

Agenda Item #: \_\_\_\_\_



# Staff Report

## City of Manhattan Beach

**TO:** Honorable Mayor Montgomery and Members of the City Council

**THROUGH:** Geoff Dolan, City Manager

**FROM:** Richard Gill, Director of Parks and Recreation *RG*  
Mark Leyman, Recreation Services Manager *ML*

**DATE:** August 5, 2008

**SUBJECT:** Discussion of the Tournament Format Proposed by the Association of Beach Volleyball Players, Inc. (AVP) for the Manhattan Beach Open Volleyball Tournament (MBO) to be Held September 19-21, 2008.

### RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council discuss and provide direction for the tournament format proposed by the Association of Beach Volleyball Players, Inc. (AVP) for the Manhattan Beach Open (MBO) Volleyball Tournament to be held September 19-21, 2008.

### FISCAL IMPLICATION:

There is no fiscal implication associated with the qualifying process for the Manhattan Beach Open.

### BACKGROUND:

For the past seven years, the AVP has run the pre-tournament qualifying rounds at the MBO. Each year, a predetermined number teams advance from the pre-tournament qualifying round into the main draw. The main draw is the final playoff rounds that are seeded from highest to lowest ranking where the teams play for the tournament title.

In past years, approximately 100 teams play in the MBO qualifier and 8 teams per gender advance out of the qualifier. The 8 teams are then added to the top 24 AVP teams that were pre-qualified and seeded into the tournament based upon criteria established by the AVP. The 8 teams from the qualifier and 24 teams from the AVP comprise the main draw of 32 teams.

Listed below are the number of AVP seeded teams and MBO qualifier teams selected to compete in the main draw from past year's agreements:

<u>Year</u>	<u>AVP seeded team spots</u>	<u>Qualifier team spots</u>
2001	24 men's / 24 women's	8 men's / 8 women's
2002	32 men's / 24 women's	16 men's / 8 women's
2003	32 men's / 24 women's	16 men's / 8 women's
2004	32 men's / 24 women's	16 men's / 8 women's

2005	24 men's / 24 women's	8 men's / 8 women's
2006	24 men's / 24 women's	8 men's / 8 women's
2007	24 men's / 24 women's	8 men's / 8 women's
2008	24 men's / 24 women's	8 men's / 8 women's

The past three years have followed the same format of 8 MBO pre-qualifier teams combined with 24 AVP seeded teams for a 32 team main draw.

**DISCUSSION:**

This year, the AVP is proposing to reduce the size of the main draw from 32 to 16 teams per gender. The 16 teams will be comprised of 8 from the MBO qualifier, which is the same as past years, and 8 from AVP seeded teams. In the past, the AVP seeded the top 24 teams for the main draw, which will be reduced to 8. The 8 AVP seeded teams will have to pre-qualify through a series of tournaments, termed the "Crocs Cup Shootouts."

The AVP selects the top 24 teams per gender for the Crocs Cup Shootouts based on the highest point totals for each team. The 24 teams will play in Cincinnati, Santa Barbara, and San Francisco, where the number of teams will be reduced from 16, to 12, to 8 respectively. The remaining 8 teams will be placed in the main draw of the MBO.

The AVP believes that the proposed tournament changes will enhance the MBO for the following reasons:

*Add Significance to the Event*

The proposed format is meant to add significance to the events beyond the size of the draw. No longer will Chicago, Brooklyn, Hermosa Beach, Huntington Beach, and Manhattan Beach be the same tournament format. Manhattan Beach will be the host city of the Crocs Cup Championship which will be the most important event on tour building through a series of events for \$1,000,000 in prize money, the largest amount in the history of beach volleyball.

*Season Long Process*

The eight seeded teams per gender from the AVP will have had to earn their spot by their performance throughout the season.

*Any team can still win the MBO*

All remaining teams can play their way into the Crocs Cup Championship by playing through the qualifier. Unlike any other sport, any team can still win the tour championship. No teams are precluded from entry or playing.

