



U.S. OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC ASSEMBLY

General Address – Susanne Lyons, USOPC Chair

Good morning everyone, and welcome to the 2019 U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Assembly.

I'd like to welcome all our partners and colleagues today, and I'd especially like to welcome the Olympians and Paralympians in the room...you are the heart of our movements, so can I ask you to please stand if able or otherwise make yourselves known to be recognized?

Thank you. These individuals, and the other athletes they represent, are the reason we're all here.

But where is here? Where are we? I don't mean the lovely Antlers Hotel, but where are we today as a community? I don't need to tell any of you that it's been a challenging couple of years, but there are still many good things happening right now, even as we enter a time of change, renewal and reform.

Competitively, our teams are performing incredibly, the most recent example being our dominating performances last month in Lima at the Pan American and Parapan American Games.

Team USA brought nearly 1,000 athletes to another continent where they had incredible experiences. They were supported by a group of committed, caring and dedicated staff who made sure the athletes felt safe, supported, valued and able to do their best. People in this room worked, literally for years, to make that happen. Not because they wanted to be away from their families for weeks at a time. Or for the glory of running a transport desk or working airport operations at all hours. They do it for the same reason the athletes dedicate themselves to greatness...because we all believe in what we're doing here. The Olympic and Paralympic movements and the values they seek to advance can bring out the best in all of us.

And that was on display this year in more places than Lima. Team USA had moments of brilliance in 2019 on snow and ice, on the track and in the pool, in almost every discipline in Olympic and Paralympic sport.

Doing everything we can to help athletes have the tools and resources they need to make those accomplishments possible is what it's all about. It takes psychologists and physiotherapists, nutritionists and strength coaches, scientists and surgeons, and the legion of USOPC and NGB staff and volunteers that work day in and day out to make sure America's elite athletes have access to the most extraordinary resources, human and otherwise, to be able to live their dreams and be their best.

But the last 18 months have been difficult in many ways, and the movements are undergoing the most extensive period of rapid change and evolution in over 10 years. Larry Nassar and his crimes against young women was a catalyst that shed a light on some serious issues within the Olympic and Paralympic community and at the USOPC. Abuse has occurred in almost every sport and a lot needed to be done to create better protections for athletes. But those issues also caused us to examine other things like how coaches train, how much emphasis is placed on winning, and how to balance athlete health and well-being with the pursuit of excellence.

We needed to take a hard look at USOPC oversight of the NGBs and at how the voices of athletes were being heard on issues that affect them. All of this, and the resulting scrutiny from survivors, the media, Congress and activists has led to a great amount of turmoil at the USOPC and in many of the NGBs. It has been a tough time, but certainly not nearly as difficult as the journey so many victims and survivors have been on. I absolutely understand the lack of trust; the anger so many feel about what happened and toward the organizations that were supposed to protect them.

So, it has been a rocky road of late and a lot of business as usual has been turned on its head. But in my opinion, that is a good thing. Let me share a little wisdom from Jurassic Park - which is where I learned my very unscientific version of chaos theory, when Jeff Goldblum's character explained what happened to the dinosaurs and their failure to adapt.

Chaos theory is all about how systems organize themselves. Too much stability makes a system or organization complacent, unwilling to contemplate change, risk averse and slow to evolve.

But the flip side of too much stability is that too much disruption and chaos make an ecosystem disorganized and unable to capably propel itself forward.

The bottom line is most really healthy, high-functioning ecosystems or organizations need to live right on that knife's edge between stability and disruption.

More than 10 years ago, after quite a few turbulent years, culminating in a failed bid for Chicago and complete dysfunction between the then-USOC and the NGBs, and a cumbersome governance system, the movements longed for cohesion, stability and peace, and enacted some sweeping reforms.

And while we lauded the apparent calm and order of our organization over the course of the next decade, that stability came with great cost. We weren't paying attention to the signs of trouble. We can't let that happen again. We will not let that happen again.

