

Mark Jones: Thank you for joining us. As you've seen and heard from Jonathan's introduction, we have had a really important day here in Chicago. I'm joined by our Chair, Susanne Lyons and our CEO Sarah Hirshland as well as three really special guests that I'll let Sarah introduce momentarily.

Mark Jones: We're going to start with a couple of comments from each of the participants, so appreciate your patience while we get out what we think are really important things to say, and then we'll be happy to take questions as they come. With that, Ms. Lyons?

Susanne Lyons: Good afternoon, everyone, you know, I think we've had a really exciting meeting today. This is my second meeting as Chair and I feel like we're beginning to make some positive progress against some of the kind of personal goals that I had as I began this role.

Susanne Lyons: And I would say that the most, two most important of those goals, one was fostering cultural awareness and changing the organization from the top to evolve to a more athlete centered organization, empowering, protecting and supporting our athletes.

Susanne Lyons: I also think we're making steady and very urgent progress on improving NGB oversight, increasing our athlete's safety policies and procedures, helping with much needed financial support for the Center for Safe Sports, and increasing the athlete voice and influence in governance and decision making.

Susanne Lyons: Today we had a number of very important topics in our meeting. We heard an update from the Borders Commission, who as you know, is ah, helping to analyze all of what happened last year and make some recommendations on changes that we can make.

Susanne Lyons: Their full report is expected to be released in the next couple of weeks, and together with the Borders Commission, members of Congress, and our various constituent groups including our Athletes Advisory Council and the NGB Council, we're beginning to gain alignment around a clear path forward on structural reform. There's a lot of convergence in people's minds as far as what needs to get done, in addition to the many changes that we have already begun to implement.

Susanne Lyons: Today we also updated the board on our strategic planning process, of which they've of course been an integral part as we build towards LA28. And we talked about the upcoming Pan Am and Para Pan games this summer in Lima, as well as updates on our preparations for next year's games in Tokyo.

Susanne Lyons: But I would say by far the most exciting news that we had today was that the board voted unanimously to change our name. And it is much more than just a name change. This is really ah, a proud day for Olympic and Paralympic sport,

and it's a reflection of our commitment to the Paralympics and to inclusion as one of our core values.

Susanne Lyons: Our Olympians and our Paralympians are both an integral part of Team U.S.A., and putting both in our name really kind of reflects that they are the stars. They are the stars of this show and the center of our universe.

Susanne Lyons: As far as the, the Paralympics goes, we have more athletes participating, we have better services for them. They have professional staff supporting them, and we are seeing from them world class performances and amazing life stories. As well as equal rewards or excellence.

Susanne Lyons: So that's the beginning, and I wanted to ask Sarah to share her thoughts on the importance of this news today.

Sarah Hirshland: Terrific. Thank you, Susanne and good afternoon, or evening, everyone. Thank you for making a few minutes to be with us. We know it's a busy day in the sport world and in our own sport world. So thank you for making the time.

Sarah Hirshland: This change represents a continuation of our longstanding commitment to create an inclusive environment for Team U.S.A. athletes, and quite frankly to set, to set a tone and to set an example for inclusion in our society and around the world.

Sarah Hirshland: As is noted in our press release, important to note, this change will affect all of our properties. The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Centers, the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Hall of Fame, and thanks to a vote by its board earlier this week, the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Museum, which is set to open next year in Colorado Springs.

Sarah Hirshland: Paralympic athletes are integral to the makeup of Team U.S.A. and our mission to inspire current and future generations of Americans, and this is not just a name change, but a renewed commitment to that mission and the ideals that we seek to advance in that.

Sarah Hirshland: We are incredibly excited about the path forward. We're incredibly excited about the opportunities up ahead for us, and frankly I'll simply say I feel incredibly honored and blessed to be in the role I'm in at this moment in time in the movement here in the country and the example it can set for those around the world.

Sarah Hirshland: So it's a privilege and pleasure to be part of such a historic moment and, and really the opportunity that sits ahead for us and for all Paralympic athletes as we look forward.

Sarah Hirshland: We are joined today by some special guests. The first of whom is Andrew Parsons, who is the President of the International Paralympic Committee.

Andrew has been gracious enough to take the time to travel here and be with us on this day and at this historic moment. And if I could, Andrew, ask you to make a few comments on behalf of the IPC.

Andrew Parsons: Well thank you very much. Good afternoon, everyone. I couldn't be elsewhere. I knew I had to be in U.S. at this very moment, this historical decision, and this is a historic moment, not only for the U.S., but also for the Paralympic movement ah, as a whole outside internationally and worldwide. To see that USOPC, and this sounds very good to say USOPC.

