

WOC in the future – Common response and proposal from the nordic federations NORD (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden)

In connection with the annual meeting of the NORD federations in Helsinki 14-15 January 2012, we have addressed the remit sent out by IOF Council November 2nd, 2011, requesting responses from member federations relative to the WOC in the future project.

The NORD federations have agreed upon a common response and an alternative proposal for the future WOC. In doing so, we have re-examined the need for changes to the current WOC format and reviewed proposed alternatives.

Vision and goals

We feel it is very important that any changes to the current format of the WOC are related to the IOF vision and goals, i.e. there is a need to address the question; *Why is it necessary to make changes to the WOC program at all?*

As you can see in our common response to the IOF Strategic Directions, we are in support of the vision of having orienteering in the future be an Olympic sport. Related to this vision and the key issues and goals stated by the IOF, particularly the statement that the WOC should be our premium platform for promotion of orienteering, we feel it is necessary to state the underlying goals for the WOC program.

These are:

- WOC should increase the visibility of orienteering. Here we feel it is important to add that broadcast TV productions are a key element.
- WOC should be attractive to external audiences and partners
- WOC should provide competitions of high technical quality which are valid representations of athlete skill, i.e. with the best athlete on each discipline as winner.
- WOC should be a vehicle for increasing the number of participating nations.
- WOC should be a vehicle for increasing the global skill level of elite orienteers, i.e. a goal should be to have athletes from more nations capable of winning podium places and medals at WOC.
- It should be possible for more nations to be able to apply for and host WOC.
- The cost of participating at WOC should be decreased.
- The cost of organizing a WOC should be reduced.

Relating these goals to the current WOC format we do feel that it is appropriate to make changes to the current WOC program, as it is limiting in reaching these goals.

Programs considered

We have reviewed and graded 3 alternative WOC programs to the above stated goals. The programs are:

1. The IOF Council proposal as described in the document of November 2nd, 2011. The proposal can be organized within 7 days.
2. An alternative program which is based upon the current WOC program, but with addition of one "first-to-finish" format (mass-start, chase-start or knock-out sprint). In this alternative qualification races, as in the current WOC program, are removed with the exception of the sprint. Qualifications for the middle and long distance races would be based upon some form of nation strength system. The new additional distance and relay would be open to equal participation for all nations. This program can also be organized within 7 days.
3. In this case a "Terrain" WOC and "Urban" WOC would be organized alternating years.
 - The terrain WOC would include the existing Middle, Long and Relay disciplines plus one additional "first-to-finish" discipline. Qualifications for the middle and long distance races would be based upon some form of nation strength system. The new additional distance and relay would be open to equal participation for all nations.
 - The urban WOC would include the existing individual start sprint discipline (with qualifications and final), a knock-out sprint discipline based upon the experience of the World Cup (NORT) and a sprint-relay. For the urban WOC equal participation of all IOF nations for all distances will be possible.

The terrain and urban WOCs would each be able to be organized within 5 days.

Evaluation of alternatives relative to the stated goals

WOC should increase the visibility of orienteering.

The issue of visibility is less related to the formation of the program than it is to the investment made in TV and media productions. Here we assess that the 3 alternatives are relatively neutral in comparison, potentially with a slight advantage to alternative 3 due to the fact that production cost is reduced in a shorter (5-day) program, and media representatives need to be on site for a shorter period of time which should increase media representation.

WOC should be attractive to external audiences and partners.

Here we assess that the 3 alternatives are relatively equal.

WOC should provide competitions of high technical quality which are valid representations of athlete skill, i.e. with the best athlete on each discipline as winner.

In all three alternatives, event quality should be improved compared to the current WOC program mainly due to the removal of qualification race days. In alternatives 1 and 2, event quality is still affected by the fact that organizers and event advisers need to work with a wide scope of discipline specific quality such as 2 different mapping standards, both terrain and urban environments and a longer program in number of days. In alternative 3 organisers and event advisers are allowed more focus, i.e. need to consider only a single mapping standard, a single environment, and more discipline specific guidelines and skill sets. We therefore assess alternative 3 as clearly the best in allowing improved technical quality.

WOC should be a vehicle for increasing the number of participating nations.

All 3 alternatives allow for disciplines which are easier for new nations to participate in and allow for shortening the week, i.e. it is possible to attend only a few days. Alternative 2 may be slightly less attractive if a terrain-based mass or chasing start is chosen as the additional first-to-finish discipline. However, this could be exchanged for a knock-out sprint. We therefore assess the 3 alternatives as being comparatively neutral.

