High Performance Committee Minutes
9.18.2023

Attendance
Wyatt Allen
Liam Corrigan
Yaz Farooq
Catherine Starr
Genevra Stone
Josy Verdonkschot (CHPO)
Stephen Hap Whelpley (Chair)

Agenda
Direct Athlete Stipend Review
Review of Worlds Results
Review of Comments on Selection Procedures & Town Hall
Discussion of 2024 Selection Procedures

The meeting was called to order at 12:00PM EST.

Direct Athlete Stipend Review
To begin the meeting, Chief High Performance Officer (CHPO) Josy Verdonkschot discussed the plans for Direct Athlete Support (DAS) following the 2023 World Championships. Going into the regatta, the intended plan was to begin by simply maintaining support of those boats that qualified their boat class for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. That being said, the CHPO explained that there was further ability to support at least the Men's Eight in making the A Final of their event. This seemed like a critically important move in order to support the crew of this particular boat class.

At the same time, Josy felt it was important to maintain Elite Athlete Health Insurance (EAHI) with as many athletes as possible as we shift to the Olympic year. The High Performance Committee (HPC) agreed, seeing that the support of health insurance was more integral to an athlete's health and safety than a DAS stipend.

Spares will not automatically receive DAS in order to afford athletes competitive opportunities to earn it. This and other qualifications will leave a slight buffer of DAS available based upon performance at PanAms or Fall Speed Order.

Those receiving DAS after the 2023 World Championships will continue to do so through March and Olympic selection camps. DAS will then be reevaluated with the completion of selection as it aligns with the end of the first quarter in 2024. The remaining funding would be allocated after trials at the start of April. Therefore, selection and Winter Speed Order will be significant factors for DAS allocation in the second period of 2024. No athlete will be removed DAS prior to April unless he or she removes his or her self from contention and training.

Review of Worlds Results

While the CHPO acknowledges some under-performances, the 2023 World Championships was still a success in many respects. The United States National Team has only exceeded an Olympic boat class medal count of 4 on one occasion since 1993. Additionally making 9 finals in Olympic boat classes is exceptional for the team as well.

One of the largest downsides was the lack of qualification by the men's double. While training and prior racing indicated their clear ability to do so, the outcome at this regatta was a matter of poor situational luck and conditions. This is a downside because the qualification of the double would have demonstrated a clear diversification of talent that USRowing has not historically shown.

Josy pointed out that generally the US only medals in either the 8+ or the 4- and rarely both. Nonetheless, with additional athletes and organization, the M8+ is likely to qualify. As for the men's quad, it showed promise and a better realization of our depth than most quadrennials. Finally, the men's pair was a pleasant surprise with a relatively late selection at trials.

On the women's front, the qualification matches that of 2019 in terms of number of boats with an exchange of the lightweight double for the open weight quad. At this World Championships, the women's quad suffered a similar fate to that of the men's double where the situation and conditions were not ideal for their best attributes. Still, this points to an area of necessary improvement so that conditions do not play as large of a role in determining outcomes.

Going into 2024, Josy suggested we can look at having potential for a medal in men's sweep, women's scull, lightweight women's scull, and women's sweep.

Review of Comments on Selection Procedures & Town Hall

The initial comments about the selection procedures were about the length of the comment period being too short. This was addressed by extending the comment period to after Worlds. In order to do this, USRowing needed clarification from the USOPC. In Olympic years, USRowing is held to the guidelines and protocols of the USOPC in terms of communication and timing. The comment period had to begin prior to the World Championships in order to satisfy the amount of time the USOPC required prior to the first proposed Olympic qualification event.

Josy and the HPC received feedback from athletes that the details around naming dates and camp invitations are their biggest concern. Again, Josy noted that during an Olympic year the USOPC regulates the process across all sports to ensure a certain format for the sake of the athletes and the sports. As a result, things like naming certain boats before others is not a possibility. Josy put forth the idea that there should be a road map to Olympic criteria and selection. The HPC endorsed this concept.

Through athlete rep discussions, there was some concern that athletes will prefer to abandon big boat camps for what appear to be more certain small boat avenues. For instance, if athletes favor the M2- or W2- over camp selection for the unqualified M8+ or the qualified W8+. To address this and other concerns, Josy plans on having a zoom in the next two weeks to debrief on Worlds and talk about next year with the athletes.

The last comments revolved around shifting the timeline earlier so that athletes could also attend the first World Cup in Varese. Josy pointed out that, in an Olympic year, World Rowing must move the European Championships earlier. This in turn affects the first World Cup. The HPC agreed that while early selection is paramount, there is a limit to how early it can be done. On top of this, it is not a direct conflict with trials, and an athlete could choose to both compete at trials and attend the first World Cup.

Discussion of 2024 Selection Procedures

At this time, the HPC engaged in a high-level conversation about the 2024 selection camps.

An initial inquiry came from several members of the HPC as to whether or not the selection camp could be extended by beginning right after the Winter Speed Order. Josy explained that first and foremost the USOPC will hold them to the proposed dates that have already been set for in the selection procedures. The HPC suggested that the additional time should simply represent training time rather than selection. It would represent an opportunity to train in the larger boats that would be selected at camp rather than the singles and pairs of Winter Speed Order. Josy appreciated this concept, but expressed both budgetary constraints as well as the logistical hoop of available rooms for housing during this time. Josy said he would look into possibilities.

In terms of the size of camps, Josy anticipates the sweep groups being 16 men and 16 women. He noted that it is not a numbers game anymore. Rather, it's a matter of both a professional and precise selection. As such, he anticipates a team of coaches that will facilitate this atmosphere. This team is also driven by the fact that there are fewer credentialed allocations for coaches than there will be boats. Therefore, coaches need to work together to build as much boatspeed across different boat classes as possible.

One HPC member inquired if it was possible for the unqualified M8+ to not go to trials. At this time, Josy felt that the USOPC did not think it was feasible to remove the M8+ from trials. That being said, Josy hopes the opportunity for the M8+ to not only qualify but also to medal will drive athletes to a competitive camp. Medaling in the M8+ could only be done with coordination and collaboration across the best available oarsmen.

Lastly, in regards to the lightweight women's double camp, the USOPC validated the decision. As for the Ted Stevens Act, individuals, whether they be lightweight or openweight, have enough direct avenues to the Olympics by both the criteria to qualify for the lightweight camp itself as well as the ability to qualify directly for the Olympics by trials in another boat class.

In Closing

The HPC agreed that at next meeting there would be a discussion about the details of the selection camps, fall speed order results, DAS updates if any, and Pan Am results.

In addition, Josy expressed a need to discuss the planning and timing for U23, Juniors, and Mega Worlds. With everything happening later than usual, the selection camps can happen after the Royal Henley Regatta to avoid conflicting with collegiate summer racing. Where to place trials in relation to Henley is another consideration.

There being no other business for discussion, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:50PM EST.