OA Tech Newsletter

Edition 1/2005

This newsletter is a new initiative designed to enhance communication between OA members with an interest in matters technical – encompassing rules, controlling, mapping and high-tech. It will be produced periodically; most likely biannual, and distribution will be predominantly via email to level 2 and 3 controllers, mappers and OA committee members. The general idea is to keep people up to date on recent changes, to raise issues and concerns stemming from recent events and to trawl for ideas. As such, I'm happy to accept contributions from all and sundry – please contact me at the email address below.

— Andy Hogg

In This Edition . . .

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Technical News

New OA Rules

There's been a bit of activity in the last year on the technical front. This was principally due to a need to update the OA Rules to take into account recent changes at IOF level, changes in current practise in Australia and to consider proposals to alter the rules from a number of sources. Changing the rules isn't a simple process – but after email discussions and a special meeting of the technical committee at the Australian Sprint Champs we managed to find common ground on most issues. The new rules came into force in January 2005, and are now available on the OA website (www.orienteering.asn.au).

National League Guidelines

Some of the rule changes mentioned above related to the National Orienteering League (NOL). We had several concerns with the National League – mostly relating to inconsistent technical standards at NOL events. In many cases it appeared this was simply due to a lack of guidance. The new guidelines have

now been produced; again they are available on the OA website (as section 5.2 of the OA Operational Manual).

Late Starts

One potential rule change we considered at length in 2004 was the late starts rule. The current rules are:

22.8 Competitors who are late for their start time through their own fault shall be permitted to start. The organiser will determine and record at which time they may start, considering the possible influence on other competitors. They shall be timed as if they had started at their original start time.

22.9 Competitors who are late for their start time through the fault of the organiser shall be given a new start time.

This rule could easily be interpreted as saying that the start team must attribute blame before deciding when the runner should start!

The outcome of our extensive discussion was that this rule should stay essentially unchanged, but that we will consider further changes in the future. In the meantime, event controllers should consider the following advice from the IOF Event Adviser's Newsletter:

"It is important that the start team have a prepared procedure to deal with runners who are late for their start. The rules distinguish between those who are late because of their own fault, and those who are late due to a fault of the organiser. In practice, there is often some dispute about whose fault it is and it is unfair on both the competitor and the start team to try to resolve that immediately.

The best procedure is normally to start the late competitor as soon as possible, so that they have minimum influence on other competitors. So, for example, if there is a two minute start interval with competitors starting on even minutes, the late competitor should start on the next odd minute. The start time should be recorded. Then, after the competitor has finished, the question can be resolved as to whether the competitor should be timed from their official start time or whether their adjusted start time should be used."

— Andy Hogg

Controller Accreditation

Curricula

OA now has official orienteering controller curricula at Levels 1 to 3. That gives OA standards that can be used to develop controller workshops, and guidelines for accrediting individuals. No doubt those curricula will be modified as time goes by. Indeed, in 30 years' developing curricula for the RAAF, RAF, ACT TAFE and now OA – I have never written one that I did not want to change the first time I used it! The point is that there is now an official structure to OA controlling – as represented by three curriculum documents – but they will be living documents. Curricula are not prescriptions for courses – they are guidelines for presenters to use, taking into account the experiences of all participants. There's an old saying in vocational education: *"the curriculum document is one thing, and implementing it is something else"*.

Accreditation

Now that all three curricula are approved, accreditation of all levels of controllers under the National Officiating Scheme (NOAS) can proceed. All States have now begun that process: all at Level 1, and some at Level 2. In total, there are now 131 controllers accredited. The decision has been made to accredit IOF Event Advisors at NOAS Level 3 – it was too complex to establish a separate level under the NOAS.

Courses which use the new curricula have already been held for levels 1 and 2 in some states. The first level 3 course will be held in Tasmania as part of the Australian Carnival. It will be a full day workshop, most likely held on the Monday following the Tasmanian Championships in Hobart. Stay tuned for updates.

Paperwork

It's inevitable that paperwork comes with a system such as this. However, OA's decision to replicate the coach (NCAS) accreditation system seems to have been justified – or you are all "naturals" at doing it. The paperwork from States could not be faulted. Nevertheless, OA is considering the option of managing its own accreditation (still under the NOAS and NCAS systems) because, inter alia, there would be savings on ASC registration fees. OA has a contract with the ASC to use their services, but that can be revoked at any time (we think). There are arguments for and against OA doing coach and official (i.e. controller) accreditation themselves – the ASC must still be involved at certain points. That's a decision for the future. In the meantime, well done everyone!

