



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Thomas Bach
President

**Address at the Annual General Meeting of the Australian Olympic Committee
Sydney, 4 May 2019**

Thank you, John, for your inspiring words. Congratulations on the excellent state of the Olympic family in Australia. As you just outlined the Australian Olympic Committee is embracing Olympic Agenda 2020 in a great way, furthering the development of Olympic sport in Australia and carrying the Olympic Values into the future. In this way the AOC is once again showing its leadership and is setting a shining example to others.

Thank you to all AOC delegates for your warm welcome. It is great to be back in Australia and in the great Olympic city of Sydney.

Ever since arriving in Australia yesterday, the memories and emotions keep coming back.



There are so many unforgettable moments that I have of the Olympic Games Sydney 2000. I am sure everyone here remembers exactly where they were at the moment when the great Cathy Freeman lit the cauldron in the Olympic Stadium. Of course, all Australians remember the incredible performance of the teenage swimming sensation Ian Thorpe. All these and many more sporting moments and the legacy of these Games, I remember all this as if it was only yesterday.

The singing volunteers was a lasting impression that I have from these Games. In fact, I kept in contact with my host in Sydney. We became friends and have been visiting each other since. I am looking forward to seeing her again this afternoon, and I am sure we will relive all the great memories of these unforgettable Games.



While it is great to be reliving memories, in sport we always look to future, to the next challenge ahead. This is why I am deeply honoured by your invitation to address you, at your Annual General Meeting today. Thank you John, for giving me this opportunity.

The overarching mission of the Olympic Games is to make the world a better place through sport. The Olympic Games are the only event in this fragile world that brings the entire world together in peaceful competition, with athletes from all 206 National Olympic Committees taking part.

The only way that the IOC can realise this mission to bring the world together in peace, solidarity and respect, is through a strict commitment to political neutrality. This principle of political neutrality allows sport to stand above and beyond political



differences. Only with political neutrality can sport truly be autonomous.

This means that we have to be neutral in every respect. In Olympic sport, all people are equal, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, or political belief. Therefore, we stand against discrimination of any kind.

We can accomplish our mission only if our political neutrality is respected by politics. If this political neutrality and the autonomy of sport is not respected, then the Olympic Games become divisive rather than unifying, and would finally become obsolete.

In his speech, John pointed out that I personally experienced the consequences of such a politicisation of the Olympic Games.



As a staunch opponent and ultimately a victim of the partial boycott of the Olympic Games Moscow 1980, I directly experienced the political impotence of sport at that time. As an athlete, I wanted to repeat our Olympic victory of 1976. While I was unable to do anything at the time, this often humiliating experience of seeing the mission of the Olympic Games being misused for political ends, was a turning point for me. Without this experience, I would not be standing here in front of you today. It has shaped my thinking about the relationship between sport and politics ever since. This is why fighting for the autonomy of sport and the rights of the athletes not to be taken hostage for political purposes is a key motivation for me to this day.

Throughout Olympic history, you, the AOC, has always had the courage to stand up for these



Olympic principles. I know that the discussion back in 1980 was not easy in Australia. But thanks to the leadership Phil Coles and John, among others at that time, the Australian Olympic family remained steadfast and participated in the Olympic Games Moscow 1980. Today, you have every reason to be proud of the fact that you are the only NOC, together with Greece, to have participated in all Olympic Games.

This is one of the reasons why it is such a personal honour to be the first IOC President to address this Annual General Meeting of the Australian Olympic Committee. It gives me the opportunity to say thank you to the Australian Olympic family for your unwavering support for the values of sport that define us as the Olympic Movement.



By enshrining the principle of political neutrality in the AOC Constitution, you are demonstrating once more your steadfast commitment to the overarching Olympic Mission to make the world a better place through sport. On behalf of the entire Olympic Movement, I thank you for this significant step you are about to take because it will make all of us stronger in our resolve to carry the values of sport into society.

