

Chief Judges Report for the FAI World Air Games Dubai 2015

29th November to 6th December 2015, Dubai, UAE

John Gaillard, Chief Judge

Background Information

CIVA had agreed to participate at WAG and in November 2014 a delegation was sent to Dubai consisting of Philippe Kuechler and Hanspeter Rohner, subsequently Vladimir Machula was appointed as Event Director.

An early issue which needed to be resolved was the format of the aerobatic part of the contest, views differed on this point ranging from a very casual approach from then CIVA President Lars Arvidsson being we will decide amongst the pilots once on site what will be flown, to the FAI approach for a category 1 Contest requiring a formal set of regulations to be published ahead of the contest. However, what had been agreed at an early stage was the following: -

- Instant scoring would be used using suitable tablets
- The scores would be shown in real time on large screens for the public
- A specialized aerobatic commentator would be utilized in conjunction with the instant scoring and large screen displays.

The above decisions were to have an impact of the CIVA approach and the required staff levels. During the period from the 1st quarter of 2015 up to the FAI General Conference in October, what can only be described as a debacle took place with the cost of participating in the event and the shipping arrangements, the original scheme of using DHL at centralized depots simply could not work for CIVA and after much discussion and negotiation alternate arrangements were made to ship directly in containers.

Just prior to the FAI Conference CIVA had in effect more or less agreed to withdraw from the WAG, mainly because of the issues related to the shipping of aircraft and other matters associated with costs both to participants and officials. Another factor was the lack of response from the CIVA designated event director, who in turn was struggling with communications with Dubai. At this point I offered to stand in on a temporary basis as Events Director and in this capacity I visited Dubai twice the first occasion being directly from the FAI General Conference in Rotterdam.

At the FAI Conference it was possible to liaise directly with Vladimir Machula and we both attended the meeting for Commission Presidents, where the WAG was discussed in detail, needless to say that there was general unhappiness amongst many of the Commissions about the preparations for WAG.

Vladimir Machula made a statement at this meeting that CIVA were prepared to participate on a “no cost to participant and officials” basis, this was strongly attacked by FAI President, who stated in this case the WAG would continue without aerobatics, and at this point I nearly withdrew CIVA’s participation, but without discussing with Vladimir this was awkward.

Coordination meetings in Dubai

At a previous meeting attended by Vladimir Macula, he had pointed out that the ramp leading up to the runway was not suitable for powered aircraft and apparently had obtained an undertaking from the WAG Organizer that this would be suitably modified., this being of significance for the whole aerobatic operation at the drop zone for both powered and glider aircraft.

However, on arrival at the drop zone the organizer took me to the runway and said that it was impossible to modify the ramp and that we would have to operate from the apron immediately to one side of the runway, this had a major impact on how we would need to operate. Our requirements had already been set out previously following the initial visit in November 2014 and subsequent input by Event Director Vladimir Machula, once again we set out and confirmed our requirements, but most of the coordination meeting was taken up by trying to agree a schedule for the WAG at the two main venues, being the SKY Dive Drop Zone and the Desert Airfield. At the first meeting I asked that the person responsible for getting data on to the big screens for the public be present, but the person who eventually turned up knew nothing of the actual detail.

We were also asked to prepare a Risk Assessment, which was done. One of the main concerns was the designation of a practice zone prior to the commencement of the contest, this proved to be a problem and eventually it was agreed by the organizer, that the SKY DIVE drop Zone would be allocated to us on both the 29 & 30 November. Set out below are the main points from the risk assessment concerning the operation over water.

- It is our understanding that suitable boats with trained crews will be provided to retrieve pilots from the water.
- It will be a requirement that all boat crews be briefed prior to operations commencing, on both the release of canopies on the specific aircraft involved, as well as the aerobatic harnesses securing the pilot to the airframe.
- We in turn have revised our lower performance limits from a minimum altitude of 100m AGL or ASL in this instance to 150m to compensate for the difficulty of accessing height above water.
- In addition, we will establish a cross wind component for take-off (likely to be 6m per second at 90 degrees), operations will be curtailed if this is exceeded.

In addition to the above it had been established from the outset particularly for the glider operation that an emergency runway would be established on the grass area to the side of the

main runway, this was mainly to accommodate a glider having to land with the main runway blocked, Philippe Kuechler will no doubt deal with this aspect in his report, but did go on record as saying that he would personally not participate at WAG without such a facility.

In addition to what has been set out above, there were various other requirements associated with operating a Category 1 aerobatic event, some of which are set out below.

- Video operator and equipment
- Flight Director
- Wind measuring equipment to establish wind at 500m in performance zone
- Deadline Judges

At the second coordination meeting, the mood had changed and there was now an emphasis on limiting the participation of CIVA Officials, as a result the video operator was cancelled the organizer saying that they had various suitable operators locally, the Flight Director was cancelled and the wind measuring equipment and deadline Judges cancelled. Also cancelled was the specialized aerobatic commentator, instead we were introduced to a local media organization who said they had such specialized commentators, when I queried this they stated that they had experience of the Red Bull Event, I had to point out to no avail that Red Bull is not an aerobatic event but rather a race.

