

The Chairman's Corner

By Jon Blank



Before I go to the mat for this month's column, I wanted to let you know how fellow NCMS athletes responded to last month's question about Lance Armstrong as a potential USMS competitor.

Jonathan Klein wrote, "I think we cannot exclude folks who have been guilty (by either admission or because they were caught) of using these substances in the past. For all we know there are folks right now who may be competitors of ours who are using PEDs. While I admit I would feel cheated if folks beating me were using PEDs I don't believe that it is a widespread problem at the USMS level".

Brian Goldman forwarded a psychological profile by Dr. Joseph Burgo of Lance Armstrong. In that article, Dr. Burgo wrote, "Given his persistent lying and bullying, his arrogance and apparent indifference to the feelings of others, and the pain he inflicted on so many people, it's difficult to feel much compassion for Armstrong -- to even care to understand why he behaves the way he does". (Atlantic Magazine, January 2013) By inference, Dr. Burgo wouldn't take kindly to Armstrong competing in USMS-sanctioned events.

Conversely, Doug Fletcher wrote that he would have no problem with Armstrong as a sanctioned Masters swimmer. Thanks to all who responded to last month's column.

Now, time to grapple with this month's article. Yesterday, I had the occasion to learn the motto of USA Wrestling: "USA Wrestling, guided by the Olympic Spirit, provides quality opportunities for its members to achieve their full human and athletic potential".

Ironically, USA Wrestling will soon need to amend its motto. The International Olympic Committee announced on Feb 12 that future Olympic Games will exclude the sport of wrestling, both Greco-Roman and freestyle. This was an unexpected outcome of a secret ballot vote by IOC members. How could one of the oldest competitive activities on the planet lose its slot as an Olympic sport, one wonders.

With the growing popularity of televised events such as X-Games and Mixed Martial Arts' Octagon, perhaps the IOC voters sought a greater audience in its future Olympic offerings. Wrestling just wasn't sexy enough for today's IOC. Besides, who needs stuffy rules such as Greco-Roman's holds above the waist only, when Octagon combatants routinely slam one another's heads into chicken-wire? Why continue to provide the 180 world national federations with the Olympic imprimatur? Voters seem not to have cared about the diversity of countries to which Olympic medals have been awarded, or the fact that women's wrestling is one of the fastest growing sports.

Again, the question of why this matters to those of us in Masters Swimming needs an answer. USMS is one of the very few Masters sports to be a contributing body to the Olympic movement. Through an historical quirk, USMS indirectly is under IOC auspices. (IOC includes the US Olympic Committee, US Aquatic Sports is the chartered vehicle for all US Olympic aquatic sports governing bodies, and US Aquatic Sports includes USMS). Thus, USMS is in the "chain of command" of the IOC. We as Masters swimmers may have the opportunity to help right this wrongheaded decision.

I urge NCMS athletes to action: support USA Wrestling's petition to the Olympic Committee to reconsider this exclusion. I'd hate to see USA Wrestling lose Olympic designation. See the USA Wrestling website, or go to the Facebook page to show support for Olympic Wrestling. Let me know via email if you support USA Wrestling as an Olympic sport. I will post replies for inclusion in next month's column.

In the end, IOC voters may still not be swayed from their venal decision. Perhaps the IOC should also vote to modify Baron deCoubertain's Olympic motto, "Citius, Altius, Fortius" ("Swifter, Higher, Stronger"), to a more realistic, "Cynicalus, Alterus, Fortviu\$" (We're cynical, we alter the events just for TV revenue).