
THE UNITED STATES ROWING ASSOCIATION

USRowing

*Member: United States Olympic Committee and
Federation Internationale des Societes d'Aviron*

THE JUDGE-REFEREE COMMITTEE

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June 19, 1989

Mr. Ronald K. Chen
Secretary *pro tempore*
Judge Referee Committee
United States Rowing Association
102 Pine Grove Road
Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922

Re: Proposed *USRA Rules of Rowing*

Dear Ron:

It's been about a year since I attended the summer Committee meeting at Indianapolis, and very little progress has been made in the development of supplemental USRA Open Water Rowing Rules. In part, *mea culpa*, for I have been unable to personally champion this effort due to an overwhelmingly busy work schedule. I am pleased, however, that the Committee will be meeting at Oakland during the Master's Nationals in August, and I would offer to explore arrangements for the Committee to meet comfortably at the Women's Athletic Club, a private facility fronting directly on Lake Merritt at which I have "husband privileges" and where meals and other services are available. Please let me know if I may be of service in exploring this further.

Having recently Refereed the open water events of the USRA-registered *10th Tahoe Summer Regatta*, I have acquired some further insight into the nature of these typically off-shore and long-distance races. I would like to share with you and the rest of our Committee my concerns regarding such events and their impact upon USRA Rules.

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The Rules as they Pertain to Safety

First, from the perspective of a Chief Referee who has officiated eight seasons of open water races involving many hundreds of fixed seat rowers on San Francisco Bay, I would preface my comments with the simple statement that at every open water event I feel a special burden of responsibility. A tiny part of each competitor's trust is placed in my hands. As final arbiter of go/no go, start or delay, I have postponed races thirty minutes to allow supertankers to transit a course; I have effectively required naval vessels to wait while the rowing fleet passed ahead. And once, when I believed a tugboat captain's radioed ETA and started a race, the ocean tug arrived twenty minutes early directly in the path of a racing fleet deep into the blush of competition and sincerely ready to cross over the chain hawser's catenary between tug and tow. We forcibly halted the leading boats barely 100 meters short of this action. At every start I am concerned about the safety of the course and the well being of the rowers. I have been known, like you, to fuss about little things before the shotgun is fired.

As I am sure this same sense of responsibility has been felt by all the members of the Committee at one time or another, you will agree with me that the hollow feeling of worry in the pit of your stomach as you look after your duties during an event is inversely proportional to the completeness of the regatta organizer's preparations and the clarity and your knowledge of the Rules under which you are empowered. In open water events as they are currently registered with the USRA, this hollowness can be a black hole with infinite horizons. But I continue to believe that when the hollow feeling is entirely gone, you have either become over-qualified and complacent or you are refereeing the perfect event. Beware the first and seek the second.

It is clear that open water rowing events are a special case not adequately covered under the existing *USRA Rules of Rowing*. As the USRA continues to register such events for both sliding and fixed-seat regattas, it remains imperative that adequate Rules be developed which provide a handhold and reference benchmark for the Open Water Referee. Until this time, Open Water Referees would seem to have only Rule 1-105 to follow:

"In situations not covered under these Rules, race officials are empowered to make such decisions and give such instructions as are necessary to carry out their responsibilities, and to effect the purposes described in Rule 1-102 ("Purposes")."

Because open water situations are not covered in the body of the existing USRA Rules, there are but bits and pieces of rules which might be distilled from the main which are of help to the Open Water Referee. Under the catch-all rule above, a great deal of latitude is presently awarded to these Referees in deeming an event to be safe and properly conducted. Indeed, each open water regatta organizer typically provides its own starting rules, course descriptions, and special safety requirements peculiar to that event, and the Referee must remain flexibly on top of the situation: sometimes there is a shotgun, sometimes a horn; sometimes there is a controlled steerageway start, sometimes a drifting timed start; sometimes there are radios, sometimes there are not;

sometimes there is ocean shipping traffic; sometimes there are inadequate pace boats; sometimes the weather turns nasty. There is more variety to the safety considerations on an open water course than on a highly-regulated Albano course.

