

The ICF Secretary General's Report ICF Congress 2021

Overall Perspective

The arrival of COVID 19 has had a significant impact on the operations of the International Canoe Federation between 2020 and 2021. Prior to COVID the ICF had already considered potential contingency plans in terms of finance and operations should any negative situation impact the sport, however, no one foresaw the implications of the COVID19 pandemic and the consequences it would bring to the organisation.

COVID19 Impact on ICF

Due to the ICF's strong and robust financial strategy COVID19's impact was cushioned somewhat as the ICF had the reserves to continue its activities throughout the pandemic. However, for 2020 the ICF Board of Directors (BoD) agreed to curtail non-essential activities and competitions in order to reduce spending.

The ICF staff were all retained as employees with financial help from the Swiss Government. This enabled the staff to continue to work with the security that their jobs were safe.

The ICF had to change its focus and its objectives in 2020. Having completed the first rounds of the Olympic Games qualification events for Tokyo 2020, the goal was to ensure that the ICF could deliver safely the remaining qualification events or have legally sound Olympic athlete quota decisions should cancellation occur of those qualification events. This involved a considerable amount of work and resources to amend and achieve this strategy.

The second amended objective was to put in place COVID19 preventative measures for ICF competitions to safeguard the event, the athletes and everyone involved. This was a constant changing environment and the ICF plans changed many times over the two years and continue to change. But happily the ICF has managed to operate events throughout the pandemic period.

The ICF BoD had to take the necessary steps to cancel a number of events in 2020 and 2021. The welfare of the athletes, coaches, national federations, staff, volunteers and local organisers were our number one priority throughout the discussions and decisions for hosting events.

Events were only held where the ICF believed protocols were in place suitable to protect all our stakeholders and that the local pandemic situation was managed by the authorities appropriately.

With the successful hosting of the Olympic Games in Tokyo 2020, the ICF is guaranteed a financial contribution from these Games which will secure the ICF's continued operational and financial future to the Olympic Games, Paris 2024.

At this time, I would like to give credit and appreciation to the ICF Medical Committee for their advice, diligent work and constant communication in relation to measures against COVID19 for our competitions. This input helped us enormously in managing all aspects of the health and welfare of those involved in our competitions. The advice and support we obtained was invaluable for our organisation during a very difficult period.

I would also like to thank the ICF BoD for acting swiftly and objectively when the pandemic started in early 2020 to agree a number of emergency contingency plans in terms of finance and operations well before many other sports organisations had started tackling the pandemic issue. The critical decisions made by the ICF BoD in early 2020 significantly helped the ICF operations throughout the pandemic and prevented many problems or issues arising.

Finally, over the pandemic period, the ICF has had to use every single version of its contingency plan that were approved and the ICF has been through each budget option that was agreed by the BoD in 2020. The result is that the ICF remains in a good operational and financial situation at the end of 2021.

Television and Broadcasting

The ICF continued the live television broadcast project between 2019 and 2021. The television audience figures for canoeing during the pandemic have been encouraging and maintained our presence in the sport world. The TV project is managed in-house and has remained within budget throughout the last few years.

The following media programme formats were produced:

- Live production of Finals at each World Championships, World Cup for Canoe Sprint and Canoe Slalom
- 26 minutes Highlights of each World Cup and World Championships
- 5 minute news programme made available during competition
- Live webcasting and Video on Demand of all ICF World Championships and Olympic Discipline World Cup events
- Live coverage of a number of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Qualifiers

Always moving forward

- Live coverage of the Canoe Sprint Super Cup.
- Live streaming for Non-Olympic discipline World Championships

The Broadcasting project for the ICF has worked incredibly well with the product being shown worldwide in over 140 countries.

The ICF has consolidated its tv audience with long term agreements being made up to the Olympic Games in Paris 2024 with Eurovision, Belarus TV, Sky New Zealand, L'Equipe France TV, CCTV China and Eurosport.

The Eurovision contract for ICF World Championships is a significant contract that solidifies Canoe in the sport broadcast business. Coupled with the Eurosport deal to show live all ICF World Cups gives the ICF a solid tv audience and exposure up to Paris 2024.

Social Media

The ICF has worked hard on improving the social media exposure of the sport. A major success was the targeting of the Chinese market and streaming our events in China on social media with a dedicated Chinese commentator. This provided instant success in terms of large viewer numbers and engagement that Canoe had never experienced before in the Chinese territory.

