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SECTION III

The participants
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The athlete as a primary stakeholder of sport events

Without the athlete, there is no sport event and spectacle for consumers, there is no entertainment. The athlete is unquestionably central to staging the sport event and the subsequent competitions which entertain the masses. Ultimately, the athlete is responsible for delivering a competition within their sport, for which an appetite to watch events in the stadium, on television and through online streaming can be considerable. Consequently, we see the athlete stakeholder as the prime producer and beneficiary of sport event competitions.

The athlete interacts with a number of different stakeholders of sport events including coaches, trainers, technical officials, administrative support staff, mission staff, volunteers, fans and the media. Ultimately, as the central figure in competition, athletes can be pulled in many directions leading up to, during and after events and thus, hold a significant level of responsibility related to the event success and building the sport they represent.

Despite the undeniable importance of the athlete as a central figure in sport event competitions (on the field), their role within event organizing, staging and preparation (off the field) is far less developed but arguably, equally as important. It is interesting that over the long history of Olympic Games and other major sporting events like the Commonwealth Games, the athlete has not played a greater formal role in event management decision making, particularly as a voice with voting privilege to represent the athlete-centred perspective. However, in recent years, the athlete role has started to evolve within sport event planning.

Kihl et al. (2007) argued that ‘realizing athlete-centred high performance sport requires the implementation of various structural mechanisms that provide and support a legitimate space where athletes and their advocates are empowered to exercise their political autonomy’ (p. 2). Drawing on the theory of deliberative democracy which purports the importance of listening to a number of different constituents to help inform policy and strategic direction, Kihl et al. (2007) argued that the athlete’s role has the potential to contribute to sport policy through formal and informal power. A deliberative democratic approach considers the voice of those impacted by organizational decision making and strategy, and within a sport event model, adheres to primary stakeholders like that of the athletes for direction and support of initiatives. Kihl et al. (2007) remarked that ‘the importance of administrative and communicative power to
a deliberative democratic approach to athlete-centred sport is its use for the critical analysis of efforts to involve athletes in decision making and the policy process’ (p. 10). Given that athletes directly experience the created environment surrounding their event, and are ultimately able to ascertain what works well and what hinders their own performance (a key to event success), knowing their experiences and perspectives seems only logical to increasing an athlete-centred Games initiative.

Today, we see major sport event properties recognizing the importance of including the athlete in their decision making through the formalization of athlete representatives (AR) within the property rights holder’s executive board (e.g. International Olympic and Paralympic Committees [IOC and IPC respectively]; Commonwealth Games Federation [CGF]). This shift towards a deliberative democratic practice which involves the Games primary stakeholders, arguably started when then IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch in 1981 created the IOC Athletes’ Commission to be later confirmed within the Olympic Charter (International Olympic Committee: Olympic Charter 2013). However, despite the positive recognition that athletes can contribute more than athletic entertainment alone, the voting rights and privileges for athletes did not occur until many years later for the majority of sport event properties; instead, athletes were in more of a consultancy role where their opinions were sought but not necessarily adopted. Regardless, the shift during this time to a more athlete-centred approach witnessed athletes taking on more prominent roles within event organizing and concomitantly, the athlete voice started to be heard. Later on in the chapter we will hear some of the current initiatives in which ARs are engaged in within their event property.

In current sport administration, we now see that former athletes have taken on many prominent administrative roles with multi-sport and single-sport movements. For example, the current IOC president, Thomas Bach, has been instrumental in many national and international movements within sport and now currently holds what is arguably the most influential position in sport events in the world. We see evidence from many different athletic backgrounds where athletes have successfully transitioned into both paid and volunteer administrative roles post-athletic career (please see Table 7.1). We believe this trend should continue, and that more athletes need to become involved post athletic career in the central administration of sport events. In the future, it is likely that the stabilization of ARs within executive boards will lead to more athlete centred initiatives led by former athletes.

As noted by Kihl et al. (2007),

there are two fundamental aspects to the development of, and calls for, an athlete-centred system. First, athletes’ needs are the focus for determining what structures, systems, and resources are required to ensure their success in competitions. Second, athletes are expected to be involved in ongoing deliberations about policies and decisions that affect them.

