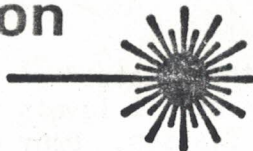


International Laser Class Association



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OLYMPICS DISCUSSION PAPER.

Once every four years the Classes for the Olympic Games are chosen by the International Yacht Racing Union (IYRU) at their annual meetings. The selection meeting will be held in November 1984. At their meeting in 1983 the IYRU select the number and type of yachting events i.e. single-handed centreboard dinghies, double-handed centreboard dinghies, 2 and 3 handed keel boats and catamarans.

The Laser has always been talked about when the subject of Olympics is discussed. Our strong Class Association has the opportunity to try and influence any decision made and the World Council of the Laser Class wish to seek the opinion of members before it decides on what action, if any, to take on this matter. It is important that you read the following notes carefully and through your District answer the simple question whether you are in favour or against the Laser becoming an Olympic Class.

Sailing in the Olympics.

The Olympic Games are held every four years (the next one is in 1984) and yachting is one of the sports at the Games. The yachting events are held in several Classes. The first three boats in each Class are awarded an Olympic Gold, Silver or Bronze medal respectively. In 1984 there will be seven Olympic Classes: Winglider - sailboard, Finn - single-handed centreboard dinghy, 470 and Flying Dutchman - small and large double-handed centreboard dinghies, Star and Soling - two and three-man keelboats and Tornado - catamaran. These Classes can be changed for the 1988 Olympic Games by the IYRU.

Unlike our own World and Regional Championships, competitors in the Olympics represent their countries and only one yacht from each country is allowed to compete in each Class. The selection of each yacht is the responsibility of the National Yachting Federation in each country, not the individual Class Associations.

Statements, Questions and Answers concerning the Olympics.

The World Council has prepared a sample of questions and statements which it has attempted to answer or give an opinion on.

What is the benefit to the Class if we become Olympic? We have our own World and Continental Championships which are very good.

The Olympics has been promoted as the premier yachting competition. In many countries Governments and National Yachting Federations give the majority of their support to Olympic Classes. If the Laser were to gain Olympic Status, it would help the growth of our Class in countries where the Laser is already sailed and introduce our Class into others in which the Laser is not sailed.

2.

The attraction of the Olympics and just the "status" of sailing an Olympic boat will attract new blood to our Class at all levels and stop the drain of our top sailors into existing Olympic Classes. Many of our top sailors have moved to Olympic Classes to try and win, what in their opinion, is the ultimate event. The majority of these, when questioned, would rather sail the Laser.

If the Class were to become Olympic, we could create an elite group of "full time" sailors at the top of our national fleets and it will be more difficult for the club sailor to win major events.

We have this already within our Class without Olympic Status. The standard of competition in the Laser Class has increased dramatically over the past years to a level where anyone who is trying to win a major championship has to embark upon a rigorous training programme, equal to that followed by Olympic competitors. Terry Neilson and Andy Roy, first and second in the last Laser World Championships, spent three months training all day prior to the Championships.

Club racing in current Olympic Classes is almost non-existent in many countries. Is there a danger that this could happen in the Laser Class ?

Unlikely for two reasons. Firstly the Laser is an absolute one-design and therefore no equipment changes to the boat can be made which will affect the boats' speed. In all the current Olympic Classes small variations in hull shape and stiffness, sails and mast designs can be made which outdate older boats. To do well in the existing Olympic Classes you must have the latest equipment and be prepared to experiment and change as new ideas are developed. This does not apply to the Laser. Secondly the size of the Laser Class is far greater than any of the current Olympic Classes and therefore we are big enough to have good racing in large numbers at all levels.

Without exception the price of all previous and current Olympic boats has increased when each Class became Olympic. Will this happen to the Laser if it becomes Olympic ?

Probably not. The price of any product is governed by market demand. The majority of Laser sales are to the club sailor and leisure market in which there are a number of competitively priced similar boats. The number of people in top competition is very small compared to the main Laser market so a Laser manufacturer who tried to increase prices because of Olympic Status is very likely to lose a substantial part of the main market to an extent that it could mean economic suicide. The market in current Olympic Classes is completely different. The majority of boats sold go to potential Olympic sailors with virtually none going to the club sailor or leisure market.

The popularity of an Olympic Class has generally decreased when that Class has become Olympic. Is there a danger of this happening to the Laser ?

Unlikely. The Laser is different from any previous or current Olympic Classes and as discussed in other answers the Laser, because of its unique Class size and concept, should not suffer from the adverse effects of changes in equipment and increase in prices that have hurt previous Classes.

3.

Will the pressures of Olympic sailing cause our Class Rules to be abused and cheating become commonplace ?

Only time will answer this one. When the Class refused Olympic Status in 1975 one of the reasons for concern then was that our Rules would not stand the pressures. Most other Class' Rules are written in a way that lists a number of things you cannot do to a boat. If the Rules did not say that something was illegal, people would introduce changes until a Rule was drafted to exclude that change. The Laser Class Rules were a fundamental departure from this attitude. Our Rules say you cannot change anything unless the Rules specifically allow it. Our problem in the early years was educating people to this new concept, particularly those joining us from other Classes.

The World Council believe that the concept of our Rules and the principles of our Class have now become firmly established and that everyone accepts these. Laser sailors now protect the one-design concept with vigour and in the majority of cases are self-policing. In addition the Olympics, like our World Championships, will almost certainly be sailed in boats provided by the organisers, thereby eliminating the possibility of rule abuse. It is accepted that this service cannot be enjoyed at National and Regional level, but good scrutineering should go a long way to preventing any problems.

If the Laser becomes Olympic, will this affect the organisation of Class regattas and selections at present handled by District/National Laser Associations ?

This can only be answered by each District. It depends on how the National Yachting Authority in each country administers the present Olympic Classes. In theory, the District/National Laser Associations should operate as before. Certainly the operation of the International Office would not be affected.

There are probably many other points and questions which will no doubt be put forward and discussed before a decision is made. This paper is intended to stimulate comment and gauge feeling and to give you an indication of the World Councils thinking.

In summary, the World Council would support the Laser becoming an Olympic Class if it were the majority wish of the membership. The Council appreciates that Olympic Status may give some problems for the Class, but believes that we are sufficiently large and mature enough to deal with these problems, should they arise. It considers that the Olympics will increase the growth of our Class by gaining more support from National Yachting Federations in existing "Laser countries" and introduce the Class to "non-Laser countries".

World Council
International Laser Class Association

6th September 1983