

Minutes

Special Meeting of the USA Fencing Board of Directors

August 31, 2011 via Teleconference

Present: Bradley Baker, Bill Becker, David Blake, Aaron Clements, Wes Glon, David Herr, Alan Kuver, Paula Reed, Sunil Sabharwal, Laurie Schiller, Soren Thompson, Kalle Weeks

Absent: Terry Kwan, Mario Rodriguez, Alex Wood

Guests: Donald Alperstein, Dan Berke, Greg Dilworth, Christina Gordet, Jay Strass

I. General Information and Organizational Items

General announcements

Remarks – Kalle Weeks, President

The US Fencing Foundation will be making a \$63,000 grant to USA Fencing. This represents the usual 4% of their assets. Steve Sobel was elected President and Sam Cheris as Secretary-Treasurer of the Foundation.

After this meeting we will be bidding farewell to two Board members, Alan Kuver and Bill Becker; we are grateful for their service on the Board, and look forward to their continuing involvement in USA Fencing activities.

II. Motion (Mr. Blake): To provide for modification of the qualifying paths for National Championship events for the 2011-2012 season as follows:

Division IA – Summer National Championships

...

Eligibility (age, classification, qualifying path)

Fencers must be 13 years old before January 1 of the current season or on the Junior NRPS AND have:

- Placed in top 8, of those eligible and not already qualified, at any current season Division I-A Regional

Open Circuit tournament OR

Second: Mr. Kuver

This motion was tabled at the August 18th meeting and referred to the ROC Advisory Group and Tournament Committee for comment.

[Secretary's Note: The responses from the Tournament Committee and ROC Advisory Group that were distributed to the Board have been appended to the end of these minutes.]

Discussion of the motion included goals of the proposed change and of the overall ROC program, features of the program that encourage participation, and features of the program that discourage participation.

A question was raised whether the intent of the motion is to count people qualified via points, as well as via a top-8 result?

It was indicated that the intent of the motion was only to include those with a top-8 ROC result or who had qualified through their placement at the previous season's Summer Nationals.

It was noted that fulfilling this intent would require an amendment to the bullet point in the Division IA qualification path for those accumulating 1000 or more points specifying an "as of" date after the last ROC of the season.

The motion was amended to include the addition of "on the day after the final ROC tournament of the season." To the end of the bullet point in question.

Mr. Blake and Mr. Kuver indicated acceptance of the amendment.

Motion, as amended, passed.

III. Motion (Mr. Becker): Replace Sections 4 - 6 of Article t.87 in its entirety by the following:

4. When both fencers make clear their unwillingness to fight, the Referee will immediately call 'Halt!'

Unwillingness to fight (non-combativity)

If one of the two criteria below is present, there is unwillingness to fight:

1. criterion of time : approximately one minute of fencing without a hit
2. absence of blade contact or excessive distance (greater than the distance of a step-forward-lunge) during at least 15 seconds.

5. Individual events

- a) If during the first two periods of a direct elimination bout both fencers make clear their unwillingness to fight, the Referee will proceed to the next period, without the minute rest.

- b) When both fencers make clear their unwillingness to fight during the third period of a direct elimination bout, the Referee will proceed to a last minute of fencing. This last minute, which will be fenced in its entirety, will be decisive and will be preceded by a drawing of lots to decide the winner should the scores be equal at the end of the minute.

6. Team events

- a) If both teams make clear their unwillingness to fight during a team match, the Referee will proceed to the next bout.
- b) If both teams make clear their unwillingness to fight during the last bout, the Referee will proceed to a last minute of fencing. This last minute, which will be fenced in its entirety, will be decisive and will be preceded by a drawing of lots to decide the winner should the scores be equal at the end of the minute

Rationale:

The FIE has dropped the penalty cards for non-combativity, and simplified its definition. We should comply with this change.

Second: Mr. Baker

Mr. Becker indicated that the motion is being brought forward from the FOC.

There followed a discussion of the history and future prospects of non-combativity rules.

Motion passed.

IV. FencingTime Contract (contract was distributed separately)

Motion (Mr. Becker): To approve the contract.

Second: Mr. Baker

One contract amendment was noted, incorporating an agreed-upon change that had failed to be incorporated into the version distributed to the Board.

Mr. Dilworth explained the purpose of the proposed contract and answered questions by Board members:

Fundamentally what is being done with this contract is the replacement of our current tournament software with other software that will hopefully serve us well for the next 10+ years. This calls for the development of the new software over the 2011-12 season. It will then be used for at least the following 3 years, with some additional development work over that term.