— Neville Bleakely
OA Manager,
Coaching & Officiating

High-Tech Update

A recent proposal to the OA Council, which was approved at December's conference, was an upgrade to the OA website. These upgrades are currently underway, and will be complete before Easter. The improvements include a content management system for news articles, and an interactive events calendar. The new website will also provide an opportunity for State Association websites to take advantage of the technical tools and hosting arrangements of the OA site (at no cost to the State).

In the future, the new system may be expanded to include an interactive, searchable results database, an online entry system and online membership management. The intention here is to avoid the (current) situation where most States are independently developing such systems. Obviously the development of the expanded service will require active collaboration between States and Clubs to find a solution which suits all.

Mapping News

Digital printing

Map quality associated with digital printing continues to be the main mapping issue. A paper was prepared for the Dec 2004 conference, and the following recommendations were adopted:

1. Continue to require that the OA Mapping Chair check the printing quality of Group A events
2. Put a clause in competition rules relating to the requirement for OA Mapping Chair to approve map printing for Group A events when digital printing is requested:

15.11 *Digital printing of maps for group A events must be approved by the chair of the OA mapping committee*

There is considerable pressure to allow digital printing of 1:15,000 maps at Group A events, and not without good reason. Offset printing for small runs is expensive, and most course setting and printing is now done in conjunction with digital printing. The reality, however, is the inescapable fact that the digitally printed maps are of poorer quality that offset printed maps (especially in colour control and clarity). Simpler maps are OK for 1:15,000, but quality varies between printers, and in some cases it may be appropriate for the 1:15,000 maps be sent to a more expensive printer for a higher quality job, with the 1:10,000 maps printed cheaper.

Technology is improving daily, and it will not be long before all maps will be digitally printed. The role of the Mapping Committee in maintaining quality control on these group A

maps will be discussed at the mapping meeting at the Australian 3-days. I am planning to ask all elites for their opinions on this issues, as they would be most affected by a move to digitally printing at 1:15,000 for group A events.

Sprint mapping standards

The IOF produced a draft set of guidelines for mapping standards for sprint races (ISSOM 2004). Comments were invited from mappers around Australia, but no comments were received. No comments were forwarded to the IOF. The ISSOM 2004 specifications plus OCAD starter file are available from the IOF website, or by contacting me by email.

Mapping forum

A mapping forum was held in Orange in association with the Australian Championships Carnival. Two presentations were made, one by Chris Wilmott about photogrammetry and one by Jon Sutcliffe about design considerations for maps. Summaries of these presentations have been circulated to mappers on the OA mappers email list.

— Noel Schoknecht
Chair,
OA Mapping Committee
sandyknoll@it.net.au

Soapbox

This section is intended as a forum to raise technical issues, particularly those stemming from major events. Anyone who would like to contribute their feedback through this forum will be encouraged. Obviously, the intent is not simply to criticise, but instead to look for solutions to technical problems that we all face and also to promote new ideas which are particularly successful. To kick it off, here are a couple of features I noticed from last years Championship season, and a thought for controllers from Anthony Scott.

Length of Races

This is an oldie but a goody. I ran a race (which will at this stage remain nameless) during last years championships which included a range of physically difficult and technically taxing courses. This is all very well – I enjoy running through green at times, and I like route choices in a Long Distance race. My one complaint about this event was the length of courses. The M21 race was won in a touch under two hours, and for a time it looked like there would be no finishers in the W21s! These long times were translated to all other age groups. All in all, a day of very tough, very long orienteering.

Another example which I would like to cite is the NSW Championships – held at the Pagodas as part of the Australian Championships Carnival. For those who are not familiar with it, this area is a sandstone maze – with prospects for fantastic orienteering and route choice legs. The courses on this occasion were excellent, and most courses were about 5 or so minutes longer than the target (which I regard as being close enough). However, it's worth noting that the weather on that day was dry, and that heavy rain (or even a bit of drizzle to wet the rocks) could have increased the time taken by 50% or so. So, while the setters can lay claim to getting the length right, I would be inclined to set courses on the shorter side in an area like this – to avoid catastrophe if the weather turned.

