Baden-Baden 1981: The Athletes' Voice

By Michelle Ford-Eriksson with Anthony Edgar

The symbol of the 11th Olympic Congress designed by Otl Aicher. Far right: The meetings were held in the Kurhaus in Baden-Baden.

Photo: OSC

This is a first-hand account of Michelle Ford-Eriksson's experiences as an athlete chosen to represent her peers at the 11th Olympic Congress held in Baden-Baden, Germany in 1981. It was also the first IOC Session and Olympic Congress for Juan Antonio Samaranch, who had been elected President of the IOC in Moscow the previous year. Baden-Baden would lay the foundation for the creation of the athletes' voice within the Olympic Movement.

Preamble

Set against the politics of the Cold War, an Olympic boycott, and the emergence of systematic, state-sponsored doping, this was a time of great upheaval within the Olympic Movement.

Internationally, sport was operated and controlled by the International Federations (IFs). National Olympic Committees (NOCs) were static, passive bodies with no function except for the six months prior to the Olympic Games. The IOC's legal responsibility was limited to the Games period. Every four years there existed the Olympic Games (summer and winter), but between the Games there was no activity within the Olympic Movement.

The Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden followed the US-led boycott of Moscow 1980 with the expected retaliatory Soviet boycott of Los Angeles 1984, which hung over all athletes like a thick fog.

The East German doping programme, only confirmed after the Berlin Wall came down and the Stasi [East German Ministry for State Security] files were opened,

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Michelle Ford punching the air with joy at winning the gold medal in the 800 m freestyle at the 1980 Olympic Games. She started her Olympic career in Montreal 1976, at age 14. At Moscow 1980 she was the only non-Soviet bloc female swimmer to win a gold medal in the pool. In 1981, Michelle was part of a select group of Olympians invited by the IOC President to participate in the Olympic Congress, where she participated in athlete workshops and was heavily involved in the preparation of presentations to the IOC Members. She was director of sport at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL), before returning to Australia to work with the Organising Committee for Sydney 2000. "The Athletes' Voice" is one chapter in Michelle's yet to be published autobiography.

had shown its ugly face in Montreal and Moscow. My deep-voiced competitors, with their hulking bodies and impossible speed, dominated the women's events in the pool at both Games. In Baden-Baden we called it "the most shameful abuse of the Olympic idea".

The IOC had held tight to its strict amateur code, yet there was a disparate canyon between the full-time sports programmes that existed in many Soviet bloc countries and those of us who needed to fit in training in and around work, or school like myself.

There was great gender disparity in sport worldwide. The IOC was a male-only club and few women held senior executive positions in any sport, with only 22 percent female participation at the Olympic Games in Moscow.

The US-led Moscow boycott had left us, the athletes of the world, with a sense of helplessness. The boycotts of Moscow and LA stripped thousands of athletes of their Olympic dream. The scars were still raw for those of us who had participated in Moscow, and even more so for those who were prohibited from participating by their respective NOC or governments. The government of my country even offered bribes to athletes to not compete in Moscow, with many of the public and media calling us traitors.

The boycott reinforced to us that the athletes played no part in the administration of sport. We felt we were treated as insignificant pawns by a political machinery. We were voiceless.

The IOC today loudly pronounces that "the athletes are the centre of the Olympic Games". This was not the case 40 years ago.

We wanted a seat at the table, the right to self-determination, the right to inclusion and equality. We wanted our voice, the athletes' voice, to be heard.

The IOC Congress in Baden-Baden would lay that foundation. This is that story.

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The 11th IOC Congress in Baden-Baden

"United by and for sports", declared the logo. This was the 11th Olympic Congress, held in Baden-Baden, Germany in 1981 – and was the first IOC meeting where

The original athlete's certificate created for the Congress. It lists all athletes who were invited to the 11th Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden in 1981, and is signed by all athletes who attended the Congress.

