



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

PETER TALLBERG

Moderator • International Olympic Committee



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I have been given the task of acting as moderator during this session. This morning, we have listened to four speakers during “The Athletes” plenary session and, during the next 20 minutes, we shall be listening to four prominent sports representatives, who will cover the sub-theme: “The social and professional life of athletes during and after elite competition”.

There has been tremendous development in world sport over the last 28 years. It was in 1981, 28 years ago, during the Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden, Germany, that athletes were invited to participate on an almost equal basis with the representatives of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and International Federations (IFs) for the first time. Delivering their message to the Congress, the athletes’ main speaker at that time, Lord Sebastian Coe, said: “The athletes must be treated as the most important group and thus as one of the four pillars of the Olympic Movement.” This fact could perhaps today be enlarged, and cover all elite athletes, not only the Olympians.

When I participated in my first Games in Rome in 1960, the amateur rule and issue were still of great importance. There were so-called “college professionals” in the west and so-called “state amateurs” in the east. Those systems covered the training and well-being of the athletes both during and after their active elite performance on the playing field. Times have changed dramatically, mainly because of changes in world politics.

This time, during this Congress, we can clearly see that the athlete – and I say the elite athlete – has been put in focus. Important issues related to the fourth pillar, to the elite athletes, are being debated.

The general opinion today is that the failure to provide a holistic and well-planned approach to the development of an athlete during his or her active sporting career, leaves the athlete ill prepared after finishing competitive sport.

When faced with retirement from elite sport, which usually happens in their early thirties, many athletes face a loss of identity, self-confidence, direction, status and financial security.

I have met many interesting business and sports personalities in my life. But by far the finest experience I have had during my 33 years as an IOC member was during my long chairmanship of the IOC Athletes’ Commission. The members of the Commission were devoted, clever, well informed and motivated. They were mostly young people, who were usually well prepared for meetings, cooperative and well spoken in several languages.

I can honestly say that the members of the IOC Athletes’ Commission are the very best group of people I have ever encountered or worked with. I would now like to mention some of the members from the very beginning of the IOC Athletes’ Commission:

- Sebastian Coe, today Chairman of the London 2012 Games Organising Committee;
- Thomas Bach, today Vice-President of the IOC and President of the German Olympic Sports Confederation;
- Kip Keino, today President of the Kenyan Olympic Committee and running an extremely successful children’s home in Kenya.

I could mention many more, but I believe these examples demonstrate that top athletes generally have a significantly higher level of professionally oriented soft skills, such as the ability to focus on goals, time management and strong work ethics. Today you have to be extremely well equipped mentally in order to reach the top i.e. the elite level. Nevertheless there are few international programmes that give athletes the required help both during and after their sporting career. The IOC coordinated programme – the Athlete Career Programme – has made great strides, but there is still more to be done!

Research and experience shows that athletes who have a healthy social life while pursuing an education, or are linked to a job performance scheme alongside sports training, are more likely to achieve their sporting goals and be more successful in life after competition.

All Olympic Movement constituents should endorse the importance of combining **education** and **sport** – or a dual career.

There should be an obvious identification of athlete-friendly structures, such as secondary schools, universities, technical institutes or the army, with sponsors, state companies, etc.

Programmes and messages should be delivered using youth events such as the Youth Olympic Games and the Youth Festivals as channels.

Partnerships with sponsors should be developed aiming at lifelong projects, not only at sports performances. Cooperation with Adecco should also be continued and strengthened.

During recent years, the IOC has been vigorously trying to achieve equal rights and possibilities for both female and male athletes. Some 43% of the competing athletes nowadays are female. There are, however, areas where more must be done, like for example, in the field of sports administration. Female athletes also need to be given the opportunity to reconcile the demands of sport and motherhood.



The sports world should develop license systems and certification models for agents, as well as provide tools and education to athletes to assist them in selecting and managing their relationship with agents.

It is not unusual for athletes to be completely dependant on their entourage to carry out even the smallest of tasks. When the bonds with their entourage loosen at the end of the athletes' career, many of them find themselves unable to cope with the demands of everyday life.

The lack of support is particularly prevalent among athletes who leave professional elite sport for reasons of disillusion or injury, or who have been forced into retirement on account of a doping offence. These athletes are then abandoned by their entourage as they lose their money-generating power and are no longer profitable financially.

It must also be noted that there are clear differences on a global basis. Athletes from poor and developing countries must receive more assistance and aid. Here, Olympic Solidarity and the NOCs have an important mission to fulfil.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that this brief introduction has given you some background information as a basis for our discussions.

I will now give the floor to the representatives of the IOC, the NOCs, the IFs and the stakeholders for five minutes each. Please respect the time schedule, in order to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to take the floor during the 60 minutes of questions, comments or proposals.

So now the next speaker is Hicham El Guerrouj, world famous runner from Morocco, dual Olympic champion in Athens and still a multiple world-record holder. Hicham, the floor is yours.