

25th August 2023

For the attention of Eugenijus Komars, Event Director.

Protest re: Task 23

I am protesting your decision to reject my complaint re: Task 23. The basis of my protest revolves around 3 points:

1. Fairness of the amended task
2. Lack of provision in the rules to change task data during flight
3. Effectiveness of WhatsApp to communicate task data

1. Fairness of the amended task

I believe the change of goal location and dropping method did cause some panic with regards to Task 23. There was a considerable and unexpected increase in workload as a result of the amendments, including changing the planned approach into the goal and flying the balloon accordingly. The Competition Operations Handbook (COH) 2.4.3 states that 15 minutes are allowed before general briefing to give pilots "adequate time" to study the task data sheet, highlighting the importance of study and preparation time for pilots, but this does not appear to have been considered in the changes to this task. Additionally no opportunity was provided for pilots to easily ask questions and seek clarification on the changes.

As the second change to the task was received in flight, I received less time to prepare for the change in task than other pilots who had taken off later, and therefore the latter gained a competitive advantage.

2. Lack of provision in the rules to change task data during flight

It is my understanding that the only times which Task Data can be provided to pilots is during task and supplementary briefings. I do not believe the event director followed the rules when the task data was modified during flight.

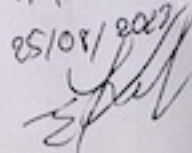
It is stated in the COH (section 2.4.10) that "it is recommended to use [modern technology] recalls only for severe cases and not to conveniently change a task minutes before the launch period" as I believe has happened in this circumstance.

I understand the issue relating to landowner access for task 23 was an unusual circumstance, however, there does exist a procedure for such a situation. Chapter 12 (12.1.2) of the rules states, "if the goal ceases to exist and no similar goal is seen within 100m, the competitor should aim for the co-ordinates."

The changes in task data made via WhatsApp were not in line with the guidance available in the rules or the COH, with the goal having been moved 282 metres.

3. Effectiveness of WhatsApp to communicate task data

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Whilst the general briefing notes stated that WhatsApp will be used for "the recall procedure, for spreading competition-related and public information, etc", **it was not made clear WhatsApp would be used for changes to task data**. Whilst I have previously received notification of cancelled tasks/flights using WhatsApp, I have never encountered changes to the task data during flight. Both myself and crew chief missed Jan's message on the 'ED' WhatsApp group sent at 5:32am – and 8 competitors did not respond to the later WhatsApp message.

Rule 8.9 states "alternatively, an official may circulate a written notice to each balloon and obtain the signature of the competitor or crew member". By using WhatsApp, it is important that the response confirming receipt requested (pilot ## + ok) by the event director acts as confirmation that the information has been both received and understood. The lack of response from 8 pilots questions whether the changes were both read and understood by those pilots.

I do not believe is possible - as you suggest - for pilots to monitor the WhatsApp channel "constantly" for changes to task data in a safe manner (as might be possible with monitoring a radio frequency). Competition balloon pilots and crew have a high workload, controlling the balloon, navigating to the tasks set and maintaining a good look out in a busy sky.

I do not believe the approach of reviewing the WhatsApp log to see when a message status is updated to 'read' is sufficient – whilst a pilot may open the message thread, and messages are marked as 'read', that does not necessarily equate to a person having read and understood a message (which may not be immediate visible on the WhatsApp group due to an excess of messages).

My motivation to bring this protest is one of seeking clarity for future flights and to uphold the respectful, fair and sportsmanlike values of competition ballooning.



Daniel Gregory,

Pilot #41

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Event director
100 EUR received