Staff has received feedback from members of the community voicing their opposition to the AVP's proposed event changes to the MBO. Concerns presented by the community include:

*Fewer Matches For Spectators*

The AVP's proposed format reduces the number of matches for spectators to watch in the main draw. As stated above, the main draw will be reduced from 32 to 16 teams per gender. Therefore, 32 fewer matches will be played on Friday, Saturday and Sunday of the tournament.

*Gives Top Players a Competitive Advantage*

The top 8 players selected through the Crocs Cup Shootouts will not have to play in the MBO qualifier. Therefore, the top 8 teams will play fewer rounds creating an uneven playing field.

*Format Diminishes Manhattan Open Tradition*

Proposed format would have the fewest main draw teams in tournament history. The MBO tournament has traditionally been one of the deepest and toughest tournaments to win.

Based upon the community concerns, one option for the 2008 MBO for City Council's consideration would be for the AVP to increase the number of teams advancing from the pre-tournament qualifier from 8 to 16 teams per gender. This would increase the main draw from 16 to 24 teams per gender and allow a greater number of teams to advance through the MBO pre-tournament qualifier. As an "open" format, both amateur and AVP players have an opportunity to compete and potentially win the tournament.

In addressing the current language in the agreement pertaining to the pre-tournament qualifying round for the MBO, the contract states in Section IID that "The CMB shall retain the right to conduct, if it desires, a pre-tournament qualifying round including non-AVP players and retain the proceeds. However, the CMB will grant the AVP permission to run these qualifying rounds if the AVP will open up the qualifiers and take a minimum of eight (8) Men's teams and eight (8) Women's teams to play into the professional rounds of the MBO."

The City Attorney stated that this provision allows the AVP to conduct the qualifier as long as the AVP agrees to take at least 8 men's and 8 women's teams from the qualifying round into the main draw. Should the AVP fail to do so the City then has the right to conduct the qualifier. Because the AVP is still in compliance with its contract with the City, they are free to implement their proposal. The City's only real leverage regarding this issue (assuming that it opposes the change) is with regard to discretionary matters regarding the current tournament and obviously with regard to negotiations regarding future tournaments.

The current contract is for the 2008 event only. The AVP recognizes the concerns of the community and has already agreed with city staff to run the MBO as a 32 team event beginning in 2009 if that is the City's preference.

**CONCLUSION:**

Staff recommends that City Council discuss and provide direction regarding the tournament format for the 2008 Manhattan Beach Open.

Attachments: Correspondence from the public

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Dear Manhattan Beach City Manager:

I'm a long time Manhattan & Hermosa Beach resident and I urge you to take back the Manhattan Beach Open from Leonard Armato, and the Association of Volleyball Professionals. He is turning the biggest and best volleyball tournament in the country into an exhibition.

I played in a number of M.B. Opens in the 1960's and 70's. My first was in 1966. I never made it to a Sunday, but I had the pleasure of having my butt kicked by some of the best volleyball players in the world along the way. One year, my partner and I earned 6 points off the former Olympic great Gene Selznick and his partner former UCLA Bruin, former L.A. Laker and Olympian, Keith Ericson. I wouldn't trade that for anything. Up and coming players will never get that opportunity with the recent moves of the AVP.


Charlie Saikley was my little league coach at Live Oak Park. I coached one of Charlie's kids at M.C.H.S. in the 1990's, to this day; the family and I remain close. Frankly, Charlie would be turning over in his grave by the recent actions of the AVP and their proposed top eight-team exhibition. Charlie and I often discussed the beach development with and without the AVP in Manhattan Beach. I can remember him vividly says, "What's the worse thing that can happen without the AVP in Manhattan Beach? A Manhattan Beach kid could enter and win it. What's wrong with that?"

I'm sure if you ask all the former men and women winners of the Manhattan Beach Open who have their names on the pier about the new AVP format they would agree that the idea stinks! If Leonard wants an exhibition event let him pull a permit and have one. The city of Manhattan Beach should then take back the Manhattan Beach Open and run it as they see fit. Hopefully, it will be open to all and may the best team win!

