



USLA Board Meeting

Wednesday, December 21, 2022 @ 8:00PM EST
Zoom Call

Board Present: Erin Warren, Bob Hughes, Bruce Norman, Don Simkin, Chris Mazdzer, Tucker West, Scott McIntyre, Nonie Manion, Adam Berlew, Summer Britcher

Staff Present: Jim Leahy, Mark Grimmette, Gordy Sheer, Lucy Beaulieu, Amy Chapin

With a full agenda Ms. Warren called the meeting to order at 8:03PM and formally welcomed Mr. Bruce Norman to the Board. We are excited for the passion and background that he brings to the Board. Mr. Norman expressed that he is grateful to be here.

Minutes:

April – As there were no comments on the Minutes, Ms. Warren asked for a Motion to Approve.

Motion to Approve Minutes of April 2022 by Adam Berlew, second by Don Simkin. All in Favor. Minutes Approved.

September – As there were no comments on the Minutes, Ms. Warren asked for a Motion to Approve.

Motion to Approve Minutes of September 2022 by Chris Mazdzer, second by Adam Berlew. All in Favor. Minutes Approved

CEO Report: Jim Leahy

Mr. Leahy reported that it has been a very good start to the season. Our athletes at all levels have been very competitive. At the Senior level Lubo Mick, Kaspers Dumpis, Mandi Hillebrand, Jakub Simonak and Caroline Kannell are working well together. At the Junior level Pat Anderson, Arturs Darznieks and Tori Lam are working well together. And at the C level Aidan Kelly and Jayson Terdiman have done a great job.

Mr. Leahy expressed that he would like to take this opportunity to address Mr. Mazdzer comments regarding culture.

Communication & Staffing Improvements:

Mandi Hillebrand - Prior to hiring Mr. Hillebrand as a start coach, we reached out to several athletes to be part of the process. Once he was on board, he had a misstep with his approach to some athletes. After becoming aware of this Mark Grimmette and I had a conversation with Mr. Hillebrand as to what is appropriate behavior. Since Mr. Hillebrand's employment, the improvement we have seen in start performance has been very positive. We have Mr. Hillebrand committed under contract for two years and I look forward to seeing what a full year of his coaching will do for our athletes. Very excited to see he and Bruce Norman work together in a project. Mr. Norman will address later this effort.

Caroline Kannell - Although Caroline, our new ATC, is a USOPC employee, we made it clear to the USOPC that our athletes needed to be part of the hiring process. And indeed, they were.

As Sandy Caligiore announced he was not returning to USA Luge, we took the opportunity to request feedback from the athletes. With that feedback we hired Lauren Howe to take over our Public Relations department. Ms. Howe comes to us with a strong background in corporate public relations. She was very instrumental in working with Summer Britcher and Emily Sweeney on their initial announcement of sliding as a doubles team. She worked with them both on the most recent interview in Park City with NBC Sports. Again, her hire has been well received.

Jakub Simonak: Although some athletes believed we did not need a team manager this season, other feedback suggested we needed one. We had several candidates but found a former athlete that our coaches felt would be a good fit. The feedback I received from some athletes so far is Mr. Simonak is great to work with. We all know this is a tough job.

Mr. Leahy continued that we have listened to athlete feedback and made changes in two additional areas. We heard over the years that the athletes believe the quality of the apparel from Yeti needed an upgrade. We heard that cry loud and clear. This is the first year of a four-year deal with Karbon. Although we had some supply chain delivery issues as well as some sizing issues, Karbon is a great product.

Second, we heard athletes' gripes pertaining to slow reimbursement of expenses. With the hiring of Lucy Beaulieu our priority is to get reimbursement checks back to the athletes in a timely manner.

Speaking of Ms. Beaulieu, she has made an impact in aiding the coaching staff on the road. Any issues with credit card usage are immediately handled. She is also working with Keith Younger on hotel bookings to pay our stay via wire transfer to avoid large credits being placed on credit cards which may initiate high balances.

Noting challenges expressed with technology advances we replaced Jon Owen as the tech leader with a new working group that includes Jon as well as Mark Grimmette (Chair), an athlete rep (Tucker West), Gordy Sheer, Bruce Norman (BOD member), Mark Mirgon (retired DOW engineer) and myself. These weekly meetings are creating a better technical pathway.

Jon Owen worked very closely with the coaching staff to make sure that as many equipment needs possible were available in his workshop during the Park City World Cup.