Andrew Parsons: To make this inclusive statement by changing its name. I think it's the most [inaudible 00:06:24] nature of the Olympic and Paralympic movements. Normally you change your name as important step of a change of your attitude and your spirit and, and your culture.

Andrew Parsons: And this is what we have been seeing from an IPC position when we look at the, what the, the USOPC is now doing and Paralympic movement in U.S. And this change lays a very strong foundation to transform the Paralympic movement [inaudible 00:06:48] as we look forward, look toward, I'm sorry, the Los Angeles games in 2028 and beyond.

Andrew Parsons: We really want to make that 2028 a catalyst for change in this country, not only for the, the, the person with the disability of this counts, but for the Paralympic movement as a whole. And with this change in the name, I think it represents more than just a name change, and we couldn't be happier at the International Paralympic Committee.

Sarah Hirshland: Thank you very much, Andrew. Our next special guest needs very little introduction. She is an eight-time Paralympic medalist, Para Nordic Skiing, Para Cycling, Para Rowing, Oksana Masters. Thank you for being with us, Oksana.

Oksana Masters: Oh my gosh. Thank you. I just feel like a little kid in a candy shop today, because I know there's a whole lot of work that went into this and a whole lot of generations of athletes before me, and during my time as an athlete, this generation fought for this moment. And today, to be in this room and actually celebrating is incredible.

Oksana Masters: I know that you guys have probably already heard a lot of times that this is not about a name change, an organization name, but it's true. It's not just about the name change of the organization.

Oksana Masters: To me as a Paralympic athlete, it just shows that the USOPC is truly embodying the inclusion of Paralympic athletes and fully incorporating them, including them, celebrating them, and embracing the Paralympic athletes as a whole, Team U.S.A. as a whole.

Oksana Masters: And, oh my gosh, I'm sorry, you guys. I just can't believe this. [inaudible 00:08:23] and because I have personally, personally have felt the growth of the USOPC and this organization, growth of Paralympic athletes and their just passion, the same passion that each Paralympic athlete has for Team U.S.A., the same passion to incorporate them. This is an amazing monumental day for sure.

Sarah Hirshland: Thank you very much. And last, but certainly not least, six time Olympic medalist, member of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Hall of Fame, Bonnie Blair. Thanks for being here.

Bonnie Blair: Yes, thank you. Very excited to be here today. You know, as athletes, whether you call it Olympic or Paralympic, we're all training extremely hard mentally, physically. So many things all combined. And I think this is really something where we'll be able to, I say we even though I know I'm done competing and I'm no part of it anymore. But once you're an Olympian or Paralympian, you're always one.

Sarah Hirshland: [crosstalk 00:09:33]

Bonnie Blair: And, and I look at that and think of how many different ways we'll be able to learn from each other. I really think probably the Paralympians wind up having so much more of a creative way to train because of maybe some of the limitations that they've had.

Bonnie Blair: But those are things that could probably work for us. And so I think that's just one of the things. But I think really becoming one, all Team U.S.A., is something to be shared and to be proud of. And for me to be sitting here in this room with Oksana and everything that she's been through already, you know, that gives me butterflies.

Bonnie Blair: So, I think it really kind of goes hand in hand. And, and I think ah, we're really going to keep making big strides I, I think as we heard maybe from Andrew. Maybe this makes it different for other countries to probably do the exact same thing in moving forward and making it more inclusion all around the world. And how special can that be?

Bonnie Blair: So as a member of the Olympic and Paralympic Hall of Fame, I'm looking forward to the day that Oksana joins me to be in there and, and I'll be in the front row waiting for you to be inducted.

Oksana Masters: Oh my gosh. That's some big shoes to follow. Thanks. Legend.

Jhonatan: Thank you. At this time, we will open the floor for questions. If you would like to ask a question, please press the star key followed by the 1 key on your touch tone phone now. Questions will be taken in the order in which they are received. If at any time you would like to remove yourself from the questioning queue, press star 2. Again, to ask a question, please press star 1 now.

Jhonatan: We'll take our first question from Christine Brennan with USA Today.

Christine Brennan: Hi, there. Thank you. Hello, everyone and congratulations on this great news. Sarah, you mentioned, um, ah, this statement of inclusion that your, that this is ah, maybe goes beyond sports or setting a tone, an example for inclusion in our society.

Christine Brennan: As you know, there are people in high places in this country who would prefer to divide us and choose exclusion and omission over say, cooperation and understanding. Is that part of your statement and your message?

Sarah Hirshland: Well, Christine, as you know, it's why I work in sport and, and give my life to sport. It is one of the things that unifies us and one of the few things that unifies us in such a powerful way. And sports, for many, many years and many decades frankly, um, has, has been a contributor to positive values, to inclusion, to commitment, to friendship, to camaraderie, to sportsmanship.