Has the sport of volleyball really improved with the AVP running the Manhattan Beach Open? Have short-courts, quirky volleyballs, antennas and rally scoring upgraded the game? Have the meager TV rating for beach volleyball given Manhattan Beach a substantial tourism boost? Is the AVP baggage worth the hassle? The answer to all these questions is NO!

I urge you to take back the event Charlie Saikley and the City of Manhattan Beach built into the world's greatest volleyball tournament. Make it something we can all be proud of again.

Sincerely,

  
Dick Blount

P.S. I'm sorry I can't attend this meeting in person. I have a friend battling cancer in Colorado and I will be with him and his family all next week.

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CITY OF MANHATTAN BEACH  
JUL 31 2008

## **Arguments against the Proposed AVP Format Change** by: Kevin Cleary

### **1) AVP Hasn't Acted in Good Faith**

- The AVP didn't inform the City about the format change until after the contract was signed.
- The AVP initially denied that there was any change to the format, but finally acknowledged the change to the city after they issued a press-release.

### **2) It's Not Broken**

- The Manhattan Open is the Premiere Tournament in Beach Volleyball, why make a change that negatively impacts the reputation of this great event?

### **3) There's No Support For The AVP's Format Change**

- The volleyball community is overwhelmingly against this format.
- The vast majority of AVP players have signed a petition opposing this change.

### **4) 74 Fewer Matches For Spectators**

- The AVP's proposed format reduces the number of matches for spectators to watch in the main draw from 132 to 58 (loss of 74 matches).
- Most of the tournament matches will be played before the weekend crowds show up.

### **5) City Has Final Say On Contract Compliance**

- Pursuant to the AVP's contract with the city: Section II – B "The CMB shall provide an event director to oversee and monitor the total operation of the event... All decisions of the event director shall be final with respect to any issues that involve compliance with the agreement as well as any issues that directly and/or adversely impact the community."
- Charley Saikley specifically requested this provision to protect the city and the Heritage of the Manhattan Open.

### **6) History Favors City On Format Change and Contract Compliance**

- When the format was changed in the past, the change was reflected in the contracts.
- There was no such change from 2007 to 2008. This precedence and understanding favors the City.
- Any ambiguities should reference to the way the tournament was run in the past.

### **7) Format Undermines AVP Player Guarantees**

- The contract states the AVP will make its best efforts to guarantee 15 out of top 20 teams in the main draw, but their new format undermines that effort. Their proposal guarantees the top 8 teams, not 15. The other 8 teams must come from the qualifier and its unknown how many top 20 teams will then progress to the main draw.

### **8) New Format Diminishes Manhattan Open Legacy**

- Proposed format would have the fewest main draw teams in tournament history, which undermines the legacy, prestige and tradition the tournament was built on as the deepest and toughest tournament to win.
- This format shows a lack of respect for its heritage and diminishes the accomplishments of the players who earned plaques on the Pier.

### **9) Format Is Unfair And Gives Top Players a Huge Competitive Advantage**

- A good comparison to the AVP proposal would be insulating Tiger Woods and 7 other top PGA players from the rest of the playing field at "The Masters." If all the players in the Masters had to play 4 rounds except the top 8 players who were only required to play the final round, you'd create an uneven and unfair competition and undermine the greatness of that Event. This is the same format the AVP is selling to the City.

### **10) They'll Be Far Fewer Teams In The Qualifier This Year**

- Historically beach volleyball tournament participation decreases by over 50% after Labor Day. Because only a handful of players make a living at Beach Volleyball the vast majority of competitors are seasonal players (May thru August).
- The Manhattan Open has more pull than any other event, so a 50% decline is unlikely, but a 25% to 30% decline in qualifier entries is a real probability. Prize money is only awarded to the top 16 teams, so there's no additional motivation for lower ranked player participation this late in the year.

### **11) Tournament Format Extended One Day**

- The proposed format is scheduled to run over 5 days instead of 4 like passed years, so there seems to be an increase in overhead, not a decrease.