**5th FAI WOMEN’S WORLD HOT AIR BALLOON CHAMPIONSHIP**

**Northam, Western Australia, Australia**

**Event Debrief Summary**

**Date: 8th September 2023** (See Note #1 below)

**Time: 18:45-20:05 hrs**

**Venue: Northam Aero Club**

**Chair: Jury President Debbie Spaeth**

**Supported by: Jury: Hiromi Furukawa & Ruth E Wilson**

**Attendance In-Person: Approximately 45 including 14 Pilots.**

**Responses via Survey: (9) = (4) pilots & (5) Crew Including 2 Team Mgrs.**

***Note:***

1. There was an in-person debriefing session after the final competition flight on Friday PM. Due to time constraints, an on-line survey was also made available to WWHABC participants. This summary incorporates both the in-person and on-line survey comments.
2. Senior event officials were not in attendance as they were at the Competition Centre /Northam Rec Centre working. But received notes later which are included here.

For the in-person session, the Jury President led with the list of questions that mirrored those of the on-line survey.

**Invitation Process & Pre-event communications**

* All seemed to feel the pre-event communication process generally good. Margie Putland answered questions in a timely fashion. And there was a round of applause for her work.
* “Hats off to Margie” for her help when countries had to change competitors between initial invitations and start of event. Was professionally and painlessly handled.
* Wonderful collaboration was seen from the Australian Balloon Federation and Northam Organization.
* Travel allowance was appreciated. Free Propane was appreciated.
* Many pilots were able to borrow equipment from Australian pilots across the country. Thanks was given to Sean Kavanaugh who became the de facto coordinator.
* A dedicated person to handle international shipment of equipment with advice on customs requirements would have helped for the pilot(s) who brought own equipment.
* The delay on achieving approval from CASA for the Brazilian balloon to participate should not have occurred. Pilot lost practise flights.

**Handling of Equipment Requests & other Individual Needs**

* Support from local crew with vehicles was awesome. “Really nice & Helpful volunteers. A lot of nice people helping at the event.”
* Would have been appreciated to have allocated spaces organised to park the balloon trailers overnight. Hotel parking lot was not trailer friendly.
* Balloon Vehicle parking at the Rec Centre could have used some order or suggested parking as difficult at times to get out of there at the end of the briefing as vehicles blocked each other from departure.

**Pilot On-Site Check-in**

* All positive responses were received on this during the on-site debrief.
* On-line survey mentioned some pilots had issues with paperwork which slowed down the process for those in line behind them.

**Competition headquarters facilities (Northam Rec Centre)**

* Competition Centre was well accepted.
* Balloon vehicle parking could have been managed better to allow chase crews to depart quickly, easily, and safely.
* There was talking by measuring team at back of the room which was distracting for the pilots sitting nearby.

**Refuelling facilities**

* Refuelling facilities were well accepted.
* One comment from a pilot that no clear arrangements were shared on the purging of tanks prior to shipment from Northam. In a show of hands, only a few pilots needed this help so would have been best for them to ask for help pre-arrival, so this was in place at the end of the event.
* The Chair’s response was that pilots should not assume everything would be done the same as at other events. ‘Be proactive on behalf of yourself.’

**Communication process during the event i.e., Use of WatchMeFly.net and WhatsApp**

* A positive response received regarding communication during the event.
* Suggestion to add ‘alert’ on the WhatsApp group to advise that new information was posting on ENB.
* Suggestion for competitors to create their own WhatsApp group for social interaction and chat.

**Social events**

* Social activities were very good with much appreciation displayed towards the Northam Aero Club (NAC) staff with the supply of food morning and evening for pilots and teams.
* The volunteers were amazing, and Errol & Heather (at NAC) were absolutely brilliant.

**Team Managers – Want CIA written protocol for Team Managers**

* There should be a Team Manager registration before the event.
* Need a clear explanation of the status of Team Managers during briefings, about asking questions, what can they do. Add to a CIA document, maybe Competition Operations Handbook (COH)?
* There is no rule or regulation for the Team Managers to follow, only what the Event Director advised at an early briefing. CIA published information for all to know would be helpful.
* While Team Managers were eventually given assigned seating this was not in place until after Flight #1 briefing.
* Very dissatisfied with the approach and response from various officials. Impossible for Team Manager to speak with some officials.
* Poland Team Manager spoke of being physically pushed out of the briefing room by an official.