Sarah Hirshland: And so it is a very important institution in society as a values driver, and this is one of the critical values. And sport has the ability to unify. And so yes, we must hold ourselves to a high standard um, of setting an example, not just for those in the movement itself, but for all those who enjoy it, watch it, and participate in it.

Christine Brennan: Anyone else you're sending a message to? Sorry, you probably can't answer that. But I, I, it needs, we are in quite a divisive time. I don't think that's a political statement. Um, is, is, is, is there a bigger message even than that outside of sports?

Sarah Hirshland: Well I would say, Christine, everyone is a big word.

Christine Brennan: All right. Thanks very much and congratulations again.

Sarah Hirshland: Thank you.

Mark Jones: Thanks, Chris.

Jhonatan: We'll take our next question from Gerard Farek with Around the Rings.

Gerard Farek: Yes, hello? This one actually is for ah, Andrew if I could, to Bonnie's point, I would be curious ah, is that the goal for the IPC, to get every country on board with ah, something like this? And ah, I'd also, I'm curious if there are any other IPC advances or initiatives that might be greatly helped by something like this.

Andrew Parsons: Oh, thank you very much for your question. No, it's not something that we are actively pursuing to have ah, in every single country of the world, one single organization which would be, which would be the NOC, and the NPC at the same time. We have four countries in the world that has, that have this kind of

ah, this structure, and USOPC is one of them now. Well, has been one of them for years.

Andrew Parsons: Which a lot of advantage in each, in terms of services to the athletes and so. In some other nations, they could not be, it could be different. But ah, I'm talking about the U.S., it's obvious advantage because the USOPC is a, is a very, I'll say I don't like the word powerful, but it's a very strong organization in the service ah, provided to the athletes and development of sport opportunities.

Andrew Parsons: So to have these organizations embracing the Paralympic athletes [inaudible 00:14:53] is very good and now having even the, the name, it's a very, it's a very important message that they are sending to the world, inside of sport and outside the world of sport.

Andrew Parsons: So it's not something we're actively pursuing. We need to understand the different national contacts that we have around the world. And there are many benefits that we can have by working together, the Olympic and the Paralympic movement.

Andrew Parsons: In the thing that we have signed March last year is agreement with the IOC that goes until 2032, you'll see that we, in this we are actively pursuing a stronger partnership between the two movements. But aren't necessarily having all the NOC's and NPC's as one organization, every continent in the world.

Mark Jones: Thanks, Mr. President.

Gerard Farek: Okay. And what about any initiatives or, or something that you have in the works already? Does ah, something like this help that?

Andrew Parsons: Oh, I think it helps when we're talking about the U.S., for example, we have the games in L.A. nine years time, and this lays a very strong foundation for that. So as I have said, the U.S. is one of the most important markets in the world, if not the most important market when it comes to sport, and our presence here in the U.S., to be honest with you, we are not where we want to be yet, and we believe that this is a very important um, I would say step in the direction.

Andrew Parsons: And, because we want the L.A. games to be a, a chain, a game changer for the Paralympic movement. So this is an important step. I think it sends the right message, and the message goes not only into the world of sport, but goes to spectators, viewers, partners, broadcasters.

Andrew Parsons: And so it's an important message that we hope in 2028 we'll have the event here that will put both Olympians and Paralympians at the same level, and this will be in this market and we know the impact that things, when things happen in the U.S., they happen in the rest of the world. It will be a game changer probably.

Mark Jones: Thanks, Gerard.

Gerard Farek: Excellent. Thank you.

Jhonatan: Thank you. We'll take our next question from Tom Roeder with The Gazette.

Tom Roeder: Good afternoon. Ah, Sarah and Susan, Susanne, ah, obviously very cool news today, but you're coming off a Monday when Diana DeGette in Denver, head of your Oversight Committee, said some very unflattering things about the Olympic Committee, including claiming that you care more about money and medals than you care about athletes and issuing legislation. How do you respond to her comments? And how do you respond to this piece of legislation?

Sarah Hirshland: Ah, we certainly appreciate the efforts of Congress and we'll continue to work constructively with both the House and the Senate. We've cooperated with every request for information. I've spent significant time in Washington, D.C., as many of you know, and will continue to do so.

Sarah Hirshland: As it relates to the comments we are and have been very clear that the Olympic movement failed our athletes. We have also made enormous strides forward, significant changes, and are continuing to do so. We're proud of the work we've done, and we know that work is not yet completed. We have work yet to do and we're committed to doing it.

Mark Jones: Thanks, Tom.

Tom Roeder: Thank you.

Jhonatan: Our next question comes from Matt Traub with Sports Travel Magazine.

