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ORIGINAL TEXT IN ENGLISH

Standing on an Olympic podium, watching your country's flag being raised, hearing your national anthem, I must confess: it is simply the most beautiful and fulfilling emotion one can imagine.

For those of us who have achieved this, the journey was long, and at times painful, but beautiful in the end. At the beginning, there is always a motivation and often an inspiration. When watching young people in the pool or on the football pitch, I have often asked myself where this motivation and inspiration come from? There are probably a multitude of answers, but for some fellow athletes, as in my case, it is in fact quite simple: a champion or an amazing performance provides the inspiration and it is parents, coaches and the sports system that provide the motivation.

And let me tell you the truth, it takes a lot of inspiration and a great deal of motivation to get to the top. It is no different from many other human activities in this respect. There is a perception that performance comes as a natural fruit of talent, but this is not the case. Work, abnegation, training and discipline are probably just as important as talent.

Michael Phelps, Jean-Claude Killy, Nadia Comaneci and Nawal El Moutawakel are all powerful names resulting from incredible circumstances and lives beyond imagination. Although they are all talented, inspired and motivated in their own right, they are what they are today because of the ultimate event: the Olympic Games.

Let there be no doubt, when an athlete dreams of achievement, he or she dreams of an Olympic medal; when an athlete wants to be a part of something that is bigger than sport, he or she wants to be a part of the Olympic Games. What about the man or the woman in the street? From Russia to Argentina, from Zambia to China, I can safely say that the answer is exactly the same. Why is that? Well, I believe that, as individuals, we are all driven by emotions and built on values. We are a result of the past and motivated by the future. We all have our roots and respect other cultures and tastes.

The Olympic Games really do have it all. I repeat this because I am deeply convinced that the Olympic Games contain all these dimensions. The Movement we know and love and dedicate our lives to is built on

nothing other than a philosophy and the honest belief that sport can change the world.

I would not pretend that I was thinking this when I jumped into the pool on cold mornings. But what I always knew, working towards the Olympic Games, was that I was following in the footsteps of universal legends. I knew that I was taking part in an event that brings dreams, inspirations and leaves memories because of the sports performances.

I also knew that, away from the centre stage, the effects were enormous: the image of a country transformed, cities transfigured and the lives of many changed for the better.

I am a swimmer and I stand here before you celebrated sports leaders, businessmen and women, politicians, journalists and scientists. I am talking about the Games and what they represent. To leave no doubt, each and every proposal I make will have one and only one purpose: to perpetuate the tradition and possibly make the Games and the Movement stronger in the future.

Thanks to a real vision, as central stakeholders of the Family, we athletes have a voice in the highest organs of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). We are thankful for being given this great opportunity.

Three subthemes regarding the athletes have been proposed for this Olympic Congress. Let me outline our views.

### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ATHLETES, THE CLUBS, FEDERATIONS AND THE NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEES (NOCS)

As said, winning a medal in the Games brings an amazing sense of achievement; it also brings fame, media recognition, and sometimes sponsorship. It is life changing.

This comes with a tremendous amount of pressure that we impose naturally on ourselves. But the system is also very demanding. In this environment, designed to produce great performances, improvements can be made.

Athletes perform best when their relationships with coaches, managers, doctors, clubs, National Federations (NFs) and NOCs are good. Our feeling is that there are many problems in this complex system of organisations, mostly due to a lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the different actors.

We recognise that there is no single organisational model; basketball is different from tennis and Italy's structures are not replicable in the United States. However, and despite these differences, a certain degree of standardisation can and should be achieved.

We could foresee the IOC making available, as it does for Athletes' Commissions or NOC statutes, a number of documents which could serve as reference or as a framework for sports organisations:

- Standard contracts between athletes and all parties, outlining their rights, duties and obligations;
- Standard contracts at the NF and NOC level, for the purposes of participation in the Games;
- Standard contracts between players and agents.



