

2019 IOC Women and Sport Award Winners

World Winner: Po-Chun Liu (World Baseball Softball Confederation)

Ms Po Chun Liu is an umpire at the World Baseball Softball Confederation, recognised for being the first female baseball umpire in her native Chinese Taipei. As a child, Ms Liu was forced to abandon her hopes of playing baseball after being told that it was not acceptable for girls to participate in the sport in Chinese Taipei. Coaches told her the same – but she refused to allow such discrimination to stand in the way of her dreams.

Prior to becoming an umpire, she volunteered with Little League Baseball, helped with summer camps and interpreted for Chinese Taipei's Baseball Association during international competitions. Despite then successfully completing her umpire training, the authorities in her home country still attempted to block her path – stating that the equipment she needed to officiate games was not available. The challenges she was trying to overcome were discovered by the New York Yankees, who in 2009 sponsored the kit she needed for the job. Today, she's an international baseball umpire, and a great role model and staunch advocate for female empowerment through sport.

Rather than accepting the gender bias shown towards her as a child and leaving behind her wish of playing a part in baseball, Ms Liu refused to give up. As a result, girls and women now have more opportunities than ever to get involved in the sport – not only in Chinese Taipei but on an international scale. She's passionate about creating openings for girls and women to take up leadership roles, and has organised baseball clinics, workshops and international games in her home country. She's enticed sponsors to promote women's participation in sport, while writing books, giving speeches, acting as a mentor for elementary and high school teachers, and designing curricula for umpire training.

Her work has been recognised by her peers and honoured with several awards. In 2017, the President of Chinese Taipei awarded her the 24th Ten Outstanding Young Women in sports, and in 2015, she was handed the 2015 Golden Mask Award by the Harry Wendelstedt School for Umpires. She also made Forbes' 2018 list of the Most Powerful Women in International Sports.

Winner for Africa: Djatougbe Amélie 'Nathalie' Noameshie (Togo)

Mrs Djatougbe 'Nathalie' Noameshie's devotion to the development of sport in Togo saw her elected as Vice President of the Togo National Olympic Committee (CNOT) in 2016 and Vice President of the Togo Volleyball Federation in 2013. She has played a particularly instrumental role in the advancement of women in sport and sports participation for girls.

A former player in the Togo national team and the University of Lomé team, Mrs Noameshie has been active in the Togo Volleyball Federation since 2003, first as Assistant Secretary General, then Secretary General in 2007 and Vice President in 2013 – the first woman to be nominated to the position.

A pioneer for women in volleyball refereeing throughout Africa, in 2008 Mrs Noameshie became the first fully qualified female international volleyball referee on the continent. She has since officiated in major African and world competitions, despite it not being entirely accepted at the time that a woman could referee in an area dominated by men. She took part in refereeing seminars at the African Volleyball Confederation and the European Volleyball Confederation to raise awareness of gender equality – now, 10 years on, there are 45 female international volleyball referees.

What's more, Mrs Noameshie has been involved in coaching young players through the African Dream Project, a development mission for volleyball in schools throughout Togo that provides children aged eight to 14 with a four-year training programme to improve their technical and tactical skills. She monitors the training programmes and organises regional and national school competitions. The first

national African Dream festival, held in January 2017 in Lomé, brought together more than 200 students, of which half were girls.

Mrs Noameshie follows specific aims on the changes and improvements she is passionate about seeing for African women in sport. These include raising awareness among the national population and in the media of the important role of women in the Olympic Movement and encouraging women to take on leadership positions in sport and to aim for elected positions within sports administrations. She remains driven to continue to actively support positive change in Togo.

Winner for the Americas: Comisión Mujer y deporte de Costa Rica (Costa Rica)

The Women and Sport Commission of the National Olympic Committee of Costa Rica is promoting the leading role of women in Latin America across different areas and is making considerable progress.

The Women and Sport Commission offers sports management tools and promotes research into training methods in order to increase the participation of female athletes. Additionally, by promoting education and professional development, encouraging the inclusion of women in leadership roles, overseeing proposals that create regulations or laws that prevent and punish harassment or abuse in sports, they aim to ensure full and effective participation of women and girls by eliminating all forms of violence.

The commission has used workshops, group interventions, formal education and sporting activities to encourage the integration of women in sport, offering such tools as sports management, empowerment and harassment and abuse awareness training. It has also lobbied for the creation of a legal framework that recognises these issues and offers aid for women.

Empowerment workshops have been held annually for women in Costa Rica who are interested in becoming sporting leaders. Sports management courses address such concerns as: women in global leadership positions; gender and leadership; project management in strategic areas of sport; initiatives and new communication methods; and cooperation and collaboration between men and women to achieve sporting objectives.

What's more, the commission has increased the participation of women in sports training, with its attendee rate on courses and training activities for women increasing from 30 per cent to 50 per cent. Similarly, an average of 21 women currently have roles within National Federations, including boards of directors, sports management positions and trainers.

The Women and Sport Commission is now in its 10th year since its founding in January 2009, and over the past decade around 20 administration courses have been carried out on the theme of tools and leadership for women in sports management in the different provinces of Costa Rica.