We went through a lengthy RFP process. FencingTime came out as the preferred option. We have spent last couple of months establishing the terms of the contract. This agreement will yield a significant upgrade in tournament software, providing benefits to the Association, bout committee staff, and athletes.

Benefits: The current software is not user friendly. It works because we have been using it for a long time and have developed processes to work around its limitations. For example, it doesn't allow us to use screens for posting information. Even simple adjustments are not possible. FencingTime addresses these existing issues.

How confident are we that FT can deliver these services?

Very confident. It is near-ubiquitous at local tournaments. There have been many users over a long time period.

Is this of strategic value to the organization?

Yes. The current software requires manual processes to get information in and out. It doesn't allow us to do posting to the web.

Has it been budgeted?

There are monies in the event administration line that will cover this. We would not need a variance.

Has someone who specializes in this area of IP law had a chance to review it?

That has been a fair amount of the effort in working on this contract. It has been worked out to everyone's satisfaction.

Motion passed.

V. Adjournment

Motion (Mr. Baker): To adjourn the meeting.

Second: Unidentified Board member

Motion passed.

Tournament Committee Response to Proposed Qualification Path Modification

The Tournament Committee supports the proposed modification of the Division I-A qualification path so that those ineligible or already qualified are skipped over when determining the top 8 qualifiers. This is consistent with existing practice for other qualifying tournaments.

Mary Griffith
Chair, Tournament Committee

DRAFT

ROC ADVISORY GROUP'S RESPONSE
TO THE BOARD MOTION REGARDING "ROLLOVER"

To the Board of Directors:

This letter will serve as the ROC Advisory Group's ("ROC-AG") response¹ to the motion by Mr. Blake regarding modification of the qualification pathway adopted by the Board in April 2011 to include "rollover" qualification for Summer Nationals if fencers who are already qualified for (or are ineligible to fence in) Summer Nationals place in the top 8 of the current seasons's ROC.

At the outset, the ROC-AG would note that, in its view, the motion currently being considered by the Board represents a smaller reflection of the currently-ongoing and much, much deeper and more fundamental debate regarding the purposes of the Association and the purposes and recommended character of the Association's entire tournament scheme, inasmuch as the ROC-AG has been proceeding in formulating its recommendations (including the recently-adopted qualification pathway) based upon its understanding of directives from and conversations with members and former members of the current elected administration, including the President and the former Vice-President overseeing the ROC-AG (the latter still sitting in most cases as an advisory member of the group). In order for the Board to make a fully informed decision regarding the instant motion, some detail into the ROC-AG's understanding of its mission is necessary.

The ROC Advisory Group was formed in September, 2008² at the outset of the new administration, in order to formulate plans and recommendations for "regionalization" of the Association's non-youth competitive opportunities³. In the first season of its operation, the Group's interface through the Board was through one of the Vice Presidents, Mark Stasinos. At that time, it was the ROC-AG's understanding that the Group's purpose was to create incentives for grassroots fencers to compete at a regional level to a much greater degree prior to participating at national tournaments, particularly with respect to a number of perceived (and sometimes competing) problems and/or issues observed at NAC's and at Summer Nationals, including but not limited to:

- National tournaments growing beyond the Association's ability to adequately service, both through a need for larger venues outside the Association's financial means as well as through the lack of sufficient trained volunteers willing to work those tournaments;
- A need for new mechanisms and opportunities for identifying new volunteer officials active at the local and/or regional level having a degree of competence indicating a capacity to transition into working at national events;
- Limited nationally supported competitive opportunities for top-tier recreational fencers and/or senior fencers seeking to transition from competitive recreational status into being competitive at the Division I level (e.g., A- and B-rated fencers), and the need for some mechanism by which those fencers may be acclimated to concepts existing at the elite level (e.g., a points system); and
- Myriad flaws and defects in the existing sectional system, including wide disparities in the skill level of fencers qualifying for Division IA Summer Nationals, attributable in no small measure to the design of

¹ This response is being provided by the Chair of the ROC-AG without the opportunity to have it fully vetted by the whole Group; however, having received communications back from all but one member of the Group, the Chair believes that this document represents the position of a majority of the Group both with respect to the Group's understanding of its assigned tasks as well as its position with respect to the instant motion, as well as other alternatives being suggested.

² At its inception the Regional Open Circuit was called the "National Open Circuit", or "NOC"; in part because of potential confusion with the other major Association tournament offering ("NAC"), the name was changed after the first season.

