



FRANK FREDERICKS

Keynote speaker • International Olympic Committee



ORIGINAL TEXT IN ENGLISH

I am very pleased to be here today to address you not only on the theme I know the best, “The Athletes”, but also to give you an athlete’s perspective on the four other themes of our Olympic Congress. We all know that an athlete is more than just an athlete. His or her field of activity is not limited to the field of play but goes far beyond.

I am deeply convinced that every athlete in the world can contribute to building a better society for future generations by giving the best of him or herself inside and outside the sports arena.

OLYMPISM AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES

I would like to start my presentation with the main area that concerns us: the Olympic Games and what it means for us to take part in it.

There is no doubt that, without athletes, there would be no Olympic Games and no sport. There is absolutely no doubt that the athletes are at the heart of the Olympic Movement.

If, today, the Olympic Games are the premier event, watched by billions of people throughout the world, attracting worldwide interest, we all recognise that the athletes are the reason.

Through their performances, athletes have given the world the most beautiful and memorable moments.

I am sure that if I asked any of you to tell me what memories you have of an Olympic Games or any sport, you will come up with a name right away.

Everybody remembers Jesse Owens, Bob Beamon, Abebe Bikila, Nadia Comaneci, Jean-Claude Killy, Mark Spitz, Alberto Tomba, Michael Phelps, Usain Bolt and what they did. They all became heroes, examples to follow in sport and in life. They have inspired generation after generation throughout the world.

Today, in our evolving society, the athlete is similar to a movie or pop star as a role model or hero for the younger generation. He makes them dream, gives them hope and even helps them to find their own way and own goals in life. Of course, we do not become champions just like that.

It would be too easy. Like any other job, it demands years of learning, training and sacrifice.

As some of you may know, I hail from Namibia, a country four times the size of the United Kingdom, located on the south-western seaboard of Africa with a population of two million. I grew up in the dusty streets of a township in Namibia called Katutura. Like many destitute Namibians under apartheid, we had very little to look forward to, except hope for a better future.

Growing up poor and overcoming obstacles made me a stronger person. I became more determined to succeed in life, and to me that meant staying in school and getting an education.

However, since I was a young boy, I had a talent for sports. Athletics became my trump card to get noticed. I became an athlete with a purpose.

My purpose was to get a life, to represent my country, to give the best of myself. And I must confess, I have succeeded.

As a result of my athletic achievements, I was given the opportunity to study in the United States. This heralded the beginning of my athletics career. Through a careful combination of high level athletics and education, I was able to obtain a Master’s Degree in Business Administration while at the same time build an international career in athletics. It was not an easy journey, because I had to constantly strike a balance between academics and athletics.

Despite the difficulties in combining sport and education, I am happy that I was able to persevere because today, having retired from active sports, I can proudly fall back on my academic credentials.

I can only imagine the frustrations I would have been faced with following my retirement from international athletics if I had no academic grounding.

Remember, if it was not for family, sport and education, a young man from a little-known country would not have had the opportunity to stand in front of you today.

My career in athletics, and the experiences of many other athletes across the world, is testimony to what sport can do to help a young person achieve his or her goals and his or her dreams.

Although we know what sport has done for us, we cannot be complacent in assuming that the generations that follow us will find sport as we have. We must actively work to guide them towards sport, to show them the physical and emotional rewards. We have a responsibility to the younger generation to let them know that taking part in sport is a wonderful life experience.

As President Rogge often says, “Athletes have to represent the three values of the Olympic Movement, excellence, friendship and respect. They have to show the kids of the world who follow us on TV, or on the net, that winning is great, but that it is the taking part that counts. Excellence means sharing our passion with them freely and showing them how men and women of honour and courage behave. Friendship encourages them to consider sport as a tool for mutual understanding. And respect incorporates respect for oneself and one’s body... respect for others... for the rules... and for sport.”



THE ATHLETES

Being an athlete does not stop on the athletics track, in a pool or on a court. Like any citizen in the world, an athlete has to show that he is competent, dynamic and capable of addressing any issue. Like any citizen of the world, an athlete has a right and duty to express himself, to make his voice heard and to play a bigger role within the sports movement on local, national, regional and international levels and beyond the sports field within society in general.

And that is the goal of the Athletes' Commission of the International Olympic Committee (IOC): to be the athletes' voice.

People have to know what athletes think, what athletes feel and what athletes want regarding the position they occupy within the sports movement and society in general. They also need to know about their choice of training and competition programme, their life and career choices, and even the preparations for and running of the Olympic Games or any other sport events.

These are key concerns for today's and tomorrow's athletes. These are also the sub-themes of this overall theme, "The Athletes", which were largely discussed during our International Forum last May in Marrakech. Let me outline some of our recommendations, which will be discussed during the forthcoming breakout sessions.

On the first one, "Relationships between athletes, clubs, federations and NOCs", the Forum's participants unanimously agreed that all the members of the sports movement – clubs, National Federations (NFs), International Federations (IFs) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs) – have important roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis the athletes and vice-versa.