Photo: Michelle Ford

IOC Executive Board and IOC Congress, 23–28 September 1981, Baden-Baden

Athletes Invited by President Samaranch to attend the Olympic Congress

Invited and attended
Yuko Arakida, JPN, volleyball
Pär Arvidsson, SWE, swimming
Thomas Bach, FRG, fencing
Sebastian Coe, GBR, athletics
Alexander Dityatin, URS, gymnastics
Irene Epple, FRG, alpine skiing
Michelle Ford, AUS, swimming
Ivar Formo, NOR, cross-country skiing
Mohamed Gammoudi, TUN, athletics
Bernhard Germeshausen, GDR, bobsledding
Slobodan Kačar, YUG, boxing
Kipchoge Keino, KEN, athletics
Zoltàn Magyar, HUN, gymnastics
Herminio Menéndez Rodríguez, ESP, canoeing
Robert Nightingale, GBR, modern pentathlon
Svetlana Otsetova, BUL, rowing
John Peterson, USA, wrestling
Juan Daniel Pirán, ARG, fencing
Hans Kjeld Rasmussen, DEN, shooting
Esko Rechardt, FIN, sailing
Jürg Röthlisberger, SUI, judo
Teófilo Stevenson Lorenzo, CUB, boxing
Elisabeth Theurer, AUT, equestrian
Vladislav Tretiak, URS, ice hockey
Vera Zozuļa, URS, luge

Invited but did not attend
Yavé Cahard, FRA, cycling
Nadia Comăneci, ROU, gymnastics
Władysław Kozakiewicz, POL, athletics
Luděk Macela, TCH, football
Darell Pace, USA, archery
Daniel Senet, FRA, weightlifting
Sara Simeoni, ITA, athletics
Radu Voina, ROU, handball
Robert van de Walle, BEL, judo
Miruts Yifter, ETH, athletics

athletes had been invited to participate in shaping the future of sport and the Olympic Movement.

Invited were 35 Olympians, of which 25 attended the Congress. It was to be a watershed moment for the Olympic Games and world sport.

It was the beginning of the athletes' voice.

The invitation

It was my 19th birthday, 15 July 1981, and an A5 envelope arrived in the mailbox. The Olympic rings bottom left and embossed in capital letters the words "COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIQUE, SWITZERLAND". With a hastened sense of excitement and curiosity, I carefully opened the fine paper envelope. The official IOC letterhead shone in the top right-hand corner.

Lausanne, 10th July 1981, ref number 5623/81
Dear Miss Ford,
May I first congratulate you on your selection as a participant in the forthcoming XIth Olympic Congress, which is an event of extreme importance to the world of international sport …

The letter, signed by IOC Secretary General Monique Berlioux, stopped me in my tracks. I was to be one of a select group of Olympic athletes to attend the IOC's Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden, Germany, later in the year.

We had only just come through a USA-led boycott of Moscow 1980 where we, the athletes, had been used as the key pawns for political purposes. The scars were still raw, for those of us who had participated in Moscow, but

Meeting of the first IOC Athletes' Commission in 1985 in Lausanne, chaired by Finnish IOC Member Peter Tallberg. Left: Michelle Ford.

Photo: OSC

especially so for those who had been prohibited from participating by their respective NOC or governments.

These were different times. Athletes were considered insignificant to the administration of sport, and in part, to our own destiny. We were told to stay in our place, that our job was to perform on the field of play only, without consideration, and we were prohibited from making any financial gain from our sport activities, let alone being able to make a living from it.

We understood that any questioning of the authorities, or the way Olympic sport was governed or operated, or how decisions were made and who made them, would result in adverse consequences.

We were now invited guests and to be active participants at the highest table in world sport, and participate we would, leaving a legacy to which all sport still aspires.

We had one shot, and we took it.

The Congress

A two-hour drive south of Frankfurt, nestled in the Black Forest, and renowned for its thermal baths, the small village of Baden-Baden is an impressive town. At its centre, streets of colourful buildings line cobbled streets and the narrow River Oos winds its gentle path through groves of lush green foliage.

Seated in the back of the black Mercedes car along with my personal chauffeur, who had waited for my arrival at Frankfurt airport, I realised I was now at the gateway to the other side of the Olympic life. Every detail of our ten-day itinerary was precisely ordered, accentuating the tone that prevailed: that of a gentleman's club of the highest standard. The athletes' hotel, although not five star, was nonetheless elegant and private. Everything was organised to the second.

Targeted, yet diverse, the athletes that had been chosen to attend the Congress had been nominated by their IFs and/or NOCs and selected by the IOC's Tripartite Commission. However, athlete names had not been forthcoming, and "there had been few nominations from NOCs outside Europe, and none from Africa", and it was thereby noted at the June meeting of the IOC Executive Board that "the Tripartite Commission was prepared to accept two additional nominations from the African continent". This would bring the number of invited athletes to 34, with 10 coaches.

Each athlete who attended had to be no older than 30 years old and have participated in at least one of the past three Olympics (1972, 1976, 1980), so Munich, Montreal, and the Moscow Summer Games and Sapporo, Innsbruck, and the Lake Placid Winter Games.