A request came from athletes and coaches to have Matt Mortensen work with the Team in Oberhof during the World Championship training period. This has already been approved and his travel plans are in the process.

Technology

One of the important scorecard targets was to build two new men's double sleds and have them ready for the beginning of the season. That was accomplished. And showing great promise.

Our plan was to always have the "A" Single sleds ready for the beginning of the season. That was accomplished. I'll have Mr. Grimmette discuss the "B" sled progress.

Athlete Development

Pipeline development is an important pillar in our strategic plan. Our Junior National team has done well the first half of the season. We have 4 athletes that have attained "A" team status. This is something we have not accomplished in the past.

Our C team athletes have been training in Europe. Typically, this group predominantly stays in North America. Getting time in Europe on multiple tracks is amazing. Although from a financial position it has placed an additional burden on the parents to support, Brenna Payne has worked with the parents to help each athlete create their own crowd-funding page.

Financial

Additional funding was discussed on our last call. Since that time, we have raised the following: Our goal for "giving Tuesday" was \$15K. We raised almost \$18K.

We applied for a NY State grant to help with TV production for next year's World Cup in Lake Placid. We were awarded \$137K.

World Cup in Park City

Mr. Grimmette will address from a sport performance standpoint, but I'll address the success we had with sponsor engagement. Don Simkin & Ken Yonemura can chime in on their assessment as well.

Many thanks to our Staff (Mark Grimmette, Gordy Sheer, Dmitry Feld, Brenna Payne, Jon Owen and Zack Layton. We had all hands on deck for the event. Thanks to LP staff (Amy Chapin and Lucy Beaulieu) who stayed behind in Lake Placid to support our Junior and C teams in Europe.

We had great representation from our sponsors. Most stayed at the same hotel which enabled a lot of one-on-one time. We started with a breakfast on Friday with some great conversations. Dmitry Feld, Brenna Payne, and Zack DiGregorio gave tours of the track. They all watched some great sliding for the event and over 50 luge rides given after Saturdays race and finished with over 200 people at our cocktail reception.

Some key take-aways from the World Cup weekend:

World Financial Group, who left us in 2018, attended the World Cup. In the past they provided \$75k annually. They had some key decision-makers in attendance. Our hope is to bring them back into the fold.

Having some of our technical partners at the event created some additional opportunities, ie., Stewart-Haas Racing. We have had delay issues with RCR and our steel project and the opportunity to work with another racing team is exciting.

Mr. Leahy on a final note after hearing from our athletes discussed an issue with a hotel in Oberhof. The team stayed at a hotel in Oberhof for training in early November. The team also booked this same hotel for two weeks for World Championships in January. The athletes and coaches let us know that there were numerous issues during their stay. With this in mind, we have booked another hotel in Oberhof for our January stay. The original hotel is not happy and issuing we defaulted on an agreement. They have sent a default notice for \$30k and will take us to court in Oberhof. We have acquired an attorney in Germany.

Looking at the overall scorecard via the strategic plan, the two areas that we are still working on is the hiring of a head coach and hiring a technical manager. However, our belief in establishing volunteer working groups may help us achieve the same results.

Ms. Warren added that going forward and on an on-going basis can we make the scorecard a living document so things that are addressed are reflected in the scorecard. The key point here is that as it relates to culture and the athletes being heard, we are engaged in a partnership moving forward with them.

Compliance Audit – We will undergo a USOPC compliance audit coming up in June/July. Amy Chapin is finalizing our most recent SafeSport audit with only a few corrective actions. There will be much information to come on the compliance audit.

Ms. Warren added here that during the last meeting we discussed some budget trade-offs. Given the state of the budget is there any sense on what those trade off's might be. Mr. Leahy

replied that this has not be resolved and that Mark Grimmette will continue to consult with the athletes on this prior to final decisions being made.

Sports Performance – Mark Grimmette, Bruce Norman

Mr. Grimmette stated that Mr. Leahy did cover quite a bit already but to review:

Season Update – Mr. Grimmette gave an update including the medals earned by the National and JR. National Team to date. We can ask where these improvements came from? It's not just one thing, but we can say that our start times have improved. Our training for sliding has improved. The National Team staff seems to compliment each other and generally the environment seems to have been positive with better chemistry than in the past.