The athletes thus have a central role to play in raising the profile of sport and recreation across communities. For their part, the sports organisations must ensure that all athletes can compete on a level playing field. The athlete, to do his or her job properly, needs the support of his or her club, federation and NOC.

The Forum also encouraged sports organisations to strengthen their athletes' commissions, or if necessary create one, so that the athletes can make their views heard and ensure that the information provided is accessible to all. This is why, inside any sports body, it is important that athletes are in a position to influence developments and decision-making.

It is more important that athletes sit on the executive committees, so they can voice their concerns and vote. And one issue on which athletes most definitely should express their concerns is the protection of their health.

Athletes' health during training and competition is an issue which spans the areas of education, information, treatment, prevention and anti-doping. For this reason, we called on the IOC to implement educational programmes on health protection and injury prevention at the Olympic Games and Youth Olympic Games (YOG), and to encourage NOCs and IFs to do the same.

As for the fight against doping, we have adopted a strong position: a (life) ban should be recommended for anyone connected with cheating or other behaviour that undermines fair play and ethics.

Cheats must be punished; young athletes must have healthy dreams.

The role of sporting bodies is to implement the WADA code and harmonise sporting calendars.

As for the IFs' technical decisions, in particular relating to competition schedules and rule changes, these should be taken in consultation with the IFs' respective Athletes' and Medical Commission representatives.

On the athlete's side, we need to work for better protection, better communication on the dangers of over-training and over-competition, better prevention and better education.

As athletes and as human beings, we have to encourage clean sport and set a good example for the new generation.

On the key issue of an athlete's social and professional life during and after elite competition, we all need to understand the importance of combining education and sport ("dual career"), and thus to recognise and endorse the importance of life skills.

As I said earlier, an athlete's life should not be restricted to the sports arena.

There is a need to push the promotion of education throughout an athlete's sporting career.

From the very start of their career in sport, athletes should be given opportunities to prepare for life, and the Olympic Movement and national sporting bodies should provide specific support or assistance in achieving social and professional stability during and after elite competition.

This should be augmented by support from coaches and agents in preparing athletes for their final exit from sport and a daunting future.

Of course, an athlete should also take the necessary steps to prepare for life after sport throughout his or her sports career, in order to make his or her post-sports life a success.

However, sport also has a duty to give the athlete something back at the end of a sporting career.

As President Rogge once said, "The sports movement has a moral responsibility to help athletes integrate into the labour market at the end of their sporting careers. Athletes dedicate their lives to sport and it is only right that sport should give them something back".

We have to introduce and implement programmes, such as the Athlete Career Programme, which provide emotional support and management during the transition period and create partnerships with sponsors to contribute to life projects, not only sports performance.

All the stakeholders in sport such as national sports organisations and government bodies as well as the athlete's entourage, including their family and coach, should help the athlete.

Having a successful sports career is not incompatible with a successful social and professional life.

There are many examples of athletes who have shone on the international sporting scene living a so-called "normal" life at the same time as winning medals.



This is why the Athletes' Forum in Marrakech has recommended amending the Olympic Charter to contain language encouraging the Olympic Movement to support Athlete Career Programmes during athletes' active careers and throughout the transition period that follows. And, in particular, amending the mission and role of NOCs by urging them to support and assist athletes in achieving a level of stability and continuity (both social and professional) during and after elite competition.

THE OLYMPIC GAMES – AN ATHLETE'S PERSPECTIVE

A global research project conducted for the IOC in 16 countries has shown that 63% of people believe the Olympic Games are the pinnacle of all sporting events. Furthermore, 73% expressed the opinion that the Olympic Games are more than a sporting event, while some 70% thought the Olympic Games set a positive example for children and encouraged them to participate in sport.

And we must all admit that the performance of Olympic athletes, together with the ceremonies and atmosphere surrounding the Games, make the Olympic Games the premier event in world sport.

At the end of the day, we will always remember their performances, their wins and losses, their joy and their sadness.

And, all together, we have to continue striving to make the Olympic Games stronger and more enjoyable, and in particular more attractive to the younger generation. But how? Maybe by providing a programme with a mix of novelty and stability. And by us, the athletes, being there and giving the best of ourselves.

There is no doubt that sports presentation and competition formats must be dynamic, so that the younger generation will remain attracted and come back to the field of sport.

We are supportive of the modernisation of sport, as long as the soul and nature of sport is not altered.

IFs are very active in this area, working on elements such as governance, judging and refereeing, competition format, and presentation of events, with the objective of increasing the appeal of their sport.

This, in turn, will have a positive influence on the athletes.

For the Games, but also any other sporting event, the athletes are the main "actors". Organisers must focus on providing the best conditions for their performances; from venues to food, everything must be optimal.

This is why the involvement of athletes in the preparation of the Games is highly important. The athletes' input is needed, not only during the preparations for the Games, but also during the bidding process.

I am pleased to say that this is the case within the IOC, as the athletes are represented on all IOC commissions, in particular the Evaluation and Coordination Commissions.