Most were household names in their countries, some of world acclaim. Yet here we all were bound by a common thread: we had surmounted the odds and won Olympic medals.

On 21 September, two days before the official opening of the Congress, the 25 athletes, some with trepidation, others with gusto, met for the first time in the athletes' designated area: the International Hall. A welcome speech introduced our appointed staff and our official interpreters, followed by an overview outlining our heavy social calendar and the reason we were assembled:

"There will be four 5-minute presentations to be delivered by the athletes scheduled for day three of the Congress." No topics or indication of what we might talk about was given.

"It's now up to you!" stated IOC Member and Olympian Peter Tallberg, in his refined Finnish accent. A yachtsman who had competed at five Olympics between 1960 and 1980, Tallberg had been asked by President Samaranch

Baden-Baden 1981: Up until then, the IOC consisted of 82 men. The only woman, who can be seen in the front row, was Monique Berlioux, who was IOC Director but not a member of the committee. Above: Commemorative medal from the 11th Olympic Congress with the portrait of Pierre de Coubertin. Photos: OSC

to be the IOC liaison between the IOC Members and the invited athletes and to coordinate our activities.

Tallberg introduced Donna de Varona, American dual gold medal-winning swimmer from Tokyo 1964 and the first female anchor for ABC's Wide World of Sports, a guest of Congress Organising Committee President Willi Daume, to help provide guidance.

With the formalities over, the wine glasses began to be filled. This was a time when the Movement was said to have no money and was struggling to find cities to host the Games. Yet here the wine flowed, courtesy of Jürgen Schroeder, the former German oarsman and our go-to person in charge of the athletes' programme.

Only six female athletes had been invited: myself, Australian swimming gold medallist in 1980; my roommate, Yuko Arakida, Japanese volleyball gold medallist in 1976; Svetla Otsetova, Bulgarian rowing gold medallist in 1976; Elisabeth Theurer, Austrian equestrian gold medallist in 1980; and the two winter athletes, Irene Epple, West German alpine skiing silver medallist in 1980; and Vera Zozuļa, Latvian luge gold medallist in 1980.

The athletes present were a convivial group, but all strangers. Each athlete from the Eastern bloc had an "interpreter" in tow, although we later came to understand that these were their political watchers, there to make sure they toed the party line.

Many of the athletes in the room had been victims of political plays by their governments. Seeing the African representative, I was reminded of the Olympic boycott by African nations in 1976, which followed the refusal by the IOC to ban New Zealand after their rugby union team toured apartheid South Africa earlier that year. I had a vivid memory of the African nations arriving at the Olympic Village in Montreal, and waiting for them at the opening ceremony, only to learn literally minutes before the parade of athletes that they had to withdraw.

At 14 years old, this had been my first encounter with a boycott. At the time, I had felt extremely sad for these athletes, among them medal prospects, who had their Olympic moment taken from them. Then, four years later, the impact of the 1980 boycott, of whether we would go or not, had been heavy on all of us. It was startling to think how many athletes around the world had been denied the opportunity to compete in both the 1976 and 1980 Games.

The conversations and banter filled the room – some serious, some casual – about home, family, their athletic exploits. The official languages of the Congress were recorded in our circular as being French and English, but language didn't seem to be a problem among the athletes. It was obvious that many delegates at the Congress regarded us as a mere masquerade. This feeling was accentuated when we were joined by some of the IOC Members, national delegates, who sought to be seen with their star athletes.

School visits, excursions, wining and dining. It was all a far cry from my rigorous training routine. At 3 pm after a copious lunch, some of the athletes present reassembled to discuss what the four athlete speeches should focus on. What struck me was the fact that, regardless of sport, nationality, or personal background, we soon found a united, common voice.

For those present, there was limited understanding of the IOC and any knowledge of sports administration stopped at the door of our national and international sporting federations. Convinced we were there to

"contribute", we could not be blinded by the fanfare and attitudes of others.

Nods of agreement set forth an interesting dynamic.

The issues were multiple and complex, and preparation time, unlike for the other delegates who had months to prepare, was limited to hours. We needed to make mention of this in our first speech:

"We are coming from different countries and various sports to present the opinions of the athletes. Due to this fact and to make our contribution most effective, sufficient time is required for preparation. During the last three days we have been working day and night in various discussion group sessions and we are therefore thankful that we have had the possibility to come to Baden-Baden some days before the Congress."

Complaining was not the way to be heard. Instead, we felt we had to show our value by being clear and concise, expressing our concerns, and calling for action. As we talked, a burning question emerged: how, in four five-minute speeches, were we going to present all the topics that were important to us?

