

**Workshop: “Fostering a Global Voice for Women and Sport”  
(National Association for Girls and Women in Sport)  
2013 AAHPERD National Convention and Exposition  
April 23, 2013  
PAM BOTELER**

**SLIDE 1**

Good morning,

My name is Pam Boteler and I am President and Chief Enthusiast of WomenCAN International. Our mission and vision is simple – **Olympic events for women’s canoe and equality in Olympic Canoeing.**

**SLIDE 2**

**Women in Olympic Sports**

Women have come a long way in Olympic sports,  
no doubt.

Do we still have much work to do?

YES

We have an Olympic program that is still riddled with imbalances within various sports.  
And, one of those sports is Olympic Canoe/Kayak.

And - No –

Women’s Canoe is still not in the Olympics.

**SLIDE 3**

**Olympic Charter and International Canoe Federation (ICF) Statutes**

There are 2 statements that are the foundation from which I speak today. The first comes from the Olympic Charter: “The practice of sport is a human right.” The 2<sup>nd</sup> comes from our International Canoe Federation statutes: basically, discrimination is not admissible.

**SLIDE 4**

**Sport = Canoe/Kayak  
2 Disciplines w/sub-disciplines  
16 TOTAL EVENTS**

Let’s dive right into our sport -- Olympic Canoe/Kayak, and then we’ll come back out and look at the Olympic program big picture.

- Within the sport we have technically 2 disciplines – sprint (or flatwater) and slalom (or whitewater).
- Within each of these disciplines, we have 2 sub-disciplines – canoe (or single blade paddling) and kayak (double blade paddling).
- To further distinguish our styles of paddling – canoeists are kneeling on one or two knees (as you can see in the 2 center photos) and typically paddling only on one side,

while kayakers are sitting on their bums, paddling on both sides using that double blade (as you can see from the far left and far right photos).

That's our sport. Let's look at the chart.

- Today, ONLY 5 out of the 16 sixteen total Olympic events offered are for women – and those are all kayak events. And,
- ONLY 5 of these 16 are canoe events, and none are for women.
- Men's sprint Kayak and Canoe have been in the Olympics since their exhibition events in 1924. They were added officially in 1936.
- Women's sprint Kayak was added in 1948.
- Now, when you consider that you can take a kid at about 13 years old with little or no exposure to any given sport and turn them into an Olympian in about a decade, why are women still denied their chance to compete at the highest levels of our sport almost 90 years after its introduction into the Olympics?

I'll come back to what we think are the some of the factors involved in our exclusion in a few minutes, but basically -- It's been almost NINETY years.

*(On a side note, canoe/kayak is similar to cycling and rowing – which are multi-discipline/multi-equipment sports. Yet Rowing and Cycling have significantly more athlete quota slots than Canoe/Kayak (we had 330 athlete slots for London vs. 528 & 549 respectively). In light of current underrepresentation of the sport in the Olympic program, it is not surprising that the ICF is unwilling or unable to deal with the addition of women canoeists. While we recognize that this is a dilemma, the answer is not to continue to deny female canoeists their rightful opportunities).*

## SLIDE 5

### **Women's Canoe – Nothing New!**

I want to show off a little bit of our canoeing herstory.

Women have been canoeing.... forever.

Usually as a mode of transportation throughout the centuries.

We have documentation of women paddling Olympic style (high kneel) – as early as 1918 in the U.S. (at my canoe club – the Washington Canoe Club upper left). The Washington Canoe Club is also lower right. Yonkers Canoe Club (NY) lower left.

## SLIDE 6

### **Women's Canoe – Nothing New!**

For Slalom we have stories dating back to the 1950's.

I have MORE women's canoe stories to tell you than I have time for today, but suffice to say – Women have paddled canoes plenty – in countries around the world, but, they have been, and still are, actively discouraged from canoeing, particularly at the highest levels.

I am here today because of THEM,

and for what they STOOD for –

And for what they TRIED to do but were STOPPED.

We are committed to realizing THEIR dream for THIS generation.

## SLIDE 7

### **London 2012 Summer Olympic 26 “Core” Sports February 2013 IOC Voting on Removal of One Sport for 2020**

Now, let's take a step back again and look at the big Olympic picture.

