

# CONCEPTUAL THOUGHTS BEFORE THE COPENHAGEN FORUM SAILING AND THE MEDIA

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Sailing is considered by many to be one of the more conservative, or traditional, of sports. Sometimes we like this, because we feel privileged to be members of an 'elite club', but other times it is frustrating, because those outside our sport fail to understand, despite our efforts. This cautious attitude within sailing is often reflected in the activities of our governing bodies, where decisions regarding innovations and changes are often overcautious, even defensive, aimed at protecting the very aspects of our sport which make it so confusing for others. If we really want to become a spectator sport, then we cannot go on indulging ourselves, we have to consider more extreme options.

More than two decades ago great excitement, and some indignation, was caused by a group of 'hot-headed' individuals, who dared to recommend that the displaying of advertising on hulls and sails, or by crews on clothing, while racing, should be permitted. It took more than a decade for the Advertising Code to be produced and accepted, and who could imagine our racing infrastructure today with pure white hulls and sails?

In the modern world, having a high profile and winning public acceptance is a major factor within all competitive sports governing bodies. Our sport is no exception, and the most important instrument to help us realise our objectives of achieving such recognition, is the MEDIA.

Media awareness and acceptance is an absolute necessity to attract the public and sponsors to our sport and to create the heroes who awake the interest of youth and newcomers. Such recognition is needed within sailing to strengthen and build grass roots activity, and to reinforce our Olympic status.

Throughout recent decades many sports have changed in order to secure media recognition, some with success and some without. Sailing has also made some moves in the direction of change, but the quandary of how to remain an effective participant sport, whilst accommodating the necessary reforms to become a successful spectator sport, has never been properly addressed. This is the reason why the EUROSAF Executive decided to combine our Ordinary General Assembly with a Forum focused on discussing and debating these issues. We have invited some highly qualified media experts to lead the debate, and we wish to hear the opinions of our European MNAs and sailors. The objective is to help European MNAs develop ways in which they can leverage the media in their own countries, for the benefit of sailing locally and as a whole.

Co-operation with the Media is a two ways process. They use a wide range of modern systems and technologies nowadays, and it is up to us to service these systems, and the media personnel, by providing the best race formats, scoring systems, information output, equipment, simple rules, qualification systems and alike, in order to make their task easier. Sailing has tried to adapt, through the development of Olympic equipment in the direction of 'high-tech' classes, some rule changes, the introduction of the medal races at the Olympics, but the results of these minor adjustments do not seem to satisfy the public. As a consequence, representatives of the sailing media are frustrated and unhappy that they cannot promote our sport effectively, resulting in the 'broadcast ranking' of our sport being at the bottom of the pile. Journalist James Boyd (who will be joining us in Copenhagen) wrote: "Our sympathies go out to UK TV

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*commentators Richard Simmonds and Shirley Robertson, as they attempted to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear", referring to the difficulties of non-sailing commentators lacking the information they need in order to broadcast. It needed experts like Richard and Shirley. We have also invited Mr. Morten Lorenzen (sailor, race organizer and television commentator) from Denmark, who in his open e-mail to ISAF, following Qingdao, mentioned the lack of a Commentator Information System (CIS) in our sport. Almost all sports offer this web-based system except sailing, which is the 'nerve centre' and 'knowledge-hub' for every commentator. Morten also knows a lot about the tracking systems now available, so it will be interesting to hear his comments on this and other media related issues.*

The spectrum of possible changes for sailing are unlimited. Just to highlight some possibilities, here are some moderate and some really revolutionary examples:

- To improve the control of the starting line and to establish immediate information for competitors, spectators and media (*could be electronic or infra system and a very visible electronic board*).
- To change the penalty system (*could be an additional mark outside the course one or two boat lengths from the ordinary mark's like the penalty loop in biathlon – more understandable*).
- To move judging in the direction of on the water umpiring.
- To simplify rules as far as possible.
- To change the redress system
- To strengthen the medal race format with a combined knock-out system and no results carried from the previous races (*in many sports most competitors leave gradually, and only the best stay until the final. This is drama for the sake of the media*).
- To improve tracking systems and introduce the best solutions, even at national level.
- To establish the web based CIS system for major regattas.
- To introduce weight categories instead of classes
- To narrow the course on every leg for the sake of TV broadcasting, or
- To experiment and introduce with 'the Ring' (*see separate paper*)

I hope that most of the European MNAs will join us in Copenhagen. It is of the utmost importance we hear your comments and proposals on this premium topic, which is the largest challenge facing our sport today.

George Wossala  
President  
EUROSAF