

USOC: US Sailing blew it with Hall ruling



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**ON THE
OLYMPICS**

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The decision to yank Annapolis sailor Farrah Hall from the Beijing Olympic team in favor of Nancy Rios never passed the sniff test.

Lame excuses by US Sailing about its unilateral ruling in October 2007 only made things worse.

Now, a panel convened by the U.S. Olympic Committee has found that Hall was judged by a kangaroo court that ignored federal law and followed its own rules that were, at best, written in the dirt with a stick.

In a 23-page ruling, the hearing panel called the situation created by US Sailing “a



“It’s a little bit of a hollow victory,” Annapolis’ Farrah Hall says of condemnation of the ruling that kept her out of the Beijing Olympics. 2008 BALTIMORE SUN FILE PHOTO

procedural nightmare” that could have been avoided if Hall had been allowed to defend herself.

Hall, the five-member panel concluded, was denied due process. US Sailing, it ruled, has six months to make its rules comply

with federal law and USOC bylaws or face probation or revocation of its standing as the sport’s governing body.

“In some ways it’s a little bit of a hollow victory,” says Hall, a 1999 graduate of Broad-
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Farrah Hall starts the coming European season with the No. 1 U.S. ranking as she eyes making the 2012 Olympics in London. 2008 BALTIMORE SUN FILE PHOTO

'A hollow victory' for Annapolis' Hall

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neck. "But now no one else will have to go through what I did."

A victory for Hall and other athletes. But it's also a case of justice delayed, justice denied.

Hall, 27, can only imagine what it would have been like to march with the U.S. delegation in Beijing's opening ceremony, to wear the uniform of her country, to raise her hand and take the Athletes' Oath, to compete in the world's premier amateur sailing event.

"I do regret not being there," she says. "But it's over, and I'm over it."

On a practical level, Hall is out legal fees — no small obstacle in a sport in which athletes pinch pennies while begging for sponsors' dimes. And, because she can't put the Olympics on her resume, it's that much harder to attract financial support.

In brief, the mess began after Hall won the RS:X windsurfing Olympic trials Oct. 14, 2007. While Hall was showering, Rios protested a collision with another competitor that she claimed tore her sail and pushed her to fourth place among the six sailors. A protest committee agreed with Rios and gave her six points instead of two, vaulting her into first place overall. US Sailing quickly nominated her to the Olympic team.

Hall was informed of the turn of events, and her attempts to get a fair hearing were stymied by US Sailing.

"I felt I had been done a serious wrong. My sense of justice was violated," Hall says of her decision to fight. "There was potential to lose in a big way, but I felt compelled to take it as

far as I could."

In a statement, US Sailing said the USOC decision will gut rules "that have served the sport well for many decades" and make it difficult to stage any sailboat races, from the elite level to yacht club regattas.

In the end, however, this case is about more than Hall. This is about a sailing federation with scrambled priorities.

At the 2004 Athens Olympics, US Sailing did little to help former Bowie resident Kevin Hall, a survivor of testicular cancer, get the testosterone injections he needed to stay alive and compete. Last year, it railroaded Natalie Salk, a teenager with Olympic aspirations, by using rumors of underage drinking to deny her a spot at the Junior National Regatta.

A hearing officer for the American Arbitration Association found there was no evidence Salk had been drinking nor was there proof that she knowingly drove with alcohol in her car. "At no time did US Sailing provide Ms. Salk with the charges against her," the arbitrator wrote. "Indeed, at the conclusion of the hearing, the arbitrator was not certain what rule US Sailing was alleging Ms. Salk violated."

With the European sailing season just a month away, Hall starts with the No. 1 U.S. ranking and a clean slate. Her focus is shifting to the 2012 Summer Games in London. Hall says she hopes there's smoother sailing ahead for her sport.

"There's a lot of opportunity for change," she says. "There are some really smart people at US Sailing and the USOC, and I'm confident they will make it better for everyone."