Matt Traub: Hi, thanks for having me. Ah, for Susanne, ah, what was the time, what was, if you could explain, the time ah, timetable that you did for ah, first proposing and, and kind of I... , putting the idea of ah, USOPC out to your Board of Directors, and then ah, how it got to this point where you were able to approve it today?

Susanne Lyons: Well you know, I think that we've actually been talking about this path for some time. And you may recall that one of the big steps that we took last year was to equalize our payments for, for Paralympians who are successful and reach the podium to ensure that they have the same rewards as Olympians.

Susanne Lyons: And so we increased our funding to what we call our Operation Gold program. And that was an important statement, to say that the level of um, effort that goes into becoming, you know, the greatest in your sport, is equivalent. People come off of different paths, but they are all they all have the heart of athletes and they are all working in the same sort of way.

Susanne Lyons: So that was the beginning of this, and I would say that at the same time, you know, we have been hearing a lot from our Paralympic community saying, you know, "You've done a lot to give us new services, et cetera, but when are you going to really recognize us as part of your identity?"

Susanne Lyons: So there's a lot of work that goes into a brand change, if you will. You know, many of you know I come from a marketing background. It took some time to do the work that was necessary to set the stage to be able to very quickly um, present to the world a new face for ourselves, and we are ready to do that.

Susanne Lyons: The Board has actually been talking about this and it was 100% in favor of it, probably more than six months ago. But we wanted to kind of link up our, our timing and be, be ready to do this properly, and so that's why we're launching today.

Matt Traub: Thank you.

Jhonatan: Thank you. Our next question comes from Beau Dure with The Guardian.

Beau Dure: Hello. Thanks very much. Speaking of the legislation that was ah, just introduced, there's a small but perhaps significant difference between what Corey Gardner introduced in the Senate and what to get interviewed introduced in the House this week.

Beau Dure: And that regards the United States Center for Safe Sport, what [inaudible 00:20:26] is a task force is supposed to assess whether the center quote has the necessary fiscal resources, which is something that's not found in Gardner's bill. Is, is it your position that ah, the federal government should really be stepping in and taking some of the funding burden off the USOPC and taking on more itself?

Sarah Hirshland: We are not looking for the federal government to take burden off the USOPC, but rather to supplement and contribute incrementally to that effort. The, the scope and magnitude of the demands on The Center for Safe Sport are significant and it requires significant funding.

Sarah Hirshland: And so we are not looking for them to absolve us of a responsibility and obligation, but to add to it and contribute to the growth and effectiveness of the center incrementally.

Sarah Hirshland: One other comment I would make is, you know, we know that the NGB community are important contributors to the center, we are important contributors to the center. But the athlete community has also been incredibly clear that independence of The Center for Safe Sport is critical to its success. And that is something we're, we're incredibly respectful of.

Sarah Hirshland: So we have pointed to the model that was constructed and built around USADA as an effective model of contributions from our organization, and yes, contributions from the federal government that allow that organization to do its work independently and without perception of any um, lack of independence, if you will.

Sarah Hirshland: So there are a couple of factors there that are important to consider, but we are enormously supportive of federal funding for the center. Absolutely.

Beau Dure: Thank you, Sarah.

Mark Jones: Thank you. Jhonatan, next question please.

Jhonatan: Thank you. We'll take our next question from Nick Wolaver of Olympic Rings and Other Things.

Nick Wolaver: Hi, guys. Congratulations. Ah, question for Andrew. Could you tell again the other three nations that already have both the Olympic and Paralympic in ah, NOC, and maybe the next three that might be on your radar or wish list.

Andrew Parsons: The Netherlands, South Africa, and Norway are the three who currently are a single organization being both the NOC and the NPC. And again, this, we don't have a wish list at this moment in time. When it comes to organizations merging, I don't see that [inaudible 00:22:55].

Andrew Parsons: We believe that this is according to the national structure and, and, and let's say the alignment of the objectives of the two movements in the particular country. So we don't have a wish list. We just want that whenever it happens, it's for the benefit of the athletes.

Andrew Parsons: So the new created organization can provide the best services to the athletes and that, as it happened here in U.S., that you have the name Paralympic on your name. This is a very important thing for our movement to be recognized, to be identified.

Andrew Parsons: Because we are talking about two movements that, who are partners, but they are different movements with different names, um, and different objectives. But we work really well together. But not necessarily by just being the, a single organization ah, across the world in different nations.

Nick Wolaver: Okay, thank you.

Mark Jones: We ah, we're at officially 30 minutes and it doesn't look like we have any additional questions in the queue, so I think with that, we'll thank everyone for spending some time with us this afternoon.

Mark Jones: Again, this was an important day for two movements in this country and for inclusion worldwide, and ah, I'm psyched to be part of it. So thanks for joining us, and we'll talk to you soon.

Jhonatan: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. This concludes today's teleconference. You may now disconnect.