**Task Setting**

* In general, the response to task setting was negative.
* Pilots are used to more challenging tasks requiring strategic thinking during flight.
* Pilots did not appreciate having the CLP provided so that they did not have to work to choose their own. Another part of strategic flight planning.
* Waypoint list was “unacceptable” as downloadable list was not provided to competitors.
* Wanted more challenging tasks to improve their skills. Only 5 task types flown out of a choice of 20 in the rule book. Would have liked task mix to include, Gordon Bennett, Double Drops, Land Run, 3- shape tasks, etc.
* Targets were not on goals given for the task so while flying a computer line to the goal pilot did not make the target.
* Flying CLP to JDG has more chance for collisions. There was a huge competition air space so use more space for safety.
* Wanted Gravity Marker Drops to even out those with a good throwing arm versus those who did not have a good throwing technique.
* Competitors really wanted tasks to stretch their decision-making skills. And make their own mistakes rather than follow the flight line with other pilots as they took off from the CLA.
* Comment was ‘don’t be afraid to use the pink flag’ for supplemental briefing to supply updated or changed information. Especially if it means a more meaningful task.
* Wanted two tasks to be setup for evening. And cancel the 2nd on the field if not possible, but at least have the opportunity for more tasks.

**Note #3.**

**While not at the debriefing session, the Event Director provided the following information about task setting:**

*The tasks that were set were entirely determined in the interests of safety for all, given the prevailing weather conditions. Yes, it would have been nice to provide a greater variety of tasks, but it was not possible when this would mean having 30 balloons ascending and descending over 4,000 ft at greater than 1,000 ft/min through layers of wind in excess of 35/40 knots (I have had a look at some of the tracks and it was not unusual on each day for balloons to be travelling at over 70 km/h). Not only would this have been incredibly dangerous, but also, as was discovered by some on the Friday morning, you can quickly run out of competition area and suitable/safe landing areas when travelling at that speed!*

*Also, with Rule 9.2 requiring landowner permission before driving onto private property, and the scarcity of available sites, the use of ILPs in Northam is extremely difficult.*

**Satisfaction with the competition flying area in general.**

* There were unanimous responses to the beauty and flying area as being really great.
* Pilots who flew practise flights around and over the Avon River Valley were disappointed such amazing scenery were missed by other pilots as competition tasks were held in a different area.
* Strong negative reaction to the Commercial Ballooning companies flying in vicinity to competition pilots. This should have been better organised to avoid any impact with competition flying and potential results.
* Landowners were incredibly helpful & nice.
* *Having never been to Australia, it was awesome to get to know it like this, also the representatives for the farmers were very nice and accepting to ballooning.*

**Comments on competition map**

* Seeking and receiving the four co-ordinates of the competition map from the Event Director was a positive action.
* The coordinates for published goals should have been on the middle of crossroads to allow flight with pilot looking outside the basket, not nose in the computer, to get a good result.
* Goal list was not provided as a waypoint file for competitors.
* Would have appreciated a bigger flying area/larger map to see more of the beautiful flying area.

**General Briefing**

* Only positive responses to this question.

**Weather Briefings**

* The event meteorologist was professional with his met information at all briefings and proved popular with the competitors.
* Windsond readings were taken only once, a 1 hour before Task Briefing, 2 hours before launch. Example: Windsond at 4AM, Task briefing at 5:15AM and launches at 6:15AM. However, no additional Windsond readings were taken nor supplied to competitors.
* It was noted that there were countries with their own wind readings for their teams. It seemed to be a general feeling that if organizers provided 1 or 2 additional wind readings for all competitors, closer to launch time, it would create a more level playing field.

**Scoring (provisional results, publication of scores, accuracy, web format)**

The initial response to this question was that the WATCHMEFLY scoring system was much better and more popular.

The Northam event scoring was not applauded positively. Various comments covered –

1. A 3 day wait for flight #1 results was unacceptable.
2. Old mentality and old scoring used.
3. Did not want paper Flight Report Forms. Use digital.
4. Were told no enquiry until scores were final. (*See note #4 below*)
5. Questioned why markers were supplied at tasks daily and must return them.
6. Stated that at other events, Junior WHABC for example, pilots received a full supply of markers for the event. The pilot was responsible to manage markers, then to return at the end of the event. Pilots willing to pay for any lost markers.

There was a question asking if the CIA approved scoring systems used for Cat 1 events. Jury President said, yes, the CIA has a process for review and approval via its subcommittees.