The quorum of athletes agreed: if this was to be our only chance to be heard and the integrity of the Olympic Movement was at stake, four short speeches would not be adequate. On 22 September, the eve before the official opening of the Congress, we drafted a letter, which was then typed and delivered to President Samaranch and the Executive Board of the IOC:

Baden-Baden, 22nd September 1981

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE IOC AND THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
THE ATHLETES ATTENDING THE CONGRESS WANT TO EXPRESS TO YOU THEIR ENTHUSIASM IN BEING INCLUDED AT THIS IMPORTANT BADEN-BADEN CONGRESS.
BECAUSE IT IS THE FIRST TIME THE ATHLETES HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE AND REALISE THE RESPONSIBILITY AS SPOKES PEOPLE FOR ATHLETES ALL OVER THE WORLD THEY RESOLVED IN THEIR MORNING SESSION THE FOLLOWING:

They would like to have more time to meet and discuss their concerns with the IOC President, Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, and the Tripartite Commission
They also have requested more time during the Congress to address the serious issues challenging the future of the Olympic Games.

Early the next morning, we heard word that President Samaranch accepted our request to meet and agreed to an additional five-minute presentation and an extra 15-minute speech on the last day of the Congress. Word also came through that one of these must be presented by the Russian ice hockey champion – and later, the President of the Ice Hockey Federation of Russia – Vladislav Tretiak.

Preparing the speeches

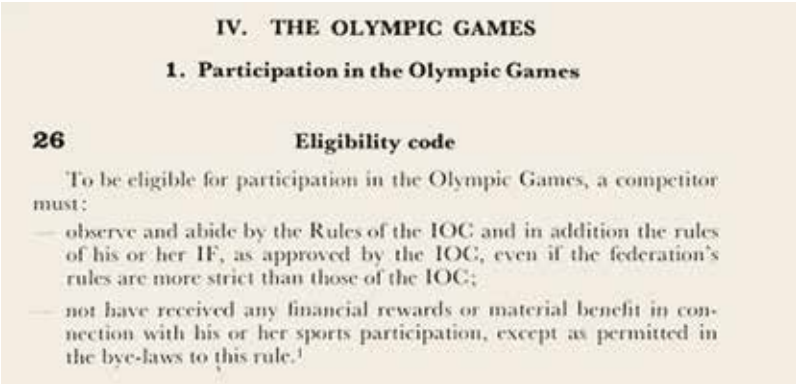
The clock was already ticking. We had one day to discuss and prepare, to determine what the speeches should address and then get them written. Five main topics emerged: issues that had bitterly affected the athletes over the past decade and consequently questioned the perennity of the Olympic Movement.

We agreed our topics would be:

- *Doping*
- *Rule 26 – the eligibility to compete in the Games, the so-called "amateur rule"*
- *The inclusion of athletes at the decision-making table and the participation of women in the Olympic Movement*
- *Political involvement and boycotts*
- *Olympic ceremonies*

We decided that Vladislav would present on Olympic Ceremonies, as this had been an important issue at the 1980 Moscow Games, where for some athletes, the Olympic flag was raised in lieu of the national flag.

Each topic touched a raw nerve. We had each been impacted directly or indirectly by these five key points, with the boycott and systemic doping being the most significant news stories from the Moscow Olympic Games. In my sport alone, the East German female swimmers had gone from no individual gold medals in Munich in 1972, to winning 11 of 13 gold medals in the pool in Moscow, breaking 10 world records, and a further 15 silver and bronze medals. They averaged two out of every three medals won by women in the pool. I was



IV. THE OLYMPIC GAMES

1. Participation in the Olympic Games

26 **Eligibility code**

To be eligible for participation in the Olympic Games, a competitor must:

— observe and abide by the Rules of the IOC and in addition the rules of his or her IF, as approved by the IOC, even if the federation's rules are more strict than those of the IOC;

— not have received any financial rewards or material benefit in connection with his or her sports participation, except as permitted in the bye-laws to this rule.[1]

Farewell to amateur sport, which had been anchored in the Olympic Charter by rule 26 until 1981. The Eligibility Code was loosened in Baden-Baden. The responsibility for the relevant sports was transferred to the International Federations.

Meeting of the Athletes' Commission with the IOC Executive Board in Lausanne in 1986: right, Michelle Ford; next to her, the current President of World Athletics, Sebastian Coe; and Thomas Bach, IOC President since 2013.

