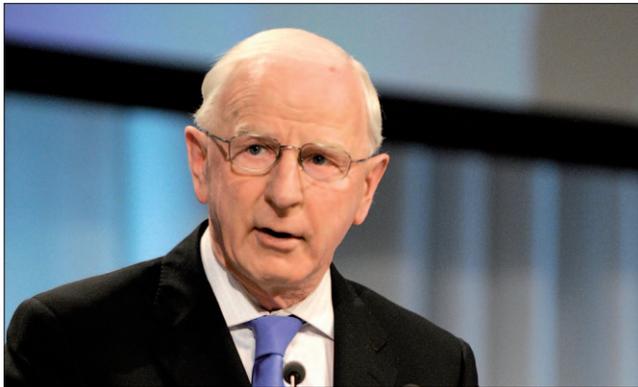




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ORIGINAL TEXT IN ENGLISH

There has never been a more important time for children to discover the gift of sport, nor has there ever been a more important mission for the Olympic Movement than to provide real and meaningful leadership in bringing this gift to them.

Positive signs of “green shoots” indicate that the global economy may already be on the road to recovery; a more responsible approach to recycling and energy production bodes well for addressing the environmental challenges of global warming; and it is surely only a matter of time before our most eminent scientists discover a cure for the swine flu virus.

But the many challenges of the obesity epidemic, which predominantly affects young people and is now the scourge of over 1,000 million lives around the globe, continues to grow.

Obesity can result in a higher risk of heart disease, type-2 diabetes and other diseases, including cancer. Despite numerous initiatives and high levels of funding from governments, world bodies and brand-owners, there has still been no significant progress in arresting its spread. Let me give you some examples:

In my country, the average 14-year-old is nearly 4 stone (24kgs) heavier than his or her grandparents were at the same age. (*University College Cork, February 2009*)

This is the first generation in the history of mankind with a declining life expectancy, being expected to live two years less than their parents by 2050. (*New England Journal of Medicine*)

Being even moderately obese cuts two to four years off a person's life, while more severe obesity can remove over 10 years from their life expectancy. (*Oxford University Report, March 2009*)

The corresponding economic consequences are equally startling:

- “Obesity is already creating a major economic burden for governments, overtaking tobacco-related illnesses and consuming up to 8% of overall health care budgets.” (World Health Organization)

- “Obesity could affect economic output as severely as malnutrition, slicing up to 3% off gross domestic product in the hardest-hit countries.” (World Bank)

Only the Olympic Movement has the unique expertise, brand, role models and infrastructure to provide meaningful leadership in this challenge. Our Olympic Charter proudly declares our goals to be “teaching youth through sports” and “encouraging people to follow a way of life based on the joy found in effort”.

Furthermore, at the 11th World Sport for All Congress, we released the Havana Declaration that stated: “Particularly for the sake of the youth of the world, it is time for urgent, real, targeted multi-sectoral action – in health, education and sports sectors – at all levels of society and government in regard to physical activity.”

A list of recommendations to promote personal physical activity was prepared, including suggestions on the provision of community sport and recreation facilities, as well as increased sports and physical education in schools.

Our President, Jacques Rogge, has already begun to deliver on these commitments. When he was President of the European Olympic Committees (EOC), he created the European Youth Olympic Festival as the supreme celebration of education through sport in Europe. He has now expanded this vision by laying the foundations for an even greater event, the Youth Olympic Games (YOG), a similar concept, but on a world scale. And this is an event that has the true potential to inspire children, to capture the hearts and minds of young people and to get communities active everywhere.

In 2007, the European Parliament added to its “Resolution on the Role of Sport in Education”, saying that physical education was “the only school subject that seeks to prepare children for a healthy lifestyle and focuses on their overall physical and mental development, as well as imparting important social values such as fairness, self-discipline, solidarity, team spirit, tolerance and fair play”.

With the kind support of our friends in Samsung, our own EOCs have also introduced a Schools and After Schools Programme that uses a train-the-trainer model to assist in bringing tens of thousands of children into an active lifestyle. Funding for such projects can often be a challenge, but good initiatives that service our communities will find a way!

So what more can we do, and where have we been going wrong?

As proven by its ever-growing TV audiences, sport still occupies an esteemed position in people's “repertoire of interests” but, most importantly for children in our digital age, there has been significantly reduced active participation. This is most likely due to time pressures, academic obligations and limited infrastructure, but at a time when a privately owned social network like Facebook can recruit over 200 million young users in a little over two years, it is clear that computer games and online communities now increasingly command the bulk of young people's leisure time.

We therefore need to challenge our own thinking on alternative approaches to recruiting young people into a more active lifestyle, fundamentally re-evaluating approaches to exercise and sports and creating more readily accessible solutions that address behavioural patterns



of participation, while offering “everyday active fun” with significant corresponding health benefits for everyone.

For me, sport will always be about getting young people onto playing pitches, into gyms, halls and clubs. Social networking for me was the local dojo, where I could meet friends and enjoy the spirit of friendly competition, and I sincerely wish that every child could share this experience, enjoy the camaraderie, and learn the true meaning of Olympic values like peace, friendship and harmony, rejecting prejudice and violence, and enjoying a healthy environment and lifestyle.

And be clear that this should extend beyond those children who can compete “higher, faster or stronger” into a system that gives everybody the chance to discover the delights of sports participation for themselves. Let our potential champions emerge from a culture that gives every boy and girl their chance to play!

But, for the future of our children and in fulfilling the vision of our founder Pierre De Coubertin’s dream, I believe that each and every one of us must be more diligent in responding to the challenges of our times in finding new ways to engage young people in sport.

As one of the other themes of this Congress is “The Digital Revolution”, I will tell you of another initiative currently being developed by the EOC. Working with some academic and commercial partners, we are developing an “active network” online, where we will replace “social” networking with challenge-based motion control games that require a high level of physical participation to play.

The Mayo Clinic has said that one of the best ways to re-engage young people in sport is using computer games. These games have the potential to educate children on the rules of the sport and build their confidence in that discipline. The system not only builds key-stage skills and gives them an aerobic workout, but ultimately helps children to find the sport that is of particular interest to them, with the website ultimately acting as the conduit to the local club.

This is just one of many things that can be done, but as we move forward from this Congress, my message to you will be first and foremost to capitalise on the benefits that the YOG can bring to your home territories. Then work with your National Olympic Committees (NOCs), Sports Federations and athletes to find new and innovative ways of building sports participation among children.

Success will deliver a significant dividend both at home and abroad, while presenting a contemporary vision of the Olympic brand for sponsors and increasing the perceived relevance of the Olympic Games in the years between Games.

The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.

It is, however, generally accepted that “lessons learnt young, stay with you for a lifetime”, so perhaps we might better achieve our goals by focusing on the role of sport in the harmonious development of children, blending sport with culture and education to create a way of life based

on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles. So let us increasingly prioritise sports participation among children, coming up with 21st century solutions that re-engage young people in our sports.

Thank you for your attention.