Social media numbers for facebook, Youtube, and twitter continue to grow and this has been the case in 2017 and 2018. The use of live feeds and editing videos of our competitions has had a major positive impact to viewership and engagement on our social media channels.

The ICF has streamed all our events throughout the last three years on Planetcanoe.

ICF Governance

ASOIF and the IOC have paid particular attention to the governance of International Federations and there is a process where we are rated in terms of good governance. Further evaluation by ASOIF on the ICF Governance is expected in 2022 and the ICF will continue to co-operate and advance this particular aspect of our work accordingly.

ICF Finances

The ICF has continued its conservative investment strategy. As in previous years this strategy has resulted in sustained returns on investments resulting in the ICF being in the fortunate situation of being financially stable. The future IOC contributions for Tokyo 2020 are

Always moving forward

expected to be similar to Rio 2016 and therefore the financial situation of the ICF is positive and relatively stable.

Event Management

In 2020 the ICF hosted only 3 events worldwide due to the pandemic. In 2021 the ICF managed to complete a large number of international and world events including Olympic Qualification events. All ICF events had COVID prevention rules in place.

The technical deliverables of ICF events changed significantly for 2020 and 2021 due to COVID19. The amount of work involved in safeguarding each event was staggering throughout the period. The fact that the ICF registered so few positive COVID cases at our events is a result of the thorough and dedicated work done in delivering the ICF events and a credit to all the ICF staff involved. It is estimated that the ICF would have spent 300,000 Euros in COVID testing alone for 2021. Most National Federations will have paid a large amount of money for tests and hotel isolation costs for their athletes to compete and we sincerely appreciate this support so that ICF events could occur.

The ICF developed new onscreen television graphics for 2021. The use of celebration pontoon and kiss and cry areas at the finish line has led to athlete profiles being more accessible to the audience. The ICF has included dynamic green screen athlete graphics for introductions and additional statistical biographical information for tv. The use of drones at our events has also improved the visual package and image of the sport that we present to the public.

In 2021, the ICF for the first time had live television coverage of the Paracanoe World Championships with a very healthy number of countries taking the production.

ICF and Legal Challenges

The ICF has been involved in more legal challenges since the last Congress than ever before. So much so that the ICF has spent an unprecedented amount of money and resources on legal issues. Estimates suggest that a considerable amount of money in the region of 750,000 Euros have been spent in the last three years on legal issues.

Stand Up Paddling

The dispute between the ICF and the International Surf Association (ISA) was finalised. The ICF won the main argument in that the Court of Arbitration ruled that the ICF and its national members were free to

Always moving forward

organise SUP competitions nationally and internationally. It also allowed for members to present national teams for SUP competitions run by ICF or its members.

However, the Court of Arbitration went further and said that if SUP was a sport on the Olympic programme then ISA would be the preferred Federation recognised by the court. This issue is not completely closed because the International Olympic Committee was not part of the decision and therefore the decision is not binding on them. Since this decision the ICF has significantly advanced in the SUP domain and continues to make significant inroads into the discipline. In 2021, the ICF hosted the largest SUP World Championships ever in Hungary in terms of number of countries and number of athletes.

Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games Legal Challenges

Each edition of the Olympic Games, there are debates and discussions over various ICF rules and decisions related to the Games. However, this Olympic period the ICF had to defend itself in the Court of Arbitration in five cases. The ICF won all five cases without any issues. However, the financial impact of defending these cases is significant on the ICF budget.

Anti-Doping and Governance cases

At this time the ICF is still involved in a couple of CAS cases. One is related to how the ICF decided on the Olympic Games events for 2024 and the other is WADA's disagreement over Russian athlete tests from the McLaren report. Decisions on both these cases are pending at the time of this report.

Conclusion

The ICF and canoeing has come through a very difficult period due to COVID19. COVID19 impact is still not completely finished and it is likely some side effects on the sport will occur into 2022 and 2023. But it is evident that the quick reaction by the ICF to recognise the potential seriousness and magnitude of the pandemic helped to alleviate some of the major issues and problems for the organisation and the sport.

However, the ICF finances and human resources have been negatively affected over the last three years dealing with the pandemic. As we move into 2022 and 2023 hopefully the ICF can return to running the sport without having to consider the pandemic fallout.

I would like to thank all the ICF staff for their dedication and the high quality of work they have produced throughout the pandemic. There is a fantastic team spirit that exists in the ICF Headquarters at this time which has certainly contributed to the effectiveness of the organisation. In addition, the support of the ICF President, the ICF Board of Directors and the ICF Medical Committee has been invaluable throughout the pandemic.