

BMC position paper on climbing as an Olympic sport

Preamble

This paper has been agreed by the BMC National Council and Board of Directors in response to a recommendation put forward by the Organisational Review Group for the BMC to clarify its position and level of support for climbing as an Olympic sport.

Background

- The first involvement of climbing with the Olympics was when Alpinism became an Olympic sport in 1894, the year the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was founded. The first time Olympic medals were awarded to climbers was to General Bruce's 1922 Everest expedition. German brothers Franz and Tony Schmidt were the next to receive the Olympic Alpine Prize, for the first ascent of the Matterhorn's North Face and in 1936, Gunter and Mrs Dyenfurth won the award for their Himalayan exploration. In 1946, the Alpinism Prize was dropped from the Olympics.
- The BMC has had a direct involvement with competition climbing since 1988 when the BMC 'Competition Climbing Committee' was set up. This followed the establishment of the Climbing Wall Working Party in 1983 chaired by Ken Wilson and the Climbing Wall Committee in 1985 chaired by Dave Pearce. Competitions Committee chairs over the years have been Stephen Porteous, Graham Desroy, Paul Dewhurst, Mike Watson, Ian Walton and Iain McKenzie. This involvement has enabled the BMC to maintain direct influence over the development of competition climbing and to promote British climbing ethics, traditions and environmental considerations across new generations of high performing climbers.
- Notable international successes over the years include: Jerry Moffat's victory at the 1989 inaugural Climbing Grand Prix event in Leeds and Simon Nadin becoming World Cup Champion in France later that same year; Ian Vickers becoming European Lead Champion in 1998 and Andy Earl becoming European Bouldering Champion in 2004; Fran Brown winning gold medals in the 2012 and 2014 World Paraclimbing Championships (alongside three gold medal performances by paraclimbers at the Briançon 2018 World Cup), and; Shauna Coxsey's success as Bouldering World Cup Champion in 2016 and 2017 and Hannah Slaney's gold medal in the IFSC Youth World Championship (Junior Bouldering) in August 2018.
- The BMC has employed a technical officer to manage national and international climbing competitions since the early 1990s, and over this period competitions have become an integral part of the work of the organisation. The first formal BMC competition event – the British Indoor Climbing Championship (a lead only event) was in 1992 and the first national bouldering event – the British Bouldering Championship was in 1999. The BMC, in agreement with Mountaineering Scotland, is also directly responsible for the selection, management and administration of the GB Climbing Team and development squad, and for running the national paraclimbing series.
- UK Sport provided financial support for the GB Team during the 1990s to the mid-2000s and Sport England has supported competition climbing since the mid-2000s. The BMC's staff commitment to competition climbing, the GB Team and associated work programmes varies throughout the year and averages three to four full-time equivalents, some staff positions being directly funded by Sport England.
- In 2008-9 there was a debate within the BMC to agree the organisation's formal position on climbing as an Olympic sport. Discussions were held across the BMC's structure of regional meetings and in September 2009 National Council agreed – with the proviso that competitions

must be conducted on artificial structures (rather than outdoor crags) – that the BMC was supportive of climbing becoming an Olympic sport.

- The International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) has lobbied for the inclusion of climbing in the Olympics and in August 2016 the IOC named five new sports (including climbing) in the programme for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Tokyo will involve a total of 20 male and 20 female climbers from across the world and a combined discipline event (lead, bouldering and speed climbing). There is currently no Olympic commitment for climbing beyond 2020; the 2024 Olympics will be in Paris and the IOC will decide on the future of climbing as an Olympic sport in October 2020. The BMC is a member of both the IFSC and the UIAA and sends representatives to key meetings and technical commissions of each organisation.
- In 2017 the BMC applied for UK Sport funding for an Olympic climbing programme and in February 2018 an investment of up to £630k was awarded to individually support medal contenders for the period up to the Tokyo games. This funding is channeled through and managed by the English Institute of Sport (EIS) and the BMC has influence over the use of the funding through membership of the EIS Performance Management Board (for climbing). More recently £192k of UK Sport Aspiration Fund support has been granted for other climbers with high potential.
- In 2017-18 the BMC commissioned a major review (the Organisational Review) of its structure, governance and future strategy. A total of 51 recommendations were put forward and these are now being addressed by an internal group focused on organisational development; this work will involve the detailed analysis and costing of the proposed changes and will include the production of a new strategic plan for 2020-25. The two recommendations directly relevant to competition climbing and the Olympics are:

Recommendation 15:

The BMC should give clarity to members, partners and stakeholders on its level of support for the Olympics.

Recommendation 24:

The BMC should create a joint subsidiary for competitive activities in partnership with Mountaineering Scotland and other relevant home nation governing bodies for the purposes of managing competitive activities and to support elite level competitive activities such as Team GB.

Clarification of the BMC's current position

- The BMC's involvement with competition climbing goes back 30 years; the organisation formally supports climbing as an Olympic sport and this involvement and support will continue in the future.
- The BMC is committed to managing national climbing competitions in England and Wales and to encouraging international events to be held in the UK. There is a financial cost to this work and future funding allocation will be determined in the context of the BMC's overall strategic priorities and finances, and the availability of commercial support. Funding for activities related to competition climbing and the Olympics will therefore be a clearly defined part of the annual planning financial process, and ring-fenced to ensure transparency of costs and effective financial control. The net cost of competitions related work – as a proportion of the BMC's overall specialist work programme costs – has been in the range 8.3%-12.7% over the last 5 years.

- The BMC recognises that the 2020 Olympics present an important opportunity to connect with new climbers and promote BMC membership, good practice and the transition from indoor to outdoor climbing; the BMC will approach this in a considered and responsible manner taking into account access and environmental matters, the BMC participation statement and in the context of the organisations role as the guardian of overall integrity, heritage and ethics of British climbing and mountaineering.
- The 2020 Olympics also present a major opportunity for our partner organisations – the Association of British Climbing Walls (ABC), the ABC Training Trust and Mountain Training – to promote their role and services to indoor climbers; the BMC will work closely with these organisations to help climbers develop their interest and involvement in the sport.
- The BMC is undertaking a detailed analysis of the options for managing competition climbing (ref: Recommendation 24 above); this process is well underway and the Working Group will report to the BMC Board in mid/late summer 2019.
- The BMC supports the inclusion of climbing in the 2024 Olympics and beyond and would encourage the IOC to expand the scope of the climbing event in future Games to include the individual disciplines of lead, bouldering and speed climbing. The BMC also supports the case for paraclimbing to become a Paralympic sport.