



Report

ICF Ordinary Congress Rome, Italy 4-6 November 2021

Name of the BoD Member: Greg SMALE

Function on BoD: Chair Canoe Polo

1. Major events since last ICF Congress

The Canoe Polo World Championships are deliberately held every two years. This supports global participation in this discipline and takes into consideration countries who may not have the resources to compete globally so regularly and instead compete in their continental championship, and accordingly strengthen the discipline within their respective continent.

The 2020 ICF Canoe Polo World Championships was scheduled to be held in Rome, Italy and preparations were going well but when the Covid19 global pandemic arrived this of course impacted the discipline dramatically. The event was initially postponed from September 2020 to April 2021 and then again to October 2021.

However, after much consideration, liaison with teams including outside of Europe, and the numerous quarantine restrictions imposed around the world the very difficult decision was made by the ICF Canoe Polo Committee to propose the cancellation of the championship to the ICF Board. This was made with a 'heavy heart' but ultimately in the best interests of Canoe Polo for the future. After full discussion by the ICF Board the cancellation was agreed, albeit reluctantly.

In Canoe Polo participation at the world's does impact on ranking for the next world's and without continental representation in the 2021 world championships the 2022 worlds would have been disproportionately impacted.

Following the announcement of the cancellation the Canoe Polo (CAP) Chair has received numerous contacts that the decision was correct and there have been zero complaints from any participating federation concerning the cancellation.

While proposing the cancellation of the world championships it was clear the restrictions in Europe were beginning to change and it was enthusiastically proposed that attempts to have the European Championships were explored (with the original competition already cancelled). For the future discipline strength and re-start, I'm very pleased that the ECA and FICK have been able to successfully go ahead with a European championship in Catania, Italy with strong entry numbers.

At the time of writing this report no other continental championships have been able to be fixed, again primarily due to the impact of quarantine on amateur athletes/coaches/officials who have other careers and families to take into consideration. The cancellation was a hard decision but in the best interests of the discipline.

2. Tasks undertaken since the last ICF Congress

- Attendance at all except one ICF Board meetings (in person/online). As a first line responder during the Covid19 pandemic I was unable to attend one short online meeting.
- ICF CAP meetings/other conversations online during the pandemic.
- 2019 ICF Canoe Polo Rules seminar.
- Attendance and referee duties at the 2019 Asian Canoe Polo Championships – Deqing, China.
- Significant rule revisions following the rules seminar.

3. Issues and Main Points for the function since last ICF Congress

The world of sport (and politics) is changing and the days of remote governance/leadership without consultation are coming to an end. Multiple sports now have members taking a more active part and if excluded are more vocal in person and/or online.

The above said, it is noted that the federations are the members of the ICF, not individual persons, and care must be taken with voices having a personal agenda that may on occasion be in conflict with their respective federation viewpoints.

The ICF CAP recognised this necessity to involve the community early and while limited in budget successfully staged the 2019 ICF Canoe Polo rules seminar in Madrid, Spain. To hear views across the discipline focus on invitations were to those federations that have supported the four categories of Men, Women, U21 Men and U21 Women but of course trying to include continental representation. Unfortunately, the Asian Canoe Polo Technical Delegate was unable to attend however contact with Asia was made post seminar.

The following attended:

- ICF - Greg SMALE, Jacques WEBBERS, Cyril NIVEL, João BOTELHO, Eva LINDMARK and Mario PEREZ LOPEZ.
- Gianluca ZANNONI - ECA- Technical Delegate
- Miguel Angel ACRE - COPAC - Technical Delegate
- Darryl O'BRIEN - Canada
- Antoine DUCOURET - France
- Björn ZIROTZKI - Germany
- Dave EDWARDS - Great Britain
- Rodolfo VASTOLA - Italy
- Christiaan Michiel JACOBIE - Namibia
- Michiel SCHREURS - Netherlands
- Andi FEAR-ROSS - New Zealand
- Pawel TELEMAN - Poland
- Jorge PEREZ – Spain

Unusually I list the attendees as a point of reference. Many of these names are exceptionally well known and respected in Canoe Polo and while others could have been added it was a strong group.



The ICF President kindly opened the seminar and took significant time to explain 'why Canoe Polo is not to date in the Olympics and why the World Games are so significant'. His detail was well received and much appreciated.

Jacques WEBBERS (ICF CAP Advisor) and Greg SMALE led the seminar which opened in part with:

- *Argentina and Chinese Taipei made a big commitment to the 2018 world championships.*
- *New boats and equipment from the sponsorship of Yupin Sports have in the last few weeks been supplied to Egypt and Cambodia.*
- *Thailand sent two U21 teams to the Asian Cup (continental championships) and they were of a good standard for their age group.*
- *India repeated their entry into their continental championships.*
- *The 2019 ECA European Canoe Polo Championships in Coimbra, Portugal saw teams adapt to the new rules very quickly and there were some very high-quality games with very few fouls at the top end of the competition.*
- *The live-stream quality from the Euros was very good – but this comes at a cost and one question to be asked is who should/can pay for this?*
- *There were comments at both the Europeans and Asian championships that the referees were more consistent in their decision making. (Due to the pandemic, there have recently been comments to the contrary and an area to be focussed on again).*
- *Athletes train incredibly hard and are super-fit.*
- *The quality of coaches is noticeably improving and while the majority of coaches are ex-players there are sports qualified coaches coming into the sport.*
- *The next world championships are already allocated - 2020 Rome, Italy, 2022 St Omer, France and post seminar 2024 Dequing, China.*
- *Canoe Polo will be in its 5th World Games in 2021 (now 2022) and is likely to continue in 2025.*
- *The costs of travelling and environmental awareness is ever growing and may in the not too distant future have a real financial impact on many sports – increased flight costs etc.*

Always moving forward

How have we reached this point?

- *Work by the ICF.*
- *The ICF Canoe Polo Committees over the years.*
- *The incredible work of competition organisers and their teams.*
- *The support of National Federations – sometime passive but in any case, allowing the discipline to grow.*
- *And all volunteers right down to clubs and individuals who sometimes are even blocked from starting the discipline but find a way through and begin to grow.*
- *At world championships level many countries have made canoe polo what it is today by regular, not occasional, participation in the world championships since 1994.*

Focussing on the rules:

- *The core of the rule book is still there from the beginning which is a credit to those who started it.*
- *With more countries, more clubs, individuals getting together to play, more spectators physically at events and via live-stream there is a real necessity to simplify the rules further.*
- *Commentators and those who are new to the sport and watching for the first time must be able to understand what is happening AND we should be more aware that when translated complicated rules sometimes don't translate well.*

The seminar was very successful with one significant change being the 'card system'. Feedback was players travel across the world and then get 'sent off' for too long when for example there is no actual injury. All accepted dangerous fouls must be strongly penalised.

The seminar has generated numerous changes, but with more consultation than ever before, and has led to the rule revisions in the congress paperwork including the Appendix for U15 Canoe Polo. While an ICF event is minimum of 15 years of age there is a lot of youth polo being played globally and the group agreed that guidelines would benefit all with discussion that 3v3 is often too slow and by having 4v4 this would enable a team of 4 plus an adult all in one car.



Always moving forward

4. Future Initiatives and recommendations to be considered

- Rule revisions including Appendix - U15 Canoe Polo.