

Dear WCA Community,

As you are likely aware, the WCA Board published a statement roughly a week ago highlighting an immediate change to the recognition of several regions in East Asia. We have heard sufficient feedback to suggest that there is a definite need to consolidate further details about the decision and the planned direction of the WCA as a whole. We hope that the following topics can shed some light on the current and potential direction of the WCA along with the overall context and conversations that factored into this decision.

Recognition as an IOC Sport

We would first like to address the topic of why we are even looking to align with the IOC's standards in the first place. It is important here to highlight the existence of the WCA Sports Organization Team ([WSOT](#)). As its Motions outline, a current goal of the WCA is to eventually be an IOC-recognized sport, which will open ourselves to a myriad of financial opportunities and partnerships that will help to grow cubing globally. Several opportunities for feedback within WCA Staff have been started in the last few years with the goal of gauging opinion on the possibility and progress of becoming recognized as a IOC sport. Notably, a previously-debated topic was that of an anti-doping policy, which was voted on in the [WCA's Annual Meeting in October of 2021](#). With an approval percentage of ~86%, the WSOT was accepted as an official WCA Team within the WCA in 2021. Additionally, as per Page 6 of our [Vision and Strategy document](#) from 2021, becoming a registered sports organization is a significant component of our anticipated growth of the WCA.

Clearly, this is a slow process, though the WCA Board and WSOT see plenty of value in having a log of updates that is accessible to non-WCA Staff, and the likelihood is that this will exist in the WCA Forum.

Cancelation of Competitions in Mainland China

Many have wondered why there have been no competitions in Mainland China in the last two years. In short, there were several competitions that directly ran into issues with the local police for two main reasons:

1. The WCA is not officially registered in Mainland China
2. COVID restrictions within Mainland China.

Of course, an inherent risk of competitions being canceled at the venue is significantly demotivating, and the Mainland Chinese Delegates spent plenty of time evaluating how this issue could be resolved taking specific consideration to the difficulty of navigating the political situation.

Registering the WCA as an NGO in Mainland China

The main aim of the region change is to align the WCA with international standards. The so-called “Olympic model” is agreed and signed by Mainland China and Taiwan authorities, which is widely used in various international sports/organizations/activities other than the Olympic Games, including Chess, E-sports. Other organizations including the WTO, WHO, APEC follow similar standards. By using this model, we can formally register the WCA as an NGO in Mainland China and better facilitate regular WCA competitions. It has been more than two years since Mainland China last hosted a WCA competition. With COVID, post-COVID, and the geo-political changes during the past few years, it has presented a significant challenge for the community there to host WCA competitions. During these changing times, the Delegates from Mainland China have discussed repeatedly how to find a solution to get back to regular WCA competitions in Mainland China.

Consultation with Stakeholders

Some time ago, the Mainland Chinese Delegates brought the WCA Board up-to-speed with the current situation in Mainland China and outlined the necessary steps to take to ensure that competitions can resume in Mainland China. Throughout this process, Delegates from Mainland China had in-person verbal discussions with Delegates from the affected regions. This allowed for the parties to discuss with no language barrier their respective futures in the WCA. Having engaged in these discussions and shared their respective opinions, the Mainland China Delegates further developed their proposal which was eventually presented to the WCA Board and the WSOT. After this point, the Delegates from Mainland China had email exchanges, Slack discussions, and video meetings as the discussion progressed.

What if we remain as an independent organization?

While the WCA continues to operate as an independent organization, the sports organization recognition process is one in which we would be guided by organizations with more experience in handling such issues, allowing us to be able to provide valuable funding and opportunities for the overall community - which would largely include WCA Staff and competitors (in the form of prize money or stipends). While the WCA pursues opportunities for partnerships regularly, such opportunities are difficult to come across. Being recognized as an official sports organization is the primary means in which we would have access to convenient and significant avenues of funding.

