

What happened at the Nordics?

I have received the question 'what happened at the Nordics?' many times these past months and since I thought that Tracey Batenburg and Aurelian Sports/Grip Pole would honor the contract they have signed I have avoided the answer. But now it is clear that, not only will Tracy and Grip pole not honor our agreement they are also ignoring the whole issue.

Therefore I now have no obligation to withhold the truth, so here it is.

Before

When I started planning the Nordic Championships in 2013 I directly contacted a manufacturer of poles, since this was going to be the 9th competition I have hosted no one knew better than me what was needed to do. I have previously worked with three different manufacturers as sponsors and I contacted one of them to ask if they were interested to sponsor NGPP2014. They accepted and we started planning.

As we came into the New Year I was asked if we couldn't use the same poles as they would use at the WPSC14, so I contacted the sponsor Aurelian Sports and received an answer from Tracey saying that they would not be done in time. Several weeks later she contacted me again saying that due to many requests from the athletes, who were going to compete in the Nordics they had pushed the deadline forward and she now believed she could have them done in time. We signed a contract (see below) and I sent an email explaining the situation to the other sponsor who was not too happy about the change.

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24.03.2014

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Sponsorship agreement for Nordic Grand Prix Pole Championships (NGPP) on May 9, 2014

Aurelian Sports will provide the following for the NGPP:

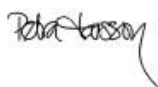
- 2 professional competition poles at 4 meters in height and 45 mm in diameter. Poles are to be fixed securely at top of truss but must be secured via pressure on floor.
- 4 practice poles for the warm-up area (ceiling is approx. 2.95 m / 45 mm)
- 1 pole as a prize

NGPP offers you the following:

- Space to have your roll ups on the side of the stage.
- Your logo will be printed on all posters, flyers and program.
- You will be linked and presented on our website and Facebook page.
- You will receive 6 free tickets to the competition.
- You may use our logo on your website.
- Your flyer will be handed out to all visitors and participants.
- You will be allotted ½ side advertising space in our program.



Aurelian Sports Limited - Director



Petra Larsson- Organizer NGPP

Tracey and I were in constant contact via email all the way up to the competition and everything sounded great.

During

The poles arrived at Globen (competition venue) the day before the competition. Tracey, myself and the Swedish technician Tracey had hired to put them up arrived at Globen at 2pm, as this was the time Fitnessgalan told us to be there. But Fitnessgalan was not done setting up the light rig so we were not allowed to start setting up the poles. We waited for 4 hours, and then we were allowed to put up half the pole (top part) but since they were not done with the truss or floor we could not raise the truss and put together the whole pole or screw it to the floor.



I asked Tracey if they could handle it from there and she said yes, at this point I would like to say that I have never needed to get involved with setting up poles for any other pole manufacturer I have worked with. It has rather been the other way around. With all other sponsors it clearly states in their contracts that no one except their staff and their technicians are allowed to touch the poles. This is due to legal and insurance issues. So I left.

When I arrived on Friday morning the poles were up and as I shook them I thought that they had too much movement and were not stable enough so I asked Tracey about this. She informed me that they had not tightened them yet and it was going to be fine. I trusted her since she, the expert of her product, and I had a contract.

Unfortunately Fitnessgalan had rented the stage for a lecture so we couldn't go on for the next 3 hours to test them properly. As soon as we were allowed on the stage, both me and the athletes tested them and came to the conclusion that they were not stable enough for safe use. I immediately informed Tracey of the situation.

Tracey and her hired technician exchanged the poles against the extra ones they had with them, but they were the same. There was too much movement to be approved for competition. Since Tracey has taken the judges training she should have known this, as it clearly states in the rules there should be no more than 2 cm lateral movement.

So they switched them around, took them down, changed the pieces and put them back up. Nothing helped. During this time I was in skype conference call with KT (president IPSF) and Florenza (head of technical committee IPSF) and all the present judges, trying to come up with any solution. We also had several meetings with the athletes.

We had a meeting with the judges, athletes and Tracey on stage where she explained that the poles were secure both at the top and bottom and if they would break it would be in the middle. When one athlete asked what would happen if they were to do a fonjii and due to the extreme lateral movement if there would be a pole to grab onto when coming out of the movement, Tracey replied 'what is a fonjii?'. At this time I kept calm and did everything in my power to find a solution. Unfortunately when the head judge and I had to inform the athletes of the progress Tracey was nowhere to be found. After having looked for her I found her hiding in the toilets. She proved to neither acknowledge the situation nor take responsibility of her involvement, not to mention not having honored our contract.

After battle of the Pole in January I had two x-pole competition poles left over (without feet or hat). So I sent a taxi to the studio to pick them up as well as two regular poles. The idea was to take parts from all of them in order to set up two poles safe and suitable for competition. We would have needed another 15-30 min to see if this would solve the problem but Fitnessgalan decided otherwise.

Fitnessgalan went on stage and announced the cancellation of the competition without having informed me and this is how I found out. It was a huge surprise and disappointment for me and everyone else. All the athletes that had trained hard and prepared beautiful routines, the entire audience that had paid money and came from near and far to watch and all the judges who flew from around the world to support our competition were completely let down.

Fitnessgalan did not allow me to go on stage and address the audience in order to explain the situation. After having pleaded with them to at least allow me to quickly use the microphone to apologize for the need to cancel the event, their response was extremely rude and insulting, leaving me with no further options.

After this we packed all our stuff together and drove it back to the studio. After about 30 minutes, my phone rang. It was Tracey, who told me she was on her way to come and leave her poles with me until DHL could pick them up. At first I thought she was joking but she showed up demanding that I helped her carry them in. Thereafter she began defending herself and being rude to everyone around her. This continued until I was forced to ask her to leave. She took no responsibility of any kind for her role in this crisis.

After

A few days after Tracey contacted me via email asking me to remove Aurelian Sports/Grip Poles logo from the Nordic website; she said she did not want to be associated with the competition. So I did. I contacted a lawyer for the first time in my life and asked how I could get back the money for what I spent. He said 'you have a contract so it should be crystal clear, let me look into it'. A week later he told me she has registered her company in Isle of Man, which is a tax haven, so it is harder to get to her. This was a shocking discovery and a new territory for me. We sent her a claim nonetheless, which wasn't for the work I invested (which included 420 hours of organizing) but for all the money I spent, the t-shirts I printed, the programs etc. This amounted to 16 000 euros.

Then I got an even bigger surprise, Fitnessgalan decided to sue me for 90 000 euros.

So this is where we are now, 6 months after. Tracey is not replying to any of our emails or claims. She does not want to take responsibility for the major role she played in this unfortunate event. If she had tested her poles to the correct specification with a technician who understood the requirements of pole and rigging, they would have been manufactured correctly for competition standards. If that would have been done, then the need to cancel The Nordic Grand Prix Pole would not have been there.

It would have been a great competition, so many talented athletes in a great venue!

If for nothing more I have learned a great deal from this and hope my misfortunes can educate and help others to avoid being in the same situation I find myself in. Competition and Even organizers around the world know that safety for our athletes must be our first priority at all times. This is what happened at the NGPP.

Petra