- This shows the list of core sports from London 2012. There were 26. In February, the IOC had to vote to remove one. The items in green were the “Bottom 5” – or, on the chopping block for removal. Wrestling lost [CLICK] and was tossed.
- Note that Canoe/Kayak was also in the Bottom 5.
- It's unclear why..... But, we can, of course, guess.

## SLIDE 8

I have to share with you a few images of some of our current awesome inspiring athletes. Here are sprint canoeists.

Single blade.

Kneeling on one knee in such a dominating powerful position, paddling on one side only.

Upper right is a pioneer in Iran – Nadiya Talanak – Iran's first female canoeist. She won a silver medal at World Cup #3 in 2012.

Lower left – Guatemala 2012 national championships – first ever women's canoe events – these are 12-13 year old girls (who typically kayak but prefer canoe!).

## SLIDE 9

And a few slalom photos. The podium shot upper left is from the 2010 Junior World Championships – the first junior worlds to include women's canoe. Medalists were China, Australia and USA.

## SLIDE 10

### **What Factors are Contributing to the Exclusion of Women's Canoe from the Olympics?**

What Factors are Contributing to the Exclusion of Women's Canoe from the Olympics?

1. ICF continues to state Women's Canoe “needs more development” – specifically, Sprint Canoe needs more development, but, they stated Slalom is Ready for Rio.
- They've made these kinds of statements for over 10 years for sprint. So what exactly did they say?

SLIDE 11

**International Canoe Federation**

**Position Statement**

*“The ICF would like to point out that on a global scale, few National Federations are developing the Women’s Canoe category in the Sprint discipline whereas much progress is being made in the development of the Women’s Canoe category in Slalom...”*

*... the ICF is now committed to having a Women’s Canoe Singles event (Canoe Slalom) included in the Sport Programme of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.”*

ICF Press Release, November 20, 2012.

- This is great news but also perplexing news. We’re ecstatic that they would say they are adding slalom to Rio – but why not sprint?
- Further down in this press release and in other statements within this time frame, ICF officials have pushed sprint canoe out to as far as 2024 – when most of today’s paddlers will be retired.
- This puts US in a bit of a quandary – we are excited for slalom, but, we’re a joint mission, Sisters of the Single Blade. And we like the Soldiers creed: leave no soldier behind. We feel BOTH are Ready For Rio.
- And, if I can frank with you - this statement is very misleading and inaccurate. Whether intentional or unintentional, this statement from ICF leadership is unacceptable based on the data and our knowledge of what is happening around the world.

Let’s take a look at the data.

SLIDE 12

**Canoe Sprint and Canoe Slalom**

**2009, 2010, & 2011**

**World Championships**

- The red bars are sprint and blue is slalom. The left 2 sets of bars are countries competing at the world championships in 2009, 2010, and 2011. And the bars to the right are an approximate # of countries total developing and competing at various levels around the world.
- This data indicates sprint is just as, and in some cases more developed than slalom.
- When you look at the total countries competing international in these years, they are about even – 24-25 countries.
- This certainly shows that sprint has more than “a few”.
- Looking at this and reading these statements, we continue to be confused because the ICF has never defined “good enough” and what is “enough countries” to warrant increasing our opportunities. These are age-old “chicken or the egg” questions which have been barriers for women in Olympic sports throughout the last century.
- It’s been proven time and again that opportunities spur participation and quality.
- They will keep sprint in a terminal development state to avoid addressing core issues.

- And without a formal announcement for anything related to Rio - our turnover of athletes – in both disciplines will continue to be quite high due to the toll it takes without support.
- Women cannot afford to do this for nothing, all while going to school and/or working full-time.

## SLIDE 13

### What Factors are Contributing to the Exclusion of Women's Canoe from the Olympics? (continued)

2<sup>nd</sup> factor.