The Olympic Movement should do more to use the images of athletes to exemplify Olympic values.

At the Olympic Games, I learnt about Olympic values, not only about winning, but other values such as fair play, respect, sportsmanship, courage and friendship.

In 1992, at my first Olympic Games in Barcelona, I competed in the 100m and 200m events. Walking into the Olympic Village, and seeing all those stars from other sports made me realise the magnitude of the Olympic Games. I became an Olympic athlete or Olympian. After winning my first silver medal I became an Olympic medallist.

However, in 1996, the biggest mistake I made was to go and stay in a hotel. Winning became more important than the other values. I personally think and believe that all athletes should stay in the Olympic Village. This will reinforce the principle of equality at the Olympic Games.

The real shock was not what happened at the Games but afterwards, when I came home, and was greeted by thousands of my fellow Namibians at the airport and in the streets. That was when I realised the real magnitude of the Olympic Games.

Let me also remind you of Pierre de Coubertin's words of wisdom: "At the Olympic Games, the important thing is not winning, but taking part. What counts in life is not the victory, but the struggle, the essential thing is not to conquer but to fight well."

THE STRUCTURE OF THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

As chairman of the IOC Athletes' Commission, I deeply understand that the structure of the Olympic Movement is vertical in nature, in that athletes are associated with clubs, clubs are affiliated with their NFs, which in turn are usually affiliated with an IF as well as their NOC and government. NOCs are affiliated to the IOC.

Within the Athletes' Commission, our main commitment is to make sure that the voices of the athletes are heard within the IOC.

As a consultative body, our main role is to liaise between active athletes and the IOC, to represent athletes within the Olympic Movement, and to uphold the rights and obligations of athletes.

We work for the athletes and we are elected by athletes who have competed at the Olympic Games.

We defend the interests of all Olympic athletes and their place within the Olympic Movement.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues for their outstanding work all year long. It is a real pleasure working with you.

My thanks go also to all former members, in particular to Sergey Bubka and Peter Tallberg.

In order to strengthen the role of the IOC Athletes' Commission, and for us to evolve over the next decade, athletes need to be active at club level.

NFs need to have an athletes' commission, as do IFs and NOCs. I would strongly urge them to follow the IOC's path and open the door of their executive committees to athletes, so that they could play a greater role.

This way we can ensure that the welfare of athletes is the primary concern, particularly in the organisation of the Olympic Games. Obviously, we would like to see every athlete who has qualified for the Olympic Games compete at the Games themselves, but you will understand that



we need to respect the working practises of 205 NOCs and as many as 33 IF athletes' commissions.

Sporting organisations must ensure that all athletes can compete on a level playing field through effective and impartial implementation of technical standards and judging.

I am fortunate that I am from an event in athletics where there are no great problems with judging. But imagine an athlete spending four years training to qualify and compete at the Games and a judge then ruining it for him or her.

We cannot afford to have judges ruining the life of an athlete. Judging at the Olympic Games needs to be of the very highest standard.

And, today, the Olympic oath is not enough. We have to consider a code of ethics for athletes.

Another concern is the competition schedule. Some athletes are complaining of competition schedule overload. As an athlete, do you have a say in this? Probably very little, but we should be involved. IFs should consult more with athletes, whether they are retired or active.

We are thankful to all stakeholders for making our dreams come true by their sacrifices, and for making the Games happen.

And we in turn are ready to give back.

OLYMPISM AND YOUTH

The YOG is a very important event. Therefore, the Athletes' Commission will support the IOC in organising this event. For the first ever Summer YOG, which will take place in Singapore, the members of the IOC Athletes' Commission will be on site during the entire event. They will talk with the young athletes about their ideas, dreams and how they dealt with crucial issues such as doping. They will be taking part in the educational and cultural programmes implemented by the Organising Committee because sport, education and culture play an integral role in the development of the young.

Through such a combination, we are able to develop critical life skills that matter long after a career in athletics, football, skiing or tennis has come to an end.

CONCLUSION

Sport changed my life. What I am today is because of what sport has given me. What I have built, what I have discovered, what I have achieved is thanks to sport.

As I said earlier, we have a responsibility to the younger generation to let them know that taking part in sport is a wonderful life experience.

We have to be sure that this is the case everywhere in the world.

I would like also to remind our young people that they represent not only the promise of a brighter future, but also the vitality of our present.

At the same time I would like to remind those individuals and institutions responsible for the development of sport, that sport, education and culture play an integral role in the development of our youth.

We know of professional athletes who took their sports seriously, excelled in it, and have gone on to make a mark in their professions or in enterprise, and as leaders of society.

It is crucial that we prepare young people so they can look forward to a future that will be both challenging and richer in opportunities.

Whether we are athletes, sports leaders, coaches, doctors, journalists or private individuals, it is up to us now to fully play our role in society and to communicate our passion for sport to the younger generation.

With my fellow athletes, I am ready to continue to play this role, following Coubertin's motto: "See far, speak frankly, act firmly." How about you?