(p. 4)

We see this as the case within the IOC, IPC, Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) and CGF movements specifically as their athlete representatives are involved in such contemporary issues as the Social Media Policy formation and adoption, athlete education post-career initiatives and diversity statements for their respective sport properties. The strategic capability of sport organizations is most likely enhanced by including athletes in decision making, particularly since athletes can add much information regarding the sporting context (Ferkins and Shilbury 2012). Furthermore, Thibault et al. (2010) noted that:
The athletes’ perspective

Table 7.1Athletes transitioning into event management within IOC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Athlete Experience</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charmaine Crooks</td>
<td>Olympic and Commonwealth Games Medalist</td>
<td>IOC Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IOC Coordination 2014 Sochi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Member of COC EB 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IOC Rep on WADA Exec. Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Pound</td>
<td>1960 Olympic Swimming Finalist</td>
<td>COC EB 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefan Holm</td>
<td>2004 Gold Medal High Jump</td>
<td>IOC Vice President and EB Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bach</td>
<td>1976 Gold Medal Fencing</td>
<td>IOC Athlete Member 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana Bartekova</td>
<td>2012 Bronze Medal Skeet Shooting</td>
<td>Young Ambassador YOG 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saku Koivu</td>
<td>2006 Silver Medal Ice Hockey (Men’s)</td>
<td>Athlete Commission 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Popov</td>
<td>1996 Gold Medal Swimming</td>
<td>Athlete Commission 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita DeFrantz</td>
<td>1976 Bronze Medal Rowing</td>
<td>IOC Member 1998</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The athletic and organizational achievements listed herein are only samples from the careers of the aforementioned people and are not an exhaustive list of accomplishments and contributions.

Providing athlete representation and inclusion in sport organization’s deliberative practices should ensure that high performance athletes needs are positioned at the focal point of agenda setting, as well as being included in discussions about decisions and policies that most affect them.

(p. 278)

Certainly, this is the case with today’s AR who face a number of difficult challenges in representing the athlete body which competes at the events.

The athletes who compete within today’s major multi-sport event world face some unsettling new realities (especially post 9–11) where they assume a level of risk and responsibilities leading up to and during each competition. Due to the increased threat of terrorism during sporting events, athletes are faced with an increased security presence in and around the Athletes’ Village and sporting venues, for example armed guards to keep them safe during transportation to and from venues. These measures, although meant to keep the athletes safe, can be for some, fear and anxiety producing (MacIntosh and Nicol 2012). The result of the increased safety measures has
placed an emphasis on the AR to ensure that the athletes at the Games are prepared ahead of time for the measures that will be in effect during Games-time. Hence, part of the AR role is to help prepare the athletes to deal with some of the stress and anxiety which may come from events (e.g. security measures, travel) outside of their actual sporting competitions. Ultimately, today’s modern multi-sport events are wrought with the aforementioned issues and additional concerns including environmental sensitivities, media responsibilities and other pertinent areas surrounding games time in which the athlete needs to be prepared to face. We will go through some of these responsibilities now.

**Athlete representatives and their responsibilities**

Along with the AR increased role in preparing athletes to deal with the new realities of competing in major sport event competition comes a need to have a strong working knowledge of how national sport governing bodies (NGBs) function, the governance structure, and policies that impact the athletes they represent (Ferkins and Shilbury 2012). Hence, the AR role is multifaceted and demanding. The AR is charged with ensuring proper and timely communication with the athletes they represent (e.g. including policy changes and decisions effecting their preparation and possibly performance) along with the communication at the board room. Furthermore, an understanding of how to communicate to the various international sport federations is necessary to ensure that policy documentation is well understood and communication can flow.

According to current ARs (interviewed to help write this chapter), some of the current functions of the AR include the development of national level athlete engagement models, career and post career transitioning, assisting in host city selection, discussing future Games with the host organizing committee, contributing to governance decisions, ensuring the fulfilment of the strategic plan, mission, vision and values and advocating for athletes rights. Furthermore, AR are also dealing with issues regarding the fight against doping, sponsorship infringements and rights, equity within sport, protecting the environment, education and career development after athletics, and standing up for several different causes that are of focus. Consequently, there is a need to have athlete commissions (AC) for all international multisport federations; yet, athletes from smaller nations tend to have the challenge of their NGB not having much capacity and therefore not having as much knowledge in advance of the Games. Next, we take a look specifically at how the AR role evolved within various sport event properties.

**Athlete representation within the International Olympic Committee**

The Athlete’s Commission was formed in 1981 to help establish a link between the Athletes of the Games and the IOC executive (International Olympic Committee 2013). This was seen as the first formal step in promoting the athlete’s voice to the upper administration. The creation of this commission may have been the push for International Sport Federations to establish further athlete commissions to represent the interest of their athletes, thus acting as the impetus for sporting bodies to begin considering the athlete voice in staging events.

