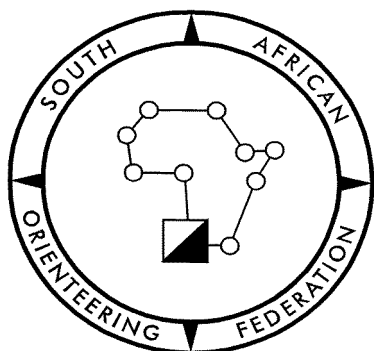


## SAOF Internal Press Release: SA Champs Irregularity



*As discussed by SAOF Management Committee: Eugene Botha, Garry Morrison, Richard Lund and Bernelle Verster, at an SAOF Executive meeting held on 2 November 2009 at George Lea Park in Sandton, Gauteng, with further research conducted in the month following.*

During the long distance event of the SA Championships held in Sabie and hosted by RACO, a number of controls were collected early which gave rise to an irregularity. Upon the lodging of an informal complaint by PenOC, the SAOF enquired into the irregularity. The manner in which this was done was objected to, leading the SAOF to withdraw their enquiry and revisit the procedure to be followed in the case of irregularities.

The collective responsibility around the SA Champs irregularity was discussed. The manner of formalisation and sensitivity to feelings of club members were flagged as inadequate. There is a great need to advertise the proper process to follow to raise a complaint, and to make sure that everyone understands this procedure.

The correct procedure is to make a written complaint to the Organiser(WRE) /Controller(SA events), who makes a decision. Only competitors can protest a Controller's ruling (18.1-18.2). A protest can be made in writing (18.3), which is then considered by a jury (19.1). The jury's decision is final (19.6). In addition to improving this process, and educating the members about the procedure and their rights, the Constitution needs to be refined to provide greater guidance in these matters. If this process is not followed every member has the right to make an appeal directly to the SAOF (20.1), as there is no properly constituted provincial body currently.

The incident that followed from the SAOF was then discussed. It was agreed that SAOF could not follow the correct procedure, as no enquiry process has ever been voted on by the AGM. This led to a misunderstanding of the SAOF's intentions, which was exacerbated by the reference to the 'possibility of suspension' included in the

enquiry. This was only referred to as a result of the Constitutional Rules and the requirements of fairness that are stipulated by SRSA and SASCO in enquiries. It was felt, however, that a procedure executed in some way was needed to uphold the standard of the sport, and that withdrawing the enquiry meant that no one learnt from this experience, and as such it was a failed exercise. However, the Technical VP will hold a WRE debrief with the organising club. One of the points for discussion will be the incident that occurred at SA Champs.

It was noted that this was not an isolated event:

(i) At a Klipriviersberg event (2009) some controls were not hung by the time the first competitors went through.

(ii) A Doornpoort event (2009) had a control in the wrong place, which eventually led to an inconsistency at log level.

(iii) At a Zoo event (2008) a competitor realised that he had crossed an out of bounds area after following another competitor. The person responsible for results compilation on the day was informed and both were marked as disqualified in the results. The competitor should have been instructed to notify the controller and then waited for the controller to revert to the results on the status of the second competitor. This led to disqualifications that were dealt with at GOC level.

(iv) At a St Davids event (2009), there were several controls close together and OCAD placed the control numbers for 10 and 15 such that they were close to the circle for 15 and 10 respectively. The situation was aggravated by manually moving the numbers to more readable areas of the map. This affected the women's course. The first lady complained that the controls were in the incorrect place and a helper rushed out to check. The planner realised that the controls were correctly placed, just the position of the control number was incorrect on the map. The helper reported that he had swapped the controls. The planner then realised that the controls had to be put back as control 10 was also on the men's course. Apart from all women being affected, 3 men were affected. There was no protest and the legs were cut out of the women's race and a fudge was done for the affected men.

(v) At a WCOC event (2008) a control that was not placed in time led to a voided M21E course at Champs level.

These, and other, irregularities pointed out that a more formal enquiry procedure is crucial to maintain event standards. These incidents were highlighted as examples of

slipping standards, as a result of planners and organisers being overburdened, which in turn slows growth of the sport. More volunteers, led by an event organiser that is separate from the event planning and controlling itself, for these events are very much needed. In order to encourage these volunteers, educational material to assist planners, controllers, event organisers and mappers are being developed. In addition, less serious irregularities should be tolerated and discussed at length after the event, on the same day, especially when the planners are still inexperienced. This creates a constructive learning experience.

The danger does exist to alienate people with legalese, to avoid this, the members need to be educated about the formal procedures and what they mean. This also means that people will not take offence to actions that are merely following procedure, and not meant to offend. To minimise the legal impact while ensuring quality, the complaints have to be dealt with on the day as far as possible, while following the correct procedure as documented in the SAOF Rules of Foot O.

In conclusion, the SAOF must uphold the constitution and its rules, to which the committee is subjected. Two factors contributed to the SAOF wanting to hold an enquiry. The first was confusion about the proper complaints process to be followed at events (local and WRE). The second was to establish the conditions that arose which resulted in the early removal of controls. The SAOF withdrew its enquiry documents on the basis that these have not been approved by the AGM. However, it was agreed that the enquiry documents, although very formal, would in all likelihood be accepted as they currently stand, pending adequate education of the members on the proper complaints procedure. The SAOF will review and submit the enquiry process for approval at the next AGM.

The SAOF cannot allow event standards to drop. In Gauteng at least three events had serious irregularities which caused members to suffer harm. This reflects on the SAOF and negatively impacts our efforts for excellence. It was agreed that the VP Technical would discuss the events leading up to the irregularity while debriefing the WRE with RACO, to ensure they are not repeated at any event, and the SAOF committee do their best to ensure transparent processes that are fair to athletes and event planners alike.