

# Editorial

By mid March it was clear that we were heading into a serious and growing pandemic. Bodies across the globe from national governments to village committees were applying increasing restrictions and closing down more and more events, activities and venues. Among them were the ICF, who, correctly, pulled the plug on all the spring events, including the Olympic qualification competitions. Some will be lost for this year. Others may be postponed to a very full autumn schedule although there is also the possibility that even future years will be affected, too.

## Olympic wooden spoon performance

towards this unlikely situation just in case.

Competitors, where the odd second can make the difference between reaching the record books or not, needed to try to peak on the day of their event, a date which was likely to be changed. They needed to train when clubs and training venues were closed, when public transport was much reduced and when we were moving towards a situation resembling house arrest. They needed to book their transport to Japan when most of the world's aircraft were grounded, if they were able to negotiate closed national borders. For some poorer countries these can be challenging issues even in normal times. Social distancing would not be possible in some competitions, especially where teams or crews were involved. Having brought competitors together from around the world and put them in close contact, they would then be sent back around the world with whatever viruses they had shared. Six Croatian and Turkish boxing team members who attended an Olympic qualifier in London in March subsequently tested positive.

As always with Olympic Games, the Japanese spent a fortune on building facilities, which stand ready for whatever date is used. These expenses need to be funded by those who will watch but, although millions had already done so, most spectators would not have wanted to book hotels in Tokyo when dates were at risk, when there were few flights and when health was a major concern, even if they were permitted to travel. It was said that events could take place behind closed doors, which will not help the finances nor would closed competition help reduce the spread of Covid-19 by competitors.

At an Olympic Games the competitors are outnumbered by the media, who need to book hotels and many of whom need to ship container loads of equipment. The media are now faced with uncertainty. Having prepared schedules around weeks of sport, they face a total vacuum of content. After all, most other sports had already taken action to ensure their major events did not clash with the Olympic Games even before the virus appeared. Social distancing means any programme from a discussion panel upwards will be difficult to prepare.

Even for the Olympic Games themselves, a major part of the occasion for many officials would be the social reunions, drinks and meals together, unwise for the many over 70s who would be at particular risk.

Canada spend much on Olympic results. They withdrew their team from the 2020 Olympics because of the virus, to be followed by Australia. Hugh Robertson, head of the BOA, expecting that Britain would follow, said that, in addition to all the practical issues, it was inappropriate to run the Games at a time like this.

At this point the IOC allowed themselves a further four weeks to decide whether they needed to take any action themselves. They were considering running a reduced Games, offering the worst of both worlds and unacceptable to the Japanese, for whom there would have been major financial implications.

This is an event where we could have expected the IOC to lead the decision making by example. Instead they were about the last to get their act together. They have a lot to do to recover their respect. Announcement at the end of March of 2021 dates was the correct start.

**Stuart Fisher**

The body conspicuously failing to show leadership were the International Olympic Committee, who doggedly claimed that the 2020 Olympic Games would go ahead on the planned dates and that any changes were not even being considered. Few people believed this but competitors had to work

'What is *that*?' The smartly dressed woman in her 30s had a strong Italian accent and we had stopped at a station on the Bure Valley Line in Norfolk so perhaps it was understandable that she could not identify the highland cow gazing in from the adjacent field.

Near Lochgilphead I found a car with the windows wound down. Three young men of Asian origin from Glasgow were trying to bait some excitement from inside the car from a couple of highland cows safely in a field on the other side of a fence. We are told of inner city kids who have never seen a cow but these three men were unable to identify two cows even when they did see them. Were they wild animals and were they dangerous, they wanted to know. In fact, they were utterly unmoved in the face of attempted provocation.

## What is that?

For those fortunate enough to be familiar with the countryside it can be hard to appreciate how significant can be a trip away from familiar urban surroundings, away from home. In the past this has best been facilitated by education authorities with school trips but they cost money which now has to be saved and these do not contribute directly to the over-riding priority of exam grades.

In 1982 Scotland had 123 residential outdoor centres of which 70 were run by local authorities. Over half have now closed. This year North Lanarkshire's Kilbowie centre with its dry ski slope near Oban and Glasgow City's Blairvadach centre with 44 staff are to close. That will leave just the City of Edinburgh's Benmore and Lagganlia centres, North Ayrshire's Arran centre, South Ayrshire's Dolphin House and the Orkney Isles' Hoy centre. Petitions to save Blairvadach and Kilbowie have drawn over 10,000 signatures.

Some authorities are making use of private centres, removing responsibility for staffing and upkeep of facilities, even obtaining some one off cash for their sales. Glasgow is to make more use of parks and open spaces. In particular, the Pinkston watersports centre is a valuable resource. Even so, having somewhere built of concrete, surrounded by tower blocks and a short ride from home by public transport is not the same as somewhere remote with a backdrop of water, cliffs and mountains where you have to take some responsibility for yourself.

John Ramwell, former editor of Ocean Kayaker, was a prison officer who had to take naughty boys away on trips, particularly in sea kayaks. The boys were required to take responsibility for themselves, including their food. One didn't comply and complained when he had nothing for his evening meal. Eventually John gave him £1 and told him to buy some chips. They were far from civilization. That lesson would have been remembered.

My father was a marine zoologist who made monthly two day trips to collect specimens. When I was at junior school he took me on one of these trips on the small research vessel, from Millport through the Kyles of Bute to Tarbert, from where, after a night moored to the pier, we returned the next day. It remains one of the best experiences of my life. True, it was not an educational trip and there would probably be health and safety rules to prevent it now but I was so fortunate to have this priceless experience.

Another piece of good fortune was while in Ambleside one evening in the mid 80s while researching a river guide. With nothing planned I wandered along to Charlotte Mason College, where there was a lecture by Colin Mortlock on offer. It turned out to be the first airing of what would lead to what I consider Cicerone's most inspirational book ever, Colin's The Adventure Alternative, which I think should be compulsory reading for all in education.

'Inspiration in education? What is *that*?' you can almost hear the authorities say.

**Stuart Fisher**



Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed:  
everything else is public relations - George Orwell