

Olympic Boards Contribution to LA28 Format Working Party

Executive Summary

The Olympic Classes recommend the adoption of two distinct final formats across the ten Events, reflecting ongoing efforts to refine fairness and excitement in regatta conclusions.

This paper focuses on the finals format for the boards (iQFOIL and Formula Kite), aiming to balance consistency with a final day showcase, ensuring that final outcomes are both robust and dramatic. Proposed changes are grounded in stakeholder feedback and detailed event performance data, aiming to optimize athlete experience while ensuring an enticing broadcast product.

Opening Series options have been widely discussed and agreed.

Recommendation 1: Number of Final Formats

The Olympic Classes recommend implementing two distinct final formats across the ten Olympic sailing events, most likely divided between Boards and Boats. This structure aligns conveniently with the Los Angeles 2028 (LA28) Games, which effectively consist of two separate regattas: the board classes competing at Long Beach during the first week, and the boat classes competing in San Pedro during the second week.

Historically, Olympic sailing has had limited experience designing formats specifically intended to appeal to commercial audiences or engage broader fanbases. The nature of this challenge involves numerous and competing trade-offs—balancing sporting integrity, athlete experience, broadcast considerations, and audience accessibility. Given those complexities, it is improbable that a single, perfect format will be achieved on the first attempt.

By adopting two formats, the sport can sustain engagement around this discussion rather than settle it prematurely. Fans, sailors, and commentators will naturally compare the approaches as they watch. Their feedback—on what aspects enhance storytelling, viewer comprehension, and perceived fairness—will be invaluable. The contrast between the formats can provide a live case study, allowing the sailing community to collectively learn and refine toward either a unified, improved solution or a deliberate acceptance of multiple, diverse formats that illuminate different strengths and characteristics of sailing.

Recommendation 2: Final Format Design

Boards: The board classes final will continue with a straightforward and visually clear structure—four boards competing head-to-head, with the first to cross the finish line in the final race of the competition winning gold (**the “first to two wins” format**). This is a concise format well-suited to short-course stadium racing and television coverage.

Boats: The boat class finals will feature an intense and condensed racing series, maintaining a **continuous, low-point scoring series** through to conclusion rather than switching to a “winner-take-all” final-four format on the final day, integrated with results accumulated from the preceding three days of competition. Further technical details are supplied in a separate report.

Key Factors for the “First to two wins” concept

- **Credibility and merit** must remain at the heart of Olympic sailing — athletes who perform consistently across the event must retain a realistic pathway to win.
- The system must **reward performance in the Opening Series** while maintaining opportunity and simplicity in the Medal Series.
- **Broadcast clarity and reliability** are essential — formats with fewer, well-structured races consistently proved more understandable for audiences and commentators.
- Athletes overwhelmingly prefer **formats that feel earned rather than elimination-based**, with clear opportunities to recover or advance based on racing performance.
- In high-speed classes like Kite and IQ **races of more than 4 boards were incredibly difficult to manage** through direct or digital umpiring, also more difficult to follow for broadcasters.
- Sailors ‘sitting out’ rounds was balanced through the ability of leaders to have **more than one opportunity to win in the Grand Final**
- The winner of the Opening Series must be beaten twice to take Gold away from them.

Maximising viewing potential

In the “First to two wins” Medal Series, all competitors entering the Medal Series have **almost equal chances to win Gold**. Previous performance in the Opening Series is rewarded by **staggered seeding** into the elimination rounds of the medal series, but up to the Grand Final all boards start with the **same chances of advancing**. There are no points carried forward.

This approach will attract broadcasters from all countries participating in the Medal Series, as any of these countries has a chance to win a medal, including Gold. **No medal is decided before the beginning of the Medal Series**, or in fact, the conclusion of the Grand Final.

There are two options that we propose to be tested to maximize viewing potential:

- “First to two wins” with 10 boards advancing from the Opening Series
- “First to two wins” with 8 boards advancing from the Opening Series

Both options are designed to fit a 52-minute window (per event). This has been extensively tested in live broadcasts of both classes.