Ultimately, the WCA is above all an organization focused around cubing, and while a significant portion of its charm has been in its identity as a largely grassroots organization, we have to take significant measures to ensure that the recent and projected growth can be accommodated across the globe. In moving forward with such recognition, we lose some of our ability to make our own decisions. This is the tradeoff we will need to work around.

Impact of the 2023 World Championship

The discussion of how to bring competitions back to Mainland China had been ongoing for quite a few months to this point, but the upcoming World Championship brought about the realization that the final decision needs to be made quickly, as the Nation's Cup, by definition of the event, effectively solidifies how the WCA views the regions within its body of results. If we were to register as an NGO within Mainland China, this would very likely be a point of consideration by whoever would review our application. At that, a rejection could feasibly mean the end of WCA competitions within Mainland China in particular. While this overall topic had been ongoing for several months before this concern became apparent, this concern definitely expedited this effort.

Common Concerns or Misconceptions

Political Motive

The original announcement to the website mentions that *"This is purely an effort to align with the IOC's standards."* Upon further discussion, we realize that "purely" in particular was not the correct term to use for the intended message. As many would expect, the WCA prefers to stay outside the realm of politics wherever possible, as we are by no means sufficiently qualified to make judgements on politics nor do we have appropriate diversity in our leadership to ensure that we can make unbiased decisions.

As such, the statement was intended to convey that this is not a decision where the WCA seeks to impose its personal politics - but rather to step forward in making an urgent judgment call based on standards that oversee organizations directly within the WCA's planned trajectory. We completely acknowledge that the phrasing here was misleading enough to suggest that we sought to cover up the byproduct of allowing competitions to return to Mainland China. We apologize for this oversight.

Financial gain/concerns

Upfront, we can assure you that there were no direct financial transactions involved in this decision.

Of course, the WCA would receive payments in the form of dues from competitions in Mainland China. However, the WCA has operated in significant health without these funds, and it will continue to do so with or without these funds. As such, the nature of WCA dues played no part in this decision.

There is also the angle that making this change allows us to proceed with the sports recognition process, which in short will open us to a lot of funding opportunities to enhance the competition experience. There is obviously a moral dilemma here in deciding where the line is between proceeding with the recognition process and adjusting the current political stances to align with the process. This is why we are slowly working through the needed changes such that we and the relevant stakeholders can evaluate the inevitable impacts in regards to the potential opportunities offered to the WCA.

Censorship

Several questions that we've received pertain to how the WCA will handle acts that express disagreement with these changes through means such as supplying a different flag or regulating how they represent themselves through their competition names, websites, or logo - for instance. An exact policy on this will be released in the coming weeks. However, we can assure you that we will not silence individual competitors' views on the matter.

Board Composition

At this moment, there are three members of the WCA's Board:

1. Ethan Pride, Australia
2. Blake Thompson, United States
3. Somya Srivastava, India

We address this specifically because there is an inevitable reality here that this particular decision does not affect any of the members of the WCA Board. None of them are directly impacted by the change in representation of these regions, and none of them are directly impacted by the inability to host competitions. While this allows the Board to be generally unbiased in such geopolitical decisions, the impact of changes to such regions on our day-to-day lives is minimal. This is the reality of the WCA's current state, where we are simply composed of volunteers who are willing to hold such positions. Our ideal Board composition is to have a healthy balance of backgrounds across the globe, but there are only so many members of the WCA Staff who are qualified and willing to even apply to a Board position. This proves to be especially difficult as previous Board elections often have very few individuals send in an application, and we often have to operate with very few members as a result. If you notice a lack of representation for your region on the WCA's Board, you are welcome to encourage your local WCA Staff Member(s) to apply – so long as they meet the requirements to be a candidate of the election ([Point 4 of Motion number 5.2021.1 - Election of Directors](#)).

Aligning other regions with IOC Standards

Due to the time-sensitivity, these regions are the first batch to be released, but working further towards becoming a registered Sports Organization requires us to eventually align with the IOC's recognized list of regions. As such, there are other regions within the WCA that would eventually need to be adjusted, but the WSOT and the Board are carefully evaluating these respective changes to determine the pros and cons as well as time sensitivity of such changes.

