

I was asked by several others immediately after the meeting on September 9th, “what just happened?” After days of emotional tension, I told them I would send my analysis of the meeting and afterwards of the events. I was not present at important meetings or was able to get behind the deceitful and vague answers coming from the BOD leadership, so my analysis may be filled with speculation and assumptions, but offer my opinion of “what happened”.

When I first learned about the diabolical idea of merging the US Biathlon Association into the US Ski & Snowboarding Association my immediate response was that it couldn't be done. Ed Williams and I had the same thoughts from our experience in establishing the US Biathlon Association following the separation of biathlon and pentathlon due to the Ted Stevens Sport Act. Ed was directly involved in writing the Ted Stevens Sports Act and knew immediately that a merging of two NGBs would not comply with the law. There were multiple conditions and actions of the leadership of both the USBA and USSS leadership that also violated the provisions of the Sports Act.

Although it was admitted that discussions had begun in 2024 in announced meetings, it was formerly announced to the biathlon community in May 2026. Once I learned that this merger was being promoted by Sophie Goldschmidt, CEO of the USSS and Bob Hall, USBA BOD chairmen and USBA CEO Jack Gierhart I contacted him, and during his return call on June 1st he framed the merger as an alignment of two Governing Bodies, each with a focus on “skiing”, with the intention of eliminating duplicities of administration and increasing fundraising potentials. We did not discuss at any length the legality of a merger and at the suggestion of compliance to the Ted Stevens Act he responded that it would meet the requirements.

Attention to the proposed merger widened and most questions about the idea were mostly deflected but had the impact of modifying the nature of the concept from a merger to a strategic alliance. The secrecy and knowledge of Sophie Goldschmidt's previous failed attempt to absorb surfing sparked significant resistance from the biathlon community. What followed were several events, including a Town Hall and Special BOD meetings that tried to avert opposition. The three Working groups assigned to develop support even reported concerns, but a heatedly scheduled meeting for a vote descended into a 3 hours executive session that could not find support for a proposed vote on an agreement that was not available to the biathlon membership. Another hand-picked working group was assigned to write a proposal for a vote with a short timeline for the September 9th meeting.

Prior to that meeting three events occurred that lead to the collapse of an agreement. The first was the powerful message sent by Marc Sheppard and Jon Schafer to the BOD and others in the biathlon community on September 8th. This letter, despite Bob Hall's invitation to Sophie Goldschmidt to speak at the meeting, had a devastating impact because it exposed Sophie by her own words. Her comments to the USSS coaching staff exposed her true motivation. In speaking she again explained the great outcomes for biathlon with an agreement, she ended by criticizing the biathlon opposition for not accepting her view.

The second was Bob Hall's announcement that there wouldn't be a vote at the meeting and called for a vote to go into executive session to discuss the information that had just arrived out of "left field". Everyone knew it was the message that Marc and Jon had send the day before, and it wasn't coming from left field, but essentially the entire membership that had expressed opposition to the concept. When he asked for a vote, Leif Nordgren admirably voted no and expressed his concern that continued secrecy would further create greater mistrust between the BOD and membership. Despite his statement, and several abstentions, the 60+ members on the zoom meeting were abruptly locked out the meeting. Without resuming the open session, the meeting was adjourned after another lengthy executive session by a written notice on the website. Shortly after USBA made an announcement that the agreement was put at pause with no mention if it was to be restarted. USSS also, in a press release, announced similar information but included statements from Sophie Goldschmidt blaming USBA for the failure. Similar to her comments after the failure to control surfing, she followed the same script.

Now following the advice from Jon Schafer, Leif Nordgrean and a host of others, it is the time to put this aside and work toward rebuilding trust in the USBA leadership and letting the staff get back to work in doing the things they do well. Money is always helpful in building success, but it is only one ingredient to success with the most import being finding and developing talented athletes, supporting them with the right training and guidance and competitive activities. We must all work towards those ends.