

# **A New Deal for Sport in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with specific focus on the Role of the Media**

## **The symposium**

**is organized as a part of the celebration of the 10 anniversary of the issuing of the Panathlon Declaration (Ghent, 2004-2014).**

### **Panathlon International's major challenge:**

*How to accommodate the contrast between the positive and admirable ideals and values of sport that are proclaimed, and the current questionable practices in sport?*

*On the one hand* there is the acknowledgement that sports continue to unlock, more passionately and emotionally than other social activities do what people think of themselves, what they want and what they stand for.

There is also the acknowledgement that sports possess important features (i.e. striving for excellence, self-determination, shared commitment and identification with a reference group, a “WE”-feeling) that have the ‘potential’ to encourage social, moral and political values that are crucial to a democratic polity.

*It is this ‘potential’ that is claimed to make sports morally matter and to make them so much more part of a solution than of part of a problem in today’s society.*

*On the other hand* current sport practice is often attributed low moral status because:

- Sport practice is accused of immorality and illegality, with a number of high-profile scandals, including doping, match fixing and illegal betting in many sports, especially in soccer and cricket, child (sexual) abuse, child trafficking, child labour, and corruption of sports administrators and sport agents.

- In addition to these abusive and criminal actions, other infringements in sport have also been identified, such as cheating (by athletes, coaches or administrators), aggression and violence, and instrumental and exploitative behaviour of trainers, coaches and parents.

- Finally, we see an ever more glaring contrast between the enthusiasms and joy that mega sport events generate and the frequent reports of lack of benefit and negative side effects for the local population and the related protest as we see in Brazil for FIFA 2014 and the Olympic Games Rio 2016.

**Panathlon International's position** is that it prefers to be called naïve than be accused of culpable neglect. The positive potentials of sport are too important to let them undermine and let them controlled by the Global Sport organisations alone. Sport belongs to the world!

### **Panathlon International's answers:**

- 1. Stimulating a fundamental re-conceptualization of Sport, i.e. a New Deal for Sport in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century!**

In Panathlon's view the time is ripe for a disclosure of the way our 'truths in sport' have been established. The exposure of *mainstream tendencies* should lead eventually to the elaboration of a New Sports Model.

With its "Declaration of Ethics in Youth Sport" in 2004, celebrating today the 10th anniversary of its issuing and on account of its numerous efforts to implement that Declaration since, Panathlon International has proven already its credibility and determination to promote the integrity of sport and to actualize its positive potentials.

## 2. A reflection on the role of the media in sport

### **The fourth statement of the Panathlon Declaration deals with that issue:**

**We welcome the support of sponsors and media but believe that this support should be in accordance with the major objectives of youth sport.**

- We welcome sponsorship from organisations and companies only when this does not conflict with the pedagogical process, the ethical basis of sport and the major objectives of youth sport.
- We believe that the function of the media is not only to be re-active, i.e. holding the mirror up to the problems of our society, but also to be pro-active, i.e. stimulating, educational and innovative.

One major question is here: "What are the pros and cons of presenting more than "event reports" and adding *a balanced presentation of "all" aspects of sport, i.e. of the athlete and its context, i.e. trainers, management, sponsors; positive and negative aspects; action and emotion; event reports and background analyses, benefits and aberrations, process (training) and product (results)? Do we need more columnists, investigating journalists next to sport reporters?"*

However, Panathlon International is realistic enough to grasp that 'what' will eventually be an important driver of such a fundamental process of re-conceptualization of sport and a reflection on the relation media and sport will be *a pressure out of 'necessity'* that is to say an accumulation of intolerable situations on many levels and sectors of sport and the missing of appropriate media coverage, i.e. some kind of financial crisis, maybe with bankruptcies of high profile clubs, the increase of incidents and scandals and a related common outrage in our societies, a worldwide pressing need to tackle overweight and obesity or to use sport for developmental purposes not only in the third world but also in underserved groups including children, youth women, the elderly, disabled persons, migrants and refugees, and people of low socio-economic background, etc.