Pilot who lost her marker asked if CIA had any criteria for what kind of proof a pilot can provide to support the marker should not be considered ‘lost’. She had a video, but it was not considered ‘conclusive’ due to missing detail.

**Note #4**

**from Scoring Officer**: *Scoring officer said he was interested in speaking with pilots at any point in the scoring process and felt this was a misunderstanding during a busy time for him.*

**Note #5**

**from Jury President about scoring process for WWHABC:**

*The scoring for this event was done using CIA Balloon Live App/WMF for Track data and task logger marks. eKLIPS program processed the WMF data for scoring purposes.*

*For audit purposes, the jury was able to use the eKLIPS summary for each pilot and each task, which included:*

* *Goals for individual task*
* *Info from Tracks including Goal Declaration & Marker Drop Information.*
* *Pilot Results from task*
* *Measurement recorded by Measuring Team*
* *Penalties applied along with rule # and applicable comments.*
* *For changes or updates, indication showing which official made the change.*

**Tasks that were scored by the logger.**

* Mixed reaction as it was recognised that some pilots were long delayed in pressing their logger button and or returning details to the scorers who had to wait unnecessarily to finish their scoring.
* *It is exceedingly hard to gauge what the discrepancy in time between your flight computer/GPS position and when you push your logger as to the accuracy of the mark. But maybe just my inexperience?*
* Future idea to publish tracks during flights. To see other pilots tracks for competition purposes. And maybe for public interest in the sport.
* *About the electronics we are using and how much this can disadvantage a pilot if they do not have someone technical on the team. I had issues with my computer on the practice flight and the 1st flight where Windows updates created a situation where my computer would not talk to the BLS. Then another issue with a broken touch screen causing other issues/computer freeze. Without a computer geek on the team, the playing field is no longer level.*

**Unsportsmanlike Behaviour by Senior Staff**

* Comment made that attitude of Event Director was that he did not want to be there. *Director’s style was combative*. And dismissive of genuine questions.
* Some pilots commented that certain official were rude with shady comments made.
* If someone asked a question, it was met with an antagonistic reply. Also felt they were made fun of with the answers given.
* *Although I never had an issue with him, I felt the way he addressed some of the competitors was disrespectful and petty, especially those who asked questions. It was uncomfortable to witness and made him appear very unapproachable, especially considering the number of rookies in the field.*
* *Although I get that some people have different communications styles, but if he (ED) was trying to display dry humour, which I usually like, it only worked 10% of the time and would have had to be sprinkled with some niceties to work.*
* *Everybody else did an amazing job and this is one of the best competitions I’ve been to, and I hope it won’t only be remembered how bad the task setting and --the communication by the event director was.*

**Comments on Media Coverage:**

CIA PMR (Public & Media Relations) SC has been working closely with the event organisers for Junior WHABC and Women’s WHABC for more social media during the 2023 Championships. This included: FAI website, FAI Ballooning Facebook, FAI YouTube.

* Did you look at any or all of these FAI platforms during the Championships?
* Suggestions on what you want to see for social media during future CIA Championship events.
* More photos? More Videos? More live streaming?
* All of the above plus drone coverage. Query raised on why drones were banned. No response was available. CIA should encourage event organisers to embrace all of the above to promote our sport of hot air ballooning. All agreed that drone Involvement to promote the sport would be a positive step.
* All positive responses on media and social media coverage of the event. The Northam community was behind the pilots and teams with large numbers of public turning up to view inflation and flights, after finding updates on social media sites.
* Pre-event – encourage competitors to link their social media accounts to the Championship.
* *The live footage & technical explanations were really well received by other balloonists that were not at the event, also by family and friends back home. It allowed them to feel connected and engaged with what was going on even if they were not there. It also allowed for a greater understanding of what competition ballooning is, which is great!*

**Other Comments/Topics:**

* Andy Baird, Chair, CIA Competition Subcommittee invited pilots to email him on any issue or for future advice.

**Looking for countries to host next WWHABC.**

* Pilots were asked to help find a location for the next WWHABC as no enquiries nor any firm commitments received by CIA as of 8th September 2023.
* A *future location* was also a query on the on-line survey. Two pilots indicated they would be interested in finding out more details about hosting a WWHABC.
* Pilots from Poland and Austria were sent emails by Jury President, with a cc to Chair, CIA Event Development SC (EDS) for follow-up from EDS.

At the in-person meeting, final comments from the Chair encouraged pilots to interact with their CIA Delegates regarding future championship locations, to follow the FAI Facebook page, and share photos on social media.

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