Referee Committee Minutes - FINAL
June 22, 2022
7:30 PM EST

AGENDA

1. **Welcome (Lyn)**
    a. **Call to Order** – *7:32pm E*
    b. **Roll Call**
        i. Attendees – *Bob Appleyard, Dee McComb, Derek Blazo, Eric Weir, Howard Meisner, Jess McAlear, Lyn Wylder, Mike Murphy, Terry Friel Portell*
        ii. Absent – *Elaine Roden, Kris Thorsness*
        iii. Guests – *Sue Farabaugh, Sheila Tolle (until 9:15pm), Andy Cooke, Mary Bush*
        iv. Staff – *Jules Zane*
        v. *Jules Zane started the recording of the meeting.*

2. **Report and Discussion from the Sub-Committee on Governance (Howard/Terry)**
    a. *(Howard) We want to have a conversation with Rich at USRowing once we have a consensus on what it is that we're asking for.*
        i. *(Howard) Just to remind everybody, we started this process because of the bylaw changes that were voted on last year and went into effect in December. The bylaws that govern the composition of our committee all disappeared. As a subcommittee, we looked at the current IOP, history, and our experiences from years of officiating to determine what we know about USRowing's relationship with us at officials, and who's providing what services to whom. We really found a number of areas that we think are worthy of consideration in this proposal. There is a national shortage of officials in sports competitions. It will be necessary to grow the corps of officials, and manage that corps accordingly.*
        ii. *(Terry) So when the group sat down, one of the first places we started was what we provide and who our constituents are. You'll see in the Word Document of the IOP what our mandate is. Our first constituency is athletes and competitors. The second is LOC's. The third constituency is USRowing. The fourth constituency is our fellow referees and candidates. We work with Jules in the management of the corps. We've been very involved in recruiting and training candidates. We recognize that at a lot of regattas, we are considered volunteers. We laid this document out not necessarily for us, but for USRowing so that they understand.*

b. *(Terry) The first area that we felt needed to be addressed was "Define and strengthen the relationship between USRowing and its Referee Corps by re-establishing a dedicated officiating program office."*

- **i.** *(Derek) USRowing has hired a bunch of new positions recently. Part of my concern is that there is a Safety guy, and some of our work should go over to him, but he's already overwhelmed.*
- **ii.** *(Howard) That's a big part of what we're trying to say. Officiating is a big part of the services that USRowing provides. It needs to be a full time position. Jules, what is your percentage of referee work?*
- **iii.** *(Jules) Some weeks is 60-70%. Other weeks are 20-30%. On average, I'd say 40-50% of my time is spent on referee issues. I very much support getting a staff so that it's not 50% of someone's time.*
- **iv.** *(Mike) Just curious, wasn't that John Wik a few years ago?*
- **v.** *(Howard) Yes, a few years ago, we had a Director of Referee Programs who filled this role, and we would like to go back to that structure.*
- **vi.** *(Jules) Back when they hired me, they gave me his same job description, but not the director title because I worked remotely instead of in Princeton. I also didn't get any support staff. Wik had lost his administrator in early 2017. His administrator was one of the people who was let go when USRowing had financial difficulties coming out of the Rio Olympics. At the end of 2017, the transition started, and Wik started with SafeSport.*
- **vii.** *(Dee) My question comes along the lines of, what it is we're looking for to recreate the dedicated support? Was there discussion at the governance structure on technology to support the referee corps?*
- **viii.** *(Lyn) You're talking about the volunteers keeping RefCorps going.*
- **ix.** *(Terry) This was our starting point. We need a group; we need an office. Technology and all that would be handled by that group.*
- **x.** *(Jules) We're moving more departments into SalesForce. That's going to come with a broader investment on our part. Doug (Jones) has been meeting a lot with Rich. He's extremely supportive of our development group.*
- **xi.** *(Howard) We should have professional services baked into our request.*
- **xii.** *(Terry) Any other thoughts on that section?*
- **xiii.** *(Derek) These are pretty general, right? Are we going to be more specific? Like about the RefCorps development?*
- **xiv.** *(Terry) At this point, we're trying to be pretty high level. We want an office to run the referee corps. It's everything.*
- **xv.** *(Derek) That's great, but we don't tell them what's not working.*
- **xvi.** *(Howard) We definitely go into what's not working. This is a starting point. If we went to that level of detail, we'd still be working as a committee trying to get it all enumerated, and would not have made much progress.*
- **xvii.** *(Derek) Have you gotten to anyone else besides Rich that you need more staff?*
- **xviii.** *(Jules) Yeah, we had that conversation today. Kelly left for a medical thing. then left for another NGB. Rich took over in January. The budget had been set in October. He's really assessing people's strengths and making changes on the fly where possible, but also longer term. I don't think the ask of adding staff to the referee program will be out of the blue. For your info, I've been split into referees and membership for 18 months now.*

c. *(Terry) The second ask we have is to "establish a dedicated seat on the board." We'd like someone on the board who is elected not on the chance that they're a referee, but because they are a referee.*

