



Statement by WFDF Regarding the WUCC and WJUC

Over the last month, The World Flying Disc Federation has received a number of complaints from its national association members and athletes participating in the two major world championships we sanctioned this summer, the World Ultimate Club Championships (WUCC) and World Junior Ultimate Championships (WJUC). Both were held in the city of Lecco, Italy and hosted by UltimatEvents.

Overall, many felt that promised amenities fell short and/or were expensive for what was delivered. The complaints include the following: quality of the fields; extremely poor quality of the temporary dormitories and their furniture; inadequate dormitory washrooms and shower facilities; poor wi-fi access; food was not unlimited as promised and seemed expensive; transport shuttles, while on time, had too limited a schedule and finished too early at the end of day; volunteers received little training, were poorly managed, and given little information; and the score reporting system the TOC planned to use never became operational.

WFDF Relationship with Tournament Organizing Committees

In responding to these complaints, WFDF would like to clarify upfront what our role in organizing a world championship tournament is and how our relationship with a Tournament Organizing Committee (TOC) is structured. Traditionally, WFDF has selected an event host to run the event and left the logistics to the local group, with WFDF maintaining control over the play-related issues such as team/player selection, game schedule, etc. and maintaining an oversight role. This is because WFDF has very limited resources (one full-time and one part-time staff member) and running an event like this takes a full-time commitment of at least several people and the mobilization of hundreds of volunteers. Nonetheless, we have formalized the process over the last several years and it has several steps.

Call for bids: We begin by putting out a call for initial bid interest and, based on the preliminary response, then put out a call for formal bids by a certain deadline. Bids are required to be in a standardized format provided in the bid manual addressing all the aspects of the event, including the venue, housing, meals, transportation, commercial expectations, and other ancillary aspects of the event. A detailed budget is also required. For example, the bid package for WUCC 2014 was fifty-four pages long, of which nine pages were the budget. A key tenet of the budget is that players' fees and room/meal plans are supposed to reflect actual expected costs, and any profit can only be earned out of commercial arrangements with vendors, media, and sponsors.

Approval of bids: Bid applications are initially reviewed by the Ultimate Committee and, for Juniors events, the Youth Commission. The Ultimate Committee ensures that each bid addresses all the issues completely and often sends them back for further clarification or revision. Once all the bids are deemed complete, the Ultimate Committee makes a recommendation to the WFDF Board of Directors on the bid to be chosen, using criteria including quality of the fields, cost, accessibility for travel, experience of the tournament organizing staff, relative attractiveness of the bid elements (housing/food/transportation), geographic diversity, etc. Upon vote of the WFDF board, a detailed contract is negotiated (the contract for WUCC 2014 was eighteen pages long) and signed before an announcement is made.

Ongoing Monitoring: Prior to the review of bids, we usually have a WFDF representative do a site visit and have a discussion with the TOC staff to understand things from the ground level. Once selected, there are one or more site visits done to follow up and get updates on the event. A total of four visits were done in connection with Lecco, and there was ongoing communication (usually weekly telephone meetings in the months before the event, and often daily as the event neared) between TOC and the WFDF staff. Of course, there is also ongoing coordination between the Ultimate Committee and TOC on play-related matters. Having said that, WFDF can only push so hard on issues if TOC has certain ideas, as long as the items in the contract are adhered to. After the event, a final financial statement is required to be provided to WFDF by TOC eight weeks after the event.

In summary, once a bid host is selected, WFDF exerts its control over the event through the arm's length contract it has with the Tournament Organizing Committee and by its ongoing monitoring to ensure the terms are met and other promises in the bid package are carried out. However, we do not control the tournament funds and instead rely on the good faith cooperation of our host in running the event. The WFDF event fee that is collected is available for working capital for the TOC and is payable 50% a month before the event and 50% six weeks after the event. The financial and other risks of the event are largely borne by the TOC, as we saw in 2012 with the deficit that was absorbed by JFDA in running WUGC.

Initial reaction of WFDF to the Complaints

We acknowledge that many of the complaints we have received are valid. We apologize because the overall World Championship experience - for a combination of reasons - was not satisfactory and did not meet the standard we expect out of a WFDF-sanctioned event. However, we hope players recognize that the many of the problems were magnified by the unprecedented poor weather, the most summer rainfall in 120 years of recorded history for the region. This led to the extraordinary step of WFDF deciding to cancel the first full day of WUCC as the fields were completely flooded. Despite taking this step to try to avoid trashing the fields on the first day, the saturated ground resulted in generally poor and worsening field conditions as the week went on. The high water table also had a major impact on many of the temporary facilities that were arranged as pathways became muddy and rutted as there was no place for water to drain off.

One of the difficult issues for WFDF in reviewing the bid for WUCC by UltimatEvents was that it was the only bid received for the event. For WJUC, the bid offered the best combination of lowest total cost for the most players with highest likely attendance. When reviewing the joint bid, we recognized the challenges of having a site so far removed from housing and meal facilities. Logistics for a normal-sized event would have been difficult; for the largest world championship ever, they obviously were daunting. And, having to set up a temporary dining area to feed 4,000 athletes and arrange for a temporary housing area for 1,400 players was a big undertaking. Nonetheless, the TOC had experience running a large event, the 2011 WCBU, and a dedicated full-time team, and they convinced us they could handle the logistics. We monitored this carefully during our site visits, making sure that they were getting the right contracts in place well in advance, and became convinced that arrangements should have been satisfactory. When looking at the costs for WUCC, they were not materially out of line with previous major events.