The list is not exhaustive of course. It is also important to understand what the common issues are and how they can be resolved. Let me give you an example. When an athlete plays for his or her national team, who is in charge of the insurance? It could be the club or NF or the Organising Committee of the event.

There is probably no standard practice or perfect answer. But, it would be best for all those involved, to have some indication of what has been done successfully elsewhere and the reasons behind it.

We trust that the IOC, as the leader of the Movement, could investigate and share best practices in this area.

We are convinced that there is a lot of goodwill in the system. People and organisations are ready to share if they feel they are contributing to a greater cause. And this really is a greater cause!

In Marrakech, during the IOC Athletes' Forum, a number of recommendations were made in order to better cater for athletes with regards to local, national and international structures. I will be brief, as my colleagues will be presenting them in more detail during the breakout sessions. I would, however, like to mention that there is a need to:

- Ensure a level playing field. Judging and refereeing must be of the highest standards.
- Develop tools that allow athletes to communicate with each other and provide regular information regarding their sport and activities.
- Ensure provision of legal advice when needed.

## HEALTH PROTECTION IN TRAINING AND COMPETITION

Before moving on to actual suggestions and recommendations, I would like to give you a personal perspective, which is shared by many of my colleagues.

Doping is the number one threat to sport at the present time. Doping overshadows every performance. Doping damages the credibility of athletes. Doping threatens traditional sport at its very root. For an athlete, doping is choosing to take a short cut to the top. It is also choosing to cut short a career and to damage one's health.

There is no other way than to fight this problem, hard. There is no other way than to combat all those who choose to distort the rules of play and spoil sport.

Many believe that fighting is not enough. We know that peace will ultimately come from understanding and respecting others. This is learnt through education. Education will be the key in the fight against doping.

It was suggested during the Forum in Marrakech that the IOC should implement educational programmes on health related subjects during the Olympic and Youth Olympic Games. This will be done.

Other organisations, such as NOCs and International Federations (IFs), should be encouraged to do the same at their own events or activities.

Doping aside, sport is also a generator of health-related benefits and risks. Our duty is to admit that sport, when practised at the very top level, puts an athlete's body and mind under tremendous strain.

There were many recommendations made to the IOC and the Sports Movement in the contributions received for this Congress. Here are a few that we believe are worth adopting:

- IFs must regulate competitions in a way that protects the athletes' health and bodily integrity.
- International calendars must provide for some breaks and rests at senior and junior competition levels; commercial interests should not dictate the agenda.
- Sporting organisations must conduct health screening to detect problems. The health passport introduced by some IFs is a positive step.
- Continuous education must be provided to anyone involved in an athlete's entourage: coaches, physicians, administrators and parents.
- Research regarding the health of athletes must be intensified, and properly funded.

I have listed a number of actions to be undertaken. Except for the first recommendation, which clearly points towards IFs, the others can be performed by clubs, NFs and NOCs. This is why, starting at the international level and moving towards national organisations and clubs, it is critical to formalise the roles and responsibilities of all parties. This must be done to ensure that goodwill and great intentions bear fruit.

To help and assist those in need of resources, the IOC should be ambitious and, here again, play its role as a catalyst for collaboration.

While it is not our place to operate on the ground, making information available and setting up "train the trainers" forums as well as posting videos on the web would be of great help to many.

## THE SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF ATHLETES DURING AND AFTER ELITE COMPETITION

I could not start this last topic without paraphrasing President Rogge. On a number of occasions we have heard him say: "The Sports Movement has a moral duty to assist the athletes throughout their career and especially when retiring from elite competition."

As a matter of principle, the President is right! More than anyone else, he knows what it takes to do it all: train, study, focus on the next race and look ahead to the future. It is indeed a challenging balancing act. This is why help and assistance is needed from the sports system at large.

