

Report to the USHPA BOD: The 2009 Big Spring US Nationals

Attendance:

This year's event was very well received by the pilots who attended, who were unstinting in their praise for the meet and continually said how much fun that they were having. We had a total of thirty-three competitors throughout the event. The minimum number of required FAI Sporting licensed competitors to qualify for CIVL WPRS points (15) was met in the open flex wing class, but not in the Swift or Rigid Wing Class (as has been also true of all proceeding US competitions under the current CIVL rules) . [Almost all of the top NTSS ranked pilots](#) attended (nine out of the top ten, for example), as expected. Dustin didn't come because he was attending and winning the Brazilian Nationals.

Regarding CIVL sanctioning the USHPA Competition Rulebook states:

2. 4. CIVL Sanctioning All USHPA sanctioned meets are encouraged to apply for CIVL sanctioning as well so that pilots attending the meets can earn WPRS points.

The Big Spring US Nationals was [CIVL sanctioned](#) in keeping with the above encouragement of the USHPA Rulebook.

The open flex wing class at the Big Spring co-Nationals had thirty competitors while the King Mountain co-Nationals had thirty-four competitors who competed in this class.

Larry Bunner lbunner@aol.com (who attended both halves of the US Nationals series) writes:

First and foremost the city of Big Spring clearly is in strong support of hang gliding. They make a significant investment both monetarily and in time to make the pilots feel welcome and supported.

Second, the conditions at Big Spring are second to none in the US. I have flown in two competitions there and not one day has been cancelled. The lift is big and comfortable to fly in and is well marked by fluffy cu's. Many pilots had personal bests for altitude gain, hours and miles.

Third, the tug pilots were outstanding. They pulled us up right into the good lift, taking us up wind on the windier days and circling under the clouds on the other days to ensure the pilots had the best opportunity to get up and on task.

The Maryland-Pennsylvania area was well represented with eight pilots this year. I will be back next year and hope to bring along a few more pilots from the surrounding areas.

Conditions:

Flying conditions this year did not have the usual 160-300 km distances (as well as out and returns and triangle tasks) we are used to seeing every day at Big Spring due to the fact that there were sometimes cu-nimbs in the panhandle area, however we did have very challenging tasks of 130 to 160 km on each of the seven out of seven competition days that we flew. We didn't cancel any days,

even with higher than normal winds, because the winds are easily handled here in the flatlands with no mountains nearby. It was often as though we had glass-off conditions and all the pilots had fun flights.

We had one day where the task was stopped after an hour and six minutes, due to a nearby gust front and a cu-nimb (all pilots landed safely). Another task was cut short (after 130 km) by a cu-nimb to the north of the course.

The weaker-than-normal conditions reduced the racing that normally favors us in Big Spring, and on some days required to pilots have additional patience. Many pilots made it to goal on all five of the days that flex wing pilots made it to goal at all. Numerous pilots were rewarded with their longest flights ever and their first goal flights.

We used [four weather models and numerous weather services](#) to arrive at our weather predictions at 10 AM each morning. A full weather briefing was given to the task committee each morning (and a reduced one to the pilots at 11 AM). The weather forecasting was crucial in determining the tasks and avoiding the areas of unpleasant conditions. Normally it is quite rare to have conditions here in August that would cause any concerns to hang glider pilots, which makes the forecasting a matter of looking at the winds and the lift, as well as cloud base. This year we took it much more seriously and were rewarded with excellent results.

The launch and flying conditions found at Big Spring allowed for all the pilots to launch and be included, and to start all the tasks and fly safely on all tasks. No pilot had to experience challenging conditions on launch no matter what the wind strength or direction with a wide open expansive plain in front of launch. The landing fields are huge and it required phenomenal misjudgment not to land safely. Because all the pilots could launch and get into the air high above the Big Spring airport, it made for a fair competition and a fully valid meet.



Jeff O'Brien. Video stills by Niels Dachler.

Validity:

A total of [21,291 kilometers were flown](#) by the pilots during the competition. Seven tasks were flown on seven days, all but one of them valid tasks worth at least 900 points on each day using the OzGAP 2005 scoring system - the approved method by the [USHPA competition rulebook](#). Five days were worth almost 1000 points and the one day when the task was stopped was worth more than 800 points.

The standard for full validity of the USHPA sanctioned competition is 3,600 points. This meet was worth 6,400 points. It was a fully valid meet, and then some.

Every single day was a completely valid day, including launch validity and task validity.

The average flight in the flex wing class was 100 km. Compare this with the average flight length flown at the King Mountain co-Nationals.

Mentoring/Clinics:

Each day the top pilots presented information on how other pilots could improve their speed and flying. In addition, there was plenty of informal mentoring for the newer pilots, although we did not have clinics in the evenings because almost all the pilots were too tired after flying great distances each and every day. In addition, Belinda held numerous personal driver briefings to help educate drivers new to Big Spring on the routes and procedures. Her briefings were extremely popular and resulted in increased safety and awareness. Many drivers commented on how valuable these briefings were to them.