So, there is benefit to being on the edge of chaos; that balance between disruption and complacency ... that's how we can ensure rapid change, a healthy evolution and the creation of a new, positive environment.

So that's where I think we are. We need to find the right tension between partnership and pushback from the key groups that make up our community – the athletes, the NGBs, USOPA and the USOPC. Not enough tension or balance of power makes for a one-sided system with important groups disempowered and disenfranchised. Too much conflict prevents meaningful change and progress.

Every voice that's been part of the process to reform our community is critically important. But if none of us trust each other or our motivations, we're not going to be the type of organizations that the athletes deserve.

Here's what I want you to know. First, we need to remember there are many very good things happening all around us and there are plenty of athletes who feel well-supported in their journeys. This discomfort and frustration we all feel right now is good and will make us better. And the USOPC is trying to make progress in partnership with you.

This is not easy, and we won't do it perfectly, but on the edge of chaos, what's important is that we all try together. We don't need revolution for the sake of revolution. We don't have to wait for anyone else to make rules for us. We can best do that for ourselves. We're overdue for change, and getting out of this situation we created will likely be hard and messy. We must listen to our critics, learn from our mistakes,

challenge convention; but also look for ways we can collectively solve problems. No one has all the answers. We have to do this together.

Our athletes deserve better.

And we're making real and meaningful progress. Sarah will talk more about that and I'm proud of the work we've done and where we're headed.

So, I challenge everyone, myself included, the rest of our board, the USOPC staff, the athlete advocates, the NGB leaders, and everyone else here today that believes in the power of the Olympic and Paralympic movements to make the world a better place.

And we can! We have to. The world we live in right now needs us to succeed like never before.

So many parts of our society feel broken. And yet the power of Olympic and Paralympic sport around the world remains stronger than ever.

The values we all work so hard to advance can really, truly help make our world a little bit better. Excellence, friendship, respect. Determination, inspiration, courage, equality.

That's what the Olympic and Paralympic movements stand for. That's what I stand for. That's why I am still here doing this even though every day is most certainly an adventure.

If we can regain our footing; if we can come together as a community in this country, committed to doing our very best for every athlete;

If we can make sure parents know their kids can safely benefit from the great joy of sport;

If we can create systems and processes to make sure athletes receive the resources they so richly deserve;

If we can ensure the power dynamics within our community are balanced and fair, where athlete voices aren't just tolerated, but encouraged; where the response to grievances isn't posturing, but problem-solving; where problems aren't swept under the rug and administrators don't look the other way; where we all take accountability for athlete safety and well-being.

Then, and only then, we can empower our athletes to change the world.

So that's why I'm here – to help build a world-class organization, and help support our National Governing Bodies, all serving the greatest, most committed group of athletes on this planet: Team USA.

I am committed to helping to drive the change we need, with the speed it requires. (I am not a patient person). To make sure that in the coming weeks, months and years, you read far less about administrative machinations and far more about the greatness of our athletes and the good that comes from celebrating that excellence. We need to prepare for Tokyo and begin the road to LA28. By the time we get there, I am confident that we will once again be able to call ourselves the Olympic and Paralympic family.

I am fortunate to have a strong partner in this work and whenever the going gets tough, I know I can rely on her strength, intelligence and resilience to keep us moving forward. It's my great pleasure to introduce my partner and friend on this journey toward excellence, the CEO of the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee, Sarah Hirshland.



U.S. OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC ASSEMBLY

General Address – Sarah Hirshland, USOPC CEO

Thank you, Susanne.

You have reminded us all how important it is to seek continuous improvement, which by definition, means disrupting the status quo. One of the great lessons I have learned is how to get comfortable being uncomfortable.

So, thank you for the perspective and for reminding us all the value of change and constant evolution.

