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**2022 U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Assembly  
Leadership General Address**

June 23, 2022 | Colorado Springs

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USOPC Chair Susanne Lyons

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*(Video concludes with “We did it.”)*

Yes, you did it.

And all the people you represent did it.

Together, we did it.

And that’s what I’d like to talk about with you today.

But before I do, I wanted to take a moment to celebrate two things.

First, today is the 50th anniversary of the passage of Title IX. Fifty years ago today, the world of sport in America took a monumental step forward.

Many of you here are too young to remember what things were like before Title IX. Sadly, I’m not one of them. I was in middle school at the time, and I can tell you the opportunities for young women to participate in sports and to advance their education with sports scholarships were miniscule compared to what is available today.

It was a game-changer and, obviously, the progress must continue.

But on this anniversary day, I’d like to thank those of you here for all that you have done to move women’s sports forward, pushing past old barriers and stepping through new doors.

So, thank you and keep on pushing.

The second thing I want to celebrate is that today is also Olympic and Paralympic Day – a date commemorating the birth of the modern Olympic Games in 1894 (thank you, Pierre de Coubertin). And a day when a global ideal is celebrated on a local basis, here in America and around the world. A day when many young people in local communities get their first taste of the Olympic and Paralympic spirit. Today, all around the world, events are happening with the help of community leaders and alumni and current athletes.

Both of these special occasions happen to fall on a day when we are finally able to gather together in person for the first time since the pandemic began.

I appreciate this opportunity to share some thoughts today.

As I prepared to speak to you today, I realized that this would be my last Assembly before my term as board chair expires at the end of the year. I have sat perched on a stool on this stage at these meetings for 12 years. And it caused me to reflect quite a bit about everything that has transpired since I first joined the USOPC board in 2010. Especially everything that has happened since I rather unexpectedly became acting CEO in 2018, and then chair in 2019.

Now, 2010 seems like a long time ago, and it was a very different time for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic community. It was an easy time to be really proud of what we do. It was a time when if somebody asked you what you do, and you told them you worked for the Olympics and Paralympics, then often they would say back to you, "Wow, that must be the best job in the world."

Yes, we had issues to manage for London, for Sochi and for Rio, but we were managing them. We were modernizing our business practices, our sponsors were happy, our sports and athletes were performing well, and the wind was generally at our backs.

But then, while we were in Rio for the Summer Games, we heard a loud thunder-clap and, suddenly, everything changed.

As tragic news about sexual abuse in gymnastics broke in The Indy Star, and a painful scandal unfolded.

And like a lot of scandals, it didn't just come in one hit, but instead it came in waves over weeks, over months and over years as more and more gymnasts came forward to tell their truths, and it became clear that multiple adults and organizations had failed these young athletes in many ways.

And as a community, we found ourselves in shock, embarrassment, and yes, anger. Because this was not doping or bad governance or resource allocation, or any of the other issues we had historically faced. This was something truly shocking, and it rocked us all because it revealed just how vulnerable we all were.

And suddenly, no one was telling us we had the best job in the world. Instead, the athletes, the media, Congress and the world were asking, "How could you let that happen?"

And honestly, that was a fair and obvious question. And it was a question that we had the obligation to ask of ourselves. A question that we had to answer with complete honesty and a genuine desire to understand the truth – truth about what had happened and how, and the truth about what it would take to prevent something like that from ever happening again.

So, we went through a lot of turmoil – a lot of soul-searching – and we made a lot of changes. Some of them hard, and some of them still requiring significant ongoing time, effort and cost. And all of them profoundly affecting our athletes, our NGBs and our USOPC staff.

We learned how to do new things, how to fix things that were broken, how to put systems and processes in place that would enable us to protect our athletes – and our entire U.S. Olympic and Paralympic community because we knew that any similar issues could be genuinely crippling for our Movement in the United States.

And then, just as we were starting to be able to move things forward, our world changed again. Like the rest of our fellow humans, we had to face the most serious global health crisis in more than century. It was tough. Because while some of the business of sport can be done remotely, sport itself must happen in person. And the hopes and dreams of today's Olympic and Paralympic hopefuls hung in the balance.

And because none of us had ever seen anything like it before, we had to figure things out along the way. At one point, every step forward seemed to be countered with a setback – including the postponing of Tokyo, forcing us into the unprecedented task of executing two Games in a single year.

