

The Alliance Discussions Between USBA and USSS: Paused or Withdrawn Amid Serious Allegations

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The United States Biathlon Association (USBA) Board of Directors was scheduled to meet September 9, 2026, and vote on the terms and conditions of a merger/partnership/strategic alliance with U.S. Ski & Snowboard (USSS). Reports from individuals in the meeting confirm that Bob Hall, Chair of the USBA Board, immediately said there would be no vote that day and that he moved to go into executive session to discuss information that had just become available.

The information that Bob characterized as coming out of left field was apparently substantial allegations and claims made in a letter to the USBA Board in the morning prior to the meeting. This was the second USBA Board meeting in a row in which the USBA Board moved into executive session and failed to return to inform the members waiting online of the outcome of the session.

Leif Nordegren, an Athlete Representative on the USBA Board, in a strong “no” vote on going into executive session, stated that he wanted open discussion because the secrecy of this whole situation has led to mistrust, and he didn’t want to further that mistrust by going into an executive session.

The information that Bob claimed came out of left field was likely a letter from Marc Shepard and Jon Schafer that encouraged Board members to reject the proposal. They opened their letter by stating that “Like all of you, we want nothing but the best for US Biathlon and are troubled that we feel obligated to write a piece as critical as this one, but it is being done out of necessity.”

The important points they raised were whether this proposal met the legal requirements of the “Ted Stevens Sports Act,” the lack of transparency and the failure to follow financial due diligence, and the results of a recent survey that, for the third time, illustrated the significant lack of support for this proposed “Strategic Alliance” by stakeholders in the USBA community.

Most troubling in their letter was the allegation that “during the contract negotiations with USSS, there was highly inappropriate conduct by USBA CEO Jack Gierhart toward USBA Athlete Representatives in an attempt to push them into caving in to extremely unrealistic terms from USSS. Jack repeatedly attempted to pressure USBA athletes into accepting contract terms from USSS that the athletes felt were not in the best interest of the organization.”

Marc Shepard and Schafer then went on to address USSS’s role in this negotiation: that USSS, a potential vendor attempting to secure this transaction for its financial benefit, was given too much control over the workflow and analysis. They stated that this was a blatant conflict of interest for USSS, with a financial interest controlling the negotiating process.

They also alleged that the day after one of the athlete reps received a harassing call from Jack Gierhart, USSS CEO Sophie Goldschmidt lambasted them because, “They should be more appreciative of everything that Jack is doing for them.” One athlete rep was quoted in the letter: “It seems like we are negotiating against not just the USSS, but also Jack and Bob. They each accused us many times of ‘not being collaborative,’ when all we were trying to do is act in the best interest of US Biathlon”.

Yesterday, I did reach out to Jack Gierhart for a chance to respond. To date, he has not responded.

Finally, Jon and Marc confirmed that they had received an anonymous audio recording of an internal USSS meeting with statements from Sophie Goldschmidt, Anouk Patty and USSS coaches that appear to counter many of the public statements they had made regarding the merger with USBA, stating that none of those statements sounded like a good or legal partner.

In one exchange between USSS CEO Sophie Goldschmidt and the cross-country coaching staff senior leadership, one coach noted how fast you need to be to win Biathlon World Cups and how the XC staff has tremendous concern over losing talent to Biathlon. To which Sophie Goldschmidt replied, "We certainly don't want to be losing any future identified stars or current stars to another sport; I'm totally in agreement there."

Sophie went on to state, "They (Biathlon) may not know everything behind the scenes as far as how it's going to be structured and how we know we're going to be benefiting, because sometimes you have to position things the right way." "Cross country is going to be our priority. Our core sports are our priority." "It (the process) is getting a little political. A couple of them are digging in more than they should be, given what (little) they've achieved.....some of them are believing their own BS." "We have to feel like this (acquisition) is going to help us or else we're not going to do this."

