

*IGC Steward Report
European Championships, Nitra, Slovakia.
9th to 23rd July 2005.*

Chief Steward: Mrs Angela Sheard, Great Britain
Steward: Mr Petras Beta, Lithuania

[Personal note: Mrs. Sheard, drafted in at only three weeks notice, 8 years after her only previous experience as Steward at an FAI international event, accepted the invitation from Championships Director, Mr Vladimir Foltin, with some trepidation, increased on finding that Mr Petras Beta, Lithuania being a new steward meant her becoming Chief Steward. However, his huge experience as an airfield manager and competition organiser in Lithuania far outweighed hers. Both benefited from the constant, reassuring presence of Mr Fred Gai, Germany, President of the International Jury, who led us as a team, making the work rewarding, instructive and fun.

Only the tragic death of Neil Lawson, British Team Manager, a few day after we said goodbye casts a shadow on her pleasant Nitra memories.]

1. ORGANISATION

1.1 Overall organisation

Gained momentum daily. Local staff worked well together and with the foreign officials. Many people spoke German well and two young, English-speaking Slovak volunteers deserve special mention for their tireless efforts at their unfamiliar jobs: Viktor, student pilot, manning the hangar bar immaculately at his first attempt and Viera Cagalova, daughter of the Chief Scorer, updating the news section of the website, taking some fine photographs and helping everywhere at once.

1.2 Quantity of officials

The nucleus of officials could have been larger but was generally adequate.

1.3 Experience of local officials

The Nitra team had run a successful international event in 2003 and annually, the Pribina Cup. The Championships Director, Mr Vladimir Foltin, is an IGC vice-President and the Jury members, besides Mr Gai, one Czech, one Slovak, are both vastly experienced in FAI events as well as locally.

1.4 Suitability of meetings and briefings

The first TM meeting was held during Training. Daily briefings were in a large hangar with adequate projection and sound facilities, the door kept closed to limit disturbance. Apart from the pilots and TMs, there was plenty of space for crews, visitors and other observers. Team rooms were cubicles off this area, which also included the Information office, free Internet computers and bar. The only Jury meeting to hear a protest was held in the Director's office.

1.5 Suitability of weather information.

The Director gave detailed meteorological information by Power Point presentations during Briefing. Copies of the detailed charts were also fixed to the Official Board. [Some teams brought professional meteorologists and these sometimes disagreed and attempted to impose their views so as to change tasks. Perhaps a more experienced team would be firmer at insisting they make their comments through their national TM].**

Updated information was always available from the Director from satellite pictures and soundings from other parts of Slovakia and the neighbouring states.

1.6 Suitability of facilities

All facilities were perfectly adequate, both for teams and visitors, with areas for other activities than flying too.

1.7 Transportation

Only Mrs Sheard arrived by air and transport to/from Bratislava was well-organized. No suitable vehicle was provided for private use during the event but being accommodated on the airfield made this less problematic.

1.8 Information dissemination

Apart from the official noticeboard, pronouncements made at Briefing were displayed on the large screen in the hangar and posted to TMs and staff in the mailboxes. Schedules and decisions were posted on the official board as well as, if necessary, printed and distributed in mail boxes. Results were shown on the screen, pinned to the board, printed for TMs and officials and quickly available on the website. Changes to alternate tasks were given and signed for, traditionally, on the grid.

Well worth copying: the Director's use of sms (cellphone text messages) to alert TMs and officials to changes without calling them in in person, e.g. a briefing delay was disseminated by sms and much appreciated, saving busy teams rushing from grid or trailer line unnecessarily. "All pilots accounted for" was also sent by sms. This took the Director only seconds on the computer once the numbers had been programmed in but saved lots of time.

1.9 Pilot assistance

The Information office, which also dealt with loggers etc, was open for very many hours daily, with at least two and usually more people helping pilots and crews. There was never any problem finding answers or help, including quick, small repairs in the hangars. The weighing teams, flag-waving grid staff, hangar operatives, scorers and Information office and bar staff all remained at their posts even when told they could go, so no one came back late to a deserted airfield.