And just when we thought things couldn't get tougher, they did. Of course, right?

It got tougher, because the pandemic only seemed to intensify the political polarization that had been growing here in America, and a series of tragic events intensified our self-reflection about racial and social justice.

And all of us here – both as organizations and as individuals – had to face brutal events that challenged our ideas about how far we had come... and how far we needed to go. We watched the distrust grow. We watched our sense of pride in American values fray. And we watched the discord breed dysfunction – all at a moment when unity was needed more than ever.

And so, we found ourselves besieged by a proverbial “perfect storm” as the winds blew hard against us from multiple directions.

So, what did we do? Well, as Nitra Rucker summed it up at the end of that video, “We did it.”

Together, the NGBs, the athletes, and the USOPC found a way through each of those challenges.

We successfully avoided a U.S. boycott of the Beijing Games through intense efforts in Washington.

We got nearly 1,200 athletes to the Games... and we kept them safe through more testing and masking and COVID protocols than the world had ever seen.

We helped 470 athletes win 262 medals in 56 sports.

We engaged in the Games with more than 300 coaches and staff newly trained in mental health support – with more than 90% of Team USA athletes feeling that their health, wellness and security was a priority and that they mattered more as people than just money and medals.

And yes, for the first time we aired nearly 1,500 hours of Paralympic competition.

Thank you for doing all those things because those are all great achievements in the face of adversity.

And for me, that raises a more important question. That question is, “How did we do it?”

How did we possibly achieve all that?

I've thought about that a lot because I think it's just as important to learn from our victories as it is to learn from our defeats.

And in my mind, we triumphed over adversity because of how we did two things.

First, we summoned our significant passion – passion for the athletes and for sport, passion for the Movement, and passion for serving a cause we deeply believe in.

There is a quote I like from Simon Sinek: Simon says, “Working hard for something we do not care about is called stress. Working hard for something we love is called passion.”

Now, that doesn't mean each of us did not encounter some significant stress because we all did. I know I did. But I have yet to meet anyone in the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic community who does not truly love the cause they are working for.

And so, we summoned that personal passion and belief in our mission, and it gave us the power and resilience we needed to succeed.

But that wasn't the only thing we did. The second thing we did was actually a little harder – we pulled together.

The crisis required all of us to put aside any squabbles and pull together because we knew that there was no way we could overcome the external threats if we were not unified.

No NGB wanted to find itself in the same situation as gymnastics. Athletes knew there was an opportunity to raise their voices to advocate for changes in athlete safety and well-being. And the USOPC staff knew we had to facilitate changes to many of the ways we had operated in the past.

Working groups representing our whole U.S. Olympic and Paralympic family created new bylaws and governance. We developed new compliance standards, we worked to address concerns with the Center for SafeSport, and we worked with Congress to develop new legislation and rebuilt the sport of gymnastics from the ground up.

And as we look back at the past three years, there is one fundamental lesson that none of us should ever forget. And that fundamental lesson is this:

The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic community is always at its best when we all work together –when we all assume good intent while recognizing our inherent differences and conflicts, and the strong emotion that all that passion can produce.

I assume good intent from everyone in this room, even when we disagree.

We need to find a way to trust each other and work collaboratively together. And I know we aren't there right now. Not yet.

But, deep down, we all want the same things. We all want our sports and our athletes to get the resources and support they need to perform at the top of their game, both on and off the field.

Assuming good intent and working together is going to be essential in the months and years to come. Because we all know that while the perfect storm may be subsiding, new challenges loom on the horizon.

But so do opportunities as we move toward Paris 2024, and especially toward LA28. And I think you'll be encouraged by what you hear from Sarah in a moment about how we are moving to capitalize on those opportunities.

And so, as we move forward from one of the toughest chapters in our history to a new chapter that will have challenges of its own, I want to thank each of you for all you do for this Movement that we all care about so much.

Despite the pressures of that perfect storm, I'm grateful to have had this chance to serve. I'm grateful to have had this chance to serve our athletes. I'm grateful to have had this chance to serve the NGBs. And I'm grateful to have had this chance to work passionately alongside you all – for a cause you truly love, and for a cause I truly love.

So, I thank you all.

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USOPC CEO Sarah Hirshland

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Good morning, everyone.