Interestingly, it was not until the 110th session of the IOC in December of 1999 that active athletes could become a part of the IOC membership for the first time (eight summer athletes, four winter athletes, and three athletes appointed by President). Hence, until 2000, the Athlete Commission was only advisory in nature (non-voting). Thus, it could be argued that the athlete commission was not necessarily serving the best interest of the athlete up until this time, and instead were still being heavily influenced by their own board and/or federation. Essentially, until this decision was rendered, the athletes had only the opportunity to influence the IOC because they could not vote.
Ultimately, the IOC AC is charged with upholding the rights and obligations of the athletes represented at the Games. They are involved in the IOC’s main commissions and working groups thus holding several different types of responsibilities related to Games preparation. The Chair of the AC serves as a member of the IOC executive board and can make recommendations to the IOC’s executive bodies. Composed of 12 athletes, elected for eight years by the athletes of participating Games, potential members must, no later than six months before the Games, stand as a candidate in elections. The IOC invites each National Olympic Committee with an AC to present a candidate for election to the IOC AC.

Ultimately, we see that in today’s multi-sport event environment athletes now have a formal voice; but it does not necessarily translate into voting. Thus, while the athlete has some power because of their essential contribution to the Games, they have yet to fully mobilise and rely still on the goodwill of the sport organization (Thibault et al. 2010). Lastly, within the IOC governance structure, there are athletes that sit on the executive board; however, as Thibault et al. (2010) noted, ‘these former athletes may be considered suitable representatives for current Olympic athletes, they may not be attuned to current athlete concerns’ (p. 288). This idea points to some of the concerns in ensuring that ARs assume their roles very shortly after their athlete-career is complete so that they bring into their role a very current understanding of athlete needs. To date, there is a lack of academic information regarding the athlete perspective, experiences and roles within organizing games in general. In an effort to understand the contemporary roles and responsibilities of ARs, we interviewed the current International Paralympic Committee Athlete Chair Todd Nicholson, and the current Canadian Olympic Committee Athlete Chair Adam van Koeverden and asked them about their work-related perspectives and experiences.

Paralympic athlete representation

All international Paralympic athletes have a voice and voting representation through the voice of the International Paralympic Committee Athlete Council (1989). Todd Nicholson is the current chairperson on a council which includes three winter sport and six summer sport athletes; each athlete is elected to a four-year term with the ability to sit on the Athletes Council as long as they are considered an active athlete (i.e. must have competed in one of the last two Paralympic Games). Todd was elected during the 2010 Paralympic Games in Vancouver.

In an interview with Todd (winter of 2013), he noted that the Athlete Council at the IPC is a voice on the Governing Board which has voting rights and is focused on several athlete initiatives. As Todd explained, the IPC Athletes’ Council is the collective voice of Paralympic athletes within the IPC and the greater Paralympic Movement. As the liaison between IPC decision-makers and Paralympic athletes, the IPC Athletes’ Council works to provide effective input into decision-making at all levels of the organization. To this end, the IPC Athletes’ Council works to ensure effective athlete representation on all IPC committees and commissions as well as to create other opportunities for athlete representation both within and outside the IPC. For example, the IPC Athletes’ Council has cross representation with the IOC Athletes’ Commission.

As Chairperson of the IPC Athlete Council, Todd’s current four-year term takes him until April 2017. He noted that the focus for his four-year term is on creating education and outreach with organizations such as the World Anti-Doping Agency, and athlete career programs (for when they finish their athletic career and while they are competing to help athletes find financial assistance). As Todd explained, athletes need to know what companies can help them get to the Games. He also noted that the Adecco Athlete Career program will assist athletes in their transition post-career to meaningful work (IPC n.d.).
Todd noted that one of the main responsibilities of the Athlete Council is to get the information to the athletes that they need in a timely fashion. This is a challenge for the council. For the athletes to feel they have a collective voice, they need the information that is vital to their forming an opinion and delivering their voice; and thus, athletes need the communication channel to flow both ways and quickly. Social media and networking plays an important role in helping the Council deliver their messaging. Despite the power to deliver quick information to athletes, social media has some limitations including its availability in various countries, and restrictions and limitations with privacy. Therefore, major event communication and outreach is a key focus of the Council. The IPC Athletes Council will be reaching out to the International Federations (IF) to help with communications and look at creating an athlete council within each IF as a way of networking and communicating to all athletes.

