

December 27, 2023

Statement in Support of Our Coach

Last week a member of our coaching staff shared the conclusion of events that occurred when he was coaching as a member of the US National Team staff at the 2023 World Rowing Under 19 Championships in Vaires-sur-Marne, France. We are issuing this statement now that the process to address the events has been closed by World Rowing.

We are proud that USRowing selected a CRI coach, and a coach of color, to be one of the 10 coaches to represent the USA at the JWRCs. As is typical for world events, USRowing along with other national teams arrived at the Paris venue prior to the official start of the Championships. Importantly, the team arrived before the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) had issued credentials to national governing bodies for staff to enter areas that would be restricted once the event began. On two separate occasions, our coach was singled out by security staff who restricted his movement on the grounds of the venue while white coaches he was with at the time were not held to similar standards for passage. Our coach spoke with the security staff respectfully and non-aggressively and in the presence of other USRowing coaches. The coach and his peer staff brought these regrettable interactions to the attention of USRowing, the head of the LOC and its head of security and asked he be provided easier passage without harassment and an explanation for why he was singled out.

Simply put, our coach was asking for the interactions to be acknowledged by the LOC with a reasonable expectation to have the situation addressed appropriately and to receive some form of an apology from the offending parties. Instead, what came back from World Rowing was a dialogue among vested interests, and, importantly, a passive stance around their role in a racial situation that was witnessed by multiple national team coaches. World Rowing took the additional step of putting in writing that our coach provoked and verbally abused the staff of the offending party; however, they failed to get input or document statements from those who witnessed the interactions. To date, World Rowing has not reached out to the other US national team coaches who were present when these events occurred to get their perspective or a statement of their experience.

Throughout the process, we are grateful that USRowing leaders took a proactive role in following through on this event several times with World Rowing and advocated on behalf of our coach. We also appreciate that USRowing leaders have been consistent in their stance in support of our coach while following the process outlined by World Rowing to address the matter.

Action steps we respectfully request from World Rowing:

- Improve the accreditation process to make credentials more readily available at the first date that international coaches and crews are given venue access so security staff can easily identify traveling members of national governing bodies
- Assume greater responsibility for the behavior and decisions of local organization committees including entities that support local events; this would create clear lines of reporting and jurisdictional clarity for all parties involved
- Take an affirmative stance in support of the parties injured by incidents involving racism or poor behavior at World Rowing events. It's not enough to be well intended and pursue dialogue only with parties which have a vested interest in remaining silent and/or not acknowledging their role in racist acts
- Ensure that World Rowing doesn't assail a national team coach's behavior or character in writing without pursuing all the facts of seemingly straightforward and correctable incidents of harassment in the future

World Rowing has stated this issue is closed, but it is not closed for our coach nor for CRI. The investigation, as World Rowing determined it, was not only incomplete, but it impugned a member of our coaching staff in writing. We do not accept the perpetuation of systemic bias nor will allow small moments like this one to pass by. While we see that this event may not be a sensational racist event, it happened and we stand with our coach—a two-time gold medal winning U19 coach for the United States and a champion of rowing for young people at Community Rowing and beyond.

Respectfully,



Ted Benford
Executive Director
Community Rowing, Inc.



Christina Baker
Board President
Community Rowing, Inc.