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The Working Group has been supported and guided in their 14 meetings by two Vice Presidents and several senior staff, the Events Committee Chair and Vice Chair, the majority of whom have been involved in direct discussions with the IOC and its Olympic Broadcast Service.

Introduction

This document represents the final step in a series of recommendations developed by the Working Group and already supported by Council (see Appendix 1) to define the competition format for the Olympic Sailing Competition (OSC). Taken together, these recommendations form a complete package that balances the principles of sporting credibility and consistency with the need for simplicity, clarity, and global appeal. The proposals build on extensive analysis and discussion and are intended to provide a coherent framework that can be applied across all events at the Games. By bringing the work to a conclusion in this paper, the Working Group presents a coherent concept that addresses the key format issues of our sport at the Olympic Sailing Competition (OSC). The Working Group acknowledges that many factors influencing the successful delivery of the Olympic Sailing Competition fall outside its remit. These areas – in particular storytelling, visual and broadcast presentation, and venue reliability – have already been noted in other papers.

Context

Sailing's value to the Olympic Movement has been declining for some time as evidenced by the regular reduction in athlete quota since the 2000 Olympic Games. Whilst sailing does well for universality and heritage, its media and spectator metrics are poor, and it is complex and costly to deliver. Athlete quotas for every sport will come under renewed pressure after the LA 28 Olympic Games so action is required now to reduce the risk to sailing in the future.

This Working Group has already presented recommendations where it can within its remit, all of which have been approved by Council, to address the cost of delivery and make the competitors more visually identifiable to audiences.

With declining audience numbers and viewing hours, sailing needs to make transformational change to bring broadcasters back to the sport so audiences can see the brilliance of sailing's athletes. Broadcasters make their scheduling decisions more than a year ahead of the Games, before most athletes have qualified, and they are selecting from 50 disciplines. From the strong guidance by the broadcasters, three issues are essential:

- **Time predictability:** Sailing must start and finish on time, so broadcasters will consider showing the sport and audiences know when to watch it.
- **Greatest possible number of countries with chance for a medal:** The more competitors and the NOCs they represent, who have a realistic chance to make the finals or win a medal, the more broadcasters and audiences will engage with our sport.
- **Excitement and simplicity:** Each race must be understandable and compelling to watch so when broadcasters and audiences are deciding what to engage with, they select sailing.

Strengthening the Value of Olympic Sailing

Format is a part of a comprehensive program, and the Format Working Group acknowledges that format changes alone are not enough. With sailing and its athlete quota under so much pressure to add value to the Olympic Movement, the other priority areas that this WG believes need urgent attention to compliment the recommended format are:

- Athlete Promotion – A plan to raise the profile of sailing and its athletes between Games.
- Broadcast Presentation – Work to support the Olympic Broadcast Service and national broadcasters to present the racing in the simplest, most exciting way.
- Scheduling – Minimising recalls and race restarts to make sailing a more reliable for broadcasters.
- Competition Management – Deliver racing to the highest standards, leveraging technology effectively and selecting the right people for the right roles.

Although beyond the scope of this WG's remit, the group strongly urge the Events Committee and the other bodies of World Sailing prioritise all the aspects identified to improve the value the Olympic Sailing Competition offers the Olympic Movement.

Considerations

When discussing the following set of recommendations, the Working Group was facing a ‘magical polygon’ whose corners represent highly desirable goals that cannot be achieved simultaneously and partially are mutually incompatible or even contradictory (‘the more of A, the less of B’). Major goals in this polygon are (in no particular order in this following listing):

- Faithfulness to tradition of Olympic sailing
- Rewarding athletes’ continuous performance over a whole regatta
- Rewarding athletes’ focused performance in critical phases of a regatta
- Adherence to conditions of IOC and strong guidance by broadcasters
- Feasible for Race Officials
- Appealing to sailing audience
- Appealing to non-sport audience
- Allowing to create interesting narratives about the athletes and our sport
- Simple to understand by viewers
- Maximising the uptake of national broadcasters
- Feasibility and cost of event delivery

The Working Group developed a set of recommendations that overall acknowledges these goals through various trade-offs in order to achieve an overall configuration that the members of the Working Group – although to a different degree – see as the preferred route for the upcoming final stages of the Olympic Sailing Competition.

Recommendation 1: Number of final formats

The Working Group recommends having one (1) final format for all Events.

