

## Special Olympics Europe Eurasia (EE) Cycling Seminar Summary (May 2016)



In May 2016 Special Olympics EE held a Cycling Seminar in Belgium to coincide with the Belgium National Summer Games and Tom A'Hara (National Cycling Coaching & Competition Advisor for Special Olympics GB) attended.

The key theme of the seminar was “***A great performance deserves a great cycling venue***” and this relates to a common issue occurring in Special Olympics cycling because unlike most sports, cycling doesn't have a specific “venue” and this has to be created individually for every event with varying degrees of success.

The objectives of the 3-day seminar were to:

- Reiterate the Special Olympics mission, philosophy and rules of Special Olympics Cycling and their correlation to the Union Cycliste Internationale<sup>1</sup> (UCI) rules
- Reinforce the theme of “*A great performance deserves a great cycling venue*”
- Review the principles of divisioning
- Review venue issues that have arisen at previous Games
- Discuss the outcomes and rule changes proposed by the rules committee

In addition to the formal seminar and presentations, the seminar delegates also attended the Belgium Summer Games Opening Ceremony in Louviere, and on the Friday morning the seminar delegates attended the Belgium National Cycling Competition where there were over 150 cyclist participating.

### **Seminar Introduction**

The formal seminar started with Mariusz Damentko (Sports Director for Special Olympics EE) delivering a series of presentations covering the principles of Special Olympics, it's

---

<sup>1</sup> The Union Cycliste Internationale(UCI) is the world governing body for the sport of cycling recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

history, its overall philosophy and Cycling was noted as one of the development focus sports for Special Olympics EE between 2015 and 2017.

### **Unified Sport**

Within Mariusz's presentations was one on Unified Sport. Tom said "it was interesting to see the general feeling of the seminar delegates towards the Unified Sport approach with everyone in general agreement of the principle of Unified Sport but not in support of the reduced athlete opportunities that full implementation of unified sports could result in". However Tom also noted that this presentation sparked a positive conflicting discussion on how Unified Cycling (Pilot / Stoker tandems style only) should be re-introduced to support low ability cyclist.

Mariusz's presentations were followed by Gunter (the organiser of the 2014 European Summer Games), focusing on opportunities for cycling.

### **The Medical Side of Cycling**

A change to the agenda resulted with Doctor Debbie Vandenneede (General Practitioner) giving a presentation on the "Medical Side of Cycling". As a subject, Tom notes that this is significantly covered during cycling coaching tuition and regularly updated on Continuing Professional Development days however; having this information presented by a doctor was beneficial.

At Special Olympics Scotland West (the club where Tom is based) Tom notes that they are fortunate to have the support of a food nutritionist (Mo) to call on to assist their riders however, with this additional knowledge presented by Dr Vandenneede and the resultant questions arising post the presentation, Tom said "the principles of how, when and what to eat and drink offered by Mo now make more sense".

### **Divisioning**

To conclude the principle day of the seminar, a series of presentations were given by Kos (Special Olympics Technical Director of Cycling) about divisioning. As part of this seminar, delegates were questioned on the benefits of using a 5km Road Race (RR) as a divisioning tool and some of the issues that can come from a RR time were highlighted. This discussion continued on the Friday afternoon session with the proposal to review its use in the future.

### **Rules Changes**

On the Friday, the final session was a presentation and discussion on the rule changes currently being proposed by the Special Olympics International rules committee (Tom is currently a member of this committee). These changes are aimed at reducing issues such as those that had arisen at the World Summer Games in Athens (2011) and in Los Angeles (2015) and offers some structured changes to the way that Special Olympics Cycling should be operated.

Fundamental changes were discussed by the delegates and suggestions were made for the way to move forward. One of these proposals was that cyclists should be banded into short, middle and long distance athletes with some events having a qualifying minimum or maximum times associated with them. It was also proposed that females should be able to ride against males if there are insufficient numbers to provide a good competition (a

principle Special Olympics GB have used for many years as the divisioning system removes the differences between the genders and just focuses on the ability of riders).

In general, these proposals were accepted and during the discussion, Tom proposed a few changes to the 'medium banding' to include and overlap for all 5km and 10km events with the long distances and a minor amendment to the 'fixed program' by moving the 10km event from Friday afternoon to the Saturday morning. The alterations were accepted by the seminar delegates and changes to the proposal will be made.

The discussion also focused on a proposed 5km circuit for cycling events. This was rejected by all seminar delegates and the current 2km to 2.5km circuit was fully endorsed by all delegates as the way forward.

Many other practical elements relating to common issues such as; event organisers touching bikes, access to bikes, first aid, mobile first aid, communications, access to "loan or hire" bikes, tandems and trikes availability were all incorporated into a lively discussion.

One proposal that Tom doesn't support but was added by Kos and Gunter, was the use of National Race Jerseys by delegations. Tom notes that for many delegations at World Summer Games, their National Race Jerseys are clearly based on national flags and this conflicts with the rules outlined in Article 1 and should not be allowed.

## **Summary**

Tom noted that the seminar theme ("*A great performance deserves a great cycling venue*") was touched on in a few presentations. It was openly discussed by all delegates and nearly always formed part of the question and answer session however, Tom felt that more presentations could have reinforced this critical element because unlike many sports, Special Olympics cycling competitions can't use the open road resources used by mainstream events and with few closed road circuits available within the UK or in the area covered by Special Olympics EE, there are few readily available venues for competition.

Tom notes that Special Olympics athletes deserve respect for their commitment and training and within the sport of cycling the venue is everything. Often this can be something grossly underestimated and Special Olympics athletes regularly have to "make do" on circuits that wouldn't be deemed suitable for mainstream events and this is something that in Special Olympics GB we aim to ensure does not occur.

Tom said that overall "I felt that the Belgium National Summer Games was a great event and a great show of the progress of Cycling within Special Olympics" and that "the theme of the seminar being "*A great performance deserves a great cycling venue*" was really relevant and overall the seminar was a very worthwhile event to attend".

For any further information about the seminar or on Cycling in general within Special Olympics GB please do not hesitate to contact Tom:

Tom A'Hara  
Special Olympics GB National Cycling Coaching and Competition Advisor  
07734 084206  
[tomahara@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tomahara@yahoo.co.uk)