In the same audio recording, Anouk Patty is alleged to have said, "These guys (Biathlon) are very well funded....it does allow us to bring some funds in to support the cross-country program." "It (Biathlon) is the most watched winter sport in Europe, for sure, so I think there's a general focus around better commercializing Biathlon, whether it's in the US or Europe, that can bring in more revenue that can have a halo effect for our entire organization."

One of the cross-country coaches is also reported to have said: "It (merger) doesn't even come across as a neutral; it comes across as a pretty serious threat to me (to the Cross Country Team), because we have never seen an athlete come across from Biathlon to XC; it only goes the other way." "We feel really good about the programs that we're running and the development system that we have, and we don't want to have a tap into it where at each of our development camps they have an opportunity to shoot and to potentially push athletes out (of XC)." "They (Biathlon) have far inferior skiers, in general, and they want everything that we have. We're just barely hanging on with the 'A' and 'B' teams that we have."

It was reported and alleged that both Sophie Goldschmidt and Patty were attempting to "bully" the staff by firmly instructing them to be "collaborative and supportive," with all the staff in attendance being warned several times not to express any negative concerns, regardless of how substantial they may be.

From all appearances, these substantial allegations were what Bob Hall characterized as "coming out of left field," with Sophie Goldschmidt once again telling the community how great this was going to be by chastising members for not agreeing.

There was no reporting back to the members of USBA at the close of the executive session. Only later did the members receive a statement saying that the USBA Board was pausing consideration of the Alliance at this time.

Soon after the statement from USBA, the Associated Press reported that "U.S. Ski & Snowboard withdrew from a proposed strategic alliance that was in the works with the U.S. Biathlon Association and had been set for a vote Wednesday in what would have been a rare merger between two Olympic sport organizations."

Sophie Goldschmidt, CEO of USSS, said in a statement that "inaccurate and harmful misinformation" regarding the intent of the alliance had affected the process. Yet, she made no comment on the allegations

raised by her statements on the anonymous recording. "If we can't go into this with the right collaborative spirit, then we don't believe this is the best path forward. We wish U.S. Biathlon luck in the coming season."

This statement from Sophie was like statements made when she tried to take over USA Surfing due to opposition from its members, all while accusing members of the opposition, as in the USBA alliance, of spreading misinformation.

While the alliance between USSS and USBA appears to be dead for now, there is no clear message that the pause is permanent or that the discussion will not emerge again at a future date.

Many have suggested, including Marc and Jon in their letter, from the beginning that they were not opposed to USBA working with U.S. Ski & Snowboard. There are areas where cooperation between the two organizations may make sense and could benefit both sports. But collaboration need not mean turning over much of the control of U.S. Biathlon to USSS, especially when the membership of both organizations has never been given a good explanation of what problems the merger would solve and how it would improve athletes' outcomes for USBA.

What has been seen over the past several months, and the concerns both the cross-country and biathlon communities have raised, are questions about governance, financial due diligence, athlete representation, transparency and the actual motivations of the two organizations. These concerns are not the spreading of misinformation; they were legitimate questions that USBA should have addressed.

Now there are additional allegations that go beyond the original concerns. If the statements attributed to USSS leadership in the reported recording are accurate and presented in context, they represent a different motivation for USSS than the one presented to the USBA community. If the allegations concerning pressure placed on USBA Athlete Representatives are true, they are even more troubling and should be independently and transparently investigated. They cannot simply be dismissed because the proposed alliance has collapsed.

USSS walking away does not answer any of these questions. USBA's decision to "pause" consideration of the alliance cannot become a reason to move on. The USBA Board still has a responsibility to explain how the merger discussion got there: who authorized this process, what information the Board relied upon, what financial and legal due diligence occurred, what role USSS played in developing and evaluating the proposal, and why the concerns repeatedly expressed by athletes, clubs and members were not addressed openly before a vote was scheduled.

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Thursday, September 10, 2026