Todd noted the need to have more people with Paralympic athletes and people with disabilities working within the IPC/NPC and other sporting organizations to effectively represent the interest of the Paralympic athletes. A further developmental need is to have more athletes being used as role models within the Paralympic movement, athletes that are high profile and that have experience dealing with sponsors and the media. As Todd noted, athletes need to be educated in how to deal with media, the role the athlete has in discussing their sport, sharing information regarding training, education and opportunities to grow within the sport, amongst other factors of importance for the Paralympic movement. Overall, he believed that part of the responsibility in his current position is to engage more athletes in taking an active role within the Paralympic movement to create a stronger future for many Games to come.

**Canadian Olympic Committee athlete representation**

The athlete voice within the Canadian Olympic Committee has a long and rich history with the likes of some of Canada’s most decorated Olympic athletes including Becky Scott (IOC Representative), Hayley Wickenheiser (IOC Athlete Commission) and the current chair of the COC Athlete Commission Adam van Koeverden. Between 2008 and 2014, Adam has been vice-chair and chair of the Athlete Commission within the COC and, thus, has experienced a number of important developments to help prepare Canadian athletes competing in both summer and winter Olympics. Although he stepped away for 18 months in order to prepare for the London Olympic Games, reassuming his role shortly after completion, he has been a strong advocate for the athlete-centred Games within the governance structure.

In an interview with Adam van Koeverden in the winter of 2014, he explained that within his role, there is a large number of different elements regarding Games-time preparation in which the AR is focused; thus, there is a broad obligation to act as the voice of athletes during the lead up to each Olympic Games competition. In describing the varied roles, Adam noted the importance of having recently retired athletes engage in a volunteer capacity and become involved in the boards to share their experiences and opinions.

Adam noted that the environment surrounding major sports events has changed rapidly since the late 1990s and early 2000s due in part to the issues surrounding risk management, social media policy and other athlete realities within contemporary sport event management (e.g. LGBT issues in Sochi, selection committee for flag bearers, protocol for athlete relations). Therefore, having recently retired athletes that have experienced the new athlete realities of sports events is important to understand the contemporary sporting climate. As Adam explained, change in sports events is happening fast; as an AR, it is important to share with fellow athletes rules and regulations related to social media, expectations regarding security measures and checks in and around the Athletes’ Village and some of the political realities of being an athlete in today’s sports
The athletes’ perspective

events. Hence, the role of the AR in part is to help ease the levels of anxiety which some athletes may experience, and prepare athletes on how to succeed in the high demand environment they will face outside of their actual sport competition.

He noted that the COC has an initiative known as the Olympic Excellence Series, which helps young athletes benefit from seminars that focus on such things as health and safety during Games-time, social media policies, handling media requests and other factors to assist athlete preparation. Most of the Olympians take advantage of these classes to help them prepare; however, many athletes that are named to the team at the last minute, who often are veterans, may miss these seminars. For example, through the Olympic Excellence Series information leading into the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games, most of the athletes were informed of and therefore anticipated long waits for security and safety measures.

In terms of his AR function within the COC, Adam noted that it is an important position that brings with it plenty of responsibilities during the year and can be tiring depending on the number of subcommittees with which one is involved. However, Adam noted that it is a very rewarding experience that provides an opportunity to interact with people that are influential in the sport system as mentors and colleagues. He noted that athletes have a strong voice, with two athletes holding voting privileges on the board. The current athlete's commission has four officers and two executives, who have voting rights at the Annual Session. Athletes can also attend meetings as non-voting members. Further, athletes from NGBs can have a vote in that each NGB can bring three voting members, and one of them has to be an athlete representative. Overall, Adam noted how rewarding it is to experience the role of AR and give back to the sporting community in Canada.

Commonwealth Games Federation athlete representation

The CGF has also made significant strides in recognizing athlete needs and interests within the Commonwealth Games movement. Motions were set forth in 2001 to begin formalizing a role for athletes within the Executive Board. The AR is appointed by the Executive Board from nominations received from affiliated Commonwealth Games Associations (CGAs). In order to qualify to become an AR, a person must have competed in one of the previous two Commonwealth Games and must never have had any doping infractions. The first term for this position was held by Canadian track athlete Trevino Betty (2003–2007) followed by Lesley Rumball (2007–2011), a New Zealand netball athlete; it is currently being led by Canadian swimmer and triathlete Suzanne Weckend Dill (2011–2015).