WOC should be a vehicle for increasing the global skill level of elite orienteers, i.e. a goal should be to have athletes from more nations gaining finals places and capable of winning podium places and medals at WOC.

All three alternatives can offer new opportunities for a wider spread of podium finishes among nations as they add an additional urban distance (assuming alternative 2 includes a knock-out sprint). However, we assess that the inclusion of 3 urban disciplines in alternative 3 will even further raise the opportunity for new nations as finalists and podium winners, and therefore assess this as the best option. With more potential organisers (see next goal) there is also a higher probability to have a WOC in an athletes home country with potential for enhanced performance.

It should be possible for more nations to be able to apply for and host WOC.

Here alternative 3 is clearly the best. This in terms of having availability of appropriate competition areas for the respective disciplines, as it may be difficult to find quality terrain and urban areas from the same location. And in terms of the shorter WOC week. Many more nations should be able to host WOC with alternative 3.

The cost of participating at WOC should be decreased.

Cost of participation is highly related to the number of days a WOC is spread over. In all 3 alternatives there will be improvement compared to the current WOC program, but alternative 3 offers the most savings in participation cost. Cost of preparing for WOC (training camps etc) is also reduced as for an urban WOC preparations can more easily be achieved in the home country. Note that this may also improve fairness as large and small nations will be competing on more a more equal basis of preparations. Today large nations have an advantage of being able to afford more in-terrain training opportunities.

The cost of organizing a WOC should be reduced.

Here we assess that alternative 3 gives clear advantages over the other 2 alternatives due to the fact that the WOC week is shortened and a smaller number of finals reduces costs for TV and media production etc.

Summary

Based upon this analysis we feel that alternative 3, with alternating terrain and urban WOC weeks, is clearly preferred for achieving the goals of the WOC program.

Details of the proposal

To give some further detail to alternative 3 we propose the following as a potential program for the terrain and urban modules respectively.

"TERRAIN MODULE" (5 DAYS)	"URBAN MODULE" (5 DAYS)
<p>MIDDLE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interval start final • e.g. nations ranked 1-6 receive 3 places, nations ranked 7-12 receive 2 places, the rest 1 place, gives approx. 60 men and 55 women (strength of nations: using the current WCup quota) • reigning world champions and regional champions get a personal place 	<p>KNOCK-OUT SPRINT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interval start prologue (10-12 min) + quarter finals (6-7 min) + semifinals (6-7 min) + final (7-8 min) • reigning world champions and regional champions get a personal place in the qualification • all nations may enter 3+3
<p>LONG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interval start final • e.g. nations ranked 1-6 receive 3 places, nations ranked 7-12 receive 2 places, the rest 1 place gives approx. 60 men and 55 women (strength of nations: using the current WCup quota) • reigning world champions and regional champions get a personal place 	<p>REST DAY</p>
<p>REST DAY</p>	<p>SPRINT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interval start qualification + interval start final • reigning world champions and regional champions get a personal place in the qualification • all nations may enter 3+3
<p>MASS START</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e.g. 3 loops model (45-60 min) • reigning world champions and regional champions get a personal place • all nations may enter 3+3 	<p>REST DAY</p>
<p>RELAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • men´s & women´s relay separately • 3 legs 	<p>SPRINT RELAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • men´s & women´s separately • 4 legs, 2 runners

Comments:

- Using the current World Cup “strengths of nations” rules for qualifications gives a consistent qualification method across IOF events.
- We do feel that both reigning world champions and reigning regional champions should be guaranteed spots in all individual races.
- We consider the Mass Start as the best option for the “first-to-finish” discipline to be added. This is due to the fact that it more easily allows a larger starting field allowing smaller and new nations to participate. However, a prologue and chase start discipline could be replaced here as long as a large starting field could be accommodated.
- Smaller and newer nations could participate only at the back end of the terrain module, which would reduce participation cost.
- A mixed relay has no athlete support and we feel it should not be added to the program. Therefore the relays should be run with single gender.
- We prefer a sprint relay to have a 2-runner format with multiple (2) legs per runner.

Additional aspects

We feel that the WOC week needs to fit into a context of an overall IOF international event schedule. Therefore we propose that Regional Championships are strengthened by becoming also qualification events for WOC as stated above. We would propose that terrain and urban regional championships can be held alternating years, but in the opposite cycle to WOC.

We also feel that a structure for the World Cup which fits this overall structure of WOC and regional championships should be fixed.

Helsinki, 15th January 2012

Danish Orienteering Federation
Finnish Orienteering Federation
Norwegian Orienteering Federation
Swedish Orienteering Federation