

U.S.O.C. Asks US Sailing to Change Hearing Procedures

By CHRIS MUSELER

It has been more than a year since the American windsurfer Farrah Hall lost the Olympic trials when a competitor was placed ahead of her by a postrace ruling. But a complaint she filed with the United States Olympic Committee contesting the decision was settled in her favor last week, sparking an international debate over the autonomy of national sports authorities and litigation in sports.

"My sense of justice was affected at the trials," Hall said Wednesday. "Now I feel it's worth it knowing that everyone can have a fair trial."

Hall contended she was not given due process, as required by federal law, when she contested the decision by US Sailing, the national governing body of sailing. But officials with US Sailing maintain that they properly followed sailing rules in the process, a view that was supported at two hearings and an arbitration.

The controversy began at the women's windsurfing Olympic trials in November 2007. Hall and the eventual winner, Nancy Rios, were both involved in a collision with another competitor at the



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start of the final race. Hall won the race and led on points, but Rios asked for a better finishing position because of the incident. She was awarded the better place and wound up winning only after the decision, which was made by an off-the-water sailing jury.

Hall lodged a complaint with the U.S.O.C., asserting that the

jury's decision was wrong and that the makeup of the jury did not include proper athlete representation — 20 percent — required under the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act and the U.S.O.C. bylaws. A hearing four months before the Games and an arbitration hearing requested by Hall both con-

cluded that US Sailing had followed the rules, but Hall's U.S.O.C. complaint took issue with the rules themselves.

US Sailing officials are scrambling to respond to the decision, which asks the organization to re-write its procedures regarding jury hearings at regattas. US Sailing uses the rules of the International Sailing Federation, known as ISAF, and officials at both organizations say that applying United States law to international rules could harm the way the sport is managed.

"Right now we're working closely with the U.S.O.C. to figure out what rules we need to change," Jim Capron, US Sailing's president, said in a telephone interview Wednesday. "If it's just for events selecting Olympians, we have control over that. If it's for all events around the country, then we have to ask ISAF if we can change them."

US Sailing has until September to comply with the U.S.O.C. or risk decertification, meaning the organization would be unable to represent the country at the Olympics. The organization has 30 days to appeal the decision.