It is a proven fact, that when the mind is clear, the body will respond. In other words, athletes who have a healthy social life and a good education alongside a sporting career are more likely to achieve their sporting goals and succeed in life after competition.

Today, in the pursuit of the ultimate performance, many athletes live in an environment restricted to very few people and organisations. They tend to be isolated and often completely dependent on their entourage. This is neither healthy nor desirable.

If the system is built just to deliver results on the field of play, it can lead to a difficult personal situation at the time of retirement.

Let us be frank and honest: moving from fame and public attention to an almost normal life is hard. Believe me, it is very hard.



It is simply difficult to accept, while you are still young and full of energy, that some of the most exciting emotions in life are behind you. None of us is really properly prepared for these radical changes.

Some athletes are naturally gifted with many talents and will succeed in every aspect of their lives. Many, however, will need to be accompanied throughout the journey towards sporting excellence.

A few countries and IFs now have programmes in place. The IOC, taking up a recommendation from the Athletes' Commission, has launched the IOC Athletes' Career Programme. It has three dimensions: Education, Life Skills and Employment.

The aim of the programme is to provide athletes and sporting organisations with the necessary information and tools to set up their own programmes. Delivery will be mainly through the IOC's website and specific forums.

The IOC is playing its part. It is of paramount importance that NOCs, NFs and clubs, also put in place such programmes.

They should be encouraged to identify athlete-friendly structures – schools, universities, companies, state agencies – which can provide athlete friendly-environments. Some athletes also need emotional support when moving away from competition and this should be recognised and organised.

We are also of the opinion that the sport system must provide guidance, explanations and information regarding what athletes can contribute off the field of play.

It was pointed out in various Congress contributions that athletes have a high level of professionally oriented soft skills, such as the ability to focus on goals, time management, and strong ethics.

We can add value to many organisations. Of course, it is a personal approach to a large extent. But we believe that it is the role of sporting bodies, such as NOCs and IFs to communicate this message throughout their network of sponsors, national sporting bodies, local and regional authorities. All these are potential employers for athletes.

I have already spoken about the entourage of athletes, but I would like to reinforce this point once more: coaches, parents, administrators and agents should also be made fully aware of the role they play in the whole performance system. They have rights and duties and should be fully informed as well.

We cannot mention agents without adding a few words. Their role, positive or not, must be recognised and accepted. At the same time, there is a need to better regulate their activities.

Some IFs have licensing schemes in place. It is a good way to bring order, clarity and quality into a fairly new and lucrative aspect of sport.

In Marrakech, it was suggested that the IOC should make available a standard charter of rights and duties for all agents. It would be very helpful to many.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, ladies and gentlemen, we would like to leave you with two thoughts:

Firstly, we have provided an overview of many ideas that were expressed by you, the members of the Olympic Family at large.

We know that it will take time and effort for all of these ideas to be implemented. We know as well that assisting athletes to a greater extent than is done at present will require additional resources.

At the present time, the situation is challenging. But I am convinced that many things can be done with the tremendous goodwill and solidarity that exists among us. I have said on several occasions that the IOC can be the platform to help connect all actors and encourage sharing. This is one of the ways to save time and resources. Sometimes we are competitors but, for the most part, we are members of the Olympic Family. And a family looks after its members.

Strategic alliances and new forms of sponsorship could help us. Can we not imagine companies interested in assisting sports structures and athletes with their sports performance and also with their life project?

Adecco has teamed up with the IOC, and some NOCs have job placement companies as sponsors, but I am certain that the market has a lot to offer, provided we are all creative enough.

Secondly, as athletes, we know how privileged we are to live extraordinary lives. We also know how much the sport system as a whole has given to us, and we are deeply grateful.

As a result, you should also know that we are more than willing to devote our time and effort; we are committed to help future generations achieve their dreams.

We can be ambassadors for many causes and messages. We offer you what we have, and what we are. This is a matter of generosity and duty, but above all, it is our way of saying "thank you"!