Proposed Medal Series – “First to 2 Wins” 10 Board Medal Series



The **top ten athletes** from the Opening Series progress to the medal series:

Quarter Final

- Boards ranked **7th to 10th** from the Opening Series compete in a single race.
- The **winner** of this Quarter Final advances to the Semi Final.
- The remaining athletes are eliminated and ranked 8th-10th depending on their finishing position.

Semi Final

- The Semi Final features the **4th, 5th and 6th-placed** athletes from the Opening Series, joined by the **winner of the Quarter Final**.
- The **winner** of this Semi Final progresses to the Grand Final.
- The others are ranked by their finishing order in the race.

Grand Final

- The Grand Final consists of the **top three athletes** from the Opening Series and the **winner of the Semi Final**.

The **1st-placed athlete from the Opening Series begins with one race win**.

- All other competitors start on zero.
- The first athlete to achieve **two race wins** becomes the **Gold Medallist**, which ensures the **winner of the final race always takes Gold**, with **Silver and Bronze** decided by the next wins or finishing positions.

Proposed Medal Series – “First to 2 Wins” 8 Board Medal Series



The **top eight athletes** from the Opening Series progress to the medal series:

Quarter Final

- Boards ranked **5th to 8th** of the Opening Series compete in a single race.
- The **1st 2 boards** in the Quarter Final advance to the Semi Final.
- The remaining athletes are eliminated and ranked 7th and 8th depending on their finishing position.

Semi Final

- The Semi Final features the **3rd and 4th** athletes from the Opening Series, joined by the **first 2 boards in the quarter final**.
- The **1st 2 boards** in the Semi Final progress to the Grand Final.
- The others are ranked by their finishing order in the race.

Grand Final

- The Grand Final consists of the **top two athletes** from the Opening Series and the **top two boards from the Semi Final**.

The **1st-placed athlete from the Opening Series** begins with one race win.

- All other competitors start on zero.
- The first athlete to achieve **two race wins** becomes the **Gold Medallist**,

which ensures the **winner of the final race always takes Gold**, with **Silver and Bronze** decided by the next wins or finishing positions.

How many boards in the Medal Series ?

Viewing Potential, Balance, and Competitive Fairness

Aspect	10-Board Format	8-Board Format
Leader Reward	1st from series begins with one race win.	1st from series begins with one race win.
Win Condition	First to 2 race wins = Gold. Winner of the final race always takes Gold.	First to 2 race wins = Gold. Winner of the final race always takes Gold.
Leader Protection	Very strong – top three directly in Final, ensuring an equitable Final where all pre-qualified sailors race together.	Strong – top two directly in Final; slightly less equitable as two join later from Semi.
Athlete Inclusion	Broader inclusion – full Top 10 race on final day. However, only race wins progress, so advancing is harder for lower seeds.	Slightly reduced inclusion (Top 8) but two progress from each stage, making advancement more achievable.
Progression Difficulty	Harder pathway for lower-ranked athletes – must win each round outright.	Easier progression path – two can advance from each stage,
Impact of Sitting Out Rounds	More equitable for leaders – all top three in the Opening Series go straight to Final, reducing the “cold race” issue. First to two wins protects again racing cold	Slightly less equitable – only top two sit out, giving potential advantage to semi final qualifiers. First to two wins protects again racing cold
Race Management	4 boards per heat for direct umpiring	4 boards per heat for direct umpiring
Broadcast and Operational Efficiency	Predictable and balanced number of races with strong narrative of elimination by wins.	Equally predictable, slightly more dynamic due to two progressing per stage.
Overall, Character	Classic Top-10 identity; greater prestige and protection for leaders; more merit-based advancement.	Streamlined Top-8 system; slightly faster flow and broader opportunity for comeback performances.

Rationale and Alignment with World Sailing Objectives

The proposed format represents a balance between credibility and simplicity. It draws directly on feedback from athletes and data gathered across multiple international test events.

It aligns closely with World Sailing's stated aims to deliver formats that are:

- Clear and exciting for broadcast audiences; (Maximum number of nations with a medal opportunity)
- Credible and respected by athletes;
- Consistent across disciplines; (IQ and Kite, week one sports)
- Practical for race officials and easily standardised.