i. *(Howard) We recognize that this is a stretch. The reason it is here is that we have a lot of institutional knowledge, and we're just not seeing a board that is willing to engage with the institutional knowledge. We're not seeing a board that is focused on domestic rowing. We threw that in here. We admit it's a stretch.*

ii. *(Terry) If you don't ask, you don't get a conversation. It's worth a conversation.*

iii. *(Eric) In an ideal world, the entire board would be licensed referees. We need a feedback loop so that they know our mind without having to be there. There's two phases. One is an open line of communication so that it's freely flowing. The other is that we're not in a financial priority to get that ask. How do we encourage support? We certainly have great communication with Jules. What is our line of communication to the board? To the decision makers? He needs to manage things in a way that is part and parcel with USRowing. I would just encourage us to think about that, we probably can't get a seat at the table, but we shouldn't need a seat at the table. We need to ensure that they reach out to us with questions.*

iv. *(Terry) Good, I like that. Any other thoughts on the voice to the board?*

v. *(Jules) I think the biggest change to the structure internally is that we're trying to become a flatter organization. Someone's title doesn't determine their access to certain people. I think the way the system is set up, obviously what you wanted was to get to the CEO, because the CEO would take it to the board. Now, as long as the right person can influence the budget, the title doesn't necessarily dictate what. Think of Rich as the CEO of Domestic Operations. He can take concerns and things to the board. I think what's important in any follow up conversation with him is that we do a better job of explaining who you need and why you need them. Don't think of the way USRowing used to be. As the organization gets bigger, that's just not a tenable style of leading. I probably meet with Rich about 90 minutes a day on what's going on. I want to emphasize that where in the past, the CEO does this and the Board does that, it's not as meaningful anymore.*

vi. *(Terry) I think part of what we're saying is that we don't need the Board to get things done, but that there are decisions being made for which we have relevant knowledge. Especially concerning domestic regattas. Anything else about the dedicated board seat request?*

d. *(Terry) The third request we have is to "establish agreed expectations." I think a lot of referees don't necessarily know what USRowing provides. I think it would be great both ways if we were working together.*

e. *(Terry) The fourth request is to "establish a mutual understanding of safety."*

- **i.** *(Eric) I think that's critical. It's necessary to know exactly what your insurance coverage is. It would be very easy for someone to make a decision whether this is a good idea. We need to collaborate.*
- **ii.** *(Howard) How can we work better together? I think there are times when we've had unrealistic expectations of USRowing, and vice versa.*
- **iii.** *(Derek) This includes services too, right Howard? Should we be responsible for checking the weather every five minutes? Is that what a basketball referee is doing? If we're USRowing, maybe they should make that clear.*
- **iv.** *(Howard) We really feel that having safety in our mandate, i.e. we're responsible for ensuring safety and fairness, is a little misleading. We're also viewed as a first responder, which is a category we're not trained for.*
- **v.** *(Derek) I don't know that we should be responsible for the safety of the entire event. I think that needs to be made clear here. At one point, the entire venue fell on the chief referee.*
- **vi.** *(Jules) That's 100% not the way to move forward. Are safety and fairness two different things? Absolutely. When a player is injured at an NFL game, they guy who calls the foul isn't the guy who stabilizes his leg.*
- **vii.** *(Derek) There's only twentyeight 2k courses in the country. They need to know their own weather patterns.*
- **viii.** *(Lyn) We have a lot of people in the corps who couldn't rescue someone out of the water.*
- **ix.** *(Howard) There are a million ways that a water rescue could go wrong. An athlete could knock their head and get a concussion as they're pulled into the boat. The athlete could slip and the driver may have the boat in gear.*
- **x.** *(Derek) We have the most proximity to the athletes.*
- **xi.** *(Lyn) Even on the football field, the referee might be right there, but they call medical if there's an injury.*
- **xii.** *(Eric) I think it's important for us to bring a recommendation forward. This is something that we can do internally and then advocate. I would encourage us as a committee to schedule some time to discuss.*
- **xiii.** *(Howard) That speaks to what we say in the second paragraph. We need to come to an understanding between officials, LOCs, and athletes on who is providing what. Who is monitoring weather?*
- **xiv.** *(Derek) I'd be ok with the language if you included weather. I have almost no issues other than weather things.*
- **xv.** *(Jules) This leads into the economics of hosting a regatta. LOCs need to understand the costs of keeping people safe. USRowing needs to have discussions with LOCs on what their exposures are.*
- **xvi.** *(Howard) We need a feedback mechanism with the safety checklist. Nobody goes back to check that the next year a venue runs a regatta, and we find the same problems. There are other aspects of safety that we would include.*
- **xvii.** *(Eric) If you have a parent board that takes over, you end up training them. There's an advantage to that. That's a great way to get them on the right track.*
- **xviii.** *(Howard) Eric, in many ways, that goes back to the expectations between referees and USRowing. Is it really the expectation that referees train LOCs on safety protocols and procedures? USRowing should be doing that.*

f. *(Howard) A lot of this also exhibits in what we're titling "transparency in liability exposure." Certain states have concussion requirements. If a competitor is suspected of having a concussion, there are certain things you need to do. We don't have the capability to look at all fifty states and understand what we're exposed to, and what we might be missing. We need to push back on USRowing, you've got to give us more information about what might impact us in these states we're actively working in.*