Photo: OSC

the only non-Soviet bloc athlete to win a gold medal in Moscow, in the 800 m freestyle. It was to be another 18 years before the details of the systemic use of steroids on East German athletes, especially their female swimmers, became known. The devastating impact this doping programme had on the results in the swimming pool for Montreal and Moscow is well documented.

The inclusion of women in the Olympic Movement was also a very important point for us to address. Women's events counted for only a quarter of the Olympic programme in 1981. There were no women among the IOC Members, nor were they to be found on any of the international or national federation boards. Although the Olympic swimming programme, for example, was almost identical for women and men, the imbalance across the spectrum of sports was astonishing.

The scars were evident – each had a story, but our passion turned into a dynamic that no one had expected. Although the social events had pulled some of our group away, those who remained wanted to seize this moment in the hope that they could protect the future generation of athletes from the harms we had suffered.

My small notepad was full of scribbled notes and thoughts on the experiences of the group: grief, injustice, lack of equality, and suppression of fair play. The subject of the boycotts was raw, yet where I could express my strongest feelings, under "Politics", I drew a star, underlined it, then wrote:

- *After preparing several years to participate in an Olympic Games an athlete may be faced with nothing.*
- *Propaganda through sport and athletes to promote political ideas.*
- *Athletes should not be punished by political decisions, and the IOC should be more proactive in setting up a body which governs the athlete.*
- *We appeal to the press of the world not to make political issues out of sporting events.*
- *We are proud to represent our country but make sure that it should not be abused.*
- *Protected from geographical boycotts, athletes need to be chosen solely on their athletic ability.*

As discussions progressed, we voiced our different experiences and challenged each other closely. Athletes were not trained nor encouraged to speak. The system discouraged such "political" discussion, and among the group of athletes the effect was felt. Interest was fading – leaving only a few who realised that we needed to seize this moment and were prepared to do the work to meet the challenge.

We found it easy to speak with one another and agree on common positions. As members drifted away from the bistro table we had occupied, it became clear that while we wanted to ensure an East–West balance in our choices, we no longer needed the interpreters: those remaining all spoke good English, the language in which the speeches would be delivered.

It was decided between us that there had to be unanimous agreement between all athletes for what would finally be presented. This in itself was quite extraordinary. We were between a Moscow boycott and a possible retaliation boycott at Los Angeles 1984, in the middle of Cold War, yet we were a small group of athletes, none of whom had met two days prior, representing East and West, North and South, working together in a spirit of *esprit de corps* for the benefit of all. It was truly refreshing. It was the Olympic spirit in action.

With limited time, we decided to divide into groups to write the speeches. I had taken notes and written a speech on boycotts and injustices: the indecision, and in my case, the death threats, the Australian government offering financial rewards directly to athletes to withdraw from the 1980 team, were all still weighing on me. However, after writing the speech, I felt it would be more powerful to have someone who had been victim to a boycott present the speech. I turned to Kipchoge (Kip) Keino, unaware that he had not participated at the Montreal Games, telling him that he should deliver this speech as he represented the African voice: those who had been subject to the boycott in 1976.

Kip, a two-time Olympic champion distance runner who would go on to head the Kenyan Olympic Committee, was the only African delegate. At 41 years old, he was the oldest athlete amongst us – and after some coaching, he agreed to present the speech I had prepared, of which I was very proud.

Svetla Otsetova, the 1976 gold medallist in rowing from Bulgaria, would deliver the speech on women's participation. Thomas Bach, a 1976 gold medallist in fencing from West Germany, who had a legal background, would deliver the speech on Rule 26, the "amateur rule". Vladislav Tretiak, the Soviet ice hockey goalkeeper, was to deliver the speech on Olympic ceremonies. And Ivar Formo, the Norwegian cross-country skier and gold medallist in 1976, would be our lead off speaker, presenting our position on doping in sport.

We all agreed that Sebastian Coe, the track gold medallist at Moscow and a native English speaker from Great Britain, would present the final 15-minute speech on the last day of the Congress – his 25th birthday.

The round table

The general sentiment that we, the athletes, were seen as window dressing and not capable of such high-level talks, made us more determined to raise the issues that meant most to us.

Each of the five short speeches was met with a rumbling of interest and a smattering of applause from the members. We had exposed the issues and talked of the injustices but had not yet sought action. There would be a gap before our final flagship speech would be heard on the last day.

A small group had formed. A few athletes, a handful within the larger group, saw that this was our last chance to get the attention of the executive decision makers of the IOC. We needed to make them take note that we were serious about the mandate they had given to us. We had to demand action.

