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THE UNITED STATES ROWING ASSOCIATION

# USRowing

*Member: United States Olympic Committee and  
Federation Internationale des Societes d'Aviron*

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THE JUDGE-REFEREE COMMITTEE

W. TAY VAUGHAN, III  
Open Water Member, *ex officio*  
1832 WOODHAVEN WAY  
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94611  
415-339-8562 / Fax 415-339-2228

June 19, 1989

Ms. C'Anne Cook  
Tahoe Rowing Club  
P.O. Box 1716  
Crystal Bay, NV 89402  
916-546-5415

Re: 10th Tahoe Summer Regatta

Dear C'Anne:

Congratulations to you for organizing a well-run regatta and for arranging the perfect weather for this event. Both, I am sure, required a great deal of effort as well as copious prayer on your part! Also, I wish to thank you for arranging overnight accommodations at the Hyatt for both Bob Whitford and me.

As you know, we are still developing "Open Water Rules" for regattas such as yours; indeed, it is the experience gained from such regattas that is helping us to shape these new Rules so that they make operational and safety sense across a wide spectrum of application.

I would like to add a few comments and suggestions for next year's Tahoe Summer Regatta, although at this time I cannot provide you with actual "Rules."

1) **More support boats.** In a long race race such as your open water course, especially when there are staggered starts for different classes of boats, competitors tend to get spaced out over the length of the course. From a safety perspective, if a competitor requires immediate attendance he must not only be recognized as being in distress, but support boats must be able to respond in a timely manner. Your 10-mile down and back course suggests the need for support boats stationed over the 5-mile stretch from King's Beach to Incline Village such that all competitors along the course are always observable. Proper spacing for these support boats may depend upon the observer's height of eye from the water, use of binoculars, and that boat's ability to respond to an emergency (a runabout would be better than a rowboat or canoe). Use of two JetSkis, each carrying an extra PFD, as safety pace boats was a good frontline idea, but in a serious medical emergency it might be necessary to get a competitor out of the cold water and ashore as quickly as possible. Also, as you know, with too few support boats to man the course marks, during this last regatta some competitors cut marks unobserved by race officials, and the organizing committee was faced with determining issues of fairness after the race had completed.

2) **Distress.** Pursuant to item 1, above, you might consider providing to competitors a small bolt of orange cloth or plastic (say 16" by 16") at the same time you issue numbers; this could be waved by competitors to clearly signal distress to the support boat fleet.

3) **PFDs.** The Coast Guard has exempted racing shells, rowing sculls, and racing kayaks from the PFD requirements of 33CFR175.11. Nonetheless, I feel it was good of you to strongly recommend that a PFD for each rower be carried by competitors, though I was sorry to see that your recommendation was not uniformly heeded. While PFD requirements for USRA-sponsored open water events have not yet been clarified, your spoken notice to competitors during the pre-race briefing that PFDs *will be required* for next year's race has set the safety stage; you, as race organizer, can certainly enforce this as a race requirement for your course. Tahoe water is exceptionally cold and the weather is not always predictable.

4) **Communications.** The ski patrol UHF radios were a great help in maintaining contact among pace boats, committee/start boats, and the race organizers. They were, however, not effective for the far half of the course beyond Brockway point. When blocked by this landmass, there was no reception. For next year, I would suggest that you place a radio aboard the support boat assigned to the point turning buoys so that messages can be relayed. In addition, you should arrange for megaphones or loud hailer aboard the support boats so that they can be heard by competitors not only at the start and finish, but from support boats along the race course -- had we been clearly heard by two competitors at the Incline Village

turning buoys, perhaps they might have steered the proper course and avoided disqualification. Throughout the morning, the Coast Guard seemed most appreciative of race status advisories which we sent by VHF marine radio; you might add this communication to your routine list of things to do while the regatta is underway.

5) **Race/Cox Meetings.** I would propose that you make attendance at the coxwains' meeting for the open water event mandatory and that you maintain a signature list for this. Important announcements may be made at that time regarding the course, ammended rules or safety issues, and they should be heard by all. Perhaps one hour prior to the first race start would be convenient for the open water competitors.

6) **Checklists.** I would be happy to work with you to develop a safety and operations checklist in preparation for next year's open water regatta. As an organizer, you know it is the little things that tend to sneak up and bite you in the knees, just as you are ready to jump. With plenty of lead time and and lots of checklists as well as distribution of responsibilities, these surprises can be minimized.

I would remind you to forward to me or to Bob Whitford as soon as you can the USRA *Chief Referee's Checklist* for signature. Let me congratulate you again on a successful regatta and wish you the same wonderful weather for next year's event!

Yours,

Tay Vaughan  
USRA Open Water Referee

CC: Bob Whitford  
Paula Oyer  
Ron Chen (for distribution)