



## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ATHLETES, THE CLUBS, FEDERATIONS AND THE NOCS

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I am deeply convinced that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is an organisation centred on the athlete. From the original idea of creating an Athletes' Commission to the support programme that is currently being set up, we have seen virtually 30 years of continuous progress.

The athlete as the focus of activities, the athlete at the centre of everyone's attention: this is the path we must follow, the ambition we must hold on to.

First of all the IOC insists that Athletes' Commissions should be set up in all sports structures. Athletes must also have a voice in executive bodies.

Behind this aim lies a very practical logic. Athletes are tuned into their sport every day and their lives revolve around the quest for the ultimate performance. In this context, it is normal, logical and legitimate that athletes should be involved in all decisions that may have an impact on their career. Refereeing, technical rules, calendars and the fight against doping are a few of the areas in which they can help us make the right decisions.

It is the athletes who inspire and serve as role models for young people. It is their exploits that attract commercial interests and their medals that thrill entire nations. It is therefore vital that sports bodies recognise their importance and capitalise on the aura that radiates from them. It is a question of credibility as much as one of the responsible management of our organisations.

When I see the collective intelligence that emanates from the IOC Athletes' Commission, or the impressive make-up of the equivalent body in my own sport of athletics, I cannot help thinking that we must put all our efforts into ensuring that the Movement reaches beyond international structures and National Olympic Committees (NOCs), to embrace National Federations (NFs) and clubs as well.

The life of a sport and that of its athletes is becoming increasingly sophisticated, or increasingly complicated, dare I say. I heard what my friend, Alex Popov, said this morning and I thought it was very pertinent: the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders must be clarified as much as possible. Of course, the Olympic Charter provides a basis as far as the International Federations (IFs) and NOCs are concerned, but I believe we need to go further in terms of the number of structures involved and the level of detail provided.

Coaches, agents, clubs, NFs, NOCs and IFs are all stakeholders who need to operate in a coordinated manner in order for athletes to enjoy the best possible conditions in which to perform. One contributor put their finger on a crucial point that not only is good coordination required, but healthy relations too. You know as well as I do that sources of conflict are often linked to a lack of clarity and grey areas.

Let us try to provide a clearer framework. I believe this objective can be achieved by the IOC. It will not be done through the Olympic Charter of course. But the internet, on the other hand, offers us unlimited possibilities.

The reason I have not mentioned professional structures at this stage is because I believe they require a different approach. Their basic objective is not the same and their motivation extends beyond education and sport. They want to make money. This is not a problem in itself when there is respect and understanding among the different structures. But unfortunately, tensions usually predominate. Training costs, national teams, parallel calendars and competing sponsors are all problems that crop up too often.

To prevent athletes being caught between different objectives and interests, I believe it is fundamental that each sport should begin by identifying known risks or problems and then work on technical and legal rules aimed at preserving its future. It is also necessary to work with professional structures in order to find the most realistic and consensual solutions. It is a tricky exercise, since there is no ideal recipe or system.

One problem that arises frequently is changes of nationality. Whatever the reasons behind athletes' decisions to compete under a different flag, the stakeholders have a moral responsibility that goes beyond the rules enshrined in the Olympic Charter or drawn up by the IFs. An understanding between the NOCs concerned and the federation to which the athlete belongs is a prerequisite, but it is no longer enough.

Here also, there are no easy solutions. However, the creation of decentralised training centres, such as the IOC's Sport for Hope in Zambia, is one possible answer. Twinning agreements between clubs or NFs are also conceivable. They would make it possible to regulate relations and prevent abuses and excesses.

Another vital point that has been raised and to which I can only add my support, is that refereeing and judging in all sports should aim at perfection. Bearing in mind the interests at stake and the sacrifices made, athletes and the public are entitled to expect effective rules and judging systems, as well as impeccable behaviour.

The IFs' efforts in this field should be welcomed, but their impact must be felt at all levels of the pyramid. This is truly fundamental for the athletes who fire our imagination and the young people who dream of becoming stars.



Whether it is through the Youth Olympic Games or any other initiative, it seems essential to me that the IOC and all the other stakeholders of the Olympic Movement should equip themselves with the means to develop athletes' skills outside sport.

In Singapore next year, 3,500 talented young athletes will be exposed to Olympism through an ambitious educational and cultural programme. This first initiative will, I am sure, be remarkably useful.

Others are needed at different stages of an athlete's career in order to ensure that the energy put into the quest for performance does not lead to a dead end. This still happens too often and we must be aware of it and do something about it.

Investment in athlete training is also the best way we can ensure that athletes' active participation in sports bodies will be rich and fruitful.

For an athlete, apart from medals, public recognition and, in some cases, glory, there is nothing more beautiful and noble than to give back generously to sport and to Olympism.