

Vice-Presidency of the 2020-2024 World Sailing Board

Candidacy programme

Introducing Myself

I have been a sailor since my youth, racing with my father on our small keelboat. I began sailing Lasers when I was 19. At 21, due to my increase in size, I transitioned to the Finn Dinghy. As a young man, I had the great opportunity to train under the guidance of double Olympic medallist Giorgio Gorla in both the Finn and Star Class. This experience was very rewarding.

It was in the Finn that I had the most success winning the 1997 European Championship and coming second at the World Championship. Three years later, in Sydney, I won the silver medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, at age 37. Later, as a Finn coach, I worked with Vasilij Zbogor (SLO) to win a silver medal at RIO2016.

In addition to my involvement with Olympic Classes, I also organized and managed the +39 challenge during the 32nd America's Cup 2007 in Valencia, Spain. The management of all aspects of the +39 America's Cup Challenge was a life altering experience, especially with regard to the financial problems which expanded my role of skipper and technical director to dealing with all concerns of sponsors and political authorities, while managing a very tight budget. Motivating the young crew to never give up was very rewarding. This invaluable experience has prepared me to face the similar challenges facing World Sailing today, especially with regard to the needs of the emerging nations.

I continued my career in sailing as a coach, working especially with young athletes from countries like Argentina, Iran, Mexico and Venezuela among others at the Dinghy Academy. Supporting the next generation of sailors is a calling. The challenge is to pass on to the next generation not only skills, but most importantly, values. I am proud to have trained good resilient Finn sailors and see them becoming good citizens. I am especially proud when I see them, back in their countries, passing on their passion for competitive sailing especially in developing countries.

In my business career I started in 1993 and I am President of a specialist boat building firm - Devoti Sailing - an independent manufacturer which has built over 5000 boats to date.

I am a strong believer in open, competitive manufacturing. I have campaigned extensively to free our sport from monopoly manufacturers, who often charge unreasonable prices and deliver poor quality. I am pleased to see that World Sailing has recently addressed this problem with its anti-monopoly policy. Nearly 30 years of experience in this sector has given me real insight into how the small boat building market works on a worldwide basis. Especially in these troubled economic times, we must all work together to lower the entry level cost of our sport.

I am fluent in English, Spanish, German, French and Italian. My academic education has been classical, with a special interest in Latin, classic Greek and Philosophy. I studied Economics at the prestigious Bocconi University in Milan. I am also interested in Psychology.

While I am Italian national, I have lived in Spain since 2005.

My Candidacy

I have been and still am professionally engaged in different activities related to sailing, which provides me with a comprehensive insight into the culture and interests of sailors, coaches different MNA's and manufacturers. I am a driven, motivated individual whose success has been achieved through a combination of hard work and passion for Sailing.

I believe in what sailing does for people in terms of physical training, stamina, endurance, integrity, resilience and self-reliance is without parallel.

At this point in my sailing journey, I desire to contribute to the institutions that are devoted to nurturing and strengthening our sport.

I have huge respect for those who, before me, have steered the ship of World Sailing. It is a difficult challenge. Sailors are a diverse fraternity with many disciplines and MNA's with different degrees of development. Making sense out of all these voices and giving the opportunity to contribute to this global challenge is vital if we are to move forward together.

This is a challenge I am ready and willing to take on. I intend to listen, engaging openly and transparently all views, while challenging what needs to be addressed and keeping all sailors engaged as a team.

If elected, my main goals will be to ensure that World Sailing is felt as the home of all sailors and disciplines. This requires ensuring that conflicts of interest are declared, be it from commercial interests, managers, IP right holders, manufacturers or event organisers or other stakeholders are declared, understood and resolved. Transparency, good governance and, above all, the highest ethical standard be regarded by us as the hallmark of World Sailing. The organisation needs to revert to its essential role of supporting sailors through clear, predictable technical rules whose observance is essential to ensure thorough fair and transparent procedures.

I call on to all competitive sailors worldwide to join together to promote our sport in the new era that appears before us, with sailors being first, ensuring the organisation stands only at their service, and with ethics and fairness as the principles that will steer us through the current seas of change.

A Way Forward

Current times are challenging.

Across the world we feel the strong gales of the pandemic, with its devastating impact. We have seen it crushing the Olympic Games schedule, forcing a delay of one year to July 2021, with recent declarations suggesting that the Games in Tokyo could be cancelled altogether.

Around the world, the desire to turn a page and overcome all this doom and gloom is positively gaining traction. Strong Winds blow and cease, but eventually lead us to where we must Sail.

This feeling needs to be translated into policies for a sailing resurgence which is credible, all-encompassing, and exciting. Credible, because we need some certainty. All-encompassing because, if this pandemic has shown us anything, it is how important communities must be inclusive and not exclude any sailor, thus alienating emerging nations. It is simply not an option anymore. We all bond through the passion, which drives a common spirit to reach our common goals.