*However, Panathlon International is just as convinced that 'necessity' will have to be combined with the effort of inspiring, convincing and determined individuals and organizations that have worked and discussed in the meantime to produce and to try out viable ideas and alternatives. This symposium has been organized with this intention.*

**Specific statements, questions and issues that have been addressed at the symposium:**

**A New Deal for Sport in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

1. *Isn't the accumulation of a surplus of "power" and "money" a breeding ground for questionable management and corruption? Isn't sport has become a commodity?*

Because Global Sport Organizations such as FIFA, IOC, IAAF etc. have to combine sport-regulatory and commercial functions, conflicts of interest in their actions and decisions have become all the more likely. They have found themselves increasingly involved in off-field issues such as commercial disputes, legal controversies and human rights' violations.

2. *Isn't the fact that the sport sector still claims autonomy makes them feel relatively insulated from the criticisms and protests? Moreover who is controlling the Global Sport Organizations?*

Aren't the claimed autonomy and the lack of control fueling a rather pessimistic view as to both the willingness and the capacity of the sport sector for reform?

3. *What about the contrast between the enthusiasm and joy that mega sport events generate and the frequent reports of a lot of negative side effects?*

Mega Sports Events such as the Olympic Games, the Soccer World Championships and the Commonwealth Games are claimed to foster co-operation and dialogue among people and nations. Their economic potential and their ability to attract foreign investment, to bolster tourism growth and to contribute to regeneration and broader developmental goals have been outlined.

However, the staging of Mega Events can also have the opposite effect. They can result in human rights violations, causing severe hardship and misery. This unfortunate, darker side of Mega Events stands in stark contrast to the admirable universal ideals that are often cited at their opening ceremonies.

4. *Isn't so that sponsors but also media put pressure (directly and indirectly) on nations, global sport organizations, clubs, trainers, parents, medical staff etc. Couldn't this pressure result in exaggerated nationalism and patriotism in forcing too strict marketing and commercial favors at the disadvantage of local businesses, in interference in the preparation for competitions, the shortening of the revalidation period after an injury, the condoning or trivializing of manifest emotional and physical abuses etc.*
5. *Isn't so that in the past the sport sector always had to be forced to change their rules and procedures to accord with human and civil rights? One can refer in particular to the Bosman ruling, the resistance against the regulation of import of young athletes from Africa; and the fact that more and more the public sector and sport authorities on national and international level (e.g. the E.U) take the initiative.*

6. What if anti-doping were to be relaxed, allowing some performance enhancement practices within a health oriented risk reduction approach? Would it fundamentally change sports? How might risk reduction strategies be applied for doping in elite and amateur sports and what might the effects of such a change might be.

### **Sport Meets Media**

7. *How independent are the media in covering sport events?*

To what extent do commercial multinationals or international sport holding groups determine **who** covers sports events and **how** they are covered?

8. What are the pros and cons of presenting more than “event reports” and adding *a balanced presentation of “all” aspects of sport, i.e. of the athlete and its context, i.e. trainers, management, sponsors; positive and negative aspects; action and emotion; event reports and background analyses, benefits and aberrations, process (training) and product (results)?* Do we need more columnists, investigating journalists next to sport reporters?

9. *Isn't the sports person promoted in the media as the model for children and young people to follow and admire sometimes far from flattering? Don't sport persons to be successful aren't suggested to be egocentric and hard (no mother Theresa's in sport) isn't their ruthlessness and slyness not often condoned?*

Aren't the drawbacks of this presentation in the press that it undermines children's belief that positive values prevail in sport, and that it reinforces a generalized cynical attitude?

10. *Isn't the way television covers competitions, i.e. aren't the images that are selected and the tone of the commentary illustrating **a shift in attention from action to emotion and what could be its moral implications?***

For moral behavior in sport this could be interpreted in a way that anything that helps to achieve this outcome (emotion and drama) is considered acceptable, even if it is against prevailing values and rules. Breaking the rules, insulting the referee, aggressive behavior, all can contribute to the suspense, excitement and challenge to the action and consequently are most interesting to the commercial viewpoint.

*Aren't the media joining forces here with commerce?*

It is not the complexity of the action but of the emotions involved which attract the public's attention and which are today's significant features of sport, i.e. emotions related to winning or losing, to drama, danger and risk; in short, the emotions of passionate athletes.