Technical Update - The Tech Committee weekly meetings have been very helpful. It has identified how to be more productive and is helping Mark Grimmette, as the chair, to see where the group can help identify areas of frustration. We need to continue to focus on aerodynamics and looking to design a body in CAD that can do consistent testing.

Steel Research – some past partners (Marge Hartfel) are now working with us regarding metallurgy.

Fine Element Analysis (FEA) – we need to continue using this computerized method to better understand various forces that can make us go faster.

Data Collection - An extremely important element that needs focus on both sled performance and athlete performance. Mr. Norman is working on a sled telemetry project. We began this project in October with the goal of viewing the entire run of a sled. Quick feedback is vital and we are working on a new round of hardware that will help to collect data immediately. He continued to explain that the initial data is helpful and can be used as a good coaching tool.

There was discussion on how to coordinate with Mandi Hillebrand, USLA start coach, and what he may need to make this better. Mr. Hillebrand has shared data and what devices he has used for improvement. This data is starting to mimic some of the data Mr. Hillebrand has used in the past.

Our goal is to eventually offer a so-called MRI and cat scan of athlete performance on the sled. The possibility of pushing this even further in simulating testing is exciting.

Coaching Update – We are still looking at candidates for the head coach role. At this time Lubo Mick has taken on some of these responsibilities and has done an extremely good job.

Tech – what does our R&D roadmap look like for this March? Will we have equipment to test. This will depend on what the coaches have available to test and will also focus on this data gathering SYSTEM. We are focused on the manufacturing.

Discussion on the production of equipment and the process of manufacturing equipment ensued. Financial resources play a critical role and spending those resources effectively is required.

Mr. Bob Hughes asked a financial question---What is the additional expense of adding a head coach and a technical manager to the budget moving forward? Mr. Leahy responded with a number of \$300K.

Athlete Report: Summer Britcher, Chris Mazdzer, Tucker West

Mr. Mazdzer began that he had sent out an email to the Board as he wanted to make sure that the culture and communication issues presented in the past would be addressed at today's meeting. He felt that Mr. Leahy's report did not properly address the athletes issues and requested, along with Mr. West , to go into Executive Session to address in more detail.

Ms. Warren stated that other agenda items need to be reported, and we should go to Executive session at the conclusion of the regular business. Due to the current length of today's meeting Mr. Berlew suggested to schedule a separate meeting for the Executive session. With Board approval the meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 27.

Mr. Mazdzer continued that he was only with the team for a few weeks but believes the Team is doing a good job on the road. Ms. Britcher agreed but did address her concerns with regards to start coach Mandi Hillebrand. A lengthy discussion ensued and at the request of Ms. Warren additional discussion on this issue should be moved to the Executive session on Dec. 27.

Club Reports – Don Simkin, Ken Yonemura

Wasatch Luge Club (WLC) – Mr. Yonemura reported that the club has had several meetings and the WLC has gone through the training for additional officials. They held their major fundraising event of Jans Winter Welcome. A fair amount of funds raised at this event will come back to the Club. The club was also able to contribute funds to the cocktail party held by USA Luge during the World Cup.

He reported that the current FIL Sports Director is stepping down and that he had a discussion with her replacement on the issue of concussions. He also thanked USA Luge for nominating USLA official Grace Noda for a seat on the FIL Technical Commission.

Adirondack Luge Club (ALC) – Mr. Simkin reported that the ALC continues to work on their relationship with USA Luge and ORDA on track time. The club is frustrated by the lack of sliding at the track due to severe staffing issues at ORDA . The current schedule has only 5 sessions for the Club this year. The club understands the balance between recreational and USA Luge team sliding but wants to play a more active role in promoting recreational sliding. He just asked that USA Luge continue to battle ORDA on creating more ice time for all programs.

On a personal note, Mr. Simkin stated that he was able to attend the World Cup and there was a North American buzz, which he felt was great. He felt the Association put on a good show for our sponsors and our luge families. He thought everyone should be congratulated for a great weekend for the sport. Mr. Yonemura echoed his comments and that it was great to be at both North American venues this season after several years of no World Cups due to Covid.

New Business –

SLC Olympic Games – Mr. Leahy added that he did meet with Fraser Bullock, Head of the SLCOG and Dwight Bell during the Park City World Cup. There will be Olympic Games in SLC in either 2030 or 2034. Decision will be announced during the IOC General Session during the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris this summer.

Motion to Adjourn by Adam Berlew, second by Bob Hughes. Meeting adjourned at 9:44PM.