

Reflections of my Thoughts During the 2006 World Gliding Championships

Shinzo Takizawa

The 29th World Gliding Championships finished on 18 June 2006 without a single accident! Remarkable! In Finland, during last year's European Championships, three gliders crashed into forests alone. During an outlanding briefing, held by the Swedish organisers, we were told that 10 gliders had landed in a lake during the last 15 years, without injuries to the pilots and often only small damage to the gliders. We were also told to keep our mobile phone inside a water-sealed bag, so that it would be still serviceable after a water landing and we would be able to call for necessary help. In addition we were told not to take a gamble at low altitudes over forests and to prefer a landing in water rather than into a cleared forest area! As an Australian glider pilot, used to fly in comfortable conditions, I became quite nervous to hear of all these outlanding dramas.



Photo: Keith Gatelely, Paul from the UK team helping to rig my glider

During the first week, more than 70% of gliders in standard and racing class outlanded on three consecutive days. It was more-than-hard for the ground crews as they had to make sure that their pilots would fly the next day again, no matter in which paddock they landed, no matter how far away and how late.

In addition, there were blue scratchy conditions. Big gaggles formed in standard and racing class.

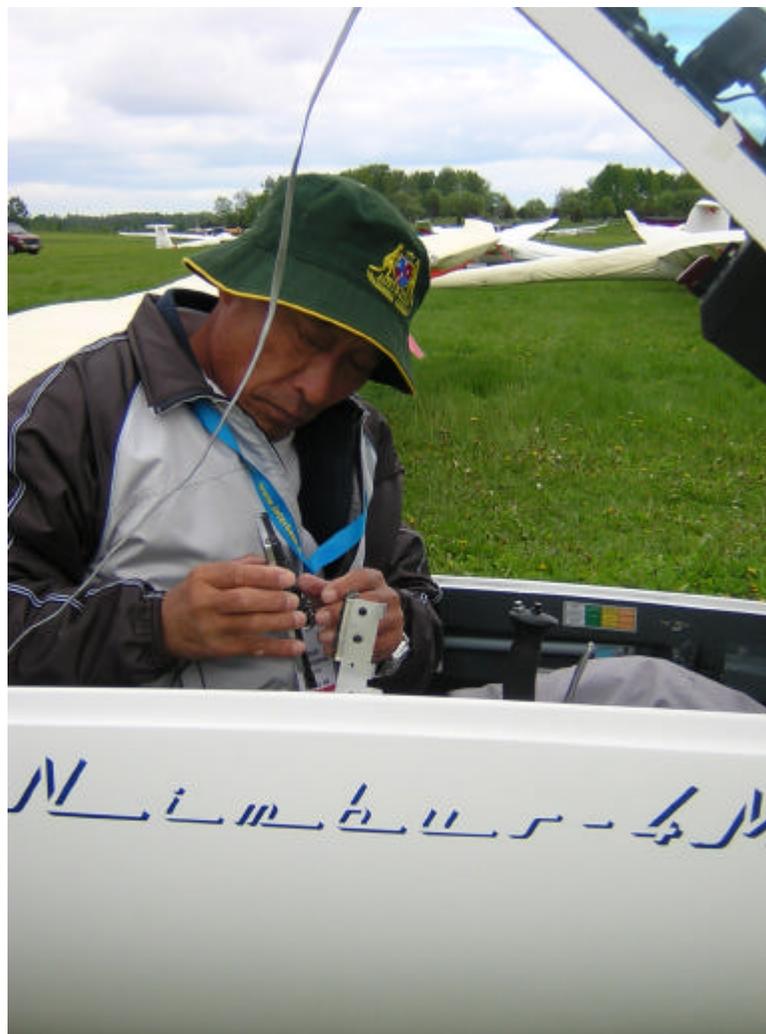


Photo: Keith Gateley. Shinzo installing his mapping screen

With all this in mind, I started my engine to get home on a day during which the whole open class nearly outlanded. I didn't want to fly into a big forest area having no option than entirely relying on my engine, so I turned back into open space to start my engine over a landable area. Others, however, got 30km more distance, which resulted in 200 points more. I started wondering why, was my spirit not enough challenging or was I competing in the wrong sport? But I know now that if I would have been more flexible, and not been so busy with my thoughts to avoid a dangerous situation over a forest, I could have achieved another 20 to 30km distance more as well. A diversion of 45-degree from track and spending 600m would have been the answer.

