

F2D News - February 2006

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In the words of the great Bob Dylan, “The times they are a changin’.” Many of you may not be aware of this, but we, the F2D community, are now at an important juncture. We are not exactly under attack, but two fronts have opened up on national and international levels and a proactive response is needed from the entire F2D community. This month I will try to explore the relevant issues on both sides of these matters, and add my own thoughts on how we, as a community, might best respond.

First I will begin on the national level. I recently received a letter from the AMA and an accompanying booklet entitled “World Championship Teams – Procedures Governing the Academy’s Sponsorship of FAI Teams.” This booklet contains the AMA’s rules and procedures for selecting and funding teams to represent the United States at World Championships in all aeromodeling classes. This document was revised in November of last year; the changes strongly reflect the changing face of the AMA and the aeromodeling community in the U.S.

It is no secret that the majority of AMA members are so-called “sport flyers” who do not actively participate in competitive aeromodeling. There has long been an ongoing debate between competition modelers and sport-flyers about the role of the AMA, distribution of its funds, etc. This is an old issue and has been discussed at length elsewhere so I will not belabor this point too much. The one thing I will say about it is that we as competition fliers are *extremely* lucky to have such wonderful people as AMA President Dave Brown, who understands our position and the value of competitive activities, on the Executive Committee.

Basically, I think we are holding on by a thread, and the executive committee seems to be doing the best they can to help us hold on. As evidenced by recent changes in the structure and content of the AMA magazine *Model Aviation*, the AMA is slowly being forced to bend to the increasingly strong voice of sport-flyers. Changes in the magazine are one thing (which I have no strong feelings about), but changes to the Team Selection program are a much bigger deal.

Let me break it down for you – the bottom line is that the competitors in each event are now personally responsible for ensuring the availability of funds from the AMA through their participation and outstanding performance in the Team Selection Program and World Championships. A points system has been implemented, where an event earns points by demonstrating a strong following through the number of Team Selection participants and by demonstrating competitiveness on an international level through top-5 and podium finishes at the World Championships. If an event fails to reach a certain point threshold, funding will be cut off.

I will admit that this is a reasonable sounding system, and a much better compromise than the immediate cut of funding that some were probably asking for (pure speculation). However, it should send a chill down your spine and show what kind of atmosphere we’re in here. What this means to us in the U.S. is that now is the time that we really need to show our enthusiasm for F2D by holding lots of events, and by drawing a large turnout at the Team Trials. The next Team Trials is still a year and a half away, but I already urge all of you to enter this contest, regardless of your perceived chances of winning, to show your support for our event. It is no question that our current team members will give 100% to represent us well in Spain this summer and hopefully earn F2D some additional Brownie points with the AMA. I hope everyone else will try to do his/her part as well to show our determination to keep F2D alive in the U.S.

The second issue facing us today is one that may change the face of F2D across the globe. Safety has always been a matter of concern for the FAI, and in particular for the Control Line Subcommittee that oversees the rules governing the F2 events. For whatever reasons they may have, the perceived risk of flyaways has become a major issue in the eyes of the Control Line Subcommittee. An often cited reason for the fear is the ever-increasing speeds of F2D models, but to my knowledge there is no direct evidence or chain of logic linking increased speed with flyaway potential. Any effort to reduce flyaways by changing model specifications in order to slow them down would be more or less a wasted effort on the part of the CL Subcommittee, and would serve little purpose other than to make existing technologies obsolete (expensive for all parties involved) and to possibly drive many fliers away from the sport. This is not the way to address

the issue of flyaways.

The topic of safety was discussed in the August 2005 issue of the F2D News. If you haven't read that article or don't remember it clearly, I recommend that you find it in the F2D News archive online (F2DNews.homestead.com) and have a look at it. Jari Valo wrote to me with some very interesting comments and suggestions, which are discussed in that article. More recently, I have been in contact with Jari again and with Dave Lovgren, perennial member of the Canadian F2D Team.

One interesting point that all of us have wondered about is whether or not the frequency of flyaways has actually increased in recent years. Even though it is not clear that flyaways are happening more often these days, the social and political climates in the U.S. and Europe may have changed to such an extent that one or two bad accidents could result in very serious repercussions for the sport. Regardless of whether or not the frequency of flyaways has increased, they do pose a risk to bystanders and I do believe that we should do everything in our power to keep the event as safe as possible.

One thing that Jari mentioned recently and that I believe would be very helpful in addressing the flyaway problem is for us to start collecting data on flyaways. We should be interested not just in how many flyaways are occurring, but should also try to characterize the situations in which they most commonly occur and to pinpoint (when possible) the specific reason for the model to become detached from the pilot's control. Though shutoffs are an obvious route to improved safety, no shutoff device can ever be 100% effective. It is very much in our interest to ascertain the reasons why flyaways occur and to try to treat the problem, not just the symptom.

It is my belief (and I believe it is shared by many others) that a large fraction of flyaways are caused by bad behavior of pilots who jerk or saw on the lines during line twists. Taking steps to ensure better enforcement of the rules such as Jari's revised warning system (see August 2005 issue) seem like a very good step in the right direction. This would improve safety and at the same time improve the fairness of the event for those who prefer to fly within the rules of the sport.

Shutoffs will no-doubt eventually become an integral part of our F2D equipment. In Fast combat they have showed their efficacy on countless occasions, though they also have showed how even the most reliable systems can be subject to freak accidents that cause them not to function. Although the technology has been developed in Fast combat, there are certain new challenges faced in F2D that would need to be addressed before shutoffs could effectively be implemented in F2D without severely disrupting the event.

Any shutoff rules will also have to be extremely well thought-out before being agreed upon, as the issue is quite complex and a poorly written or implemented rule could wreak havoc on the event. As Dave Lovgren has suggested, if shutoffs are not introduced properly, it might cause a large number of people to quit the sport. That is certainly not the reaction we would like. What we really need is an open dialog between FAI officials and active combat pilots about this matter. Then we should decide on a time table for the implementation of shutoffs, giving ample time for the technology to develop before it is required across the board (perhaps 2 years).

It is rumored that the CL Subcommittee will discuss this issue at their upcoming meeting, so it is very important that they understand the complexities of all the issues involved and their range of options for dealing with flyaways. Here is where we need a proactive response from F2D pilots around the world. We need you to contact your representatives or any members of the CL Subcommittee whom you may know and make your voice heard. Change is surely needed, but we need to ensure that the change is for the better.