At the Olympic Games it is essential that formats are simple, consistent, and easy to understand. Using one common structure across all sailing events ensures clarity for audiences and media, reduces complexity for organisers, and guarantees that every discipline follows the same pathway from opening races to a decisive final. This unified approach strengthens the identity of Olympic sailing, makes the sport more accessible, and provides a clear and recognisable narrative that can be shared across all events.

Within this single format, small variations may eventuate based on testing to accommodate the different requirements and specifications of each event.

Recommendation 2: Final Format

To help the sailing community clearly understand the proposed structure, the Working Group has used provisional names for the competition stages. These terms are tentative and will likely evolve into simpler and more widely understandable expressions as the format matures.

The Working Group recommends that the Olympic Sailing Competition comprises two stages:

- *Opening Series with Event-specific number of maximum races over three days*
- *Medal Series on one medal day with*
 - *Elimination Final (ten competitors, one race), followed by*
 - *Final (four competitors, one race).*

The Working Group further recommends that

- *the top 6 competitors from the Opening Series are rewarded with bonus points according to their overall rank in this series (see figure 1 below ‘Opening Series reward model’) to give them an advantage in the Elimination Final;*
- *the top 4 competitors after the Elimination Final advance to the Final;*
- *the overall results 1-4 in the Final equal the finishing order in this race (‘first-across-the-line’).*

The Working Group also recommends testing these cornerstones as well as the suggested parameters and, if needed, adapting within the limits of the recommendations above (i.e, opening series progressing to elimination final progressing to a final with the finish order being the overall result). The parameters are the number of competitors, the amount and kind of reward for opening series performance, and the duration of each race.

The Working Group likewise recommends the following boundary conditions: The chosen format after testing shall not

- *encourage ‘negative tactics’ such as sailing someone out of the next stage due to an overly protected own position, and*
- *have the medals predetermined before the final.*

Background

The Olympic Games demand competition formats that are credible, fair, and capable of delivering a clear and engaging sporting narrative. The adoption of an elimination-based structure, culminating in a four-athlete, first-across-the-line final, meets these requirements and offers several significant benefits:

1. Clarity and Accessibility

The structure provides a straightforward progression from an initial series of races into a decisive final phase. This creates a narrative that is simple to communicate and easy for spectators, broadcasters, and media to follow, enhancing the accessibility of the sport.

2. A Compelling Sporting Conclusion

The format ensures that the Olympic sailing competition concludes with a focused, high-stakes contest. The four-boat final, in particular, delivers a definitive head-to-head moment: a single race in which the finish order determines the Olympic medallists. This outcome is simple, dramatic, and universally understood, aligning the sport with broader audience expectations.

3. Recognition of Consistent Performance

Competitors who demonstrate consistency and excellence across the opening series are rewarded with tangible advantages in the elimination final. This ensures that the pathway to the final reflects overall performance, while still allowing for competition and movement within the fleet.

4. Recognition of Performance When It Matters Most

The Final with its emphasis on focused performance against the top athletes of the OSC complements the recognition of competitors' consistent performance. It showcases that Olympic medallists excel both in consistent performance over several races and in focused performance when it matters most. This demonstrates their comprehensive set of competencies.

5. Retention of Broad Participation

The structure enables a greater number of competitors and nations to remain in contention for longer, maintaining competitive relevance and engagement throughout the event. This reflects the principle of universality central to the Olympic movement and encourages a larger number of broadcasters to present the event to their audience.

6. Operational Efficiency

With a defined number of races and predictable scheduling, the structure provides certainty for race management, media operations, and spectators. This reduces complexity and increases reliability in the delivery of the competition addressing the main complaint from the media.

7. Enhanced Spectacle of the Final

The four-boat, winner-take-all final concentrates attention on a small, elite group of athletes. The direct, first-across-the-line format not only demonstrates a specific set of competencies, removes ambiguity in the awarding of medals, and guarantees that the ultimate Olympic moment is both decisive and highly visible. It is also the most understandable outcome for a global audience: the competitor who finishes first wins gold, the second wins silver, and the third wins bronze. This straightforward structure is

universally recognisable, requires no explanation, and strengthens sailing's ability to connect with audiences on the biggest stage.

The Elimination Final

The Elimination Final consists in a single race. Points from the race will be added to the position (score) brought from the opening series (1 to 7 points) and ties will be broken by the race result in the Elimination Final. The top four advance to the final.

In recommending the Elimination Final element, the Working Group has prioritised strong reward for athletes who achieve top positions in the opening series. If using a low-point scoring system, the first six athletes are assigned the points of their respective place in the opening series while those athletes ranked 7-10 are assigned 7 points.