Good morning, everyone. It is wonderful to be with all of you again. Let me add my welcome to all of the Olympians, Paralympians and athletes in the room. And to our partner sport organizations, NGBs and all those represented on the Multi-Sport Organization Council, thank you for making time to be here. More importantly, thank you for the incredible work you do every day to advance sport at all levels.

Having now served our country's athletes for more than a year as the CEO of the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee, I can tell you that this is the most amazing experience.

But can I tell you something else? It's hard. The complexity of the movements and all that comes along with it is like a performance of the largest orchestra you can imagine. When it all comes together, it's magical. But when instruments are off, the impact is felt by everyone.

Perhaps the difference for all of us is that we are like an orchestra playing to the entire world. What a gift and also what an undeniable obligation.

That reality, that the eyes of the world are on us, means our work will always be hard.

Now, of course that's nothing compared to the hard work it takes to be one of the best athletes in the world. The sacrifice, the discipline, the raw talent refined through patience and persistence, is a kind of "hard" like nothing I've seen before.

And yet even that definition doesn't compare to the life-long struggle for those who survive abuse or the trauma of assault that far too many members of our Olympic and Paralympic community have endured.

So, as I begin today, allow me to offer that over the past year I have listened and learned many things, but perhaps none more important, than the following:

If our community is going to address the abuse crisis in this country, then we must start by believing those who tell us when it occurs. We must open our ears, our eyes and our minds to create a culture in sport that believes a young boy or girl, man or woman, when they try to tell us something isn't right. Even when our own experiences might steer us to another conclusion.

So, to the victims and survivors of abuse, let me say...we believe you, we care about you and we want to be part of the solution.

And to all of the athletes in our Team USA family, we are doubling down on our promise to empower you to achieve your greatest potential on the field, in the pool, at the rink or on the slope. And we are also expanding our commitment to support your overall well-being as you embark on your journey toward excellence.

What does that really mean?

When we met last year, we were all reacting to the terrible tragedy of abuse within our community. We knew that change was required, and we had set about making changes, in our organization and among our member sport organizations. That work was largely focused on keeping athletes safe.

We can all feel good about the progress we have made, but we all must also acknowledge the long and never-ending road ahead as we work alongside society as a whole in the prevention of abuse.

But something else has happened since we met last year. As the doors of change opened, the conversation expanded, ideas began flowing and the possibilities of other changes started to emerge.

These suggestions and ideas, on a wide variety of topics, came from numerous sources, many individuals, groups, commissions, committees, some chartered by us, others developed independent of us, some extremely critical of us, and yet some others from the very organizations that charter us, both houses of Congress and the IOC and IPC.

So, what did we learn? Having done all that listening, what did we actually hear?

We learned that despite Team USA performing better than ever, and our considerable resources being deployed on behalf of athletes on a larger scale than ever before, and with more sophistication than ever before – we learned that trust and confidence in the USOPC is low among many of those voices.

We heard athletes describe our community as “us vs. them.” We heard member sport organizations ask for more help and expect more accountability.

In fact, in total, we heard nearly 200 suggestions and ideas to improve. That input has been invaluable in shaping the work we have done for the past year, and in setting our future direction.

We heard that we need to create an athletes-first culture, that we should do more for the safety and well-being of our athletes and that we should put stricter and clearer measures in place to ensure we are all more accountable in how we serve our athletes.

And of the 200 or so recommendations, we have acted on, or have imminent plans to act on, nearly 90 percent of them with only a handful we're still working through and evaluating the best approach.

We're setting higher standards and holding organizations accountable where there are deficiencies. But we're also supporting those organizations with additional resources, human and otherwise, to help them get better. You've seen that occur at a number of NGBs over the course of the last 12 months and I think each of them will tell you they're a better governed and managed organization because of it.

Similarly, to make sure athletes have a confidential source of independent advice, we've repurposed additional resources to add people and expertise to the office of the ombudsman, a critical link for

athletes who need help with a system that sometimes seems designed to confuse and confound rather than provide clarity and just outcomes.

