

Report on the Federation of Irish Sports media seminar for “non-Athens” sports

On April 22nd 2004 I attended a seminar organised by the Federation of Irish Sports to assist small sports bodies to increase their media coverage. This document summarises those points that arose that may be of use to Irish Orienteering.

A lot of items were only applicable to the larger sub big-five sports like hockey and sailing. The difference between the big-five (GAA, Soccer, Rugby, Golf and Horse Racing) and the others is that the media chase the big five, while everyone else has to chase the media. Do not underestimate the amount of sports clamouring for limited media attention; there are hundreds.

The bulk of the meeting took the form of a panel discussion chaired by Bill O’Herlihy, with Fred Cogley (RTE), Ger Gilroy (NewsTalk 106) and Sean Moran (Irish Times). Ger Gilroy was very impressive; he is the rising star of Irish Journalism. The rest of the meeting was comprised of a presentation about Sports Campus Ireland (irrelevant) and a presentation from a web-design company (for the birds).

- The new SportHQ facility in Parkwest is very impressive. If affordable, we should use it. At the very least it would raise our profile with the Sports Council.
- Irish Orienteering does not have the basic infrastructure in place that would be needed if we were to attempt to raise our profile. Our website lacks:
 - Athlete profiles: male/female, junior/senior
 - History of the sport internationally
 - History of the sport in Ireland
 - Profile of the sport in Ireland (events/clubs/members/participants/leagues etc)
 - Media library of high-quality photos taken by a professional agency
- We need to have a pre-packaged info-brief available in case the media do suddenly become interested in us, probably because of a piece of “hard news”; eg land-access scandal, competitor dies on course, we accidentally win the world championships etc.
- Our website has less than five seconds to attract a journalist’s attention. If it looks like it is out-of-date, they will walk away and never visit it again. The homepage must be updated at a minimum weekly. A google search using the keywords “orienteering ireland” must produce www.orienteering.ie as the first hit (ours does this).
- Text documents on the website need to be written in a different way to text on a page. 79% of people don’t read documents on screen, they scan for keywords.
- As a sport we must make a bigger effort to support the excellent work done by Martin Flynn on the website. We need to actively solicit fresh content from the membership (it is not Martin’s job to do this; he looks after presenting it on the website when it is created, or even better he delegates control of sections of the website to competent persons). Anything we can do to separate the management of website content from the look&feel and the technical details must be done.

- ♦ The Federation of Irish Sports is investigating the development of an Irish Sports Portal which they intend to be a one-stop-shop for fixtures, results, info etc.
- ♦ The media will only deal with someone if they are confident that they are:
 - Literate and able to speak on radio
 - Know the sport intimately and are conversant with current events in the sport
 - Have the full authority to speak on behalf of the entire sport. If they get a whiff that there are different messages coming from different groups, the media will walk away.
- ♦ The membership of the sport needs to be fully informed that there is one voice only. However this does not preclude interviews with high-performance athletes. This one voice should be called the “communications officer”, not the PRO; that is an out-of-date term.
- ♦ Email bombarding the sports dept with long news stories is useless. A good email will have 2 or 3 lines and will start with the words “I have a story that you may be interested in”. It should then give the email address and mobile phone number of the person to contact for full details.
- ♦ Personal contact is king. All of the sports that have successfully used the media have excellent media contacts (e.g. sailing, basketball).
- ♦ Fixture lists sent to the papers need to be accurate. Lots of sports send in lists with “to be confirmed” for venues etc; these are instantly binned.
- ♦ Results need to make it to the sports desk by 4PM on Sunday, not 9PM. The shorter the result, the more likely it will make it in. Consider dropping second and third place results, first place only.
- ♦ RTE is working on a minority sports programme. No precise details were given. Maybe it will be something like the Gillette World of Sports programme, but with Irish sports?
- ♦ Think about media friendly versions of your sport: Top Ace (handball) and Pot Black (Snooker) were given as examples of sports that successfully altered their format to suit television. Park-O world tour?
- ♦ “Ladies” compete in golf and sometimes tennis. In every other sport they are called “Women”.
- ♦ The magazine *Fairplay*, which was geared specifically at minority sports in Ireland, has closed down. This was not for financial reasons, but because of a lack of content. A huge opportunity has been lost by Irish minority sports. Paul Dunne, the last IOA PRO was one of the few who submitted content to *Fairplay*.
- ♦ We could have an opportunity that is unique to world orienteering: the possibility to influence the design of the 500 acre Sports Campus in Ireland so that it suits our sport. This facility is at the early stage of development and it may be 15 years before it is complete. They want input from sports bodies about what should be in it; they are thinking of things like velodromes, climbing walls etc, but I see no reason why we should not be able to ask for the landscaping to be Orienteering-friendly (ie, complex, not bland). It should make no difference to the overall cost at the JCB earth-moving stage of the soft landscaping.

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