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In four months' time, on 12 February 2010 to be precise, the XXI Winter Games will begin in Vancouver. It brings with it tension, nervousness, anticipation, excitement and a whole other range of emotions.

The pressure is huge for the organisers, the athletes and all of us who are members of the Olympic Movement. It is our main gathering, the event that puts a glint in our eye. We must be ready. We must be raring to go. And we will be.

You know, the simple mention of the XXI Winter Games sends a shiver down my spine. And believe me when I say that it is nothing to do with the Canadian climate! The Olympic Games are synonymous with summit, zenith, Olympia, history, legend, hero. As we prepare for the future, I believe it is never a fruitless exercise to share the emotions that feed our passion for the Games. However difficult the decisions we have to make, however high the stakes, it is the great moments that we have experienced that give us the motivation to ensure that future generations can also enjoy such moments. Here, then, are a few memories to serve as a link between the present and future as well as recommendations for the future.

Anyone who watched the match between the Soviet Union and the United States for the basketball gold medal in 1972 – particularly the dramatic final three seconds – knew that they had been privileged to witness a great moment in the history of sport.

Twenty years later, in Barcelona in 1992, the American "Dream Team" generously and spectacularly sailed through the tournament. Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson were an explosive and audacious duo, who in the service of the game helped to make the Games great.

Anyone who saw Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean dance to the "Bolero" in Sarajevo in 1984 did not need to be a figure skating expert to realise that they were witnessing an unforgettable event. All the judges agreed that it was perfect. Sixes all round.

Even people who have difficulty remembering numbers and records will always associate the figure 8.90 with the incredible jump performed by Bob Beamon in Mexico City in 1968. We will also remember how his performance was even greeted by an unforgettable downpour.

After scoring the winning goal for the United States – securing a 4-3 victory for his team over the favourites, the Soviet Union – and finally landing the gold medal in Lake Placid in 1980, Mike Eruzione retired.

He knew that nothing could ever match such a victory, which was probably the greatest and most surprising in the history of team sports. He himself described it as "a miracle on ice".

Some athletes have become true mythological figures, to the extent that some people are no longer sure they even existed. I am talking about people like Paavo Nurmi, Jesse Owens, Nadia Comaneci, Mark Spitz, Jean-Claude Killy, Emil Zatopek, Carl Lewis and Teofilo Stevenson.

Not just athletes, but heroes: heroes in the form of athletes who excelled themselves, producing performances that were sometimes legendary or unreal. A hero is someone who inspires others and takes the future of their sport a stage further. How many young athletes are trying to emulate Bolt or Phelps today? There are millions of them in the stadiums, playgrounds and swimming pools. I think it is fantastic.

Behind the scenes of these exploits are the International Federations (IFs). Coach education, athlete development, technical regulations and the fight against abuses are all essential tasks for sport.

Regional championships, continental championships, world championships, world cups, major tournaments and professional leagues are all competitions that are essential for the life of sport. But the Games bring a different dimension: more than 200 countries and regions, several billion television viewers from all continents, races, religions and socio-economic backgrounds, all watching the same event at the same time.

Let me return to the sport I know best – ice hockey. An estimated 10.6 million Canadians watched their team beat the United States in Salt Lake City in 2002. In other words, more than a third of the population! That is the magic of the Games and the attractiveness of ice hockey!

As you know, the Olympic Games are a unique, enormous platform that is essential for the IFs. However, the future success of the Games also depends on the well-being of the Federations, the engine of the sports world. The well-being of the Federations depends heavily on the success of the Olympic Games.

What can we do in the future to ensure that the interdependence between the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and the IFs becomes even more productive? I would like to suggest a few ideas, although I am aware that this is a subject that will continue to be discussed and debated.

ORGANISING COMMITTEES FOR THE OLYMPIC GAMES (OCOGs) – IFs

The IOC President entrusted me with the wonderful task of leading the coordination of the Vancouver Games. It is a great, rewarding experience. For the first time, I am able to fully appreciate the work carried out by the organising committees, authorities and sports bodies; it is truly phenomenal. In the field we are concerned with – sport – it seems to me that a great deal of effort is put in, but that the Federations' expertise and knowledge are not always fully utilised.

The Federations are consulted, they ratify the OCOGs' plans, but I think everyone would benefit if we were more closely involved in the



organisation of the Games from the outset. Of course, a more extensive collaboration model would put pressure on the Federations. But I am sure that we will cope, bearing in mind that the best solutions will be adopted in a spirit of true partnership. In practical terms, I would like to propose that a small group involving a few IFs, the IOC and OCOG representatives study this question and make recommendations for the future.