At this Annual General Meeting, you will also be enacting important changes to strengthen athletes' representation. As a former member of the first IOC Athletes' Commission, set up after the Baden-Baden Olympic Congress 1981, this is of course another topic that is close to my heart.

Having been there at the very beginning, I know that athletes' rights and athletes' representation did



not fall from heaven. It is something that we, the athletes, had to fight hard for over a long period of time.

Recognizing the Athletes' Rights and Responsibilities Declaration in the AOC Constitution will be a milestone for sport in Australia. With this recognition, you are empowering the very people who are at the heart of the Olympic Movement: the athletes.

In fact, one of the main outcomes of the recent International Athletes' Forum was a call by the athletes from 185 NOCs and 50 IFs to implement this Declaration at the national level. The AOC will once again be leading the Olympic world as one of the first National Olympic Committees to do so.



The International Athletes' Forum, which was the biggest ever athletes' representatives gathering within the Olympic Movement, also underlined that to ensure the legitimacy of athlete representation by their peers, it is essential that elections for Athletes' Commissions take place in every NOC. Also, in this respect, you are setting an important example. By having athletes' elect their representatives, you are ensuring their voices are heard loud and clear. Empowering athletes to have a voice and a vote in the relevant decision-making bodies, this is the most powerful and legitimate form of athlete representation.

This is why the steps you are taking to strengthen athletes' rights and representation are so encouraging and so important.



It sends a strong and unmistakable signal that athletes are not only at the heart, but that they are in fact **the** heart of the Olympic Movement.

With the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 on the horizon, the athletes will have so much to look forward to. As John can confirm, the preparations and the level of organisation of our Japanese friends are truly impressive. In fact, I cannot remember any Olympic city being so advanced at this stage before the Games. This is also in great part thanks to John, this time in his capacity as the Chair of the Coordination Commission for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

Under his leadership, Tokyo 2020 has embraced the Olympic Agenda 2020 reforms and its New Norm in spirit and in practise.



As a result Tokyo 2020 enjoys an unprecedented success of the sponsorship programme providing a very strong financial foundation.

All of this is in line with our new approach of making the Olympic Games more sustainable and more feasible. We have also reformed the candidature process for Olympic Games. With Olympic Agenda 2020, we have turned the page. With Olympic Agenda 2020 we are revolutionizing the way future Olympic Games are organised.

In the past, bidding for the Olympic Games was like applying for a franchise. We asked potential hosts how they would change their cities in order to adapt them to the Olympic Games. Now we ask them how we can adapt the Games to best fit the long-term needs of their city or region.



We can already see the positive results of the reforms. Paris and Los Angeles, the host cities for the Olympic Games 2024 and 2028 plan to use a record number of existing and temporary facilities. Over 90 per cent of facilities are already in place. Eric Garcetti, Mayor of Los Angeles, summed up his experience of this new approach:

“We were told all these myths about what this process was supposed to be. I was told this was going to be a very inflexible IOC and what we experienced was a tremendous flexibility as shown today. We were told if we read what’s going on that this process is tainted. It was clean and clear. We were told that it would be very demanding and that you’d have to be super ambitious. Instead it was cooperative and collaborative.”



These reforms have created momentum. At this time, we have not even elected the host city for the Olympic Winter Games 2026. But already now we have expressions of interest from numerous cities and regions for the Olympic Winter Games 2030, and even for the Olympic Games 2032, thirteen years in advance. This shows the even growing relevance and global appeal of the Olympic Games. This is why half the world's population tuned in to follow the Olympic Games Rio 2016.

Now we have the positive challenge to manage these expressions of interests.

While having many candidates at the start of the process might look good at a first glance, it creates too many losers in the end. This is why we need to focus on the best possible host for the best athletes of the world without creating too many losers.



For this reason, the IOC Executive Board has put together a working group to study how the candidature process can be taken another step further to become even more flexible, even more targeted and even more dialogue-oriented. This working group, which is chaired by John, should produce an evolution of the revolution of Olympic Agenda 2020. John is leading this working group with the ambition and drive that we all know him for. So it is no surprise that the working group has a very ambitious timeline to provide a report in time for discussion at the IOC Session already next month in June.

