I believe it is important that the athletes views are sought and considered. After all, the sport is for the athletes, isn't it? Our sport of biathlon doesn't exist just so loving parents can spend all their hard earned cash, and drive their young charges around the countryside. Nor does it exist just so coaches and officials can develop headaches and grey hairs. It exists so that we can all come together in a respectful, professional, and enjoyable environment that encourages good competition, with self development and fulfilment.

Our sporting arena would not be possible without the efforts of those who enable our racing to go ahead. Much of the work by “others” is invisible, and often goes unacknowledged and unappreciated. A race does not magically materialise on the morning of an event; much thought and consideration has taken place in the days and weeks leading up to it.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all people involved in making our racing possible, most notably Paul Connor, for spending many, many, many hours dealing with the official aspects of holding a race (aspects that remain alien to me, and that I would rather remain ignorant of). Without his efforts, and those of all who kindly contributed, especially anyone who shovelled snow, the races would not have gone ahead, snow or no snow.

Perhaps it would be appropriate for me to deliver the “CAPELLI GRIGI” awards for services rendered. Please wear them with pride.

To Paul Connor; 1000 grey hairs (it will make you look very distinguished).

To our President; 1000 grey hairs as well.

... and the Committee; 200 grey hairs each.

To all Coaches and Parents; yes, you may all have 100 grey hairs each.

There is also a special award, the “UNA MEZZA DOZZINA DI BIRRE”, otherwise known as the “six-pack of beer” award, to be presented to all volunteers, sponsors, groomers, the Defence Forces, and anyone who generously shovelled snow, or helped out at any time. You really do deserve this one!

I haven't forgotten all the hard working athletes out there. You shall all receive the “UNA PAUSA GUARDAGNATA” award, also known as “a well earned break”. Enjoy, as training and racing will sneak up upon you before you know it.

As for “LA SPORCA DOZZINA”, I hope I shall never have to hand out “the dirty dozen”! To be presented to anyone (athlete or otherwise) who behaves in an unsportsmanlike manner, or brings our sport into disrepute.

Kind regards to all,

Irene Dunn

Athlete Representative, Australian / Victorian Biathlon Association.