With that spirit, I propose specific actions in three fields

1. Organisation
2. Equipment
3. Olympic Games

Organisation

I believe we all know we have to refocus World Sailing's agenda. Recent changes have made addressing the policies of World Sailing even more acute. We should avoid throwing out the baby with the bath water. There are areas of World Sailing that need strengthening, especially those concerned with ensuring observance of the rules of the sport and their application. This requires significant technical expertise as boats and manufacturers must keep up with technical progress, and event planning. As to its the marketing activities, World Sailing should explore synergies with other organisations. An obvious example of people to team with is the group that have developed the Star Sailors League, with a well-thought out program with world class participants and an impressive event, the Gold Cup in which beautiful 47 feet yachts will compete, which has secured entries from 57 nations all over the world, under the leadership of Mateusz Kusznierewicz and Xavier Rohart.

The prime initial focus about our organisation and especially the eroded finances during these uncertain times. The sailing community should trust that its organisation is run efficiently and transparently in the true Spartan way. Recently our stakeholders have been concerned about skyrocketing office costs and insufficiently transparent sponsorship deals. We should have no time for that. World Sailing needs to invest and support in the capacity to carry out its technical, organisational, and supervisory functions, not building grand structures with expensive offices, however attractive these may be for some. If that was true before the pandemic, the current overheads are at present morally, and indeed financially, a non-starter.

Equipment

I believe we have had enough of the commercial influences on our organisation and the negative results this has brought on our sport. Sailing is probably the only sport worldwide where athletes must buy their equipment from exclusive, monopoly suppliers that have secured World Sailing's approval for their exclusive designs. I sometimes wonder how we would feel if, for instance, the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) imposed a given make of bicycles, but that is what has evolved for most categories in Sailing. As with all monopolies, this results in unacceptable, expensive, bad quality given that our very life depends to a great extent on the boats we sail which alienates young sportsmen. Fortunately, World Sailing have seen this already and have adopted an anti-Monopoly Policy, but it is being implemented slowly, burdened with influential resistance.

In part this has to do with the management and control of Conflict of Interests. World Sailing must grow past a culture of cronyism where the odd few charge royalties from offshore entities and finance activities of the very organisation that is supposed to regulate them.

Clear policies, transparency and open licensing schemes must be enforced so as to ensure improving the decision-making and the quality of the equipment sailors use to compete, and whose safety and quality must be safeguarded at all cost. This has all been introduced years ago in every other sport, and it is high time we implemented it in sailing. World Sailing should strengthen its technical and inspection capacities to ensure fair equipment, adopting and enforcing objective rules for all and monitoring the quality of the equipment to what we trust our lives to in our beloved sport of competitive sailing.

Looking ahead, we need to take a hard look at sailing options where young athletes transition. Just to give you an example - the current figures suggest that out of 800,000 young sailors sailing Optimist, 780,000 are lost when they turn 16 or younger. I wonder if a part of that has to do with the absence of a quality, exciting option for sailing, where we lack well-designed and adjustable options for all. Sailing is a weight sensitive sport. Think for instance for middle weight women. There is simply no available competitive option. World Sailing should implement a design contest so that women can continue sailing after they out-grow the Optimist? It should be an open building licence, both for single-handed and double-handed equipment. I believe this should be seriously considered - let's go for it.

The big boat offshore scene is fairly active: America's Cup, Imoca, match racing, around the world races are pinnacles that a competent World Sailing can enhance and promote even more. Special events are not a source of revenues but a valuable asset to favour and help.

On the other hand, World Sailing should delegate more to existing international organizations such as ORC the day to day administration of offshore sailing around the world. World Sailing has to help the transfer of technology towards emerging nations, favouring the birth of a local industry, fundamental to support the sport. We need to share the best practices and successful models all over the world, a key to shortcut the learning process for emerging nations.

Olympics

I propose to fight tooth and nail to save the Olympic Events in 2021. In uncertain times such as these it makes sense to consider a fall-back alternative to the 2020 Olympic Competition in the form of a World-Class Sailing Regatta; one that will make us proud as sailors, with as large and inclusive international a participation as we can make it. An event that, where possible, would feature at least all the current Olympic classes, plus classes such as J/70, Melges 24, Soling, Star, Foiling Moth and Kites, both male and female. It should be in a venue with excellent accessibility and infrastructure. I am sure many such places will come to mind, and all the voices should be heard for that choice. The challenge is to ensure a world-class event, with a special program for developing nations, marking the resurgence of sailing and making our great community proud.

A more acute necessity is to claim back the inclusion of the Paralympic Sailing Event. Sailing was one of the first five Paralympic sports at the 1960 Games. It is a perfect sport to celebrate inclusion and the values of the Olympic Movement. As sailors we cannot be mere bystanders. We need to engage back with that part of our history, one that makes us especially proud.



World Sailing's Future

Let me finish with a word on my passion for expanding the love of sailing to the next generation while building on the foundation built up over the 125 years of IYRU/ISAF/WS direction.

As a coach I am in close contact with young athletes and am acutely aware that they are the future. One day we shall all sail away and will be judged for what we leave behind. I want to hand over to them a sustainable, strong, sport based on the principles of self-reliance, honesty, endurance, and love of nature, in understanding. My candidacy is ultimately one on their behalf - this is for them.

Thank you for your ideas and support.

Respectively,

Luca Devoti