



The Role of Olympians in the Olympic Movement

Presented by
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Allow me to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the ANOCA President, General Palenfo, who in his most valuable work always places the athletes, the Olympians at the centre of his attention and who has created many initiatives for athletes in Africa. And also to the President of the African Olympians, WOA Executive Board member, Amadou DiaBa, for all his work in organising this seminar.

Many believe that the athletes past and present are the most important component of the Olympic Movement. I am therefore proud and pleased to tell you that the World Olympians Association (WOA), the organization that represents over 80,000 past participants in the Games, is making dynamic progress. Along with the NOCs, IF and IOC, we and are the fourth pillar of the Olympic Movement.



This century has already been labelled as the age of the athlete. There is no doubt that Olympians today represents the highest ideals in sport around the world. This fourth pillar is a 21st century reality.

The IOC Athletes' Commission was created in 1981 as a first attempt to help athletes attain some level of self-determination. The IOC Athletes' Commission is an excellent example of how athletes can help make a difference in the evolution of sport in a democratic fashion. In 1995 the IOC took a quantum leap forward when it established the WOA as the official representative body for all Olympians regardless of their age, sport, nationality or other definitive measure. The growth of this trend gives athletes the right to accept more responsibility in choosing their leaders and the direction they want to pursue.

Yet our challenges are just beginning. We in the Olympic Family must take it upon ourselves to prepare the Olympians for life after their sports careers have come to a close. Their participation in the overall process sends a vital message to society.



Olympians are **Role Models**. They are among the most powerful symbols within your nations. They contribute to validating the support of your sponsors. And indeed, they are the icons by which the Olympic Movement is perceived and judged. We must help them to become better examples of our shared values and true ambassadors of the Olympic Movement itself.

Currently there are National Olympians Associations (NOAs) in 117 countries and this number is growing steadily. The majority of these national associations enjoy the moral, technical and financial support of their respective NOCs. Olympians in turn remain the essential link that inspires young athletes to soar above the obstacles that daily living can hand them. Whether preparing for the Olympic Games or World Championships the spirit is the same. It takes role models to show the way.

As I previously pointed out, we are the only Olympians organization that has been recognized by the IOC. Within this distinguished gathering there are many, many Olympians and indeed, we are also delighted to say that President Jacques Rogge, an Olympian himself, has accepted our request to hold the post of Honorary President of the WOA.



With this in mind the WOA would like to encourage the Presidents of those NOCs that still lack an Olympians Association to take the lead and establish an NOA at the earliest opportunity.

In saying this I would like to illustrate the significant differences between a local Athletes' Commission and a National Olympians Association. These two organizations are quite different in nature but their purposes are often gravely misunderstood in some countries.

The basic difference lies in the fact that the Athletes' Commission is just one of the working commissions in the structure of an NOC. It is usually composed of 10 or 15 younger active athletes that advise the NOC on current practical matters such as training issues, health and safety precautions, doping prevention, etc.

NOA membership on the other hand, is not limited by age, numbers, or qualifying restrictions. Every athlete who has represented his or her country at the Olympic Games becomes an automatic member and indeed the organization itself provides independent support for the NOC.



The NOA is an autonomous body, based on the cooperation and interdependence between it and the active Athletes' Commission. Their synchronized cooperation is guaranteed by the usual practice of having the NOC President fill the post of Honorary President.

NOAs are chiefly engaged in theoretical issues of defending Olympic ideals such as fair play, ethical conduct, relating culture and sport, supporting legacy projects, perpetuating sports traditions, promoting solidarity, strengthening fraternal interaction, developing community relations, disseminating Olympic education, providing career planning and guiding job placement after retirement, etc. The WOA takes the lead in areas of vital importance like women and sport, the environment and sport, or sport for all. The WOA serves to give a powerful voice against harmful drug use and in the fight against doping, for eliminating discrimination and reducing tension and violence through sport in society at large. With over 80,000 Olympians around the world we have some of the best resources to accomplish these goals.

It is our active intent to work with the International and National chapters for the Paralympics, Special Olympics, Olympic Aid, International Fair Play Association,



and with every organization whose objectives are held in high esteem by the Olympic Movement. Working directly with local citizens also gives every Olympians the opportunity to help those who have helped them achieve their dreams.

The Athletes' Commission and an NOA are certainly two separate organizations built upon different directives and endowed with different tasks. As with the Athletes Commission, no NOC is complete without an active and well-organized National Olympians Association.

Therefore, I strongly urge those NOC Presidents whose countries do not enjoy having an NOA to examine the possibility of establishing one at the earliest opportunity. My colleagues and I in our WOA Regional Offices are ready and willing to serve your needs by providing whatever advice and assistance you may require. Please do not hesitate to contact us.

Olympians can be of great help to society as long as we do not neglect or forget their influence. We should take better care to nurture their abilities and count on them throughout their lives as they once counted on us to take them to the Games.



Africa, the fifty two countries of Africa, African Olympians and the NOAs in this vast continent are a very important part of the WOA. We welcome your participation and wish you every success in the future.

Thank you for your kind attention.