Back at the bistro table that had become our meeting place, Thomas Bach, Seb Coe, Ivar Formo, and I were the last to keep the flame alive: standing, sitting, writing, debating, and collating in detail each word to be delivered. Words were checked for clarity, to avoid misinterpretation and misuse, as we poured passion into our mission. It had to have an impact and be a call to action. Our deadline was 7 am, one hour before the Congress reconvened.

A call for action

We debated hard on every topic. On doping, if an athlete is found guilty, should they get a life ban or not? Too harsh? Should the ban extend to the coach and athlete's entourage? Doctors? Administrators? Why just the athlete? We understood that "life ban" may not be possible on legal grounds, but it was also clear, too, that if we went in softly, nothing would change. We had to be tough and felt that athletes would understand, too much having been tolerated, too many having turned a blind eye. Doping was a shameful abuse of Olympic ideals. It had to be: a life ban on athletes, coaches, and doctors would be our demand.

Back and forth, from one topic to another, each exchange became more animated and more poignant than the previous. These issues had touched our lives, maybe even destroyed our dreams. The amateur rule? East versus West? How could athletes, those from the East, receive cars, houses, full medical care, food, and a monthly stipend and yet not fall foul of amateur rules, while other athletes from other countries were

Enthusiastic: Téofilo Stevenson, Cuba's three-time Olympic heavyweight boxing champion from 1972 to 1980.

Photo: OSC

sanctioned? Athletes who had been given nothing and even had to pay for the privilege to compete? The sting of the Cold War in sport was real; we'd all felt it. There was consensus: the athlete from the West was falling behind and struggling, tied to a more stringent interpretation of the amateur rule than in the East.

Was it time to relax this most stringent, barbaric law that controlled the athlete, prohibiting them any financial gain? We believed so. Rule 26 had to be changed to allow every athlete the same opportunity. How to do this when the IOC was beholden to the amateur ruling? And, we knew that any ruling from the IOC would only be restricted to the Olympic Games and not the four years in between.

Analysing, discussing, and questioning we realised that to be effective we had to insist that the IFs – those governing the individual sports – would be a more effective target because it was their duty to deliver an equal playing field for athletes. Until now, the International Federations had remained independent from the IOC. If the Olympic Movement was to rebuild, the connection had to be stronger.

Our deadline was closing in. Our shorter five-minute speeches had addressed the issues and the Congress was attentive. We decided that this speech had to go further. Discussion on the sanctions and recommendations continued. We had to agree. More changing and redefining, making sure our words, the words of the athletes, would not be misinterpreted or misconstrued. Our message was absolutely clear.

Satisfied that the earlier speeches had made their mark, we deemed it important to reiterate our disappointment that the IOC had no women in its ranks and that female participation in less than 25 percent of

events at the Olympic Games was not good enough. It had to be said again that the IOC was "out of step" and that male and female participation should be made equal at all levels.

With only hours left, we asked ourselves a last question: what about all those who had to forgo the opportunity to participate in the Games? Every athlete, we concluded, should have the right to compete without being subjected to political pressure or discrimination of any kind, and the Olympic Games must play host to the best athletes from all corners of the globe.

With the discos closed and the parties finished, silence had fallen over the small town. Only the rustle of our papers and our words continued to be heard in our hotel, away from the mainstream of the Congress. We had been together for eight days – and although we didn't know each other beforehand, a bond had developed, close friendships had formed, and our respect for each other had grown. The four of us, it seemed, had each come to Baden-Baden with determination and hope that we could make a difference. Before retiring to bed in the early hours that day, we granted ourselves a chuckle that anyone might have thought of us as window dressing, the "unthinking robots" of the Games, there to perform only on the field of play.

Then, one last thought occurred: we could say all we liked but we had no access to the decision-making process. We needed to change this by insisting on the

independence of the athletes' voice, which needed to stand apart from the NOCs and other governing authorities. We agreed that we would offer our services to continue to assist the movement by representing the athletes' voice: a voice that had to be free from political persuasion, and a voice that would cater to all athletes.

The closing speech

By 7 am the next morning, 29 September 1981, our presentation was ready by our deadline to hand over to the interpreters. Simple and direct, this was a wake-up call: a few words, a 15-minute speech, which we hoped would change the world of sport as we had known it.

Three hours later, tired but satisfied and pleased, we took our seats among the Olympic top brass and attendant dignitaries. Sebastian Coe stood, his words about representing the athletes' voice at an Olympic forum for the first time in the 87 years since the formation of the IOC.