I'm so disappointed that I could not be there with you as I recover from COVID. But, I'm excited for all of you to be there together in person and I'm thankful that we have protocols in place to keep us all healthy.

The first thing I want to do is thank Susanne for her remarks this morning. Even more so, I want to thank her for the tremendous leadership she has provided us at USOPC – first as a board member, then interim CEO, and now as board chair – through the good times and the hard times.

So, thank you, Susanne.

I wanted to focus today on where we are headed.

But before I do, I want to comment on what Susanne said about how working for something you love is called passion. She's right of course, and I believe everyone in this room knows exactly what she's talking about because each one of us shares a common passion, each one of us shares a beautiful thing called "The Love of Sport."

We love sport. We love what sport is and we love what sport does.

We love what it does for individual people and we love what it does for society.

We love how it brings us together. We love how it shows what's best about human beings. We love how it clearly demonstrates the power of hard work, discipline and resilience.

That's why we were able to power through that perfect storm of adversity and I am grateful to everyone for your determination and resilience. I'm grateful to all of Team USA, I'm grateful to everyone at the NGBs, and most of all, I'm grateful to the athletes of Team USA.

That performance showed the pure power of passion within us all and it showed the entire world how strong Team USA can be in the face of severe adversity, especially when we work together.

But even though that perfect storm has begun to pass and we have begun moving from one chapter to another, we also know that we move forward in a world that remains very demanding, a world that continually presents us with obstacles and challenges. And sometimes, the daily grind of dealing with those challenges can overshadow the deep passion that we feel.

And so, as we talk today about our aspirations in the face of those challenges, we should all occasionally remind ourselves of our Love of Sport, especially at times like these – when much is in play, and so much is at stake.

We face substantial challenges – the challenge of elevating our performance, the challenge of expanding our resources and the challenge of growing our support.

You face those challenges every day in your world, and you know them well.

So, let's talk about that and let's start with **elevating our performance**.

We all know that when you represent Team USA, the expectations are always extremely high. Because of our unmatched performance, many of our fans and supporters don't expect us to simply compete – they expect us to compete and win.

More importantly, each of us in this room expects to compete and win. Our standards are high, and so is our competitive spirit.

That pressure to elevate our performance continually intensifies, as other nations around the world elevate their performance and the bar keeps getting raised higher and higher.

And the higher the bar goes, the better we all must become at removing any obstacles and barriers that hinder the ability of Team USA athletes to perform at their very best, and the better we must become at continually improving the athlete experience.

That starts with focusing on athlete well-being.

As we have seen, supporting athletes' overall well-being is not only the right thing to do, it's also completely essential to athlete excellence, and I believe that we have the opportunity to make overall well-being a competitive advantage for Team USA athletes.

And we all must work together to achieve that.

NGBs – We know we have asked a lot of you in the past few years and we understand the pressures you are under.

So please know this –

We are determined to be good partners in supporting your ability to enable safe, healthy athletes to compete and win and that leads me to the challenge of **expanding our resources**.

Whether you're part of a large sport with high levels of support, or in a small, emerging sport with more modest budgets... the needs are always bigger than the resources. Right?

Each year, the costs of developing competitive athletes grows larger, while the resources don't seem to keep up, forcing us to become increasingly creative in how we allocate those resources and disciplined in how we generate new resources.

We have to grow the pie, which is something we at the national committee feel a strong sense of responsibility to lead. I feel that responsibility and our team feels that responsibility.

And we all know our ability to expand resources relies heavily on our ability to overcome our third challenge, the challenge of **growing fan support** in a changing world.

We all know that fan support is critical for all of us because when fan support goes up, so does our ability to attract more participants to our sports and more members for national governing bodies.

We have the great fortune of working for the strongest, best-known, most-admired brand in the world of sport, but we all also know that strong brands only remain strong when they are actively cultivated and vigilantly protected.

The last two years have been tough for our fans as conditions made it harder for them to engage in the Olympic and Paralympic experience, compounded by an increasingly complex and dynamic media and content environment.

Meanwhile, the competition for fan support continues to escalate as well-funded, well-run professional sports invest heavily in their own growth.

And in recent years, the shine and relevance of our brand has been tested – tested by sexual abuse scandals, tested by a global pandemic, tested by an increasingly polarized socio-political environment, both internationally and here at home.

