

Olympic double medalist on Kite Boarding in the Olympics



'Brett Sellers (helm) and Bruce Kendall (NZL) sailing in the Tornado in the Breitling Regatta' [Breitling Regatta](#) [Click Here to view large photo](#)

Olympic Gold and Bronze medalist, and multiple World Windsurfing Champion, Bruce Kendall writes on the topic of whether Kiteboarding is too dangerous for inclusion in the Olympic Events Regatta.

Kendall's background a credentials are set out at the end of the letter. As well as his windsurfing expertise, he has been kiteboarding since 1997 and says it is now his main recreational sport.

He writes:

I have been surprised and shocked by many 'experts' regarding kite-boarding being in the Olympics.

In a recent article, the 'ex - pope' of yachting encouraging the decision makers to 'have courage and have a leap of faith and replace windsurfing with kite surfing' tops the lot.

They may have been seduced by the high numbers of recreational kite boarders around or kite boarders' impressive speeds and jumps.

In my opinion anyone supporting kite surfing in the Olympic Games is ignoring a number of serious issues relating to the sport.

Rigging, Launching and Landing

This is the most dangerous part of the sport.

Kite boarding requires a lot of space. The lines are normally 25 to 30 meters long and the kites 6 to 16 meters square. The Rigging, launching and landing area should be clear of obstacles and the wind should not be gusty.

The rigging, launching or landing areas should have steady clean wind, should not be too small, too crowded, or have too many obstacles such as trees, structures such as signs, poles, power lines, buildings fences etc or be too close to a busy road, airport, cliffs etc.

Launching and landing a kite normally requires assistance of a most preferably experienced person to hold the kite while the 'Kite Boarder' controls its flight.

Nearly every kite boarder has had a launching or landing 'Kite Mare' or 'near death' experience. Some have died or been seriously injured.

Seriously dangerous

Kite boarding is closer to wake boarding and para gliding off cliffs and mountains than it is to sailing.

I upgrade my equipment every few years. The safety systems have improved a lot and the wind range and depower systems have also advanced.

Kite boarding requires one to be strapped to a large kite and harness the wind -which as every sailor knows, can be unpredictable. Sudden wind changes can happen quicker than any reaction time and put the rider and those around in danger. Once one is moving at very high speed or more than a few meters in the air, it can be difficult to have the presence of mind to make the right decision to eject or it could be physically difficult due to injury or 'G' forces.

Persons that may get hit by the kite or tangled in the control bar or lines may also suffer serious injury.

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In the past 10 years in NZL there have been two deaths from Kites and well over 20 serious injuries requiring major corrective surgery.

In Almanarre France during the last 10 years, there have been 4 deaths.

http://www.kitebeaches.com/kitesurf/loc/1_almanarre.html

In the last ten years, it has been reported that globally there have been 121 deaths due to kite boarding.

I can find no statistics for those being seriously injured, but would expect them to be significant.

Statistically, Kite boarding is clearly the most dangerous sailing sport.

Conditions Required for Kite Boarding / Sea Worthiness

A common rule for most kite boarders is 'don't go further away from land than you are prepared to swim.' Off shore winds can be dangerous.

Most kite boarding equipment cannot get up wind in below 10 knots of wind.

Gusty, shifty and unstable conditions are extremely difficult and potentially dangerous, especially if there are up draughts, very large gusts or storm cells. There is some pretty impressive footage on YouTube with kite boarders landing a long way inland, or amongst buildings, [not always ending up in good condition.]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4J9mHbJJqo>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZ7irhS1I04&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kw76CYPqizY&feature=related>

Static build up in the air, such as before electrical storms, builds up an electrical charge in the kite and lines and when the 'pilot' lands from a jump, they experience an often unpleasant and some times very large electrical shock. Most kite boarders will not stay out long in those conditions.

Danger summary.

Kite boarding requires a lot of space on and off the water.

Kite boarding requires trained assistance to launch and land the kites.

Kite boarding requires stable cross-shore or on shore wind conditions of more than 10 knots or a security vessel.

Kite boarding must be treated with the same respect one needs for Paragliding off mountains & cliffs.

Common kite boarding competitions.

Free style.

Hang time

Course racing / marathons

Speed sailing

Freestyle

This is the most common and interesting to watch.

Competitions involve a small number of competitors going out at the same time in the same area and are judged by a panel of judges on the execution of free style tricks.

As with any 'judged sport' the decisions are not always considered fair and correct.

This event requires more than 12 knots to be of interest.

Hang Time

This is involves timing how long one stays in the air.

It is often run in conjunction with free style events as the equipment is similar or the same.

This event requires more than 15 knots to be of much interest.

Course racing / Marathons

These are run the same way as a sailing race.

This is the most attractive event for older windsurfers and kite surfers.

The board designs are very different and are often the deciding factor.

Evolution of the equipment is very fast at this time.

The rules are not well established globally, the numbers of events and number of competitors globally are low.

The required logistics are often too specialized to have an event with racing every day for a 5 or 7-day series.

Speed sailing:

Unless there is more than 25 knots of wind, this is a non-event.

Records can only be made in above 30 knots of wind.

Kite surfing competition summary:

Judged / subjective sports are not that suitable for yachting.

Apart from free style and hang time events, the equipment is specialized to the point where the equipment and conditions often make the biggest difference, not the skills of the rider.

The evolution of equipment is still happening very quickly and a one-design format is too early to establish.

In summary:

Kite boarding is currently not suitable as an Olympic Sailing Sport.

It is too early to establish if it ever will be.

At best, it could be a 'demonstration event' separate from the Olympic Venues and without official Olympic Class status as the windsurfer class was in 1984.

Kite surfing should be welcomed to be part of the ISAF World Cup tour to help establish if and how it could fit into the Olympic Sailing arena.

Bruce Kendall's background credentials on this subject.

Bruce has been closely involved with windsurfing as an Olympic sport from the moment it was made Olympic and has not left the sport since.

- Won the Olympic Bronze Boardsailing Medal in 1984, the Gold in 1988 and fourth in 1992.

- Won the Olympic Class World Championships in 1993 and second in 1994.

- Helped his sister Barbara Kendall win her Olympic Gold medal in 1992 and her silver medal in 1996, Nickos

Kaklamanakis's Olympic Silver medal and has worked with and coached Aaron McIntosh, JP Tobin, Tom Ashley and the HKG and Chinese Windsurfing teams.



- Currently coaching the HKG RSX team and intends to retire from coaching as his main vocation after the 2012 Olympics due to family reasons.

- Coached Sharon Ferris & her team to second in the 2003 World Yngling Championships.

Kendall clearly has a good understanding of Olympic Yachting in Windsurfing and kiteboarding and the regatta format generally and what would and would not work.

He started kite boarding in 1997 and it has become his main recreational sport when conditions allow. He has judged in the 2001 New Zealand Red Bull Kite Boarding Championships.

Kendall believe that he could coach kite boarding as he could any other form of sailing.

by Bruce Kendall

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