We've backed up our promise for financial transparency with a more detailed breakdown of our resource allocation process and have committed to laying out, NGB by NGB, and eventually athlete by athlete, what resources have been made available, to whom, and why. We'll never get to a place where everyone agrees with every decision that is made regarding resource allocation, but surely, we can get to the place where we all believe the same set of facts.

We've elevated our support for the Paralympic Movement, providing absolute parity in Op Gold awards to Olympic and Paralympic athletes, and rightfully, finally, including the word "Paralympic" in our organization's name and on all our properties.

And as you may have seen from our recently proposed governance reform, it's only the beginning of our efforts to provide greater representation, inclusion and awareness for Paralympic athletes.

We doubled support for the U.S. Center for SafeSport for the second consecutive year, providing nearly \$10 million annually from the Olympic and Paralympic community, meaning the USOPC and our partner NGBs.

We've also asked Congress to invest in the Center in the same manner that it invests in USADA. We understand the questions regarding independence when the Center's sole source of funding is the community its designed to police, and we believe this is an urgent national priority that requires the full support of the federal government.

Looking again at all the recommendations, we've also started to formalize some fundamental governance changes in areas where we believe a consensus has emerged, recognizing that none of the various reports had been exactly aligned.

These are reflected in the proposed amendments to our bylaws that we posted on our website on August 19th, for a public comment period.

As we said when we released the proposed bylaw amendments, these are some of the things we think there is broad agreement on and we'd like everyone to take two months, including our time here together at the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Assembly, to discuss and give us more feedback.

We also said this is an important step, but just that. A step in the process. Part of the journey toward excellence.

This isn't the end of the road. It's hardly the first mile.

What we're doing next will be laid out in our five-year strategic plan and will be an ongoing conversation with all of you.

Our four priorities – and where you'll see us invest and make substantive change in the coming years – are focused around how we create a better experience for our athletes, on and off the field of play; how we improve the effectiveness of all the organizations that serve our athletes; how we establish an athletes-first culture; and ultimately begin preparing for the awesome, transformational opportunity represented by hosting the Games in LA in 2028.

This will mean instituting things like a whistleblower resource, improved medical benefits, a detailed annual report to Congress, and a new compliance and certification model with NGBs.

In the coming months, we will share a more detailed plan, inclusive of how we are thinking about allocating resources to accomplish these goals. This is a plan – I am proud to say – that was, for the first time in our organization’s history, co-created with you.

We simply must stay in this together for the long game.

We are on a constant journey. We’re making progress. We’re becoming a better, more athlete-focused organization. And we’re becoming a better partner to our member sport organizations too.

As we look to Tokyo and beyond, and really, truly focus this organization on sustained competitive excellence and sustained athlete well-being, we simply must do it together.

I’ll have more to say about our journey over the next couple days, but as importantly, I want to continue to hear from each of you.

We won’t solve all our challenges, but I genuinely believe we can leave this Assembly a more committed and united community.

In that spirit, we’ve invited leaders from the AAC and NGB Council, Han Xiao and Max Cobb, to share their perspectives with you this morning.

I’d like to introduce Han next, but before I do that, allow me to share one more observation. Having watched and met with numerous athletes over the last year, I have come to understand that, for most, representing Team USA is the most important accomplishment of their lives. The magnitude of what it means, and the difficulty of the journey are undeniable.

Our mission, together, is to make sure that their experience as a Team USA athlete is one that each and every individual cherishes, not only in the moments of achievement, but for the positive impact this experience has on the rest of their lives.

That won’t be easy, or perfect, but when, not if, we are successful, we will enable our athletes to reach their dreams, their greatest potential...and in turn, they will inspire the best in all of us, and our country.

That’s the orchestra; our harmony.

So, let’s do it. We are the team behind the team, and they need our support. I’m reaching out, in partnership, and in friendship, asking you to join together on this journey.

Thank you and go Team USA.