[One pilot is remembered for throwing his logger in the face of an Info office lady volunteer, fluent in his language, who had remained late on duty from choice on a multi-landout day. He did not return to apologise after cooling off. We should like TMs to remind their pilots on Day 1 that most competition staff are volunteers giving up their personal holiday time free and deserve courtesy and respect at all times.]

1.10 Retrieval

Only one pilot (Lithuania) remained out [in Hungary] overnight, having waited, out of sight of the road, beside his glider. The crew failed to find him in an area where their cellphones didn't work. They returned early next day and had him back in time for take-off. [The French team carry GPS in the retrieve cars so a pilot can give coordinates as well as road information to avoid such a situation.] Given that pilots landed in Hungary, Poland, Austria and the Czech Republic, it is encouraging that all retrievals went well with no bureaucratic hold-ups. Roads are good and well-marked.

1.11 Launch control for fair access and efficiency

Launch control was by signalling with coloured flags, efficiently managed by well-trained local youths, cutting out most radio traffic. Club Class was always on the far side of the field from the Standard and 18m gliders, allowing them to be launched simultaneously in parallel with one of the other classes, most days all classes within the hour. All officials wore fluorescent vests. A variety of towcraft was used, including an ultra-light aeroplane for Club Class. Crew cars were very firmly ordered away 5 minutes to First Launch leaving a clear safety strip for emergency access.

Comment received from a TM after the event: start opening and closing times were sometimes lost over their radios due to aircraft noise and therefore, they had to call to ask.

[The tannoy worked well for those in the Tower vicinity but most teams listened in the trailer area]

He would also have preferred wider lines across for launching so the 18m were not always launched so long after the first of the other classes.

1.12 Opening and Closing ceremonies, incl. presentation of Jury and Stewards
"Heavy rain stopped play" at the **Opening Ceremony** in the city centre, deterring local visitors and grounding most of the fly-bys. Mr Witec, Mayor of Nitra, received TMs and officials and the city museum was opened specially for them. A glider was on display and piped music. The Jury members and stewards were presented at all ceremonies and in Briefing and were also entertained to dinner by Mr Foltin with local staff.
The **Closing Ceremony**: charming, simple and brief. Mr Fred Gai's closing speech was refreshing while saying all that had to be said. Slovakia had hoped for a first ever podium and medal but finished with a 4th, known as the "potato field".

Other social events

Excellent social events:

Slovak night with unfamiliar gastronomic specialities, good folk musicians and dancers.
International party: run on the familiar lines of each nation offering something from home, enhanced by the "Polish import" of traditional musicians from Zar (the Polish mountain flying school threatened by development) and their amazing field kitchen brewing Polish dishes.
Superb Closing Party with two different kinds of music, a capella singers and Big Band brass ensemble, fireworks and excellent buffet.

1.13 Total number of scheduled days and number of contest days

Despite complex and disappointing weather, including very strong winds, 10 days out of 13 scheduled were flown, 9 of them valid contest days.

1.14 Media liaison

Reports were sent to the local TV networks and papers daily. The Slovak President's welcome visit in hot sun (!) to fly in both a glider and an aeroplane, attracted very valuable TV time for the sport. Apart from teams, at least three skilled Slovak photographers and the late Neil Lawson, in his role as Team Manager Great Britain, photographed all events making some magnificent photos available immediately and for the next three months on the website.

1.15 Public and Internet display of real-time aircraft positions and information.

Leading pilots carried tracking devices daily but some of them were rumoured to have switched them off. The tracking projection was shown on the hangar screen and on the website [www.nitra2005.sk]. The webmaster and Ms Cagalova constantly updated the website. Due to lighting, the screen was a bit faint. TMs would like more light on the subject and facing, not sideways, tables next time.

1.16 Other organizational comment.

ID passes should be issued as early as possible to speed up recognizing who is who.

****Organizers should insist that only TMs make approaches about task changes.**

They should also be warned where crew members take over their role e.g. one who bawled down the radio for more tugs when many gliders were landing for relights. The tugs were in fact warming up to return to the grid and the pilots had not deserted as claimed. Such unauthorized radio calls caused a lot of confusion.

