



## HEALTH PROTECTION IN TRAINING AND COMPETITION

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The importance of having sport at the heart of society is well known to all of us. For this, athletes need to stay involved with their sport as role models and ambassadors, not just to inspire the next generation of athletes, but to ensure that our nations are inspired to stay healthy and active. For this to happen, athletes need to be supported within their sport and have the peace of mind about their future. This will enable them to continue competing at the highest level for as long as possible, and ensure they stay involved with their sport once they retire.

The following presentation is based on the recommendations of the fourth International Olympic Committee (IOC) Athletes' Forum held this year in Marrakech. At this Forum, Athletes' Representatives from the IOC Athletes' Commission, International Federations (IFs) and Continental Associations as well as local Athletes' Representatives and Experts discussed key issues that concern athletes.

It was important to me to take part in the discussions on "Health protection in training and competition", since I have not always been able to train and compete in the way I wanted because of health issues and injuries. I know now that most of those health issues and injuries could have been avoided.

Challenges for health issues and injuries come from a broad variety of themes: education, information, treatment, prevention and anti-doping. We agreed on the importance of all these issues. However, we have chosen to focus our discussions and recommendations on some of the questions of the Virtual Olympic Congress, to enable more in-depth discussions.

The questions we first reviewed were: 1) Should athletes receive continued education and training, throughout their career, regarding the implications of practising their chosen sport on their long-term health? 2) Which sporting and non-sporting bodies are best placed to communicate with athletes on issues relating to their health?

The participating athletes stressed that it is important for all athletes to receive education and training relating to their own health issues at appropriate times and throughout their career. Therefore, our recommendation to the IOC is to implement educational programmes on health protection and injury prevention at the Olympic Games and the Youth Olympic Games, in particular. Athletes should receive information on anything that can harm their health. In order to transfer this knowledge in the best possible way, we suggest engaging athlete role models in the endorsement of such programmes.

Educational programmes should not only run during major Games. Athletes should also be educated at other instances and especially during the early phases of their career. We suggest that the IOC strongly encourage National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and IFs to implement educational programmes on health protection and injury prevention based on the IOC Medical Guidelines. "Train the trainer" programmes should also be included via the national sporting bodies and through educational institutions, since trainers are of key importance and a major influence on the lives of athletes.

Another important question we reviewed dealt with the evolution of sports: Should new technical rules and new technologies be subject to more in-depth risk assessments regarding their impact on athletes' bodies before they are introduced into a particular sport?

Technical decisions should never lead to the detriment of an athlete's health. Therefore the IOC should insist that all IFs include their respective Athletes' and Medical Commission representatives in all technical decisions, including competition schedules and rule changes. These representatives can monitor all present regulations and future changes and verify that they lead to minimal risks or threats to the present or future health status of athletes.

Dear participants, five minutes is enough to address the key issues, but more improvements are still to be made in terms of the protection of athletes' health. This subject should not only be high on the agendas of the IOC, the IFs and the NOCs, but also in the minds of trainers, agents, parents and the athletes themselves.