- **i.** *(Jules) Our coverage is in all fifty states.*
- **ii.** *(Howard) Let's say there is a concussion regulation in a state, and we don't know about it. If they row and their concussion is exasperated, all of a sudden we're in the middle of a lawsuit.*
- **iii.** *(Jules) This is something I should talk to Tom Brooks about, as well as our director of coaching education. USRowing can be a real resource there. Maybe this is something that the USOC collects. Maybe there's resources here.*
- **iv.** *(Howard) The bottom line is that we just don't know what liability we're exposed to here. Any questions or issues? I promise we're making great headway here.*

g. *(Howard) The last recommendation that we have is to "establish a minimum of Net-Zero or a Breakeven environment for USRowing Officials." We're just looking to break even in a given year. USRowing should help establish a national standard for different types of regattas of different lengths. Regattas need to understand that there is a certain level of expenses. This pushes us to be more professional, better referees, frankly, now that there's money on the line. We can't keep losing people because we're not net zero at the end of the day.*

- **i.** *(Eric) From the candidate perspective, I totally agree. How do we bring younger referees on board? It would be very important for a candidate to feel like they're getting started with at least the minimal exposure.*
- **ii.** *(Jules) People say we're pricing them out of the sport. We posted a statement on our website today about the boycott of Masters. We said it's a balance of the feedback we receive. It's hard to balance.*
- **iii.** *(Eric) If something isn't net zero, it's not worth my time. Let's stop the bleeding and get to net zero. I think we're selling ourselves short. We should think about a protracted one-year, three-year, five-year strategy.*
- **iv.** *(Howard) We need to do a better job of articulating the value of having these licensed officials at these events. I think people don't necessarily understand what it takes to be an official, and what we put in.*
- **v.** *(Derek) I've been working really hard to grow the corps in Michigan. It would help their costs to run a regatta. We tell them what to pay and they pay, because they don't know any different.*
- **vi.** *(Jules) There isn't a ton of money extra at camps - rooms, equipment, insurance.*
- **vii.** *(Derek) I get this thing in my mind that USRowing pays an exorbitant amount of money to run a regatta.*
- **viii.** *(Jules) There are multiple venues where they only run a regatta for us for a six figure sum.*
- **ix.** *(Howard) This is the hardest nut to crack, of all of the items that we have, and the one that will probably create the greatest amount of agitate.*

h. *(Howard) What we're asking for, with the concurrence of the committee, is to proceed and present this to Rich. We were thinking initially of a small group to get through the document and answer some questions about the document. Let Rich live with it a little bit, then have him come back to the committee with his response. The initial review of this document would be a small group – myself, Terry, Lyn, and Jules obviously. I wouldn't want it to be the entire group.*

i. ***MOTION*** *by Howard that the committee accepts the report of the sub-committee on governance, and that the sub-committee meet with Rich about this report; seconded by Eric. All in favor.*

ii. *(Eric) I would just invite any of your team to contribute if they'd like to be on that team. I know it's a ton of work.*

iii. *(Jules) He hosts our town halls. I'm sure Rich could handle a big crowd.*

iv. *(Lyn) Let's get a meeting set up where the four people you want and Rich are all available. So far we've talked about this for almost two hours. I don't know how much time you want with him. Schedule a time, then let the committee know when it is. Does that work for you, Dee?*

v. *(Dee) Jules, are you in favor of this? You're in an interesting position relative to this proposal.*

vi. *(Jules) This is a dance. I defend USRowing to you guys, and I defend you guys to USRowing. In the past, people in leadership have responded really well to thought out proposals. I think as a conversation starter, there isn't anything in here that I disagree with. There is a need for additional staff in the domestic department. If anything, I see this as an opportunity to really advocate to bring additional people in. I have no issue with it. I think the way Rich approaches addressing concerns is really transparent. We're talking numbers. We explained why we left Lake Merritt. We got bamboozled by a tourism board. Long story short, I'm completely supportive of the document. I see it as an opportunity to work towards better solutions.*

vii. *(Howard) I thank the committee for their time. I especially thank the sub-committee for their dedication.*

viii. *(Lyn) I would like, on behalf of the referee committee, to thank the sub-committee.*

3. Other Items or Issues for Discussion

a. None

4. Next Meeting – ~~**July 13 (without Lyn) or July 6**~~

a. July 20th

b. (Jules) I'll do a USRowing update in writing. If you like that approach, it may save 45 minutes. Also, huge congrats on a great job done at Youth Nationals. It was a busy week, but the referees were incredible.

c. (Lyn) August meeting will be 8/17.

d. (Terry) There are five weeks in August. Perhaps a second meeting in August?

5. Adjourn – ***MOTION*** *to Adjourn by Dee; seconded by Terry. All in favor. 9:38pm.*