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Special article edition — the workings of the ARA Council uncovered »

Council deconstructed

Rachel Quarrell untangles the workings of England's ARA central council

A. R.A. Initials to conjure with. Australian Regular Army? American Rheumatism Association? The Association for Roman Archaeology? Nope, in rowing circles, it is (of course) the Amateur Rowing Association, the only national governing body conceited enough to include no country in its name. It doesn't even rule the whole of UK rowing - it's in charge solely of the sport in England: the Welsh and Scottish ARA's exist independently. The most important structure of the ARA is the national Council, but that isn't something most ordinary club rowers know much about. So we thought we'd take a look.

The ARA Council is many things: the governing centre of the organisation, a forum for representatives of 'all of rowing' to meet (does this work?), a place to air issues, and an early warning system for large external factors which may affect the sport. Every Council meeting is a complex mixture of forward planning, problem resolution, debate, headmasterly ticking off, and spreading of information. The recent year has been no different.

Big events

The Council of February 2008 reflected the political upheavals

currently taking place around the future of UK Sport, which mean that forward planning for rowing, and particularly its community-level funding, is somewhat tricky. UK Sport is involved when British International Rowing (which is linked to the ARA but includes Scotland and Wales as well as Northern Irish rowers) hosts an international regatta such as the world junior championships.

The next international events are the juniors coming up at Dorney in 2011, the world coastal championships (Plymouth, 2009), and the European Championships. The latter were originally bid for in 2010, but the ARA has withdrawn that bid, perhaps on the basis of funding for the 2011 juniors. So what, says the average club rower. Well, international event hosting has a knock-on effect on everything from grants for coaching/boathouse rebuilding, to how the sport is run, to recruitment of talented new juniors.

Informing members

The ARA reports regularly to those who attend Council on the status of safety changes, competition revisions, umpiring recruitment, administrative systems, employment within the ARA, schemes such as Project Oarsome and Sporting

Giants, coaching plans, and governance. The latter is more important than you might think, not least because the position of an ARA CEO (chief executive officer) has been planned for several years. The early 2008 meeting finally confirmed that the post will be advertised after the Olympics, with an unknown salary and job description. Nothing has yet been forthcoming....

Spending cash

The Council has some say over finance, and can to some degree control the level to which the ARA saves, spends and employs. Affiliation fees and other levies can be discussed at Council and changes made if sufficient members feel strongly enough.

Contentious issues

Last February divisional representatives had plenty to gripe about, particularly the early scheduling of the pre-Olympic GB trials relative to the men's Head of the River. There were concerns over recent proposals to license boats with the waterways authorities in blocks (and collected through the ARA), which were met with the point that the aim is not to pay more or less but to have a bigger voice from rowing when rate increases are proposed by

the Environment Agency and other waterways bodies.

Where the div reps have had a strong say is in the debacle over coaching awards and courses, which had stagnated in 2006-7 to the point where there were no courses being run in most regions, and students who had taken the classroom section of the UKCC awards could not complete their courses due to a lack of assessors. By February 2008 the complaints had taken effect and since the summer of this year a number of new courses have been scheduled, many during or before spring 2009, which should begin to dissipate this backlog, though it is questionable whether they are properly fulfilling the need for the right numbers of specific coaches to be trained.

Naughty naughty

The ARA executive and its commissions also get the chance to rap various knuckles. February usually creates a chance for several div reps with recalcitrant clubs to be publicly embarrassed as their clubs are threatened with being disaffiliated if they don't submit their safety audits. The byzantine complexity of the Thames Regional Rowing Council's online system has made this an even more tortuous process for some in the south-east.

In the past the competition review and points system have been big topics, as have rule changes, both for equipment and for racing.

The ARA Council is the formal structure governing the running of rowing in England and Wales, though the centralisation of GB Rowing means it also effectively runs the joint national squad for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The ARA Council meets four times a year (they nearly dropped it to three times a year), and the September meeting is combined with the Annual General Meeting of the ARA.

Council composition:

Chairman of the ARA (Di Ellis)
Honorary Treasurer of the ARA (Ron Paterson)
Two Deputy Chairmen (Annamarie Phelps and Gary Harris)
21 elected regional div reps
5 representatives of the appointing clubs (Thames, Leander, London, Cambridge Univ and Oxford Univ)
Up to five co-opted members
The six chairman of committees and commissions.
Three representatives of SARA
Two representatives of WARA
The Honorary President (Sir Steve Redgrave) and three Honorary Vice-Presidents

It is also attended by:

Co-opted members such as a representative of BUCS (was BUSA)
Regional council chairmen
Other ARA staff including national manager Rosemary Knapp and international manager David Tanner.
Anyone paid a wage or salary by the ARA may not vote at Council or on any ARA committee.