The initial main focus of the AR was to help grow the number of CGAs that had athlete representatives. Now, with a growing number of CGAs having athlete representation, there is a desire to create opportunities for these leaders to get together and share best practices with each other. Once most CGAs have an AR, there may be stronger support from the CGF Executive Board and its members to create an Athletes Commission. Today, the engagement level of the CGA Athlete Representative is another area of focus. To ensure engagement levels increase, the CGF has recently added the AR to the Development Committee. In this committee, the AR is able to provide ideas about how to go about supporting the enhancement of CGA interactions with their athletes and their AR if they have one.

The 2014 Commonwealth Games saw the Glasgow organizing committee include the first Athletes Advisory Committee (AAC) as a part of the Organizing Committee (OC) Board. The chair of the Glasgow Organizing Committee’s AAC was a full OC Board Member and the CGF AR was a part of the AAC. This created a full circle loop of sharing information and allowed the athletes from all around the Commonwealth a chance for input into the future Games
organizing. At the CGF General Assembly in 2012 recommendations were accepted that all future host cities must have an AAC with the chair of that committee being a full member of the OC board. This is a step forward in terms of connecting the CGF AR to the future Games organizational plans.

The purpose of the AAC is to provide an athlete perspective and advice to the OC Board and management in relation to Games planning and delivery on athlete matters and requirements in the Athletes’ Village and across venues. The idea for the creation of the AAC is for athletes to have a voice which can impact athlete attendance and participation. The AAC was created to help Glasgow 2014 achieve their vision to plan and deliver a truly athlete centred and sport focused Games. For Glasgow 2014, it was important to provide the best possible sporting experience for all participating athletes. Furthermore, the AAC also advises the Board and OC on athlete participation in ceremonies as this was identified as an area of concern for athletes following the XIX Games in Delhi, India (c.f. MacIntosh and Nicol 2012).

At the 2013 General Assembly there was acceptance by the CGF Executive Board for its Sports Committee to create a terms of reference for an athlete to be added. The Sports Committee will be working on selection criteria for this future member of the Sports Committee and will likely be someone who is considered ‘active’ or to have competed in one of the previous two Commonwealth Games. In addition the Executive Board also agreed to the merits of the having the CGF AR become a member of the recently created Development Committee. The CGF AR will be aiming to enhance the development of formalised means of athlete representation around the Commonwealth through his or her Development Committee work. Such initiatives demonstrate the movement towards including athletes within important sport event management decision making for the CGF; a deliberative democratic approach.

Beyond the competition: athlete realities during major events

Today’s sports athletes face a plethora of challenges and expectations beyond the realm of their competition. With social media booming, visibility and the personal lives of athletes are becoming increasingly transparent (and sometimes even problematic) not just for the athletes, but for the event property holder, the sponsor and the management team. Furthermore, the ideal of creating equitable sport, where athletes live up to and hold that which is deemed most admirable in society, sees the modern athletes swearing an oath before every rendition of the Games.

During the Olympics and Commonwealth Games in the past, a chosen athlete from the host nation takes the athlete oath thereby indicating their desire to compete with utmost integrity in fair competition. For example, after the CGF flag was raised, as part of the opening ceremony of the event, a representative athlete from the host nation accompanied by the flag bearer of his or her country, pronounced the oath for all of the Games athletes:

> We declare that we will take part in the Commonwealth Games in the spirit of true sportsmanship, recognising the rules which govern them and desirous of participating in them for the honour of our Commonwealth and for the glory of sport.

*(Commonwealth Games Federation 2014b)*

For the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games there was a single oath for athletes, coaches and officials. All three groups were represented on stage with a designate and each noted part of the oath which applied to them. Athlete representatives from around the Commonwealth were provided with an opportunity to contribute their input to the creation of the re-crafting of the oath.
Thus, there is a formalised written and verbally stated agreement that the athlete will participate to their full ability with sportsmanship at the heart of their competitive environment. This on-the-field declaration does not address the off-the-field realities that are now taking precedence within the major sport event movement today. For example, consider the recent social media policies, which we now discuss.

**Athletes and social media**

It is not just on the field that athletes are the centre of attention; new technology, and in particular social media, has become a part of life for today’s modern athletes. Smartphones and cameras are common sights at events which help athletes chronicle their experience. Today, athletes find themselves with the ability to take photographs and videos inside the venues, opening and closing ceremonies, medal ceremonies and other places within the sport event. As a result, property rights holders have recently introduced social media policies in an effort to ensure athletes and other stakeholders are respecting guidelines and maintaining a level of decency and integrity.