The speech had now taken flight. Where it would land in the lives of athletes was yet to be seen. We could only hope that our words would resonate: that sports' governing bodies would take action to enforce new rules around doping and protect the integrity of the athlete through more stringent doping measures and controls, that politics would no longer affect the future participation of athletes at the Games, and that more women would participate on the field of play and in the boardroom. That the athletes' voice would continue to influence and have an impact on the sporting world, to protect the athlete.

The athletes' voice in Baden-Baden became a turning point for sport across the globe. With the redrafting of Rule 26, we achieved a wide-reaching effect across all sports, be it Olympic or other, whereby athletes could receive money for their participation.

Our emphasis on gender equality was before our time and opened the door for dialogue towards equal opportunity for females. Today, there is equal participation at the Olympic Games of male and female events and athlete numbers, though there is still a long way to go for equality in the administration of sport.

While doping is still the most serious crime against fair sport, it has been perhaps the most difficult to eradicate. Our statement of a lifetime ban on doping athletes and coaches was not established, for legal reasons. However, the IOC established out-of-competition testing through the creation of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). As an October 1985 press release from the IOC Athletes' Commission stated, "The health of all athletes must remain a primary concern of all partners in the Olympic Movement".

While the six speakers at the Baden-Baden Congress were asked by President Samaranch to continue as a link between the athletes and the IOC, the Athletes' Commission was in continual flux with the addition of two representatives from the organising committees (winter and summer) appointed in May 1982. And it took until 1985, after the Olympic Games Los Angeles 1984, for the Athletes' Commission membership to represent all continents.

Change has taken time with still more to be done for equality, doping, and, although it is written in the IOC Charter as Rule 21, the creation of athlete commissions within NOCs and IFs is today still not complete. But at each step of the way since 1981, the voice of athletes has made a significant difference – an achievement that should never be taken for granted. ■

The Athletes' Final speech at Baden-Baden, presented by Sebastian Coe on of behalf of all attending athletes

For the first time, the athletes have their say: Sebastian Coe, 1980 Olympic champion and world record holder over 800 and 1500 m, at the lectern.

Photo: OSC

When I arrived here I had to admit to a certain amount of fear and trepidation at not only being included in the Congress, but also having the task of standing before you and articulating the feelings of the athletes. Well, my immediate fear was allayed. You could almost say that I felt quite in my own element when on Thursday I saw a queue forming outside the main hall for free tracksuits and inside the hall I stand here with the electric clock flashing away to my left.

We wish to record our immediate thanks to President Samaranch for his invitation to the Congress, to Willi Daume for his support and confidence in the youth of the Movement, and to the whole of the Organising Committee which provided us with the support, the staff and the facilities needed to accomplish our difficult and challenging task.

I feel it is necessary at this point to outline the working conditions and problems we had to overcome in order to address the Congress.

It may have been noted by the Congress that the athletes have been looking a little bit tired – we are! We have all been working long hours in the preparation of the papers – often working into the early hours of the morning.

No discos – just discussion.

Late nights have often been followed by early mornings. Frequent visits have been made in the mornings by the athletes to schools and throughout the day to community activities.

We are the first athletes invited to participate vocally at an Olympic Congress. It is for this reason that we realise the responsibility we have in securing the future inclusion of athletes. Since the athletes will be participating in future Congresses we ask you for your assistance in providing us with comprehensive information before we arrive.

This does not mean however that athletes will arrive here with speeches formulated and written, possibly by NOCs, IFs or even government authorities. Only independence ensures valid contribution. This is consistent with IOC philosophy.

As a group we have rejected every attempt at political pressure in both the choice of speakers and subjects.

We came here not knowing what our role would be and we had little time to define it. Fortunately, this diverse but well-balanced group was able to address a broad spectrum of challenges.

A dynamic group was formed. We worked with cohesion and efficiency, the subject always remained more important than the individual.

Five major topics emerged. They were – in order of presentation to the Congress: firstly, drug abuse; secondly, Rule 26 – the eligibility to compete in the Games; thirdly, inclusion of athletes in the Olympic Movement; fourthly, political involvement in the Olympic debate, and finally Olympic ceremonies.

While these were not the only subjects discussed we did consider them to be of immediate importance for the future of the Games.

Time prevents us from a full analysis of these subjects, but we athletes sincerely hope that you leave this hall fully aware of our feelings.

On "doping" we consider this to be the most shameful abuse of the Olympic idea.

We call for the LIFE BAN of offending athletes.