At this meeting there were again almost endless discussions about the program at the SKY DIVE drop zone, most of this did not involve the aerobatics as our performance zone was only used by ourselves and as long as an unobstructed judging position was provided on the grassed area and the emergency runway was designated and marked, we had no real input as to the activities of the other commissions using the grassed area.

WAG Powered Aerobatic Championship Contest Flights

The first thing to note, was that the promised practice days over the drop zone scheduled for 29 & 30 November were cancelled without any explanation from the Organizer, this was especially disappointing as these days had been included as part of the Risk Assessment for the contest submitted to the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority and was a matter of safety. The contest actually commenced the following day, which became a practice day.

When the contest actually started the following was noted

- The Organizer had provided no equipment (chairs tables etc.) at the designated judging line.
- The Organizer did not provide a video operator as promised
- The Organizer had made no provision for wind measurement in the performance zone.
- The organizer did not provide the agreed emergency landing strip as agreed being essential for safety

In addition to all the above the judges found themselves in an active performance zone for other commissions namely Para Motors and Aero Modelling, in fact this activity was also taking place in the area agreed as the emergency landing strip. There were some close encounters with the para motors, some of which flew within two meters of the Chief Judges position, quite amusing but actually quite serious in terms of safety.

As far as the actual competition this went to plan and with no incident, we were fortunate to experience good weather conditions and light winds throughout our contest. The lack of deadline judges did perhaps cause some controversy, as we did disqualify one competitor who had obviously crossed the deadline to the extent that he was nearly over the judges, we however had no means of assessing accurately certain other flights who may well have also crossed the deadline, but not in such an obvious manner, this is really not acceptable for a category 1 FAI event.

General Comments on the Organization of the Aerobatic Event

In retrospect the emphasis of many key aspects had been placed incorrectly, the choice of live scoring and instant display on large screens with commentary, which has been carried out successfully elsewhere, led CIVA to appoint at least nine officials, which proved unnecessary without any of this actually taking place.

On the other hand, key personnel such as Flight Director, Video Operator, and Deadline Judge were denied by the Organizer on a cost basis, this has to be put down to in the incorrect emphasis being placed on these key elements by the Organizer.

I discussed certain aspects with FAI Officials on site, who stated that they had little influence over the Organizer on a daily basis, this simply cannot be right for a FAI WAG event and surely should be reviewed for future events.

I believe the essential element which needs to be discussed is whether WAG is a serious completion at Category 1 level or basically a display of aerobatics at a high level. The initial selection criteria of a limited amount of pilots from as many countries as possible, in effect prevents WAG from really being serious, as with a few exceptions the top aerobatic pilots are limited to three nations at the most. If we reach the almost inevitable conclusion that WAG is in effect not a serious Category 1 Event, but rather a "Special Event" similar to those staged by CIVA, where the Organizer or Sponsor wants a good show of aerobatic skills, this will need to be debated especially the cost structure, but this report is not the forum for this.

General impression of the WAG in its entirety

The overall impression of the entire WAG was probably good, key aspects such as accommodation and catering were outstanding and the stay on a personal basis was good. However, there was an underlying feeling of disorganization, I am particularly happy that the aerobatic portion did not have to make use of the water rescue boats or the non-existent emergency runway. Perhaps this general feeling was summed up by the closing ceremony, I duly

took my place in the grand stand half an hour before the scheduled start, when the appointed time came carpets were still being laid and seating was not in position. The ceremony therefore commenced about an hour late and I knew that a formation aerobatic display was going to take place at 16:00 this duly happened in the middle of a speech by the FAI President, slightly amusing to the spectators.

But I was simply not prepared for what happened next, about forty balloons were seen to be approaching along the coastline, I assumed they would pass by, but it then became obvious that they intended landing on the site itself. The first landing was on the grass and the basket immediately toppled but was brought to a halt by ground personnel, others landed on the main runway and were a few meters from being in the water, however one balloon was heading straight for the grandstand in which I was seated, it finally collided with a large screen no more than a few meters from the grand stand and then clipped the rear of the stand before gaining altitude and commencing to climb. Others landed in the car park, in beach front hotel gardens and on the beach itself, there was unbelievable chaos for about twenty minutes. How no one was apparently injured or worse was beyond me, I really have never seen such confusion at an air event before.

In retrospect it is hard to believe how this could have happened at a WAG, the consequences for the FAI could have been dire, another few meters and serious injury would have occurred to spectators, perhaps this demonstrates the lack of control experienced at these games, some action needs to be taken to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

John Gaillard
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