2. This is a Big one - IOC Quotas on athlete and event slots. These quotas – or caps – were added by the IOC to control “Gigantism” – to control the size of the Olympics. But from our vantage point – and this was validated by a recent audit published by the University of Toronto: the # of athletes and events are really red herrings to detract from the REAL gigantism – which is the “Olympic Family” (i.e., accredited officials including the media). According to the Univ. of Toronto, this equates to well over a ½ million accredited officials – i.e., non-athletes.
3. Imagine a circle with the number 10,500 in it. That's the current “magic number” of athletes the IOC has allowed in the Olympics. Now imagine a GINORMOUS circle to fit some 570,000 accredited people (the “family”).
  - Yet the IOCs focus of control is on those 10,500 athletes.
  - These caps pit male and female athletes against each other and event sports against each other when the REAL Gigantism issue is that ginormous circle over there.
  - I'd like to refer you to our website to read this report but basically the University of Toronto authors state: increase the caps. Get the program balanced.
3. Adding women's events costs money and time. True – but they've known this all along – long before there were 16 events on the program.

One burning question I have for you:

Why is voting still required on things like equality/non-discrimination (i.e., voting to add women's events), when these are stated core values in statutes and charters?

Women canoeists have sat in the stands for almost 90 years while votes by the ICF on events have come and gone – with no women's canoe on the agenda for the Olympics and we still only have 2 events on the Sprint Worlds program. The others have 9 each.

## SLIDE 14

### International Canoe Federation Position Statement

*“It is good that people are mindful of gender equity in our sport, but it is equally important that people acknowledge the progress that has been made, and ... they have to recognize that Rome wasn't built in one day.”*

ICF Press Release, November 20, 2012.

- Why do they keep telling us Rome wasn't built in a day? (i.e., be patient – this all takes time).
- All we want is the opportunity to compete.
- 90 years.
- The Olympics seems to be far more important for women than for men, particularly in developing countries where women are still oppressed and repressed. It brings LEGITIMACY to our global efforts to get women/girls into sports. It is empowerment.
- And, we KNOW WITHOUT A DOUBT THAT it is a direct driver and stimulus to increasing participation.
- Without Olympic status for women's canoe - We are stifled. We are at a stalemate.
- We are asking for the ban on women's canoe to be lifted to make us legitimate – to force national federations to take us seriously because we take ourselves seriously and have the same dreams and commitment that our counterparts have.

## SLIDE 15

### **Sprint Olympic Events & Women's Canoe at the 2010 World Championships**

Look at the potential here! And World's participation should have been higher! (a few national federations which have competed internationally did not send women canoeists and the athletes could not afford to fund themselves).

## SLIDE 16

### **Sprint Olympic Events & Women's Canoe at the 2011 World Championships**

- Look at the potential here with only 2 years as official. And World's participation should have been higher this year too.
- Men's kayak/Men's Canoe and Women's kayak have 87 & 63 years respectively benefitting from the "environment for success" (funding, professional coaching, high level training groups, access to training resources).
- And at the 2011 Worlds – which was an Olympic Qualifier – there were 70 countries for men's kayak, 60 countries for women's kayak and 50 countries for men's canoe.
- With only 2 years with C1 200 (singles canoe) as an official event, and C2 500 (doubles canoe) added as official in 2011, there were 20 countries participating at the World Championships and approximately 36 countries total either competing or developing. A few countries have had athletes at other international competition, but, for whatever reason, did not participate at Worlds (e.g., USA, Mexico. Ghana had an athlete registered at Worlds).

## SLIDE 17

### **Para-Canoe/Kayak added to Rio 2016 in 2010**

I want to briefly mention para-canoe/kayak because the Paralympics doesn't have the same athlete and event caps and quotas that the able-bodied Olympics has.

This flexibility allowed the ICF to very quickly add para-canoe/kayak to the Rio 2016 Paralympics – really without any development. Look at the date of their first exhibition events in 2009 and the date of approval (July 2010). Women's para-canoe is included in this scenario.

SLIDE 18

**2009 Sprint World Championships  
Exhibition Events for  
Para-canoe/kayak & Women's Canoe**

This slide just shows participation levels at the 2009 Sprint World Championships exhibition races.

For para-canoe/kayak, the only events with participants were Men's Kayak singles (LTA Legs Trunk Arms), Women's Kayak singles (LTA), Mixed (men/women) Kayak doubles (TAA Trunk/Arms and Arms only), and Mixed Canoe Doubles (LTA/TA).