We call for the LIFE BAN of coaches and the so-called doctors who administer this evil.

On Rule 26: it is illogical to expect one rule to be capable of attending to the individual needs of all the sports in the Olympic Movement. We therefore echo the call in Congress for greater independence for International Federations in determining exactly what the needs of their sports are.

The demand for a modern Olympian is considerable. Such sacrifice to the cause of the Movement should never be

independence of the athletes' voice, which needed to stand apart from the NOCs and other governing authorities. We agreed that we would offer our services to continue to assist the movement by representing the athletes' voice: a voice that had to be free from political persuasion, and a voice that would cater to all athletes.

The closing speech

By 7 am the next morning, 29 September 1981, our presentation was ready by our deadline to hand over to the interpreters. Simple and direct, this was a wake-up call: a few words, a 15-minute speech, which we hoped would change the world of sport as we had known it.

disregarded. It is therefore the moral obligation of the IOC to ensure that within the framework of Rule 26, provision is made for the social consideration of the athlete.

With regard to the participation of women in the Olympic Movement, it is considered that this institution is out of step with modern thinking in its support and inclusion of women. We simply call for female equality of opportunity.

On the subject of politicisation of sport, the athlete has the right to self-determination and on those grounds alone we reject all political pressure.

The final major topic concerned the ceremonies at the Games. The athletes wish to maintain the traditions of the Olympic ceremony and totally support the concept of one Olympic Village.

Also discussed but not included in the five-minute presentation were other issues. For four weeks every four years the IOC does a remarkable job in its preparation of the Olympic sports. What happens during the Olympiad? We suggest that this time could be used to develop new sporting opportunities. Athletes and sports experts could take part in an exchange programme on a world-wide basis. We would like to explore ways in which to promote the history and proud traditions of the Olympic Movement, for example this was achieved here during the participation of athletes in community activities.

On the basis of the proposals of the IFs, the support of Mr. Tallberg and the commitment of President Samaranch, we strongly suggest that this group of athletes be regarded as the consulting body to help us attain the way in which athletes can participate in the decision-making processes of our Movement. To accomplish this we ask for your support in organising a group meeting next year so that we may continue our work.

In his address, Peter Tallberg kindly referred to the athletes as a reserve – a hidden treasure. His inclusion into our group could be the key unlocking the trove.

Finally, I feel that our inclusion in the Congress here in Baden-Baden and the tenacity with which we have grasped our tasks kills if not buries the common misconception that athletes are unthinking robots.

Three hours later, tired but satisfied and pleased, we took our seats among the Olympic top brass and attendant dignitaries. Sebastian Coe stood, his words about representing the athletes' voice at an Olympic forum for the first time in the 87 years since the formation of the IOC.

The speech had now taken flight. Where it would land in the lives of athletes was yet to be seen. We could only hope that our words would resonate: that sports' governing bodies would take action to enforce new rules around doping and protect the integrity of the athlete through more stringent doping measures and controls, that politics would no longer affect the future participation of athletes at the Games, and that more women would participate on the field of play and in the boardroom. That the athletes' voice would continue to influence and have an impact on the sporting world, to protect the athlete.

The athletes' voice in Baden-Baden became a turning point for sport across the globe. With the redrafting of Rule 26, we achieved a wide-reaching effect across all sports, be it Olympic or other, whereby athletes could receive money for their participation.

Our emphasis on gender equality was before our time and opened the door for dialogue towards equal opportunity for females. Today, there is equal participation at the Olympic Games of male and female events and athlete numbers, though there is still a long way to go for equality in the administration of sport.

While doping is still the most serious crime against fair sport, it has been perhaps the most difficult to eradicate. Our statement of a lifetime ban on doping athletes and coaches was not established, for legal reasons. However, the IOC established out-of-competition testing through the creation of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). As an October 1985 press release from the IOC Athletes' Commission stated, "The health of all athletes must remain a primary concern of all partners in the Olympic Movement".

While the six speakers at the Baden-Baden Congress were asked by President Samaranch to continue as a link between the athletes and the IOC, the Athletes' Commission was in continual flux with the addition of two representatives from the organising committees (winter and summer) appointed in May 1982. And it took until 1985, after the Olympic Games Los Angeles 1984, for the Athletes' Commission membership to represent all continents.

Change has taken time with still more to be done for equality, doping, and, although it is written in the IOC Charter as Rule 21, the creation of athlete commissions within NOCs and IFs is today still not complete. But at each step of the way since 1981, the voice of athletes has made a significant difference – an achievement that should never be taken for granted. ■