For example, the IOC and the CGF have stated their support for athletes taking pictures/videos and posting on Facebook, Twitter or blogs, yet also warn of the misuse of technology through a list of guidelines and repercussion for abuse. In conjunction with this outward support for the athlete’s rights to take pictures and videos, both organizations have created social media policies that forbid the use of any media for commercial and/or advertising purposes. The IOC policy details that social media activity should not imply any unauthorised association of a third party with the IOC, the Olympics Games or the Olympic Movement (see IOC Social Media Policy 2011). For example, the policy document mentions that activities like blogs and tweets should conform to the spirit of Olympism as is noted within the Olympic Charter and essentially that any postings be in good taste. In a similar vein the CGF policy notes that:

> Accredited persons who choose to share their experiences at the Games with the public through social media do so in a way which respects both themselves and others, and does not infringe on the rights of other partners, such as the media, sponsors and organizers.

*(CGF 2014 Social Media Policy: 1)*

Both the IOC and the CGF note that unless a person is accredited, media, photos and videos are for personal use only. Both policies discuss the sanctity of the Athletes’ Village. For example, the IOC Social Media Policy (2011) noted that since the Village is a protected environment, people are to tweet or blog in the first person. The policy discusses that photos of the athletes themselves can be posted; however, people will need prior written consent to use photos of others, essentially denoting the importance of people adhering to the rule of using things only for personal use.

When participants and other accredited persons choose to go public with any commentary regarding the Games, their colleagues, sports organizations or related opinions, any post, blog or tweet within a social media platform is under their own responsibility; thus, they can be held personally liable and responsible for defamation or obscenity charges. We see this with the case of Voula Papachristou, the Greek Triple Jump Champion, who was suspended by the Hellenic Olympic Committee for the London 2012 Games due to an insensitive tweet regarding African immigrants. The Hellenic Olympic Committee noted that the tweet was contrary to the values and ideals of the Olympic Movement and that they would not allow her to compete in London (Chase 2012).
Events such as this one have created the need to educate athletes on effective communication and/or media training. Interestingly, this has also created a new task for NGBs, organizing committees and property rights holders to ‘monitor’ on-line content leading into and during the Games. One of the reasons for the need to monitor the online content is for the property rights holder to maintain the level of integrity promised to their partners before and during Games-time (e.g. protecting sponsor rights).

The CGF Social Media Policy (SMP) applies during ‘Games-time’ from the period from the official opening of the Commonwealth Games Village, in the case of the XX Games in Glasgow, specifically 13 July 2014; until the day the Athletes’ Village formally closed on 6 August 2014. Similar to the IOC, the CGF wants participants to take and share photos of family and friends, but is cognizant of the need to protect their partners’ rights (e.g. media, broadcasters, sponsors). The CGF attempts to make athletes aware of the policies through various communication procedures involving the AR and the Chefs de Mission (see Chapter 11 in this book on the delegations and mission staff).

Within the SMP, the CGF has developed a list of acceptable and unacceptable use of social media and argues that athletes should at all times be respectful of others, be positive, and maintain privacy and confidentiality rights. The CGF also notes that during ‘Games-time’ there will be active monitoring of social networks and the Internet. The CGF adds that, at their discretion, they may utilise some of the content which shares and or promotes the spirit of the Games and, that they would ask for athlete assistance to identify and prevent activity which attempts to: a) promote a political cause, b) promote a business or product at the Games, c) could adversely affect the esteem and reputation of the Games and d) could cause an individual distress or embarrassment. If there are people found to be abusing the SMP or infringing on the statements contained within the policy itself, the accreditations of any organization or person accredited at the Games can be withdrawn without notice, at the discretion of the CGF or the OC. In the case of Glasgow 2014, the policy (Commonwealth Games Federation 2014a: 4) stated that:

Glasgow 2014 and the CGF also reserve the right to take any other appropriate measures, including issuing a Take Down Notice, taking legal action for damages, and imposing other sanctions. Athletes, team officials and other Accredited Persons may also be subject to additional guidelines and sanctions in respect of social media, blogging and the internet, for instance from their relevant Commonwealth Games Association or employer.

Diversity and inclusion

One prominent issue leading into the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympic Games was the political and controversial anti-gay propaganda law in Russia. This law created an air of negativity surrounding the Games with political manoeuvring following. For example, the United States delegation announced that it was to be led by successful gay athletes such as Billie Jean King (tennis), Caitlin Cahow (ice hockey) and Brian Boitano (figure skating), along with former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano. This political decision was intended to send a strong message to Russia’s political governing bodies surrounding their controversial anti-gay law. The IOC claimed it had assurances from Russian organizers that athletes, officials and spectators would not face discrimination based on sexual orientation. Meanwhile, the IOC approved a letter going out to athletes reminding them to refrain from protests or political gestures during the Sochi Games – reiterating Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter, which forbids demonstrations on Olympic grounds (‘No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is
permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas’ (International Olympic Committee (2013): Olympic Charter, p. 96). Ultimately, there were no major issues associated with either planned or unplanned protests or propaganda related to these issues. However, this issue highlights some of the rights in which ARs must focus their efforts to improve the athlete-centred environment the property rights holders claim to deliver. If sport is to truly become athlete-centred, then the respect for diversity must be present within the Games environment. Athletes need to be part of this evolution.