The world will notice other results of Olympic Agenda 2020 at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. Thanks to the most comprehensive reform of the Olympic programme in our recent history, these



Games will be more female, more youthful and more urban than ever before. We will have effectively achieved gender balance with the highest-ever female athlete representation at close to 49 per cent. There will be new urban sports on the programme that are popular with young people, including sport climbing and skateboarding. Another of the five new sport is surfing. I am sure that will be a competition that all Australian fans will especially be looking forward to with great anticipation.

All this means that the Australian athletes can look forward to an amazing experience. Good luck to all your athletes who will compete in Tokyo.

I am sure they will be a source of pride for all Australians.



Participating at the Olympic Games is an incredible experience for every athlete. I can tell you from my personal experience, nothing else can quite compare. It is of course first of all a celebration of the athletes and of sport. But it is also a humbling experience when you realise that as athletes, we are part of something bigger. You are part of a team, a part of your NOC. You are part of a real global community. You are part of the only event that brings the whole world together under one roof. Living together in the Olympic Village, all are equal. In this way, the Olympic Games give dignity to everyone. They are a demonstration of solidarity of humanity to which all contribute, and all are benefiting from. Every athlete, every member of the Olympic family can be very proud to be a part of this global community.

In all that we are doing, in all the differences we may have, we must never forget about this unifying



mission of the Olympic Games. Let us always celebrate this achievement together.

We can only accomplish this mission by showing respect and solidarity for one another. This is why the solidarity model is at the heart of the IOC's activities. The Olympic Games are the only event with the power to bring together the entire world in peaceful competition. But we can only bring the world together if everyone can participate. Therefore, it is our role to ensure that everyone has a chance to make their Olympic dream come true.

Only through this solidarity in action can the universality of the Olympic Games be realised.

This explains why the IOC redistributes 90 per cent of its income to the organising committees to make



the Games possible; to the Olympic teams, that means the NOCs, to support their national athletes and to the International Federations to support the athletes and the development of their sport. In this way every day, the equivalent of 3.4 million US dollars goes to support athletes and sport organisations worldwide.

If the criterion for distribution of the money generated with the Olympic Games would be the individual contribution to the commercial success of the Games, then we could not achieve our global mission of uniting the entire world without discrimination anymore. If that were the case, we can be sure that we would not have 33 Olympic sports, but only a much more limited number.

We would not have athletes from all 206 NOC participating in the Olympic Games, but only a much more limited number. The universality of the



Olympic Games can only happen when every NOC, every sport, and every athlete shares this respect and solidarity.

We have just heard from John how solidarity is also the underlying principle of how you support sport in Australia. I can only encourage you to continue on this path. It is only in this way that we can ensure that every athlete from every sport has the same chance to make their Olympic dream come true.

When I was President of the DOSB in Germany, I faced similar discussions.

The argument that finally won the day was that the culture of sport in Germany is very diverse, just as it is here in Australia. We should embrace and promote this diversity because it is an enrichment



not only to the culture of sport, but because it is also an enrichment to the overall culture of the country.

It is so encouraging to hear of your many initiatives to promote sport in Australia, and to spread the Olympic spirit to all Australians. The “Olympics Unleashed” programme is a great example of encouraging everyone to give it their best, to inspire young people with sport, to celebrate sportsmanship and the Olympic values of excellence, friendship and respect. It is a great example of how we can make the world a better place through sport.

In the end, this is what our mission is all about. Putting sport at the service of humanity. Transforming lives with the power of sport. Unifying people through the joy of sport.



With this Olympic spirit in our hearts, we make sure that the more our Olympic Values of excellence, solidarity and respect are challenged, the closer we stand together. The more this world becomes polarized, the stronger becomes our determination to join hands. We can make the world a better place through sport.

Thank you to all of you for being such a committed member of this Olympic Values team.

Thank you for bringing this wonderful Olympic spirit alive in your great Aussie way.