What are the benefits of being IOC-recognized?

Becoming a registered sporting organization opens the WCA up to various opportunities to support our growth. This would allow the WCA to access more financial opportunities, such

as funding from SportAccord and the IOC, while also making it easier for the WCA to seek meaningful sponsorships. This also allows for regional organizations to gain more financial support in their respective regions, which can go a long way to supporting the development and growth of speedcubing globally. This also opens several avenues and scholarships for registered speedcubers to secure grants for their efforts in the sport of speedcubing.

Why are we following the IOC standards? Were any other international standards considered?

IOC standards are shared across various international sporting organizations we hope to work with, such as the World Anti-Doping Association (WADA), and the Alliance of Independent Recognized Members of Sports (AIMS), whose policies on naming align with what we are implementing. This decision will place us in line with these international organizations and various sporting organizations of a similar size and scope of the WCA.

Examples of National Olympic Committees using this naming scheme:

- Chinese Taipei: <https://www.tpenoc.net>
- Hong Kong, China: <https://www.hkolympic.org>
- Macau, China: <http://www.macauolympic.org/EN/>

Macau, China is not listed as a National Olympic Committee but does have a National Paralympic Committee (<http://www.macauolympic.org/EN/about.aspx>).

Examples of sports federations of various levels using the same naming system (this is a very small sample):

World Athletics:

<https://worldathletics.org/about-iaaf/structure/member-federations/asia>

World Bridge Federation (WBF): <http://www.worldbridge.org/bridge-zones/qzone6/>

World Darts Federation (WDF): <https://dartswdf.com/members>

World Draughts Federation (FMJD): <http://www.fmjd.org/?p=all&cont=asia>

International Chess Federation (FIDE): <https://fide.com/directory/member-federations>

Any decision made about naming these regions would have had political considerations. The decision we have taken switches to a system of naming maintained by most other sports organizations. If we were to follow other international standards, such as that set by the United Nations, this would involve not recognizing these regions at all.

What kinds of funding would even be available to us?

Being recognized by international sporting organizations would allow the WCA to access new sources of funding to support the growth of speedcubing.

Examples:

- Association of Recognized IOC Sporting Federations (ARISF): As part of the strategic plan towards their mission, ARISF provides the ability to “Help Members to add value in their activities and increase their go to market capability.” and help sports federations access the IOC Development Support and Funding Process.
- International Olympic Committee (IOC): The International Olympic Committee has supported International Federations (IFs) with over \$63 million USD being allocated to their functioning since 2020.

These are just two specific examples of how we could get access to more funding as a recognized organization, with this also providing opportunities for funding of Regional Organizations by NOCs and domestic government initiatives, that can help support the growth of Regional Organizations in all regions, as well as more sponsorship opportunities. Alongside this, it will provide us with various benefits which we look forward to informing WCA Staff and the Speedcubing community of.

The WSOT are currently in the process of assessing the WCA’s governance standards and hope to begin implementing reforms to the WCA that would provide benefits to the community. Alongside this direct benefit, these will improve our applications to various international organizations, and we will inform staff of where this can provide direct benefit to the WCA and to Regional Organizations.

The Consequences of Aspirations for Growth

As the Board of the WCA, our ultimate goal is to ensure that we put forth the necessary resources and guidance to grow our organization and cubing as a whole. While many might think of us as more than a grassroots organization, the reality is that the further we dive into means of growing the organization – such as becoming recognized as an official sports organization – the more we need to respect the standards set forth by international sporting organizations. The need to account for geopolitics is not pleasant for anyone involved because such politics rarely constitute a win-win battle, and this means that someone within the WCA will inevitably be on the losing end. However, we are an international organization and the need to make such decisions is unfortunately unavoidable.