³ The Youth Development Committee has had the responsibility for some time to develop its own regionalization plans for the Y-10, Y-12, and Y-14 categories, currently embodied in the RYC/SYC system.

sections to fulfill governance requirements (i.e., electing section representatives to the Board of Directors), which have continued even after the last comprehensive changes to the national tournament qualification scheme in 2003.

In order to take advantage of the creation of this circuit in its first season, the circuit in 2008-2009 consisted of four tournaments representing the four cardinal compass directions, designated essentially by fiat rather than through competitive bidding: the Duel in the Desert (west); the Poujardieu Memorial (south); the Remenyik Open (north); and the Jeff Wolfe Long Island Challenge (east)⁴. At that time, the Board of Directors established that these tournaments would be qualifiers for Division IA, under condition that rather than qualify a percentage (as all other qualifying tournaments provided), only placement in the top 4 at each tournament would result in qualification for Division IA. The question of whether “rollover” would apply was expressly discussed, and it was understood by the Board at the time the motion establishing the Circuit was passed that since qualification was defined by achieving a certain placement, rather than a percentage, the “rollover” provisions applied to divisional and sectional qualifiers would not apply to the tournaments making up the Circuit; in addition to “autoqualifiers,” it was further expressly understood that these tournaments would be open tournaments in which foreign fencers could compete and potentially knock domestic fencers out of qualifying slots⁵.

In its first season, the ROC-AG established a trial points list including the four NOC’s as well as Division IA Summer Nationals. Members of the ROC-AG conducted substantial discussion with members of the Administration regarding the future of the Circuit, culminating in the report submitted to the Board at its meeting in February, 2009 in which the Group noted that it recommended gradual modification of the qualifying system for Division IA, with “qualification transitioning from placement in the designated tournaments to a system where qualification is based upon the NOC points list”, and also recommended at some point replacing Division IA Summer Nationals as a qualifying pathway for Division I with final standings in the NOC points list.

Following this statement of the Group’s future plans for the Circuit, in September, 2009, the ROC-AG advised potentially increasing the numbers of qualifiers from each ROC, and advised substantial expansion of the number of tournaments making up the circuit. The Board accepted these recommendations, increasing the number of tournaments to up to twelve in a season, and changing the qualifying pathway from the ROC’s to 10% of the competitive field, with a minimum of four qualifiers, with the express understanding that shifting from qualification based on placement to qualification based on a percentage would result in the general “rollover” provision applying to the ROC’s as well as to divisional and sectional qualifiers⁶. Subsequently, eight tournaments applied for ROC status, and all eight were approved for the 2009-2010 season; the ROC-AG continued the use of its points system for the season, and utilized it to award prizes at the end of the 2009-2010 season.

In June, 2010, members of the ROC-AG met to discuss the future of the circuit and to work towards the goals regarding qualification by points outlined in the February, 2009 report to the Board, including methods by which the Division II ROC’s could be made more attractive to tournament organizers, which culminated in the motion which was presented to but rejected by the Board in September, 2010. That motion was centered in large part around the qualification pathway which was adopted by the Board in April, 2011, but included other

⁴ Initially, the Cherry Blossom Open was designated as the eastern tournament, but the tournament organizers ultimately elected to withdraw that tournament from the Circuit; after being contacted by members of the Group, Mr. Jeff Salmon graciously agreed to fill that gap.

⁵ Despite this clear understanding on the part of the Board, at least one tournament organizer and/or the National Office applied the “rollover” provision from our percentage-based qualifiers and declared as qualified several fencers who did not place in the top 4.

⁶ The Board also approved creation of Division II and Veteran ROC’s, which are not at issue at the present time.

elements, including the ability to earn points through the Division II tournaments. During the ROC-AG's debates regarding the qualification pathways, the Group chose to follow a "hybrid" pathway, including a fixed number of qualifiers as well as qualification based on achieving a fixed threshold through the points system, with the goal of increasing the average skill level of fencers qualifying for Division IA. It was the ROC-AG's belief that this would accomplish a number of goals, including (1) increase the importance of the points standings, giving fencers a much greater incentive to keep track of points, hence becoming acclimated to a points system, which the ROC-AG realized could also be useful in assisting the Association in its long-term goal of transitioning to a numeric classification system; (2) would encourage fencers to chase points in furtherance of qualification by giving fencers an incentive to attend multiple ROC's, particularly those ROC's within a fencer's region; (3) since the ROC's are open tournaments, this would have the salutary effect of increasing the average skill level of qualifying fencers as the points threshold qualification pathway would require a consistently good performance at multiple ROC's in order to meet that threshold; and (4) would continue to guarantee that fencers obtaining a single excellent result (i.e., making the finals of any such tournament) would still qualify for Summer Nationals, even though that single result would not garner enough points to qualify for Summer Nationals through the points qualification pathway.