This also aligns with the Final Report posted by the Format Working Party in its review of Formats used for Paris 2024 Olympic Games/Proposals for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.

https://d7qh6ksdplczd.cloudfront.net/sailing/wpcontent/uploads/2024/11/08142924/Item_5.3_5.4-Format-WP-PARIS2024- LA2028-REPORT-06.11_Final-copy-1.pdf

Recommendation 3: Chose a format that is tested and proven

The proposed format is the only format that has already been extensively tested by two classes over the past 1.5 years since the Paris Olympics and that is fully supported by sailors and teams.

Furthermore, the proposed boards format finds broad support in the sailing media world, including media personnel that is regularly employed by World Sailing for pinnacle events.

Recommendation 4: Confirming details

We recommend testing the two scoring options at the 2026 Palma and Hyeres regattas with a final decision taken following these regattas.

- "First to two wins" with 10 boards advancing from the Opening Series -> iQFOiL in Palma, Kites in Hyeres (or vice versa)
- "First to two wins" with 8 boards advancing from the Opening Series-> Kites in Palma, iQFOiL in Hyeres (or vice versa)

Conclusion

The iQFOiL Class and the International Formula Kite Class recognise and supports World Sailing's goal of enhancing the Olympic sailing product.

This format proposal reflects the collective work of athletes, coaches, and organisers to find a credible, athlete-supported, and broadcast-friendly medal format.

We believe the First-to-Two-Wins model represents the best-tested, most credible compromise for the board sports. A structure that preserves the integrity of Olympic Sailing while creating a compelling and understandable sporting narrative.

The Classes remain committed to continued collaboration and testing and invites the opportunity to present further data and findings to the Events Committee and Format Working Group in support of shared objective.

Addendum 1: Medal Series Format Comparison

WS Criteria for Medal Racing

The following criteria, endorsed by the World Sailing Board (October 2025), are used to evaluate proposed medal race formats for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.

Mandatory Criteria (must be met):

1. Predictability: Fixed race start/finish times, scheduled medal/progression races.
2. Maximum Medal Opportunities: Maximise nations with a real medal chance in the final.

Important Criteria:

3. Simple Excitement: Easy to explain, compelling to watch, intuitive winner tracking.
4. Performance Rewarded: Regatta and series performance meaningfully improves medal chances.

Guiding Principles:

5. Reflects the Nature of Sailing: Shifting conditions, wide skill range, avoids negative tactics.
6. Practical and Scalable: Suitable for large regattas, efficient resources, universal access.

Paris 2024 iQFOiL Format

Status: Tested

Top 10 format culminating in a 3-board, 1-race final. The winner of the last race takes Gold, regardless of Opening Series performance.

Evaluation Summary (WS Criteria):

- 1. Start/finish times are predictable, but the all-or-nothing nature of the final creates limited outcome reliability.
- 2. Medal opportunity is maximised with 10 sailors qualifying, but the final race outcome can override prior performance.
- 3. High excitement due to winner-takes-all structure, but less intuitive if top sailor loses medal due to one poor race.
- 4. Poor reward for Opening Series performance; regatta leader can finish without a medal.
- 5. Limited reflection of broader sailing skills—final outcome rests heavily on a single race.
- 6. Very practical and scalable; easy to broadcast, schedule, and explain.

Lanzarote “First-to-2 Wins”

Status: Tested

A Top 8 format where 1st overall carries one win into the final, and the first sailor to win two final races wins Gold.

Evaluation Summary (WS Criteria):

- 1. Series structure is predictable and runs in a fixed number of stages.
- 2. All top 8 have a chance at medals; single-sailor elimination limits inclusion slightly.
- 3. Clear progression with carry-in advantage makes the format engaging and understandable.
- 4. Opening Series leader has a meaningful edge but still must perform again.
- 5. Includes repeated racing and dynamic matchups; good reflection of sailing.
- 6. Simple to deliver and easily adaptable to other fleets or regattas.

Palma “First-to-3 Wins” (Paris 2024 Formula Kite Grand Final format)

Status: Tested

1st carries 2 wins, 2nd carries 1 win into a 4-board final. The first sailor to 3 wins takes Gold.