Furthermore, the WCA is merely a small fish in this landscape. As we work towards aligning ourselves with entities that can provide access to resources to expedite the growth of the WCA, we have far less agency in the political decisions that we can make. In opting not to pursue such opportunities, the WCA is effectively stunted in its potential growth, and we remain in a position where we need to rely on the unpaid volunteer effort of a wide span of individuals in order to operate across the globe. This proves to be a difficult moral dilemma for the WCA, and we are slowly navigating it to ensure we take careful considerations to the decisions we will need to make along the way.

To put it simply, the WCA continually receives complaints about its website crashing during competition registrations, lack of prize money for major championships, and the absence of

pay for critical members to WCA Staff. It's abundantly clear that the path for growth within the WCA is immensely difficult and luck-based if we do not take measures to pursue strict opportunities for growth. As this dilemma progresses, WSOT will work to provide their progress reports such that WCA Staff can reflect on whether the current roadmap is one in which we wish to pursue.

What if CubingChina were to be a “parallel” organization of the WCA?

We are concerned that even the listing of the results of these parallel competitions on the WCA could create issues of liability for the organizers and delegates of these competitions held in Mainland China, with the potential for significant escalation. We would not feel comfortable imposing these risks on those passionate about speedcubing in Mainland China, so we, therefore, do not see this as a suitable option on its own.

In general, it is not healthy to have two organizations (even if they start out cooperating) which will have different results, different regulations, and different records. Not to mention all major puzzle manufacturers are based in Mainland China - companies the WCA might want to have a relationship with that could be jeopardized if they'd prefer to just deal with their “local” organization. Additionally, amongst all the talk of consulting with impacted cubers, there may be strong feelings held by competitors based in Mainland China who want their results internationally recognised by the WCA.

Should the WCA be intertwined with politics?

The short answer is that we would prefer not to be, but as a global organization we are obligated to make such decisions. As much as many would dream of the WCA being apolitical, any choice we make in situations like this are inherently political. While we operated with these regions being represented as they were previously, having done so is effectively a political decision on its own. In some sense, continuing to operate under the status quo would have been the “easy” choice, but it proves difficult for the growth of the WCA. After all, keeping the regions as they are is a political stance in itself. If our goal is to foster the growth of cubing, we must remain independent of politics and allow geopolitical experts to handle political matters, and cubers to handle cubing matters.

Parallels with the Russian-Ukraine situation

This topic has been brought about many times in discussion of this decision, as it is a similar decision that also followed international standards. However, in the case of the Russia/Ukraine conflict, the path to return is much more complex due to sanctions that hinder Russia's ability to utilize fundamental resources and uphold the standards of the WCA (please note that these are beyond the control of the local Delegates). This is not necessarily the case for Mainland China, as there was a strictly-outlined approach to competitions that fit within the dynamics and expectations of competitions within the WCA.

Russia is not in this position quite yet, but this is something that WSOT will continue putting resources towards to gauge the right time and conditions for a return to competitions.

Points of Reflection

Put simply, the decision we chose seemed to be the easy course for an organization that realistically has no business making judgments like this. Adjusting these regions to allow for competitions to occur in Mainland China was a difficult measure to take, but ultimately it allowed for all involved regions to have the opportunity to compete in our speedcubing competitions, which aligns with our mission statement: *“Our mission is to have **more competitions in more countries** with more people and more fun, under fair and equal conditions.”* As such, we are left with a difficult decision that requires us to determine whether such a decision truly reflects our mission statement.

We will work this coming week to address this question and properly account for the feedback thus far. In short, the steps to be taken are the following:

1. Gauging Staff feedback on the prospect of speedcubing as a recognized sport through means of email and a live Q&A.
2. Touch base with the impacted Delegates regarding their current thoughts on the situation both overall and within their respective communities.

The community will be updated with a recap of this effort soon enough, and we appreciate your patience as we proceed with that effort.

Kind regards,

Blake Thompson, on behalf of the WCA Board and WSOT