Athletes’ experiences during events

Athletes experience various off-the-field facets of Games management that impact their comfort, anxiety and/or stress levels and ultimately their performance. In 2010, the CGF engaged in an exercise to evaluate the athlete experience in an effort to better understand the areas where future host organizing committees could focus to improve the Games experiences for their athletes. The CGF, under the guidance of then President Michael Fennel, wished to understand the environment and experiential issues athletes faced in an effort to ensure that they are delivering not just the friendly Games, but the best Games possible for their athletes. Several facets of the Games experience were identified and tested during the XIX Games in Delhi, India, and included:

1. transportation
2. security
3. medical
4. accommodations
5. sport venue
6. communication
7. ceremonies
8. ancillary services
9. overall satisfaction/experience.

A total of 428 athlete surveys were evaluated (MacIntosh and Nicol 2012). The athlete respondents indicated that the majority of the facets were satisfactory with the exception of the facets of communication and accommodations, where some issues were uncovered. Upon further exploration, it was found that internet and cellular availability was not consistent within the Athletes’ Village, exposing some challenges with appropriate technology and that some of the accommodations did not meet the expected standards of the athletes.

Despite receiving positive feedback on all other accounts, the open-ended responses of athletes to questions regarding immediate concerns to improve the experience found that athletes identified a need for increased ventilation in the holding areas during the opening and closing ceremonies, that athletes wanted the opening ceremonies further away from the start of competition so that everyone can enjoy the ceremony and that increased telecommunication areas within the Village to aptly communicate with family and friends were effective. Athletes also suggested that future hosts have increased services within the Athletes’ Village (e.g. merchandising, housekeeping) amongst other facets (e.g. increased knowledge of events they could attend outside their own competition), which can ultimately make their stay more comfortable. Furthermore, many athletes noted that the security presence was indeed stressful and that many did not leave the Athletes’ Village due to concerns regarding health and safety. Ultimately, these findings were delivered during the CGF AGM where the next two host cites for the Games (i.e. Glasgow and the Gold Coast) were in attendance. Finding ways to ensure health and safety are of the highest
focus while creating an environment to reduce some of the anxiety associated with the presence of police was noted to be an area in need of addressing for future host cities.

Although many of these facets are known and considered by management to improve the athlete experience, other areas were uncovered in the research (e.g. health of travel companions, ticketing issues for friends and family, dealing with media coverage, consuming alcohol if one is of age within the Village) that denote the plethora of possible anxiety-producing events. Some of these issues fall within the responsibility of the AR and the NGBs to ensure athletes are mentally prepared for the event. Others are completely outside of management control.

One important area within management control is the policies of diversity and inclusion central to ensuring positive athlete experiences. For example, the CGF AR’s role has a responsibility to ensure the values within the CGF Movement, such as the importance of acceptance and inclusion, are experienced by the athletes. The predominant belief that sport links together all aspects of a diverse society and thereby contributes not only to the development of individuals, but also encourages respect for others is a notable responsibility. A part of this belief has to do with encouraging respect for others with a hope that it leads to a greater understanding and establishment of a more just society overall. As such, the CGF recognises that discrimination is unacceptable and consequently will not tolerate discrimination either directly or indirectly based on race, gender, marital status, age, ethics origin, sexual orientation, disability, religion or beliefs, working patterns, employment status etc. Hence, part of the AR responsibilities is to identify areas whereby the athlete experience may not live up to the ideal set of values desired by the CGF and find ways to address them appropriately.

Another area of the athlete experience to consider is the question of whether or not younger athletes have a different set of needs than older athletes. In this case, consider that the IOC has created the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) and the CGF has created the Commonwealth Youth Games (CYG) in part due to the belief that introducing younger athletes to ideals earlier on (e.g. for the IOC: fair play and education), may assist them in instituting important values. For example, in 2007, Jacques Rogge, due to his belief that young athletes will understand better the role of fair play and education, created the YOG in an effort to inspire young people around the world to participate in sport and adopt and live the Olympic Values. The YOG is an event organized for ages 15–18. Ultimately, the event is intended to bring together some of the world’s best young athletes, in part to celebrate sport and education, acting as a platform for several initiatives within the Olympic Movement.