For comparison we included the # of participating countries for women's canoe.

SLIDE 19

**2011 Sprint World Championships  
Official Events  
Para-canoe/kayak & Women's Canoe**

2011 Sprint World Championships Para-canoe/kayak participation by event.

- So - 9 months for para-canoe/kayak to get IN vs. almost 90 years AND COUNTING for women's canoe
- This shows you how devastating our caps are to the growth and overall health of our sport.

SLIDE 20

**WHAT WE WANT**

***Balance Between the Genders  
and Disciplines (Canoe/Kayak) by 2020***

- ICF officials have stated many times that they are looking as far out as 2024 for women's sprint canoe. This is unacceptable.
- We are Ready for Rio now.
- Three years to be able to tap into the "environment for success" (funding, professional coaching, ability to train full time, access to training center resources including medical, etc.).
- Quality and quantity would be dramatically enhanced, and
- developing countries would be even more empowered – and incentivized - to give a girl a canoe paddle. ("universality").
- both Sprint and Slalom are Ready for Rio now.
- A decision must be made now - in 2013.

## SLIDE 21

### WHAT CAN YOU DO? ORGANIZATIONS

1. Petition the IOC to “Get Equal Before Adding” – increase the caps. Leverage 2 recent audits of London 2012 (Univ. of Toronto & SHARP Center) and get the program right before it moves on.
  - <http://www.playthegame.org/knowledge-bank/articles/the-london-2012-olympics-a-gender-equality-audit-5567.html>
  - <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/home/research/articles-and-reports/athletes/2012-olympic-report>
2. Petition the IOC to conduct an Olympic Program review to determine what is the “magic number” of athletes which will truly represent the best in the world? Why 10,500? Why not 12,000?

## SLIDE 22

### WHAT CAN YOU DO? ORGANIZATIONS (cont.)

3. Recommend to the ICF they need to add gender equality to their list of priorities and develop a workable plan to fully balance our sport.

*“To maintain the image and reputation of canoeing and the ICF...  
Then to ensure canoeing is on TV and in the media around the world in the lead-up to Rio and beyond.  
Then, importantly, it’s my job to support our teams and athletes at the events because that is what we are doing all this work for.”*

- Where is gender equality?
- Saying you don’t allow discrimination in a charter or statutes obviously doesn’t prevent it from happening, particularly when international federations like the ICF allow member voting, even secret voting, which can undermine its statutes and core value statements.
- Unlike other forms of discrimination, it costs money to fix gender imbalances. Women canoeists need the same “environment for success” as the other Olympic disciplines in order to thrive – this includes professional coaching, funding, medical support, etc.).

## SLIDE 23

### **WHAT CAN YOU DO?** ORGANIZATIONS (cont.)

4. Create an external Olympic accountability arm for gender equality similar to WADA.
  - This could be as simple as an Equality or Accountability Commission.
  - With WADA there is anti-doping accountability, but why not accountability for gender discrimination or even corruption in sport?
5. Keep these continued gender imbalances in your conversations about the Olympics, and participate in discussions for resolution.
6. Post our website link on your website/Facebook page

## SLIDE 24

### **WHAT CAN YOU DO?** PUBLIC

1. “Like” and share our Facebook Page: Vote Yes for Women’s Canoe C1/C2.
  - We really want to get to 10,000 at least by end of May.
2. Share contacts for media actively promoting women’s sports issues.
3. Never stop voicing your support for equal opportunities for all in every sport.

## SLIDE 25

### **READY FOR RIO!**

- We have countless stories of women and girls who wanted to compete in canoeing, but have been told No in almost every decade since the early 1900s.
- Even today – we have national federations who make it impossible for women and girls to even make a national team to compete internationally.
- There is no incentive for national federations to take this seriously without Olympic inclusion and with only token events at international competition.
- Letting the women bear the failure of sport leadership to make adjustments or difficult decisions is, in our view, indefensible.
- Waiting until 2020/2024 to add women’s canoe events to the Olympics or adding more events to the world championships/world Cups is like not building schools for girls until they are smart enough to sit in class.

The difference with Women’s Canoe is – We ARE Ready for Rio!

Thank you for your support!

## CONTACT

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