2 RULES

2.1 Adequacy of Local Procedures

Local procedures were adequate. The presence of a wide ditch just prior to the field, scene of two serious accidents in the past, was emphasized to TMs before contest flying began. This was the reason for the rule about height at the preceding telegraph wires and on the advice of the national bodies, the organizers were very strict about this.

2.2 Addendums or changes

Initially, there was no rule governing direction of thermalling around the start. There were other contests going on nearby and the Director felt that it would be difficult to impose. However, following pilot pressure due to very sudden visibility reduction in marginal weather conditions some days [see storm photos on website], a one-direction rule was agreed and imposed later to everyone's satisfaction.

2.3 Fair applications of Rules and Local Procedures

Rules and Local Procedures were applied fairly. To be extra fair, the protest expiry time was added to the bottom of results pages after a protester claimed that it's absence had resulted in his late protest.

2.4 Possible improvements of Rules and/or Local Procedures

I do not feel qualified to comment and leave this to Messrs Beta, Gai and Foltin.

2.5 Task setting and operations

Task setting was extremely difficult, due to the persistence of a broad bad weather belt running north south over the contest area and airspace restrictions in what was left. Frequent thunderstorm activity, actual or threatened, reduced the opportunities to include mountain terrain. Imaginative use of AAT contributed to there being nine contest days.

2.6 Scoring system (use and application)

All scoring matters were supervised by Mr Fred Gai and my lack of expertise in this area forbids me to comment. Scores were punctual and properly signed and recorded. Chief Scorer was available all the time.

2.7 Protest handling and registration

Two protests were filed. One, from Poland, was upheld following an amicable Jury meeting. The penalty concerned flying considered hazardous at the above-mentioned wires and ditch area on finals and followed an earlier Warning. See report by Mr Fred Gai. The other was for an airspace violation. The TM, Netherlands maintained that, due to GPS logger inaccuracies to max. 36m (USAF report), the indicated one dot in the zone could not be held as proof of the violation. See report by TM Netherlands with recommendation for an imposed (as opposed to pilot choice) buffer zone of 50m round airspace where a warning and not a penalty would apply. Both protests are fully recorded by the Jury president. Chief Steward also recorded notes at the Jury meeting left on the computer in the Director's office.

3 SAFETY

3.1 General safety of the event

General safety was good. Only on one day, launching was compromised when rain squalls blotted out the field temporarily and launching should have been suspended. The Director was absent this day due to work. In marginal conditions, landings over the city were avoided.

3.2 Occurrence of incidents and/or accidents

There were no accident or incidents.

3.3 Availability of medical personnel

Medical personnel were available throughout.

3.4 Use of safety officers

A safety committee of pilots from each class was set up. The staff knew the procedures to follow in case of accident. One floor of the Control Tower also houses Police functions so coordination with local services would have been immediate. Access to the field from the main road and onto the runway area was easy and clear had ambulances been required.

3.5 Launch safety

Launch safety was good and reminders of safe procedure when hooking on etc were given. Vigilant grid staff kept spectators clear with a wide emergency access strip clear of cars from 5 minutes before first launch strictly enforced.

3.6 Pilot skills relating to safety

On the whole, pilot skills were conducive to safe operations.

3.7 Suggestions for future safety enhancements

Even more emphasis on the reasons for certain local regulations, perhaps. Zero tolerance of poor airmanship. If possible, forbidding passers and vehicles on the road just before the threshold, eastern end, parallel with the afore-mentioned ditch at landing time.

Angela Elinor Sheard

Petras Beta.

Footnotes:

1. *Reports from WWGC, Klix, recommend informal Team Manager meetings prior to the main pilot briefing each day. This is an excellent idea where a large, experienced team such as Klix can make someone available each day at that busy time. But in a location

like Nitra, where a less-experienced and much smaller team is involved with task setting and printing [not to mention stewards occupied with weighing discrepancies, scoring glitches, foreign team meteorologists, etc etc), especially when the meteorology is very challenging, right up to moments before Briefing, there is no time most days.

2. ** On this point, it is essential that **only Team Managers** propose task changes to Competition Organisers, and only to the Championships Director unless he is absent, in the busy moments immediately following briefing, not other professional team assistants. Better discipline among their professional helpers by Team Managers is to be recommended.