

SUNDAY 20 AUGUST 2006



Above, the terrible twins, Caroline and Georgina Evers-Swindell....
.....and below, Matt Smith (FISA exec. director) and Mike Baldwin (world champs chairman)

Five nations fall foul of GB visa hurdle - coach and eight driven through Africa's development

By Christopher Dodd

Evgenij Ignatov of Moldova became the latest athlete to be barred from the world championships yesterday because he could not get a visa. Ignatov, who ironically comes from Tiraspol in the Republic of Moldova, home town of Marina Smith, wife of the executive director of FISA Matt Smith, was so embarrassed to have his application turned down by the British embassy that he returned home. His absence from Eton was only discovered when FISA made enquiries as to his whereabouts after the draw had taken place.

Moldova's withdrawal brings the total of countries taking part down to 60. Teams from Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria and Cameroon - involving some 25 athletes plus officials - fell foul of tighter requirements for visa applicants.

In Cameroon they now require an individual interview with each applicant. 'When this became known to our rowing guys they were overbooked and there was no chance of fitting them in in time,' Smith said. 'The tickets had already been purchased by the president of the federation so he's out of pocket by thousands of pounds. The embassy refused to try and squeeze them in, and I am sure they are overworked and stressed by all the new requirements.'

In Kenya sudden changes included original invita-

tions to be sent by DHL which would have cost £100, and they gave up. The Nigerian rowers got interviews but were denied visas because the embassy staff said they didn't think these rowers would return to Nigeria, even though, Smith said, they had participated in all FISA's activities to develop rowing in the past year. In the case of Morocco, the team was simply too late to apply.

Athletes from Egypt are only in Eton because their officials paid £900 each for visas, raised from £500 - equivalent to about £100 sterling. Smith estimates that, in cooperation with the IOC and the Olympic Solidarity programme, FISA has spent £100,000 this year on its African development. 'This has enabled us to develop Africa which we've never had the capability to do before. FISA has really prioritised Africa - we've had two training camps there this year. FISA's number one goal is universality, and we would have had eight African countries at Eton.'

'Athletes and officials in those countries now feel discriminated against and discouraged.'



Smith says that FISA has had difficulties all year in Belgium, the

What's on today

- Heats every six minutes from 9.30 to 12.48
- W4- Women's coxless fours
- LW1x Lightweight women's singles
- LM1x Lightweight men's singles
- W1x Women's single sculls
- M1x Men's single sculls
- W2- Women's pairs
- M2- Men's pairs
- W2x Women's double sculls
- M2x Men's double sculls
- M4- Men's coxless fours

Brits to look out for

- 9.40 LW1x Antonia van Deventer
- 10.00 LM1x Zac Purchase
- 11.12 M1x Alan Campbell
- 11.18 W2- Baz Moffat & Jessica Eddie
- 11.42 M2- Colin Smith & Tom James
- 11.54 W2x Annie Vernon & Anna Bebington
- 12.36 M2x Matt Wells & Steve Rowbotham
- 12.48 M4- Steve Williams, Peter Reed, Alex Partridge, Andy Triggs Hodge

Quote of the day

'I don't like the look of that rain, let's come back tomorrow'
— anonymous Spaniard...
Little do they know!

Tomorrow's weather

- 5am: cross wind from bow side.
- 11am: cross wind from stroke side.
- Midday: cross wind from both sides. Showers, rain, sunny intervals.

Let's be hearin' from yer...

Contact Hammer Smith and the Eton Mess:
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Netherlands and the UK. 'The European Union has ramped up all requirements since the attacks of July last year. Athletes and officials are really discouraged. These are athletes who have come from other sports. They feel like we should have had a direct link to the embassies to explain we know them and work with them.

The US has a fast track for sport visas, but no such exists or is contemplated in the UK. Di Ellis, chairman of the ARA, said: 'We have to educate these countries to make applications early. I was asked to sign an application form as recently as a week on Friday.' Perhaps the visa problem is a ball which the parliamentary rowing group could pick up.

Classified Advertisement

Eton College is looking to appoint a new Sheep Persuasion Operative with immediate effect. Crook, bonnet and muslin dress will be supplied. Three bags wool and other benefits combine to give an attractive package. Members of the Peep family are encouraged to apply before Friday.



Return of the Alf

Hello there.

Well, this is a 'blast from the past to say the least. Some of you who are close to drawing a pension might remember me. I started off as ARA Alf in 1968 in Rowing magazine, changed to Just Alf when the magazine thought I was too pro-ARA and the ARA thought I was a revolutionary trouble maker, and ceased when Rowing bit the dust.

Be that as it may, I was quietly sitting at home looking forward to watching the 2006 World Championships when I received a phone call from that nice Mr Chris Dodd inviting me to contribute for the Eton Mess, a news sheet he was plotting from somewhere deep on the Continent. Clearly I hesitated since the pace-maker does not always work as it should, but said OK.

The result was that I found myself driving to the Eton course last Thursday to see what was happening. A young man who I knew said, 'You can't turn left here to the Boathouses'. 'Why not?' 'Well, Fred Smallbone says everyone has to go right and then catch a shuttle bus.' I made a comment about knowing Fred when he was knee high to a gnat, and not a Henley Steward.

I remember the 1986 World Championships at Nottingham, and the scene this year is much more sophisticated. Computers, rather than pens and memories have taken over in the accreditation department. Buses are around to take everyone everywhere when in 1986 people tended to walk.