The point I'm trying to make here is that there is a culture in Australian orienteering that a longer course is a tougher course, and is therefore better. By extension, winning times set the minimum allowable course length, and nobody minds if they are 30% longer. Well, I disagree. Longer courses are more physical, and therefore less rewarding to technically competent orienteers. Winning times are specified for a number of good reasons (particularly for fairness) – if you really think your event is special enough to require non-standard winning times you should seek permission from OA, and advertise the expected

winning time in the entry form.

As a guide, you should always aim to be within 5 minutes of the specification – if you're unsure, seek advice from others, or by looking at approximate km rates from previous courses in similar areas. In addition, don't set your course as though the world's best will turn out – look at the type of field your event is likely to draw, and set your courses accordingly.

Start format

Now for a good news story. The Australian Schools Championship in 2004 featured a fairly novel start (by Australian standards). The start was situated in the centre of the assembly area, only 50 metres or so from the finish line. The start procedure was to grab your map and run about 100 metres before you crossed a fence into the forest. It was like a start chute to complement the finish chute. For spectators (and there are quite a few at the Schools Champs) it was great to be able to see everyone both start and finish. Something worth considering for your next major event.

— Andy Hogg

Controlling events – balancing technical standards against organiser's workloads

I'm sure every competitor in orienteering (including myself) would like to see the technical standard of events continue to improve. This is one reason we have event controllers, who oversee the organisation and ensure that all the rules and regulations are satisfied, and that the event is conducted at the highest possible standard. Controllers must carefully review all the courses, the mapping, the map printing, control flag placement, and a million and one other techicalities such as control descriptions, drink controls, thickness of map bags, allocation of start times, etc.

Of course, the more rules and standards that we demand, the more work the organising committee must do. For the major carnivals such as Easter or the Australian Championships, there might be up to 7 or 8 events, with up to 1,000 competitors and a total budget reaching $100,000. Organisers will start working on the event a couple of years (or more) before the actual event. In the final 6 months the workload explodes, and the key organisers find that every weekend and every night is taken up with orienteering. The organiser must also deal with numerous demands from different technical committees as well as special requests from many competitors (as well as the usual batch of complaints and whinges). This places huge pressure on their family life and full-time work.

Controllers (and competitors) need to be fully aware of the pressures and workloads being placed on organisers and course setters, all of whom are volunteers (and fellow orienteers). They must carefully balance the demand for increased technical standards with the risk that the organisers can no longer cope. The controller must monitor this carefully and must know when to back off. No event will be perfect; as there always comes a time when the quality of the event must be balanced with the amount of work the organisers can do, and that the amount of time left before the event ("it's only 2 days to go and we haven't got our maps from the printer yet!"). On almost every occasion, some things must be dropped.

One technique is to set a list of prioities and slowly progress through this list. A very simple example is:

Priority 1 Get the controls in the correct location and have the correct code;

Priority 2 Ensure the controls are not hidden;

Priority 3 Ensure the 30m rule (control proximity) is met;

Priority 4 Ensure courses are marked in the correct colour;

Priority 5 Ensure printing quality is of the highest standard;

Priority 6 Ensure drink stations are placed at control sites and have sufficent water;

Priority 7 Ensure suitable map bags are used;

. . .

Priority 10 Inclusion of butterfly loops, chasing starts, spectator controls, or other spectator-friendly concepts;

. . . and finally . . .

Priority 123 ensure landholders receive high quality wine as a gift, by having a taste beforehand.

At events where the organisers are less experienced or time is rapidly running out, the controller might decide that only the top 4 priorities can be met. In fact I have controlled many minor events where I have felt it necessary to simply ensure the number 1 priority was met, and I didn't bother enforcing any of the others.

If a controller (or any other official) keeps insisting that every rule in the book must be met, including priority 534 - rule z, verse 6.3, there is a risk that the organiser ends up spending too much time on less important issues, and the basics (getting the flags in the correct spot) aren't achieved due to a lack of time.

The key issue, whether it is a minor event in the local park, or the Australian Championships, is that the controller should work closely with the organisers and keep a finger on the pulse. How are they coping? When do you decide to allow a few short cuts to ensure that the basics are done right? How can you help reduce the workload on the organiser? What can they do to simplify things and yet maintain an acceptable standard?

Perhaps the most important advice to controllers is this; work *with* the organisers, not against them. Make a list of priorities and slowly work down this list. Get the basics right first, and then start thinking about those optional extras. But don't push the organisers too far, or we might never see them again.

— Anthony Scott
Easter 2005 organiser
& Day 2 controller