Calculations using around 150,000 permutations of possible race outcomes demonstrated that this format best rewards consistent performance, ensuring that leading competitors retain a high probability of advancing to the final, while still offering a more than 20% probability to those ranked 7th to 10th to progress. An additional benefit is that top athletes can remain active on the water rather than being sidelined, keeping them engaged in competition, understanding the weather conditions and visible to audiences at the most important moments of the Olympic Games.

To reach this conclusion, the Group examined and compared different reward models and scoring variations, with the results supporting the adoption of the following structural element rewarding the top 6 athletes after the opening series (Figure 1).

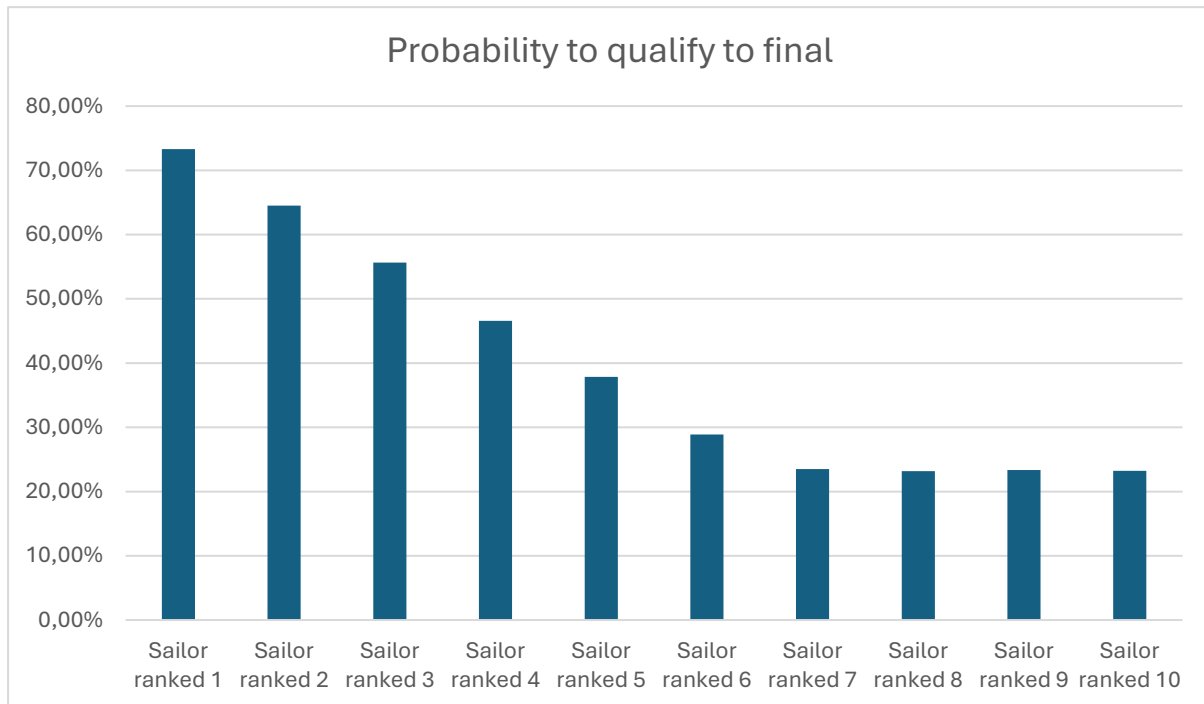


Figure 1: Opening Series reward model

While the elimination final has been identified as the preferred structure, the Working Group recognises that there are potential issues which must be thoroughly tested. These include, e.g., the relative distance between the rewards for competitors between their ranking or the number of competitors to whom the reward is granted. It is essential that any challenges are addressed through controlled trials and, where necessary, refinements or variations to the format are introduced.

One key area requiring particular attention in testing is the effective umpiring of events with fast equipment. The elimination final is designed as a high-stakes and decisive stage, and it is critical that rules are applied consistently, transparently, and in a way that supports the integrity of the competition. Testing will be needed to determine whether current umpiring practices are sufficient for this format, or whether modifications and additional procedures are required.

The Final

The four-boats, first-across-the-line final provides the Olympic sailing competition with a decisive and universally understandable conclusion. Competitors who reach this stage retain a high probability of winning a medal, ensuring that qualification into the final represents both meaningful reward and genuine opportunity. At the same time, the structure keeps the contest open and undecided until the very last race, allowing the athletes to show their ability for focused performance when the stakes are high and maintaining tension for audience engagement.