I did not see Mr Dodd: he was apparently lying low, but, after getting my paperwork, I stumbled upon

a press conference complete with free coffee and cakes. Very different from 1986! We now have a professional press organisation, Matchtight, or something like that, with a Caroline Searle as a lead figure. It was all set up!

Matt Smith, an American, but a nice tall lad and secretary of the international rowing federation (FISA), sat on the top table with an array of stars — Slovenians, New Zealanders, Americans, a Belarussian and a chap called Steve Williams from GB. Questions from the floor were less interesting than Smith's announcement that four African teams, Cameroon, Nigeria, Morocco and Kenya, had failed to get visas. I found this very sad. It would have been lovely to have had them with us.

Another youngster, a bloke called Mike Baldwin, then spoke as the Chairman of the whole thing. He apparently has 650 volunteers who have been encouraged to become FIT — 'Friendly Informed Teams'.

Anyway, that's all for now.
Cheers

ALF

PS. Please pray for good weather. Matt Smith, that American, did say how well things had been set up 'but road works and weather we can't control'. Shame really, since back in 1986, Thomi Keller, the then Fisa President, controlled the weather.

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Quick Quotes

"I like it here very much, it is very nice" - well-known top sculler

"I intend to win this week" - well-known top sculler's top rival

"My boat goes very fast" - An unidentified Italian rower, who may be lying

"Gold medals are usually better than silver medals" - jet-lagged American oarswoman

"Is that tape-recorder on?" - Australian cox

"I need a vodka." - A passing coach.

"Make mine a double" - team manager, going the other way.

"We have a very clever race strategy. We're going to go fast off the start, push it hard through the middle of the race, and then be quicker at the end" - a lightweight from Germany

Brought to you by our roving reporter, N. S. Sherlock.

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Thames Water scuppers Olympic rowing - hosepipe ban leaves 2012 high and dry

Hammer Smith reports from The Duke's Head, Putney: Saturday August 19 2006

The rowing venue for the 2012 London Olympics is under threat from two fronts - its contractors Row (rhymes with 'cow', not 'know') Australia, and Thames Water, suppliers of eau de vie to Her Majesty and the rest of us.

The new Wembley Stadium, which can be seen hovering over the Hammersmith horizon from the bar of this famous rowing hostelry on the riverside in Putney, will not be ready in time to host the Olympics six years hence. The contractors, who have already lost two cup finals and 10,000 seats, blame prevarication by the International Rowing Federation concerning new bylaws to enable crews to row round bends from a staggered start which will be required to fit eight lanes of 2000 metres into the stadium.

Meanwhile, Thames Water's hosepipe ban imposed this summer means that there is no chance of the massive stadium filling up in time for the 2012 Olympic regatta. At this stage we can only speculate as to who might step into the shark-infested deep end and save the situation.

It is this shocking news, coupled with the bombshell that Young's brewery is moving from Wandsworth to Bedford and that the grade 2-listed glass partitions of the Duke's Head, a Young's house, are threatened with extinction, that has re-booted me after my enforced retirement at the hands of the ARA, proprietors of the late lamented Regatta magazine, RIP. I shall leave it to readers' imaginations to identify what 'ARA' stands for. Heads - the Duke's or otherwise - should roll.

My, how the world is changing. The GB team is millions of pounds richer than it was when I last commented on world affairs. It is holed up in a secret location to prepare its assault on medals at the world champs in Eton, where it must win

to keep the bankroll healthy. There is a new training base in the wilds of Caversham, where all the cunning of the coaches, Messrs Grobler, Thompson and Williams, can be pursued out of the public gaze, and where the Gruppenfuierer, Tanner, can hold press conferences in the full knowledge that the awkward squad will never find the location.

Mind you, since a feature of a Tanner press conference is questions planted by El Supremo himself, it is no wonder that the awkward squad do their stuff round the back.

Talking of control, a funny thing happened at the world under-23 championships. Il Duce booked his team into his favourite hotel, the Novotel in Mecklen, having put it about as usual that the press should stay elsewhere if they knew what was good for them. So popular is the Novotel that Mr Tanner could not get a room himself. When he checked in down the road, he found the lobby full of media types enjoying a glass of Duval and debating whether they wished to share a hotel with the international manager. After a good dinner, however, relations became extremely cordial.

And so to Eton, where the international federation will once more carry out its uncomplicated programme of heats, repechages, semi-finals and/or finals - that's A and B and sometimes C semi-finals, A finals, B finals and sometimes C, D E and F finals - in Olympic or non-Olympic (euphemistically called 'international') events, and in boats which range from coxed eights to single scullers. We won't go into why there are more than one event in a world championship for some boat categories, but it has to do with people categories, some being tall and anorexic while others are tall and verging on the obese. The Eton Mess will try and help you through this porridge, so lie back and enjoy!

Hammer Smith



Eton Mess, the recipe

The Eton Mess takes its name from the puddin' served to the little horrors of Eton on the 4th of June.

It is a mixture of chopped strawberries, icing sugar, whipped double cream and crushed meringues, often doused in kirsch or port with a sprig of mint — designed to suit all tastes.

Especially recommended just before an outing.

Pic of the day



Which Olympic medallist is starting to wonder just what kind of a Mickey Mouse affair he's got himself into this time?

Answers on a postcard to:

*Rowing Nerds Anonymous
PO Box 1001
Slough.*