Winner for Asia: Saada Al Ismaili (Oman)

Mrs Saada Salim Al-Ismaïli is a Board Member at the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), and Director of the Women's Sport Department at the Ministry of Sports Affairs. She has shown outstanding dedication to the promotion of women's involvement and participation in sports in designing and efficiently implementing plans and programmes aimed at promoting women's sport throughout the regions and governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

At the Ministry of Sports Affairs, Mrs Al-Ismaïli has helped to introduce sports programmes in schools and has staged female sports tournaments for all age groups. She has increased female participation in physical exercise, formed women's teams to represent the Sultanate in regional and international competitions, and organised tournaments in all 11 governorates of the Sultanate.

As an active Board Member of the OOC, Mrs Al-Ismaïli has worked closely with the National Federations, sport committees and clubs with a view of forming female teams to effectively participate

in local, regional and international competitions. She has been pivotal in successfully identifying several female sports talents who now compete at the highest level.

What's more, Mrs Al-Ismaili has encouraged retired elite athletes involved in sports management or training and coaching to attend any tournament or event she has organised. She sees this as an opportunity for their experiences to be shared and advice to be offer to new sportswomen. Among those to have taken up the invitation are tennis player Fatmah Al Nabhaniyah, athletes Buthainah Al Yaaqubia, Shanoonah Al Habsiyah, Mazoon Al Alawiyah, and taekwondo competitor Yusra Al Shukuriyah.

Her contribution to the development of women's sport in Oman is ongoing and will continue to be felt for years to come. Alongside her other roles, she is the Vice Chairman of the Oman Women's Sport Committee, a component of the OOC, and has firmly established herself as a leading activist for women's sport in the Gulf region and Arab world.

Winner for Europe: Morana Palikovic Gruden (Croatia)

Mrs Morana Palikovic Gruden is a Croatian sports official, a former athlete in several sports, and a journalist and politician. She has been Vice President of the Croatian Olympic Committee (COC) since 2012, Chair of the Winter Sports Committee of the COC Assembly since 2014, member of the European Olympic Committee (EOC) Gender Equality in Sport Commission since 2005, and President of the Croatian Skating Federation since 2004.

A leading figure within the Gender Equality in Sport Commission, Mrs Gruden has been active in the promotion and advancement of gender equality in sport and increasing women's holding of managerial positions at national and sports associations at the local level. At the proposal of the commission led by Mrs Gruden, the COC initiated the national project of specialised education for women in sport.

The National Gender Equality Policy, from 2011 to 2015, has been a huge achievement of the Gender Equality in Sport Commission. It contains a chapter on action plans and measures for the promotion of women's position in sport. The emphasis is placed on increasing the number of women managing structures of sports federations and other sports organisations. The plan re-examines existing legal frameworks and promotes a follow-up model of statistics on women's position in sport with the view of combating any form of discrimination.

What's more, with the COC, Mrs Gruden created the Female Coordinators Network in National Federations and county sports associations. In collaboration with the Gender Equality in Sport Commission, she led the European project SUCCESS aimed at strengthening governance in the European sport community by providing women with necessary competences to support gender balance and equality in decision-making in sport structures.

Mrs Gruden organised the oldest and only international skating competition of its kind, 'Golden Spin'. The 51st edition of this event was held in 2018. She also oversaw the 2008 and 2013 European Figure Skating Championships and two World Synchronised Skating Championships. With the International Skating Union (ISU), she contributes to the training of young referees and coaches in figure skating, synchronised and speed skating.

Winner for Oceania: Vanuatu Volleyball Federation (Vanuatu)

The **Vanuatu Volleyball Federation (VVF)** is the National Federation for beach and indoor volleyball in the Pacific country of Vanuatu. Established in 1998 as the governing body, it is recognised locally as having paved a path for female participation in sports at elite and grassroots level.

VVF's Sport for Development programme, Volley4Change (V4C), was established in 2013, and focuses on supporting grassroots sport and the building of National Federations, while contributing to



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development outcomes. The vision is that women, girls and people with disabilities will benefit from improved health and wellbeing through nutrition education, increased physical activity, and leadership and inclusion in sports.

Since its inception, around 3,000 community members in 25 communities/groups across Vanuatu have participated in the V4C programme. An evaluation conducted by the University of Queensland in 2017 found that until the V4C programme came to their village, many women had not exercised since getting married. Positive feedback indicates that the programme – which is developed in collaboration with a number of key institutions, such as police, schools and government and non-government organisations – is effective in addressing cultural barriers known to influence female participation in physical activity.

VVF recognises the important and unique opportunity that sports create in raising awareness of important social and gender issues. They demonstrated this by partnering with Oxfam in 2018 to facilitate awareness on sexual harassment to VVF staff, coaches and players. Similarly, the V4C programme includes the Annual V4C Shield, conducted in partnership with the Vanuatu Police Women, in celebration of International Women's Day on 8 March each year.

The V4C programme shines a light on social issues faced by women today and addresses these issues by engaging people of all genders and abilities to increase physical activity. It also looks at mental, spiritual and emotional aspects of health. VVF's contribution to the acceptance of women as athletes has created role models for all.