The simplicity of the format is one of its greatest strengths: first across the line takes gold, second takes silver, and third takes bronze. This outcome is instantly clear to a global audience, requires no detailed explanation, aligns sailing with the presentation standards of other sports, and audience expectations. The format also guarantees that the medals are contested directly on the water in a single, high-stakes race, maximising visibility for athletes and providing a compelling broadcast product.

Recommendation 3: Target Times

The Working Group recommends testing the following target times for the finals (Table 1).

Event	Elimination Final	Final
Men's Windsurfing (iQFOiL)	4 - 6	4 - 6
Women's Windsurfing (iQFOiL)	4 - 6	4 - 6
Men's Kite (Formula Kite)	4 - 6	4 - 6
Women's Kite (Formula Kite)	4 - 6	4 - 6
Men's Dinghy (ILCA 7)	12 – 18	7 -15
Women's Dinghy (ILCA 6)	12 – 18	7 -15
Men's Skiff (49er)	12 – 18	7 -15
Women's Skiff (49erFX)	12 – 18	7 -15
Mixed Dinghy (470)	12 – 18	7 -15
Mixed Multihull (Nacra 17)	12 – 18	7 -15

Table 1: Target times for finals at the Olympic Sailing Competition (OSC)

The target times will need to meet several conditions, in particular meaningfulness and feasibility for the various events, suitability for broadcasting with special reference to broadcasting requirements such as time windows (e.g., 26/52 minutes broadcast slots), and equipment performance whilst avoiding the risk of a procession.

Further consideration: Course Layout Options and Grandstand Finish Zones

The Working Group references one of the previously approved recommendations that also applies to the Elimination Final and Final. It recommends that Race Officials and Olympic Classes:

- explore both upwind and reaching finishes across all course configurations;

- study the feasibility of implementing a grandstand finish zone that works across a range of wind conditions; and
- develop diagrams and layout plans for
 - stadium-style courses, with start/finish variations based on wind direction and
 - the Belmont venue area, taking into account the pier, beach access, and slalom racing options.

Recommendations 4a-c: Testing and Reporting

(a) The Working Group recommends that between now and the end of April 2026 as many Olympic class and multiclass regattas as possible conduct structured trials of the recommended format. Testing should cover the complete set of recommendations made by the Format Working Group, including those previously endorsed by the Events Committee and Council, so that the full package can be validated in practice.

Within this broader programme, particular emphasis should be placed on the final format, i.e., elimination final and the final, ensuring that these decisive stages deliver as intended in a broad range of circumstances. To achieve this, classes and regatta organisers are asked to retain the recommended format philosophy and fixed cornerstones and focus their testing on the following parameters :

- the number of competitors;
- the scale and type of reward for opening series performance (including whether rewarding the top 6 competitors is sufficient); and
- the appropriate duration of each race in the medal series.

The fixed cornerstones comprise having...

- an opening series with a varying number of races depending on the event,
- a one-day final stage with elimination final and final,
- carry-over points from opening series to the elimination final,
- the winner not being fixed before the final

(b) The Working Group further recommends, that World Sailing staff provide quarterly progress reports on the implementation of these recommendations to ensure accountability and transparency, with the first report delivered during the 2025 Annual Conference.

(c) The Working Group finally recommends that the Events Committee be delegated the authority to adjust the parameters listed above, based on the information received from testing and feedback from stakeholders, so that the final format for the Olympic Sailing Competition is determined no later than 31 May 2026.

Appendix 1: Format Recommendations already approved by Events Committee and Council

- Recommendation 1: Visual clues for male and female athletes
- Recommendation 2: Prominent national identifiers
- Recommendation 3: Development of standardised and audience-friendly terminology
- Recommendation 4: Race Officials preparation for Olympic Sailing Competition
- Recommendation 5: Integration of race officials into audio-visual presentation during broadcast
- Recommendation 6: Opening series scheduled over no more than three days
- Recommendation 7: Competing in a wide range of conditions
- Recommendation 8: Starting and finishing on time
- Recommendation 9: Not running Windsurfing Marathon Race
- Recommendation 10: Maximum Number of Opening Series Races and Target Durations
- Recommendation 11: Variable Leg Lengths
- Recommendation 12: Course Layout Options and Grandstand Finish Zones

Full text of the approved recommendations can be found on the World Sailing website [here](#)