Kristiansen and Roberts (2010) noted, for the inexperienced young athlete, competitive situations like the YOG may be overwhelming. The authors argued that staging major sports events such as the YOG may produce a need to examine specific coping strategies which may differ from their older sporting counterparts. It is plausible that for this particular stakeholder (young athletes), a very different set of experiences, needs, coping strategies and other environmental considerations need to be closely examined to improve their experiences. Thus, again, we see an important role for ARs within the governance structure of this event. Introducing young people to the Olympic values (respect, excellence, friendship, alongside the sports element) through the Cultural Education Program within the YOG structure may be one way to place less emphasis on the competition component of the Games; yet, Hanstad et al. (2013) noted that competing and winning was the priority for these athletes. They added that some of the athletes found participating in the CEP to be an ‘additional stressor’ that, coupled with security measures, overwhelmed some of them. It is likely that this is also the case with the CYG. At the moment, there is a lack of research regarding how and if these insecurities or anxiety-producing environmental aspects of games management have an adverse effect on athlete performance and experiences with the property rights holder.
Finally, the availability and presence of technology and the need to cover and create stories of interest leading into and during Games activities see athletes and their stories as a key focus of attention within the media. In large-scale international and national competitions in both multi-sport and single-sport events, we see and hear of stories related to the modern athlete, which discuss amongst many things, their motivations, stories of triumph and tribulation and an inside look into their personal lives. Generally, consumers identify with athletes and are interested in their stories as well as their on-the-field performances. Sponsors are aware of this consumer interest and very often use athletes in their campaigns to help project their product or service. During the 2014 Winter Olympics, Canadian broadcasters prepared a series of athlete stories that were pre-recorded with some of Canada’s medal hopefuls. These stories denoted the athlete’s upbringing in sport, including some of the training activities they engaged in, sacrifices they (and their parents/guardians) have made and some of the charitable work and foundations they are involved within outside of their sport. This is not that uncommon of a practice for broadcasters looking to fill airtime between competitions nor for sponsors who are well aware of the power athletes have to promote a positive image.

**Conclusion**

Within the deliberative democratic approach to organizing major multi-sport events like the Olympics and Commonwealth Games, the athlete is unquestionably a primary stakeholder who has an important role to play in its governance. Ultimately, the athlete voice within decision making through the formalised role of an AR is critical to ensuring an athlete-centred sport competition can be realised. Consequently, the strategic capability of boards would most likely be enhanced with the inclusion of capable people that have relevant contextual background in sport (i.e. athletes) in various capacities including that of the AR. We see evidence of this trend occurring within the major multi-sport governing body structure but also a need to increase the board composition with recently retired athletes. Furthermore, we believe that athletes must play a significant role in the decision-making processes with respect to policies that affect their lives (e.g. social media, diversity).

As noted in this chapter, the AR role is multi-faceted, requiring knowledge about the changing realities that athletes face leading into and during the sport events. Contemporary issues such as preparing for enhanced security, the fight against doping, dealing with social media, diversity rights and communication strategies, amongst many other facets of the Games experience, see the athlete as a primary stakeholder of Games management, one who needs to cope with the competition on-the-field demands and the off-the-field experiences that can cause stress and anxiety as well as many positive memories. Hence, the AR should have a strong voice when it comes to decisions that ultimately impact the Games’ primary stakeholder group.

Finally, we argue that there is an increased need for property rights holders to be involved in identifying athletes seeking to transition into roles that will support the sport system (e.g. administration, coaching, officiating) and finding ways to assist in their education to allow them to succeed in such a capacity. Ensuring athletes have knowledge of sport management systems and structures within the sport movements may see property rights holders engaged in ensuring an educational component to their athlete-centred offerings.

Future research regarding the athlete’s role in sport events should consider the strength of the athlete voice in decision making and policy creation, whether or not there is a true mobilization of athletes to create positive change, and examine some of the differences between developing and developed nations that have the capacity to hear the athletes’ voice. Lastly, there is a need for research to consider how athletes can be integrated earlier on in the decision making, relative to
creating an athlete-centred sport system including the events in which they compete. As is the focus with long-term athlete development, there should be an emphasis on how to create long-term athlete administrator positions as ultimately, the experience and the education needed to run sport events systems would benefit from the participant viewpoint and experience.

Suggested readings


References