Evaluation Summary (WS Criteria):

- 1. Format has fixed end conditions and provides suspense without overrunning.
- 2. Top 8 inclusion and comeback potential provide strong medal opportunity spread.
- 3. Easy-to-follow point ladder; commentators and audience can track progress simply.
- 4. Series leader retains large advantage but still must close the series with at least one more win.
- 5. Favors broad sailing skill and consistency across several races.
- 6. Logistically solid, but longer potential duration than other formats.

Hyerres “Advantage” Format

Status: Tested

1st carries 1 win, 2nd has ‘advantage’ (lane choice or similar) in Race 1 of the 4-board final. First to 2 wins takes Gold.

Evaluation Summary (WS Criteria):

- 1. Defined series structure, but advantage concept is harder to present visually.
- 2. Maintains 8-board opportunity across phases with progression via merit.
- 3. Moderately engaging, but ‘advantage’ is harder for the audience to appreciate.
- 4. Reward balance tilts toward 1st overall; 2nd gains opening leverage.
- 5. Still includes repeated racing and opportunity for strong all-round sailors.
- 6. Fairly easy to scale and deliver at major events.

Aarhus “0.5 Bonus” Format

Status: Tested

1st carries 1 win, 2nd carries 0.5 into the final. First to 2 wins secures Gold.

Evaluation Summary (WS Criteria):

- 1. Predictable maximum of 3 races; simple series timing.

- 2. Broad inclusion for top 8; chance to advance remains real for all.
- 3. Win tally system is intuitive and builds excitement.
- 4. Reward is differentiated between 1st and 2nd but still surmountable.
- 5. Good mix of consistency, pressure, and tactical racing.
- 6. Format is easily explained, delivered, and fair across large fleets.

Super Final

Status: Tested (U23)

Top 10 race to enter a 4-board final. 1st = 1pt, 2nd = 0.5, others = 0. Winner of last race wins Gold.

Evaluation Summary (WS Criteria):

- 1. Hard stop at 4 races makes timing predictable.
- 2. Maximum participation, but final outcome can swing on one lucky break.
- 3. High-stakes final is dramatic but risks feeling arbitrary.
- 4. Series position only gives a marginal advantage; not enough reward.
- 5. May undervalue consistency and good racing habits.
- 6. Simple to run and schedule, but lacks perceived fairness at elite level.

Top 10 First-to-2 Wins (1st = 1 Win)

Status: Proposed

10 competitors with top 3 into final. 1st carries 1 win; others at 0. First to 2 wins takes Gold.

Evaluation Summary (WS Criteria):

- 1. Series flow and number of races are clear and easily managed.
- 2. Top 10 access, with realistic chances for at least 4 boards in final.
- 3. Progression and scoring are intuitive and visual.
- 4. Gives Opening Series winner meaningful but fair head start.
- 5. Maintains variety, pressure, and dynamic racing.
- 6. Works well across regatta types and fleet sizes.

Top 10 First-to-3 Points (Weighted)

Status: Proposed

Final has 1st = 2pts, 2nd = 1pt, others = 0. Race 1 = 1pt, others = 2pts. First to 3 points wins.

Evaluation Summary (WS Criteria):

- 1. Predictable max race count and scoring method simplify event control.
- 2. Broad medal access with comeback potential from 3rd/4th.
- 3. Simple visual tally creates engaging suspense and outcome clarity.

- 4. Reward scaling differentiates 1st/2nd/3rd credibly; requires sustained wins.
- 5. Multiple races reward consistency under pressure.
- 6. Balanced structure with fair delivery and easy adaptation.
- Evaluation of tested and proposed iQFOiL medal race formats against World Sailing's six key criteria.

Addendum 2: Summary Matrix - Evaluation Against WS Criteria

****  Detailed Format Rankings vs WS Criteria (1–4 & 5–6)****

Criteria 1 and 2 are mandatory.

Format	1. Predictability	2. Medal Opportunity	3. Reward for Series	4. Clarity	5. Reflects Nature of Sailing	6. Practical & Scalable
Top 10 First-to-3 Points (Weighted)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Top 10 First-to-2 Wins (1st = 1 win)	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Super Final (Top 8)	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
Aarhus 0.5 Bonus Format	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lanzarote First-to-2 Wins	○	✓	○	○	✓	○
Palma First-to-3 Wins	✗	✓	✓	○	✓	○
Paris 2024 Format	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