I have also noted the comments of my friends Killy and Gunilla concerning respect for bid commitments.

IFS – NOCS

Within the Movement, we cooperate with the IOC and the OCOGs, and also have links with the NOCs. In some fields, we have different views, which sometimes create tensions. Without going into detail, I have noted in contributions to the Virtual Olympic Congress the issue of the qualification and selection of athletes for the Games, with regards to rule 51 and the problem of nationalities. Gunilla has just mentioned Regional and Continental Games, and there are others. I do not have any answers to these problems.

However, I am sure that we will be able to find sensible solutions through dialogue and understanding of everyone's objectives. When we face difficulties, I believe that the IOC, in its role as leader and coordinator of the Movement, should bring together the IFs and NOCs, take a stand and give direction. We are all willing collaborators at the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF), the Association of the International Olympic Winter Sports Federations (AIOWF) and the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC); let us create forums that will enable us to hold effective dialogue.

IFS – IOC

Olympic funding is an absolute necessity for many IFs. It makes possible a large proportion of their institutional and sports activities during the four years that separate each edition of the Games. This interdependence is healthy. In a global context, but also in a world of sport that is becoming increasingly complex, the IOC's support, which is essentially financial, is no longer sufficient.

In my opinion, the assistance given to the Federations for the fight against doping is opening up some very interesting new perspectives. Technology, event management, transfer of knowledge and sustainable development are all areas in which the IOC is extremely well-informed and could help the IFs.

Of course, it is not a case of the IOC taking control, but simply one of sharing good practice in order to reduce the workload and conserve resources. I am sure that, if we adopt a slightly different form of collaboration between the IOC and the IFs, the sports will also be more inclined to dialogue with each other. ASOIF, AIOWF and SportAccord are the vehicles through which we can achieve this.

EVOLUTION – CHANGE

In a world in which young people have so much choice in terms of entertainment, we must ensure that the Olympic Games remain appealing, attractive and popular; or in other words, contemporary.

The IOC and the IFs have been able to adapt in order to keep up with current trends.

In the Winter Games, the skeleton made a permanent return in 2002. New events were added in Turin in 2006: snowboard cross; biathlon; mass start; speed skating; team pursuit and cross-country skiing; and team sprint. In Vancouver, we will have ski cross.

As regards the Summer Games Programme, beach volleyball was added in 1996, triathlon and taekwondo in 2000, and BMX in 2008.

The IOC and the IFs are determined to ensure that the Games continue to reflect the evolution of sports practice throughout the world. The Programme should be constantly reviewed and adjusted.

For us IFs, it is with an open mind that we should consider changes designed to improve our sports and make them easier to understand. It is in our interests to make these improvements in collaboration with the OCOGs, and particularly with broadcasters in order to make TV coverage as attractive as possible.

I know that this is a very delicate issue and that many officials, coaches and athletes are sensitive, and sometimes resistant, to change. They are worried about preserving the integrity of the sport that they love.

Nevertheless, we should not be afraid of change. Take biathlon, probably the best example in recent history of a sport which, thanks to the necessary changes it has undergone, has not only become more appealing, but also more interesting to watch on television.

Can anyone today imagine basketball without three points for a basket or volleyball with its old point-scoring system?

Sometimes, the use of modern techniques on television can do wonders for the entertainment aspect. The best example I know is in tennis, where the electronic judge ("hawk-eye") not only increases the entertainment level but also adds an extra degree of fairness. Everyone is involved: the players, the umpire, spectators in the stadium and TV viewers, who can all see whether the ball was in or out.

I also agree with Denis's other thoughts on the Programme, especially the need for the IFs and the IOC to review the disciplines and events. By working in detail, we will be able to make things better and sometimes simpler.

You will see that exchange, sharing, collaboration, change and openness are essential if we are to progress.

We are the guardians of a wonderful legacy which has been entrusted to us – the Olympic Games – and we are privileged to be part of this Movement.

However, the future success of the Olympic Games is not guaranteed. We can be confident, but we must not be complacent. We must constantly try to improve. I have suggested a few ways of doing so and the Congress will provide us with many others. As far as the Olympic sports are concerned, we are approaching the future in a frame of mind that I will summarise as follows: we are independent according to the Olympic Charter, but fully aware that it is through interdependence that we are useful for the Olympic Games and can build a solid foundation.