If the USRA intends to continue registering open water events, Open Water Rules are desperately needed. With this in mind, I am disappointed that the Proposed *USRA Rules of Rowing* recently forwarded from the Domestic Review Committee do not contain mention of open water events. I would propose, then, adding a new Rule A-1-107 to these Provisions:

A-1-107 Open Water Events

Rowing races and regattas that take place on open bodies of water in the United States, and that are registered by the USRA, and that are not deemed "Head Races" (Rule I-1-202), nor meet the requirements of Article VII ("The Course"), shall be classified as "open water events". Open water events shall be subject to supplementary rules designed for them, or if such supplementary rules do not exist, to these Rules.

Open water events may include shells and sculls as well as the "Special Boats" (such as Monomoy whaleboats) mentioned in §1-106 of the proposed Rules. It is important to remember that the Open Water Rules to be developed under the proposed §1-107 addition should address an *environment*, not a classification of race by boat type. I would propose at this time that the Open Water Rules Supplement be designed to consist of general safety formulations such as the number of pace boats and other safety equipment required by circumstance, PFDs, signalling and communication devices, tide, current, and weather considerations, mandatory briefing prior to race start, etc., and that the Supplements mentioned under §1-106 pertain to specific courses designed by regatta organizers, special rules of racing for that class of boat, and to the design and manning requirements specific to that boat class.

The Rules as they Pertain to Regatta Operations and Boat Classes

There is an "Open Water/Fixed Seat" subcommittee of the USRA organized under the Domestic Division which is currently chaired by Jim Haussener, President of the Bay Area Whaleboat Rowing Association in California. Other members of this committee include organizers of "special boat" events as well as unusual events in traditional boats from around the country. I would propose mandating this committee to generate a standard format for the preparation of the special Rules Supplements discussed in §1-106 of the proposed Rules. When the format is agreed, each event organizer or boat class representative would then be tasked to create an acceptable rules Supplement appropriate to his constituent class or event. Within a time limit (perhaps a year would be adequate), events might then be "provisionally" registered by the USRA until the Supplement is accepted and approved by our Committee and the USRA governing body. Thereafter, without a Rules Supplement, registration of the event by the USRA may be denied.

The Rules as they Pertain to Officials

Referees for open water events require a somewhat different skill set than for more traditional racing. A pilot project has been underway in San Francisco to develop a cadre of "Associate" and "Fully-Licensed" open water referees, particularly for the Monomoy whaleboat events, and an Open Water Referee clinic was held in the spring of this year. There is general knowledge required of open water referees common to all regatta events. There is also special knowledge required dependent upon the class of boat and the regatta course. I would propose that rules for Referees follow the current USRA Referee paradigm (Peter Kay's Manual), but I would include the text within the Supplement required by the proposed §1-107. I would further offer to chair a working subcommittee of the Judge-Referee Committee to see that this Supplement is realized in concert with development of the Supplements of §1-106.

Other Comments

I was pleased to see in the minutes of the December meeting of our Committee that \$1000 of the 1989 budget has been earmarked for development of these open water rules. Would you arrange the agenda for our August meeting to allow at least one hour for discussion on this matter and perhaps invite Jim Haussener from the Open Water/Fixed Seat Committee to sit in? It is, indeed, time to get serious.

Following our meeting at Indianapolis I wrote to Susan Urbas who had promised to forward "the file" on Dragon Boats. While I never received a reply from her, I am reminded now by the wording of §1-201* of the proposed Rules that Dragon Boats will be permanently excluded from any USRA involvement (the asterisk indicates *no exceptions*). Has this exclusion been decided? Is "the file" now moot?

I look forward to seeing you and all the Committee members at Oakland in August.

Best regards,

Tay Vaughan

CC:

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