In those discussions, the ROC-AG, in keeping with the earlier statements from its February, 2009 report, deliberately viewed the points qualification pathway as the primary pathway for qualification, with the "top 8" pathway as supplemental to the points threshold pathway, and also included it to help accommodate the needs of the most highly-skilled Division IA fencers who would have difficulty in attending multiple tournaments. Both in its original presentation in September, 2010 as well as in April, 2011, it was anticipated by the ROC-AG that a fixed placement requirement such as "top 8", as with the "top 4" during the ROC's first season (as well as with earlier precedents where the number of qualifiers was defined to be a fixed number) would not be subject to the general provisions for rolling over autos and foreign fencers. In designing this qualification pathway, the ROC-AG looked with some care at attendance and qualification numbers from the various sectional tournaments with an eye towards designing qualification pathways that would approximate the number of qualifiers coming from the Sectional tournaments. As originally presented, the ROC-AG recommended a 1200 point-threshold, which was presented again with this core part of the ROC-AG's plan was presented to the Board in April; that threshold was lowered to 1000 points by the Board as passed, and hence in the ROC-AG's estimation has the potential to increase the number of qualifying fencers over the sectional tournaments.

These are but some of the reasons underlying the ROC-AG's deliberations in making the recommendation which was adopted by the Board in April, 2011, and which the current motion seeks to modify. It is the sense of a majority of the ROC-AG that the current motion, if adopted, will serve to dilute the importance of the points qualification pathway, which the ROC-AG has consistently represented to the Board, in conjunction with discussions with the President and others, as the direction the ROC-AG believes this system should move in order to accomplish many of the goals and help to provide solutions to the identified problems discussed above.

From a philosophical standpoint, a majority of the ROC-AG also believes that the proposed modification in the motion before the Board inherently diminishes the quality standards intended to be reflected in the requirement that a fencer obtain a single excellent result in order to qualify through a single tournament and inherently adds an element of randomness to the qualification process beyond that which arises normally through competition, insofar as the proposed modification will (1) potentially allow some fencers to qualify who fail to meet the same quality standards as others, i.e., will allow *some*, but very unlikely *all*, losing fencers in the round of 16 the possibility of qualifying; (2) will make qualifying through the round of 16 dependent not only on one's own skill, but also dependent on the skill of other fencers in what should be unrelated direct elimination bouts (since placement within a round is determined by original seed order, with higher-seeded fencers who are upset in a

round finishing ahead of lower-seeded fencers who fail to upset their opponents); and (3) adds to the chances of collusion between the highest-seeded and lowest-seeded fencers in the round of 16 (for the same reason). The ROC-AG also sees this as creating administrative issues, not only because there will need to be a designated administrative authority for keeping track of all of the previously qualified fencers with clear and timely routes for communication of such information to tournament organizers, but also because of administrative issues related to what it means to be “not already qualified,” including the fact that ROC tournament results are not accepted, and qualifiers are not considered qualified, until tournament results are submitted and the necessary program support fee is paid, complicated by the fact that as the season progresses, there will more than likely be fencers who achieve qualification via the points threshold who, under the motion as currently proposed, would also be skipped if they were to achieve a top 8 result in a subsequent tournament.

That much being said, it is the firm belief of the entirety of the ROC-AG that the instant motion, with modification and/or clear definition of “not already qualified” is preferable to other proposals being advanced, in particular the proposal circulated to the Board by soon-to-be-member Mr. Salmon, whose analysis in that communication was flawed inasmuch as it completely ignores the points threshold qualification which the ROC-AG considers the principal qualification pathway.

As noted at the outset, the instant motion is tied inherently to the deeper question currently being debated as to what are the purposes of our national tournaments, with various camps pulling in various ways, and the ROC-AG has been making recommendations (and has stated its intentions to do so clearly for over two and a half years) in accord with the direction it has been given, by or in consultation with the Association’s elected officers; without intending to be chiding or accusatory in any way, given the reception the ROC-AG’s motion from September, 2010 was given, if the instant motion is accepted, the ROC-AG would respectfully ask the Board to provide clear direction as to what the Board desires from this program so that the ROC-AG or its successor committee, if any, may act in accordance therewith.

For the ROC-AG

Aaron Clements, Chair