During one particular day, my third last thermal was two-and-a-half metres, my second last thermal one-and-a-half metres which I decided to leave as I was hoping for a two metre thermal to get a 400m climb on my way home. Unfortunately, my last thermal wasn't two metres, it was only half-a-metre and I finished almost last.

I decided then that I would be better off not to hope for the last thermal and to take any rate of climb till having reached enough altitude to get home. This tactic worked well, till nearly the last day. I stayed in one-a-half metres whilst observing that some UK pilots didn't take my one-and-a-half metres. I was pleased with myself as I believed I would have beaten the UK pilots, but I was wrong. The UK pilots finished five minutes in front of me! When asking them later about their last thermal, they told me that they could get two-and-a-half metres beside a lake, which gave them a high score whilst I was in the middle.



Photo: Christiane Takizawa, Shinzo landing

Was this a question of being lucky or unlucky? Well, I don't think so.

Big teams were exchanging information between each other about thermal conditions. A Norwegian pilot seemed to be the exception, as he was a pilot from a small team who did well. But when I asked him, I found out that he could speak several European languages and that he

had to be sent by SMS as well. It was therefore essential for the team captains to have a mobile phone, a computer for sending the logger traces and for making sure the tracks were correctly uploaded, and a radio with a big antenna.



Photo: Keith Gateley, relaxing under the wing before take-off

As the IGC, which decides about the location of the world gliding championships each two years, consists of mostly European members who are in favour of Europe, I believe it is only a dream to think that countries like Africa, America, New Zealand and Australia will have a fair chance to host world gliding championships in the future. With Europe's totally different gliding conditions, we need to find new ways to succeed, rather than get disappointed.

I believe there are two points which may lead Australia's gliding back into success:

1. Team Cooperation:

Whilst in the past the cleverest pilot with the most modern glider won, it is nowadays mainly a question of how well a pilot can process and use outside information.

screen for the rest of the competition and, of course, my main mapping screen did not freeze anymore.

2. Challenge and Defence:

I consider myself a senior pilot with a lot of experience, but without enough willingness to challenge as I am afraid of making a mistake which would throw me back.

Young pilots, however have more of a challenging spirit. It would therefore be, in my opinion, a good idea to place young and senior pilots into one team. If the challenging spirit of younger pilots works together with the experience of senior pilots we may find a solution as to how to achieve more in the future.

For me, the future success for Australian pilots going overseas for world championships is not a question of "how we can find our golden bird", it is, instead, "how can we manage our team to produce one golden bird".

I know this may take more than 10 years to achieve and we need to understand there is no quick solution for this. But if we take now the second step, learn how to work as a team, find out what information the pilots need to get from the team and how a team must work together, there will be some future for Australia in overseas competitions.

I like to say thank you very much to all GFA members for providing me with funding, to the Teams' Selection Committee for giving me a chance to receive this experience and to all friends who sent me encouraging e-mails. It was amazing how this gave me the energy to try for better flights. To our team captain, Keith Gateley, you were always very patient with me, gave me unlimited time when I had problems with my mapping screen and my radio, helped me to stay relaxed before take-off and, when I finished slow, you tried to cheer me up. Thank you also to Tony Tabart. I wish we could have had more time to talk with each other. And, last but not least, thank you Markus. You gave me your glider for a competition held in such difficult outlanding conditions. I remember what you said, when I took your glider back: "Shinzo, please ask me for the names of the past world champions at Leszno two years ago and you will find out that I don't remember them anymore. You will find out, however, that I remember well the names of the three pilots who crashed their gliders into forests in Finland. Do you think it is important how well you did? I believe it isn't, but it is important that you came home safe and well."

Markus is in the German team for next year's European Championships and I felt he said exactly what we all think, but what none of us dares to say out loud. One former world champion even joked: "Perhaps we will have championships in Iceland in four years!"