



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

ROBERT H. STOREY

IF representative

FIBT – Fédération Internationale de Bobsleigh et de Tobogganing



ORIGINAL TEXT IN ENGLISH

I have been asked to speak briefly about the relationships of International Federations (IFs) with the other key components of the Olympic Movement and sport, with a view to the future.

I would have to say that, on balance, these relationships are good. They can always be better. And from an IF perspective, any opportunity to discuss the matter directly with those for whom we work is welcome.

The instructional documents prepared for this discussion identify a simple vertical structure for the Olympic Movement. That structure is somewhat illusory. It is not quite that simple. The responsibilities, job descriptions, lines of communications and understanding of roles are often confused and always in flux. While the goals of excellence and support for the athlete may be the same for all well-meaning participants in the Family, the relationships, tasks and means of achieving them are not.

Let us take a closer look.

The athlete, the *sine qua non* of the system, concentrates all of his or her efforts on the practice of sport. In today's competitive world, it is absolutely necessary that athletes have a single competitive focus if they wish to succeed. He or she has an intimate relationship with team-mates, coaches, trainers, clubs, support staff and, when time allows, family.

Their focus is clear, constructed, immediate, personal and decidedly not bureaucratic or political.

Few active athletes, particularly early in their career, have the time, experience or inclination, to involve themselves in the administration of sport beyond their own pursuit of excellence.

And rightly so.

Clubs, National Federations (NFs) and IFs have the responsibility of establishing the rules, setting the standards, organising competitions and finding the means to support athletes and events in the case of "amateur sport". In the case of professional sport, the administration and dealing with relationships is even more complex.

National Olympic Committees (NOCs) face different challenges. In some countries they are the heart of the national sporting system and bear great responsibility for day-to-day sport operations. In others, the NOC is a forum for independent NFs and its role is largely concerned with the staging of the Olympic Summer and Winter Games. NOCs have the added responsibility of representing and promulgating the Olympic ideal. Interestingly enough, it is only the clubs and some NFs that actually "have athletes". IFs and NOCs have a role that, on a day-to-day basis, does not necessarily involve a direct relationship with athletes.

And herein lies the rub.

Everyone from top to bottom in the system agrees that they are working for the athletes, because after all, the success of clubs, federations, NOCs and the Games themselves, is measured by the performance of athletes.

That performance depends on the athletes' freedom to concentrate on sport alone while competing.

It is the singular job of all other components of the system to create the best possible circumstances for these athletes to excel. There are many challenges, but, while the overall goal is usually clear to all, most internal challenges come from setting objectives and communicating and emphasising the sport message clearly and continuously. This is a simple management challenge and it depends as much on the receiver as on the transmitter. But at its core, it is the sport message.

It is the responsibility of all to give athletes everything tangible they need to pursue their dream and achieve their goal within the confines of fair play and sportsmanship. It is also a responsibility to serve as a buffer and gatekeeper between the athletes and the outside world to limit the distractions.

IFs, and one would assume the clubs and NFs, must continue to foster the growth of sport and excellence in athletes in the face of the ever increasing demands from outside sport and quasi-sport agencies and individuals.

The demands on athletes and federations, however well intentioned, are increasing almost exponentially in the postmodern communication world. These demands, be they bureaucratic, academic, regulatory, commercial, political or even simply informational, gobble up a tremendous amount of time and resources. It is a constant distraction to administrators and, more importantly, to athletes. Simply put, it interferes with the conduct of sport and utilises resources much better spent on sport directly.

Managing these distractions, demands and requirements is, perhaps, the greatest test for those directly responsible for building and maintaining constructive relationships with other sport administrators and athletes.

It is the actions of individuals, within a team or not, that determine sporting success. At the root, relationships in the sport world are



personal. The strongest relationships are the most direct. They create what coaches and athletes call "chemistry". One cannot win without good chemistry. It is impossible to have good chemistry without an intimate mixing of ingredients.

Successful relations between athletes, federations and NOCs depend on having great chemistry too. This Congress is a catalyst, if you will as it is an opportunity to discuss and understand roles and goals, to address issues and to agree on the way forward. Today's athletes are tomorrow's successful leaders and administrators.

I believe that the best federations always strive to maintain the most direct line of communication possible with all segments of the system, but most importantly, with active athletes, by whatever means necessary.

As with all relationships, these are works in progress. I welcome the opportunity to participate.