A key problem is that the TOC was reliant on a variety of service providers who appear to have failed them: the provider of the dormitory beds, the water and electricity providers, the wi-fi service, etc. It is not clear whether this was due to the incompetence of the providers – they appeared on paper to have the proper experience and credentials -- or to the difficulties of operating on a remote site removed from the city center. Having so many different lodging venues and having them so spread apart also vastly complicated the transportation logistics. Ideally, a centralized housing system would allow for a more continuous bus transport system, but this was not an option in Lecco.

A further issue was that TOC wished to put on a truly world class event and envisioned a number of elements beyond the basics. Their initial bid proposed a convention onsite during the week between the WJUC and WUCC. While it was an interesting idea, WFDF decided not to approve the bid unless this plan were dropped due to the additional demands it would put on event planning and on the volunteers, and due to fears that planning for the convention would take TOC's attention from the core events themselves. In the same way, TOC put a lot of time into trying to get the Wing23 system to work, even though Ultiorganizer is a perfectly acceptable score reporting system. It was only after the Wing23system was still not operational on the first full day of play of WUCC that TOC agreed to switch over to Ultiorganizer for the backoffice schedule management. By this time it was not possible to use any on-line system for recording game scores in a "real time" environment.

The final issue to highlight is the difficulty of providing a super-low cost option to players. Unfortunately, there are few large field sites with accessible established public camping grounds nearby or other low cost options. Tournament fees need to cover the fixed overhead of running a week-long event, so it is hard to provide something that seems cheap when compared to the typical weekend tournament. Balancing the needs of different teams from different countries remains a challenge. Expenses were projected to be in line with revenues, such that out of a projected budget for the WUCC 2014 of US\$1.9 million, the budgeted surplus was only 1.1%.

Conclusions and Recommendations

WFDF has a clear idea of what the ideal tournament bid would look like. The event would be hosted by a tournament organizing committee with experience in running large, professionally-staged Ultimate events. The venue would have dozens of contiguous playing fields with a backup site available that included a turf complex, and there would be nearby access to a moderately sized stadium for showcase games. It would be hosted on or near a university campus with student housing available at a reasonable price with a sensibly priced university meal plan available that offered varied cuisines to meet cultural needs, and there would be several large convention hotels nearby for teams interested in paying for a higher living standard. It would be located near a major international airport so that most flights would be direct and competitively priced and would not require significant travel to the site. There would be a number of local bars and restaurants within walking distance that could be informal gathering spots for teams and athletes to supplement organized evening parties and events.

Unfortunately, WFDF rarely has a bid alternative that meets this ideal framework. While it is true that a tournament bid that falls outside of this outline can be a great and successful event, it does mean that such a bid will always have challenges to ensure that the World Championship standard that WFDF has tried to establish over the last three decades can be met at a reasonable cost.

Over the last couple years, WFDF has had an internal dialogue to consider taking on more control over our events in areas that make sense. Our decision to bring on a part-time Events Manager at the beginning of 2014 was the first step in this process. We are still going to be wholly reliant upon a local Tournament Organizing Committee to run the local logistics of an event, but we hope to be able to take on a lot more of the team and player related responsibilities. Over the next year, WFDF is planning several new initiatives to accomplish this:

1. Player registration system, where WFDF handles the team and player registrations and collects the funds directly, which will allow WFDF to exert more control over the TOC during the event planning phase;
2. Milestone payment mechanisms so that WFDF provides the Tournament Organizing Committee with funds as they are needed after demonstration that contractual requirements are being met;
3. Requirements for events to use currently established game tracking software to ensure real time score reporting to players at the event and those watching from around the globe;
4. Renewed focus on the essentials in the bid review and implementation – fields, housing, food, transportation, volunteer management, etc. – and restrictions on the TOCs spending time and resources on the “nice-to-haves” until the “got-to-haves” are covered; and
5. Consolidation of the commercial aspects of our events, in connection with merchandise vendors and global sponsors, and possibly also including media and other aspects.

Our goal in introducing changes such as these would be to take much of the time-consuming burden off of the TOCs so that they could focus on the local logistical arrangements. We also believe that we could eliminate the inefficiencies of each TOC having to reinvent the wheel each time in developing their own registration systems, players’ communication mechanisms, etc., and maximize the contributions made from the commercial side by formalizing these relationships on a centralized basis.

We also recognize that one of the biggest problems with our events this summer was that WUCC was too large. It is extremely difficult to find a venue that can accommodate 2,000 let alone 4,000 athletes. We have in the past talked about qualifiers for our World Championship events so that we can limit their size, but the Ultimate community has expressed its strong feeling in our annual questionnaires and the opinion survey earlier this year that it wants to keep the event open to all potential participants. While the disc community has also strongly rejected the idea of splitting up our events by divisions, WFDF may have no choice but to strongly consider this going forward as the alternative to more sharply limiting the number of teams allowed to compete in each division. We will be continuing these discussions within the Ultimate Committee and the Board of Directors in the months to come and invite any constructive input you may have.