Safety:

During the event we had no injuries. One pilot clipped a fence on landing far from the airport, took out his control frame and put a fence post through his sail. But he had a backup glider ready to go at a moment's notice as this often happens to him, and he was flying and winning the next day. EMT's, ambulances, and EVAC helicopters were on site every day and were not used.

Like almost all other hang gliding competitions around the world (one notable exception being the King Mountain co-Nationals), the Big Spring US Nationals had a safety committee and a safety officer who monitored the weather conditions and was empowered to stop a task if it became unsafe along the course line. David Glover was in contact with Belinda Boulter, who was assigned to monitor conditions and was driving the course line, as well as with many other drivers. If they or their pilots spotted unsafe conditions along the course they contacted David to get him to stop the task, if that was what was called for. The drivers were in almost constant contact with David if the conditions were iffy, and could get him to stop the task at a moment's notice.

Sometimes in the middle of a competition when there are difficult weather conditions or when pilots are over difficult terrain, having another level of observation, and the ability to stop the task can help pilots make better safety decisions.

This is by far the standard practice and is extremely important when flying in areas of outrageous turbulence or possible cu-nimb activity. For example, at the 2008 US National in Lakeview, Mike Haley, the meet director, did similar duty driving along the course line to keep in touch with weather conditions. He was able to keep pilots flying when it looked like a cu-nimb might be near, since he could see that it was far enough away from a certain turnpoint that we could keep flying safely. Not to do this is to engage in unsafe competition.

The gaggles at the Big Spring US Nationals were very manageable, and we have had no problem at all with gaggles when we have had 120 pilots or more flying there in the past. We used large exit cylinders (15 km) and could have used entry cylinders to spread pilots out if there had been an issue. Gaggles have rarely been a big safety issue, especially relative to weather conditions.

In the past twenty five years we in the competition community have tweaked and learned how to improve all the facets of racing and safety.

We had very experienced tug pilots who flew without any problems. We had Bobby-Bailey built carts and ground personnel who knew how to keep pilots safe. We had a few minor problems with broken weaklinks, likely due to pilots choosing incorrect settings for the adjustable back cradles on the carts. These problems were solved by pilots taking responsibility for adjusting the carts to their preferences.

We had daily discussion among Russell Brown the head tug pilot, Jim Little, the airport manager, David Glover, the meet organizer and director, and Davis Straub, task committee chair, to determine the safest launch location.

We had a very safe, fair, and fun meet.



Texas captures more wind power than any other state.

Sponsorship/Support:

This event had approximately \$20,000 to \$25,000 in sponsorship and support in in-kind, cash donations, and (to a lesser extent) products from over thirty sponsors/donors including Travel Texas Tourism, the Big Spring Community Visitors Bureau, the Big Spring City Council, the Alon refinery, the Big Spring Airport, etc. This resulted in many services to the pilots.

Jim Little, the Big Spring airport manager, has provided us with detailed documentation of the support provided by the community of Big Spring, the air port facility, and various business and community organizations:

Estimates of Cost—Hang Gliding Events @ Big Spring

Coordination of Activities (Administration, coordinating loan of equipment, UPS coordination, passing messages, NOTAMS, AWOS announcements, notes to all local pilots and prisons, etc. (10 hrs)

150.00

Office Equipment supplies, copying, faxing, stationary, etc.. 50.00

Coordination with Media 200.00

Use of Terminal Facility 2,400.00

Wireless connectivity 200.00

Electrical Tie-In for Concession (Connect fee) 75.00

Use of hangar Facility 2,000.00

Electrical Cost 150.00

Use of Convention Center (Welcoming Dinner) 400.00

Decorations 200.00

Canopies (Replacement) 600.00

Welcome Dinner 2,600.00

Gift Baskets 300.00

Golf Cart Rental 1,600.00

Ice 160.00

Water 150.00

Chairs, Tables 200.00

Signage (Entry Sign, direction, parking signs, etc.) 600.00

Equipment set up/take down—Bleachers, Canopies, Chairs, Fence Removal/Openings, cones, markings, taxiway light removal/protection, trashcans, liners, etc. (Manhours) (150 hrs.) 1,350.00

Portable Toilet Rentals 200.00

Temporary Dumpster 200.00

EMS Support (In-place ambulance) 3,200.00

Land Preparation (Scraping, removing prairie dog mounds, etc.) 300.00

Overtime for employees 500.00

Prizes 1,000.00

Cleaning of Terminal 150.00

Vehicle Fuel 150.00

Hours expended by volunteers Numerous.....Not included

Approximation of cost for hosting 7-day hang gliding event **\$19,085.00**

Notice that Jim has not included a number of cost items provide by the community and has not estimated the value of the volunteer labor. We would estimate the volunteer labor hours at 300 to 400 or \$3,600. We also got free ice cream, as much as we could eat, from Blue Bell, who delivered a large display cooler to the airport. That would add another \$1,500. We are quite sure that we have left out some items. The total as far as we can document at this point is:

\$24, 185.

