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# Annapolis' jilted Olympic windsurfer vindicated

Hall wins ruling against US Sailing

By BILL WAGNER, Staff Writer

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Annapolis windsurfer Farrah Hall has received some serious vindication in her two-year battle with US Sailing.

On Friday, a panel appointed by the United States Olympic Committee issued a unanimous decision stating that US Sailing's protest and redress system violates the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act of 1978.

US Sailing was given six months to make its rules comply with federal law and USOC bylaws or face probation or revocation of its standing as the sport's national governing body for the sport.

Based on an initial reading of this decision, US SAILING officials believe the panel's directives, if implemented, will fundamentally change how the sport of sailboat racing is conducted in the United States.

Friday's ruling stems from a formal complaint filed by Hall against US Sailing alleging unfair procedures in determining the winner of the United States Olympic Trials in the Women's RS-X Windsurfing class. Hall, a 1999 Broadneck High graduate, won the regatta on the water, but was stripped of the title by US Sailing following a one-party protest hearing requested by



Capital file photo

A ruling confirmed that Annapolis windsurfer Farrah Hall was improperly removed from the Olympic team.

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another competitor - Nancy Rios of Cocoa Beach, Fla.

Rios claimed that a collision with another competitor had caused a significant tear in her sail that dramatically affected her

performance. A protest committee agreed with the assertion and awarded Rios second place instead of fourth in the final race of the trials. That vaulted Rios to the overall victory and resulted in her representing the United States at the Summer Olympics in Beijing, China instead of Hall.

Hall, who had already called family members and friends to inform them that she had made the Olympic team, was pulled out of a shower and informed of the decision. Hall, who was not accused of any wrongdoing in the incident, was never given an opportunity for a fair hearing to defend her self or rebut Rios' assertion that she deserved redress.

In its comprehensive 23-page ruling, the panel wrote: "this controversy could have been avoided if US Sailing had notified Hall of Rios' request for redress, allowed her to participate as a party, and made its determination on evidence submitted by both parties. Instead, US Sailing seemed to have gotten wrapped around its own rules, and the Racing Rules of Sailing, and created a situation in which neither Hall nor Rios was ably served."

Hall, who is currently training for the 2012 Olympic Games in Great Britain, welcomed the ruling.

"I am delighted that as a result of this USOC hearing panel decision other athletes will not suffer the same convoluted, expensive and prolonged procedures that US Sailing subjected Nancy Rios and me to," Hall said. "The USOC panel recognized that before a national governing body like US Sailing can change the results of an Olympic qualifying event, it has to give all the athletes involved a fair hearing."

US Sailing follows the International Sailing Federation's Racing Rules of Sailing when it comes to handling protests and requests for redress. The USOC hearing panel decision requires that US Sailing amend portions of the Racing Rules of Sailing pertaining to the following issues:

1. All protest committees at protected competitions, which is defined as any competition for which US Sailing designates an athlete to represent the U.S., are required to include at least 20 percent "elite" athlete representation.
2. All protest committees at all other competitions must include at least 20 percent athlete representation.
3. Protest committees must permit every competitor the opportunity to participate as a party in every redress hearing.
4. Protest committees must permit competitors to present testimony in ways currently prohibited by the Racing Rules of Sailing.

In a statement issued yesterday, US Sailing claimed the changes required by the decision would fundamentally change the process for resolving protests and requests for redress, which has served the sport well for many decades. The ruling affects every event hosted in the U.S., regardless of level of competition.

"This is a landmark decision that could conceivably have a wide-ranging effect on the way we race sailboats," said US Sailing President Jim Capron, a Baltimore resident and Annapolis Yacht Club member. "This goes well beyond the Olympic Trials and could affect every sailboat race in the U.S., including every Olympic and Paralympic



class event, championship and, most significantly, every yacht club weekend race, in which there is a limited but dedicated number of volunteers."

Hall, 27, said she could not have pursued by the lengthy and expensive legal case without the support of her sponsor, Annapolis-based Compass Marketing. She also thanked advisor John Bertrand, an Annapolis resident who endured his own legal battle in order to represent the United States in Olympic sailing.

Jamie Dodge Byrnes of the law firm Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher, which presented the oral argument on behalf Hall to the hearing panel, said US Sailing would be wise to follow the directive and bring its rules into compliance with U.S. law - "the same law that all the other National Governing Bodies for Olympic Sports already comply with."

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