



WADA Media Symposium IOC President's Introductory Address 24 January 2007

Unity Against Doping Is Our Duty

Good morning everyone.

I'm pleased to join you for the WADA Media Symposium today. All of you are a key ingredient in the success of sport. If we didn't have the media to show and tell the world great stories of victory or defeat, sport wouldn't be the powerful force that it is today.

Before I continue, let me thank Dick Pound for his dedication to WADA. Everyone agrees today that sport and governments must work together, and WADA has helped to make this happen.

In the past year, several prominent cases have raised awareness of how widespread doping in sport has become. Unfortunately, the Turin Olympic Games were not without incidents. The Puerto case in Spain showed that networks behind doping are more widespread than we imagined. Major winners tested positive and became losers.

If there is anything positive about more doping cases coming to light, it's that we are doing a better job of catching people. There is also more cooperation between government and sport. But this is not enough to outweigh the negative trends.

Methods and substances used in doping are becoming more and more sophisticated. The networks that distribute them are more intricate and difficult to uncover. This is why the IOC will continue to give priority to anti-doping efforts and the work of WADA.

We have come a long way since the IOC helped form WADA in 1999. Back then, we clearly knew that we had to fix a part of sport that threatened to destroy its core principles. We knew it was a big job. Seven years later – it still is.

It's important to remember that we are trying to fix a situation that is almost impossible to measure or to monitor all the time and everywhere. All we know is that the fight against doping is more important than ever.

Why? Because science has created more powerful performance enhancing drugs that are more dangerous to the health of athletes than ever before. Winning margins have become very narrow. Many other factors have aggravated this situation, including the value of endorsement deals and a more competitive world.

Doping runs counter to the principles of sport and fair play. It devalues participation and winning for athletes, many of whom invest their lives in trying to reach glory or gold. Athletes need to speak out more against doping. We need their voice. But they should not be alone.

If we are going to reverse the situation we are now in, we need more unity in the fight against doping. Everyone must do more to speak out against doping and the damaging effect it has on sport and its reputation.

By everyone I mean coaches, trainers, medical directors, sponsors, fans and youth in general. They need to send a stronger message. They must say that they will not tolerate the unfair playing field that doping creates.

But speaking out is only one part of the solution.

You have all heard me talk about zero tolerance for doping during the Olympic Games. It has set a powerful standard. But we must strengthen efforts for random out-of-competition and in-competition testing at local and national levels, as well as for "target" testing of specific athletes.

We must ban support personnel who have been caught and convicted of helping athletes dope. And, if needed, we must sanction the bodies which govern sport if they fail to discourage a culture of doping. Severe sanctions should be increased when doping violations are part of a larger pattern, as in the Balco case.

Effective penalties are needed, but even that is not enough. Education, prevention and scientific research remain essential. The IOC will wholeheartedly support WADA in these endeavours.

You – the media –can help us gain the support of more public opinion against doping. If we have unity as individuals and organisations, we can reduce the gap between cheaters and doping controls.

I also include sponsors because the commercial influence in sport continues to grow. Are sponsors doing enough to create an environment where doping is discouraged? I don't have the answer, but I think that this deserves a closer look. It may be that cancellation clauses in endorsement contracts are not enough.

Later this morning, you will learn about WADA's priority programmes. You'll hear about what it takes to track networks and new techniques of doping. It is more than a full-time job.

As President of the IOC, as a former athlete and a sports fan I call for a total resolve to fight against doping.

If we can't improve the situation, I worry that parents will tell their children that participating in competitive sport is dangerous to their health and dishonourable. If that happens, we'll find that recruitment for sport's future champions will dry out.

The evolution of WADA is designed to anticipate much of what I believe is needed for the future. In 2008, its next chairperson will come from the government sector. The IOC will fully support efforts to make governments a bigger part of the solution in a fight that transcends elite sport and concerns the future of youth around the world.

Most athletes tell me they are insulted by the cynical perception that every winner is suspected of doping. Athletes should be offered a guarantee that they can compete in a fair environment. Winners should be decided at the finish line, not by a laboratory analysis after the competition.

Again, we have a moral duty to strengthen the credibility of sport. Doping puts sport at risk of losing credibility with everyone. If we allow this to happen, everyone is cheated. Everyone loses.

Thank you.