Here are some of the other issues which cropped up at Council in the last few years;

- whether the number of Council meetings annually should be reduced (November 2004)
- the recommendation of adding a finish-line 'beep' to regattas (November 2004)
- removing J14 events from the National Championships (November 2004)
- the introduction of online entries (2004-2005)
- a review of Regatta Magazine (February 2005)
- how to implement national equality policies (February 2005)
- the introduction of national coaching awards (February 2005)
- the points status of international athletes (2006-7)
- the Rule 43 review of safety in the sport following the coroner's reaction to the second Leo Blockley inquest (2006-8)
- a competition and points review (ongoing).

Your Div Rep

The Div Reps should be two-way representatives - they can communicate Council matters to their regions, and regional concerns and views back to Council. It is a sad fact that some of the div reps tend to concentrate on one aspect of the job to the exclusion of the other. The ARA chooses not to publish agendas of Council on its website at the moment, and minutes tend to be released only several months

after the meetings have happened. This leaves div reps as the only formal means for ordinary rowers to know what is happening at the top governance level of their sport. Yet many people do not know who their div reps are, or how to contact them. See the panel to the right for the names, and visit the ARA website's regional pages for phone numbers and email addresses.

Dreaded safety audits

Most clubs' contact with the ARA is brought into sharpest focus at the time of the annual safety audit. The audit is a self-check quiz designed to see if clubs have the safety equipment and resources they need, and are aware of their responsibilities. Clubs who do not pay their affiliation fees or fill in their safety audits are disaffiliated from the ARA by Council. This prevents them being able to enter races, and is likely to affect their insurance status while training: effectively it suspends rowing activities. Recently this has happened to several at least temporarily, each year.

The Chairmanship

The Chair of the ARA, currently filled by Di Ellis, comes up for re-election every four years, the new term of office to start on the first of April in the first year of an Olympiad. The February 2009 meeting of the ARA will therefore include the election of this post. Nominations for executive offices have to be received at least 30 days before the Council at which the vote is to be

taken. There is also a rule (in Article of Association 11e) stating that the chairmanship cannot be held by the same person for more than two consecutive terms. Ellis has served as chairman since 1989.

What's coming up next?

The next Council meeting is on Saturday 29 November. Amongst many smaller matters, it will probably include a vote on the competition review changes — called 'Win a pot, win a point' — which were originally proposed last racing season and taken back to clubs after July. The plans, in brief, mean any two-boat race earns a point, and removes the novice-before-zero stage. The upshot is that newcomers to the sport will have novice status but move to one point when they win their first race. Senior 1/2/3 categories and open are slightly reorganised, to create smaller Intermediate statuses 1, 2 and 3, followed by Senior (7-9 points) and then Elite (10-12 points).

If the changes are voted through, they will take effect next April, and a result of removing the double-status zero level will be that all members who are not currently novices or on 12 points will have one point added, regardless of recent regressions.

if you have a view on this or anything else on the agenda, talk to your div rep before they attend the Council. You can also ask them to show you the agenda for the meeting, circulated as paper copies.

