ATHLETES GIVING BACK TO SPORT

ROGER FEDERER
TENNIS STAR ROGER FEDERER HAS CROWNED AN AMAZING YEAR, WHICH INCLUDED WINNING WIMBLEDON, BY LAUNCHING A CHARITY TO HELP CHILDREN.

The professional tennis tour is known for its demanding schedule, with singles players often travelling the globe for 40 weeks a year. Yet despite the demands on his time and at the end of an exceptionally successful sporting year, Roger Federer has just launched a new project which aims to help children in sport, especially those from less well off backgrounds.

“Chances for young sports talents and children in need,” the Roger Federer Foundation’s motto boldly proclaims. As a young, developing player in his native Switzerland, Roger himself benefited from various youth charities. Now he has reached No.1 in the world and won the Australian Open, his second Grand Slam victory, Federer says he “wants to make his own contribution towards helping young sportmen and sportswomen.”

“We are in the process of evaluating in which direction Roger wants to spread the money,” said Lynette Federer, Roger’s South African mother, who along with her husband Robert is working on the Foundation’s council. “This hasn’t yet been decided on exactly. But Roger knows he wants to invest in children, and especially in less privileged children.”

CECILIA TAIT
A GOVERNMENTAL ROLE IS ENABLING FORMER OLYMPIC VOLLEYBALL STAR CECILIA TAIT TO GIVE BACK TO HER HOME COUNTRY BY HELPING IMPROVE SPORTING FACILITIES IN PERU.

Cecilia Tait started playing volleyball at the age of 12 in the streets of the shanty town where she lived in Lima, Peru. She became so good that she progressed to win an Olympic silver medal in 1988 and was heralded as one of the sport’s greatest players. But this was not enough for Tait. “There were no real facilities in Peru at the time,” she explains. “I started with nothing. I was able to become the best in the world but I want to give other kids opportunities.”

Tait, 41, who retired from competitive action in 1991, is succeeding in her aim, giving back to sport in Peru in a way that hasn’t been seen in the country before. Tait has been a member of the Parliament in Peru since 2000 and has helped form the government’s Youth and Sports Congress, which has been instrumental in increasing public spending on sport by almost a third in the last four years, to US$13 million a year. “When I had to hang up my athletic shoes because of injury I thought everything I had given for sport was left on the court,” she says. “But with my election to Congress, I have been able to do other things that are very important to me.

“My focus as a member of Congress is trying to help youth in sport, particularly - and sport overall,” she says. “Now, there are more places for kids to play sport. One of the things is a law which creates soccer fields in the shanty towns. A dusty patch of land might not look pretty but to the local kids, it means so much.

“Also, the funding is being used to help improve structure and help upgrade existing stadia around the country. Another benefit of greater funding is that the national athletes are now able to attend sports events abroad that they could not go to before,” she adds.

In 2003 Tait received the IOC Women and Sport Trophy for America in recognition of her outstanding achievements to develop, encourage and strengthen the participation of women and girls in sport. “Winning prizes like that has given me greater incentive to do more,” she says.

Peru’s sport will be firmly in the spotlight this summer as the country is hosting the Copa America Soccer Championships.

Tait is now awaiting government approval on another law she has put forward which mandates the teaching of sports in schools.
The following year, Bindra set a junior world record in the 10m Air Rifle, when he won the bronze medal. In 2002 he won a gold medal in an international competition in Germany and in 2003 he again won bronze at the World Cup.

“None of his efforts to simply work hard to achieve what he wants,” says Bindra. “The Olympic gold is the aim now and I am working towards it. Winning the medal there is no joke. It is the ultimate goal.”

Bindra, 21, will compete in the 10m Air Rifle category in Athens. Since November 2002, until the Games begin, Bindra is being funded to train at the Olympic Training centre in Colorado Springs, USA. The outstanding facilities there are better than in his homeland, meaning that Bindra can take his training to a level where, when he arrives in Athens, he knows he will be as well prepared as possible.

The USOC training centre in Colorado involves much more than just shooting practice. Along with spending time on the firing ranges, athletes receive the benefit of sports psychology classes, and have their techniques analysed by video. Every element of the event is scrutinised.

Bindra was the youngest member of the Indian team in Sydney and is now judged as the country’s best hope of winning a medal in Athens. He appreciates how much he has benefited from the Olympic Solidarity scholarship. “I really do believe in this born-with-a-talent thing,” he says. “Since my childhood, my father’s rifles became an obsession with me and I spent more and more time with them. For the past four years I have been training for almost six to eight hours a day. It is tough and by the end of the day, I am totally drained of mental and physical energy.”

Bindra won the Arjuna Award in India, the highest honour given to sportspersons in the country, after he had equalled the world junior record in the air rifle event during the 2000 World Cup in Munich.

THE ROLE OF AGENTS

A study looking at the role of agents in modern sport promises to provide the IOC Athletes’ Commission with valuable data. The nature of the relationship between athletes and commercial agents is being researched as part of a six-month project by three students of the International Master in Management, Law and Humanities of Sport run by the International Centre for Sports Studies (CIES) in Neuchâtel, Switzerland. The CIES has a close working relationship with the IOC, who provided the idea for the study. The Athletes’ Commission may then adopt some of these independent viewpoints as recommendations for how athletes deal with agents. The relationship between an athlete and agent is critical. It can lead to difficulties if the competitor is not represented properly. The students will be interviewing athletes and agents. They will be looking at what is the role of a commercial agent, the legal framework of the relationship between the agent and the athlete, what their respective responsibilities and obligations are and how national and international federations can help their members.