The volunteers were out there every day, hauling pilots around in the golf carts, bringing out water and ice, grading the launch areas, setting up the wind socks, putting tires around the airport lights to protect them from the carts, hauling back the carts after pilot launches, and helping pilots with their gliders and harnesses. Without their efforts the Big Spring Nationals would have been a lot more work for the pilots.

We have not included the prizes provided by the hang glider manufacturers or Flytec USA to the pilots in this cost calculation.

We have provided a detailed break down of costs (thanks to the good work of the airport manager) in order to back up our claims for significant community support for the Big Spring US Nationals. They want us there. They want us back. They put their money and their human resources into the effort to get us back there. We do not believe in throwing around inflated or unsubstantiated figures regarding our level of support from sponsors.

Media:

During the course of the event, over two dozen print and television media were represented. Regional television affiliates (CBS, ABC, NBC, Telemundo) broadcasted the event (in English and Spanish) regionally and in local and regional newspapers, before, during and after the event. (Derreck Turner was interviewed by Telemundo as the only Spanish speaking pilot.)



John Simon

Here are a few of the links that we have gathered to some of the TV and news articles about the meet:

<http://www.bigspringherald.com/content/view/182172/60/>

<http://www.cbs7kosa.com/news/details.asp?ID=14223>

http://www.newswest9.com/Global/story.asp?S=10872526&nav=menu505_2

<http://www.newswest9.com/Global/story.asp?S=10880216>

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2009/08/prweb2714174.htm>

http://www.mywesttexas.com/articles/2008/08/03/news/top_stories/hang_gliding_story.txt

<http://www.bigspringherald.com/content/view/183104/>

<http://www.kwes.com/global/story.asp?s=10872526>

<http://www.newschannel10.com/Global/story.asp?S=10880216>

<http://www.cbs7kosa.com/news/details.asp?ID=14299>

In addition, David was interviewed three times on [KBST radio](#) in Big Spring. He also gave two lunch time talks to the Big Spring Rotary club. Three radio stations did five live interviews and mentioned our event over fifteen times.

In addition, as is well known to the USHPA EC, Niels Dachler, an independent video producer (see

[here](#)) working with ABC, extensively filmed the event and is preparing a three-minute video for Good Morning America to be released in September.

Quest Air and the tug pilots provided full access to the media to use the tugs as camera platforms, especially for Niels Dachler.

Internal Marketing for the USHPA membership:

The event was promptly and widely covered in the Oz Report and in numerous other hang gliding community media. You'll find the videos, photos, and stories here:

- The results [here](#).
- [Jeff O'Brien's blog](#)
- [Jeff Shapiro's blog](#)
- [Timely Oz Report Updates on Facebook](#)
- [Timely Oz Report Updates on Twitter](#)
- [Wills Wing Twitter](#)
- [Alex Cuddy](#)
- [Eric Donaldson](#)
- [David Glover's meet blog](#)
- [Ben Dunn](#)
- [John Hesch](#)
- [David Glover's tweets](#)
- [Russell Brown's twitter updates](#)
- [Oz Report](#)
- [Combined tweets](#)
- [Photos](#)

You can find videos of every day of the event here: <http://www.youtube.com/davidglover>.

Internal marketing was very important to the pilots and the meet organizers. There was more coverage of this meet than of any other previous meet in the US. This provided the USHPA membership timely updates that brought them closer to the competition. In addition, there were four live streaming broadcasts, viewed as far away as Taiwan, of the task and pilot meetings. Most of our meets are held in far-off locations. While the meet can be wonderful for those participating, without care and effort the meet can be just a tree falling in the woods for our members who are not there.

As has been the case for a number of years with our USHPA sanctioned competitions, scores were posted daily (within a few hours of task completion) on the internet (as requested by the USHPA rulebook). We have been using the [Soaring Spot](#) for a few years now. It has a one-button-click connection to the SeeYou scoring program that Davis Straub developed. Both pilots and interested public can quickly see the tasks as well as the pilots' placing, and can download any of the pilots' track logs - a modern convenience available to any meet director.

Timely reports were available every evening on the Oz Report and almost as frequently from Jeff

Shapiro's and other pilots' blogs. David Glover and Russell Brown were twittering in real time (while others were flying).



Jeff Shapiro.

External Marketing:

The main stream media coverage above represents a good deal of our external marketing. In addition we had spectators come and view the competition every day and especially on the weekend days. There were two sets of bleachers for them, food concessionaire, toilets, and radio announcements of the event times.

Some local folks - including local media folks - signed up for and had Discovery flights with Zac Majors .

Our event was posted on the official Travel Texas Tourism web page, [here](#).

Criticisms:

The only criticism that we are aware of was a self criticism. We felt that the many spectators in the bleachers were kept too far from the action behind the airport fences and that they should be allowed to have a closer look at the action.

Respectfully Submitted,

David Glover (meet organizer and director) and Davis Straub (scorekeeper, task committee member, weather man)