The divisional representatives

Northern region

Div 1 — North-east — Barbara Millns

Yorkshire region

Div 2 — Yorkshire — Terry Edwards

North-west region

Div 3a — Lancashire & Gtr Manchester — Simon Darnbrough

Div 3b — Cheshire & Merseyside — J C Davies

East Midlands region

Div 4 — East Midlands — Paul Fenoulhet

West Midlands region

Div 5 — West Midlands — Christopher Anton

Eastern region

Div 7 — Bedford & Peterborough — Brian Foster

Div 8 — Cambridge Univ — Richard Phelps

Div 9 — East Anglia — Andrew Johnson

Div 20 — Lea Valley & Essex — Matthew Stallard

Thames region

Div 10 — Oxford Univ — Mark Blandford-Baker

Div 11 — Upper Thames — Andrew Weekes

Div 12 — Reading — Peter Moore

Div 13 — Middle Thames — Tony Evans

Div 14 — Staines & Molesey — John Biddle

Div 15 — Kingston & Twickenham — Richard West

Div 16 — Chiswick & Mortlake — Martin Carr

Div 17 — Univ of London — Siobhan Cassidy

Div 18 — Barnes & Hammersmith — Neil Jackson

Div 19 — Putney — Paul Lorenzato

South East (River) region

Div 21a — Lower Thames & Medway — John Clayton

South East (Coast) region

Div 21b — Kent & Sussex Coast — Andrew West

Wessex region

Div 22 — Hampshire & Dorset — Michael Green

Wilts, Avon Glos & Somerset (WAGS) region

Div 23 — WAGS — Philippa Sondheimer

Western region

Div 24 — Devon & Cornwall — Ray Mallett

Council dates for 2009: Saturday 7 February, Tuesday 9 June, Saturday 26 September, and Saturday 28 November.

What else did *Rowing Voice* 2008 contain?

2:1 – Feb '08

Ergometer and rowing machines explained, the battle between Rob Waddell and Mahe Drysdale, and a Coaching Talk feature on how to select your crews from winter training. Plus the holiday planner calendar, Rant, Hammer Smith, and UK domestic results in full.

£3/issue

2:2 – March '08

Men's and women's Head of the River races, and Tideway legend Chas Newens ranting about the behaviour of crews on the Tideway. Plus a Purney to Mortlake special previewing the 154th Boat Race — did the pundits get it right?

£3/issue

2:3 – May '08

How to prevent lower back pain in rowing, and skills rowers need to learn. Hammer Smith, Rowaholic, and a Rowdoku to bend your brain.

£3/issue

2:4 – World Cup Munich '08

All the news from the Munich World Cup, a racing update from the first FISA regatta of the 2008 Olympic season.

£3/issue

2:5 – World Cup Lucerne '08

While Britain falls off the gold standard in Lucerne, racing continues in Britain. Swamping stories from the National Schools Regatta, and the *Voice* results service working overtime.

£3/issue

2:6 – World Cup Poznan '08

The combined Olympic final qualifying regatta and Poznan World Cup, illustrated with great pictures from Peter Spurrier. Coaching Talk on how to motivate your crews before races, and an exclusive for the *Voice* by Andy Holmes on what has brought him back to rowing.

£3/issue

2:7 – Henley '08

The *Voice* goes Royal, with reports from Henley men's and women's, rowing in Iran, and how the Chinese rowing machine is gearing up.

£3/issue

2:8 – August '08

Previewing the Beijing Olympics with a full GB team listing, past and present Olympic stories, and

interviews with Mahe Drysdale and Rob Waddell. Plus news from the Coupe, Under-23s and worlds, FISA Congress, and controversy at the Cambridge Town Bumps.

£3/issue

2:9 – Beijing Olympics '08

Voice in China: daily updates from the lake at Shunyi, gossip from around the regatta and inside the Olympic park. News, views, photos, and a preview written on the eve of the finals by Martin Cross. Mke Haggerty joins the team reporting on the best medal action: eight updates with full results, and a ninth issue included three weeks later, previewing the Paralympic regatta.

£5/entire Olympic issue set

2:10 – Oct '08

Spotlight on coaches, with articles on Duncan Holland, Mike Teti and Mike Spracklen. What's been up and down with Britain's lightweight men, reports from the world university and European championships, plus all the action from Shunyi as the first Paralympic rowing champions are crowned.

£3/issue

Or write to voice@rowingservice.com if you wish to begin a subscription earlier than the current issue.

Win a box of chocolates

The Rowing Voice Christmas competition

Has your club been training up novices this autumn? Did you run a Learn To Row course, novice taster sessions, or a pubs and clubs regatta?

Following on from Patrick Kidd's description of his experience as a newcomer to the sport (see page 5), we are offering a huge box of chocolates to the club which submits the best short article about teaching people to row. Win yourselves a big treat for the clubhouse to share in the New Year.

Rules:

- There must be at least four different entries for

the prize to be awarded.

- Entries should be between 100 and 300 words
- The subject is anything to do with novices — a funny story, how you organised it, what happened on the first outing, how it's changed your club...

Entries should be sent by email to voice@rowingservice.com, by fax to 0870-164-1650 or by voicemail to 07710-538114. Please include your telephone and email contact details

Deadline 12 noon on Monday 22 December 2008.



See <http://voice.rowingservice.com/> for the full edition