And we all know the reality that outside of our community, the rest of the world does not differentiate between the athletes, the 52 individual NGBs and the USOPC.

To the rest of the world, it's all simply "U.S. Olympics and Paralympics."

And so, we are highly dependent on each other to protect our brand and what we stand for because a rising tide does lift all boats.

So – fan support, resources and performance.

Those three challenges are substantial and they potentially pose real threats to the long-term health of our U.S. Olympic and Paralympic community.

But here's the good news – our opportunities are greater than our challenges.

As the world moves to some new form of normal, we have the opportunity to capitalize on our country's love of sport, particularly when it's experienced in person.

As many Americans tire of intense political polarization, we have the opportunity to bring people together through the unifying power of sport.

And as we look out to LA28, we have the opportunity to capitalize on the inherent excitement that comes with hosting the Games here at home once again.

So, the question is, "Can we do it? Can we fully capitalize on those opportunities?"

I believe we can –

But only if we work together with a greater sense of partnership among us, only if we completely understand our inter-dependence on each other and only if we completely embrace the reality that the external threats to our U.S. Olympic and Paralympic community are far more dangerous to all of us than any internal frictions we may have among us.

Our roles are truly inter-dependent.

Athletes depend on their NGBs to provide the most advanced, healthiest training support system in their sport worldwide. NGBs depend on athletes to dedicate themselves to the demanding training required to be the best in the world. And both athletes and NGBs depend on us at the USPOC to help provide the resources required to succeed.

And in return, we ask all of you to honor our role in strengthening and protecting the overall health of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic community. Our role in strengthening the brand that is so essential to generating fan support and resources.

Perhaps, it all seems so simple.

And yet, as with any long-term, inter-dependent relationships, frictions can build up over time and internal disagreements can begin to overshadow the more serious external threats and the conversation becomes: "What have you done for me lately?"

And I want to assure you, at the USOPC, we get that and consequently, we are focused on three priorities: first, athlete excellence. Second, sport advancement. And third, community growth.

And as we travel the road to LA28 over the next six years, we have developed some very specific aspirations and goals for Team USA.

Let's start with **athlete excellence**.

Our aspiration is to be the best in the world in providing holistic support to Team USA athletes.

Supported by world-leading innovation and technology, resulting in the most successful Team USA performances in history.

Sending more medalists home in more sports than ever before, with Team USA athlete pride and satisfaction at an all-time high.

Those are our aspirations.

And I want to be clear to anyone who might suspect that we are somehow softening our focus on winning.

Our focus on winning is actually stronger than it's ever been because we are sharply focused on what it will take to win now, and in the future – winning in 2024, 2026, 2028, and beyond.

And so NGBs, you can expect us to work diligently to provide strong, multi-year funding of your high-performance efforts, providing you the stability you need to fully support your athletes and growing that funding quad-over-quad through 2028.

Providing more resources to fund the structures and tools that enable you to make sure your athletes are safe, healthy, ready to compete and prepared to win.

Our aspirations for athlete excellence are high and the same is true for our aspirations in **sport advancement**.

We want the USOPC and all NGBs to set the standard of excellence in sports administration in America – operating with superior professionalism and business practices, with NGB and USOPC diversity at all-time highs, undergirded by highly responsible governance practices and policies that ensure fairness, safety and inclusivity for all participants.

Ensuring that public sentiment for Team USA and the Olympic and Paralympic movement see positive and steady upward trends.

And that leads me naturally to our third priority: community growth.

Our aspirations for athlete excellence and sport advancement are highly dependent on our ability to achieve our aspirations in **community growth**.

We seek to drive growth in commercial revenue, helping ensure that LA28 achieves its targets and establishing strong momentum for further growth beyond 2028.

That starts with fandom. We want to grow and intensify what we call, “Share of Heart.”

In other words, we want more people to engage more often and to care more deeply than ever before, with fandom and share-of-heart in the U.S. climbing to an all-time high.

To accomplish that, we not only need to get the people who already like or love us to love us more and engage with us more, but we must also recruit new fans to our Movement, particularly the next generation of young people who are coming of age never having witnessed the Olympic and Paralympic experience in its fullest, most vibrant form.

That will be critical in elevating our fundraising success as we work to generate the largest philanthropic support in the history of Team USA.

2016 was our last summer games year prior to Tokyo, and the USOPF raised \$17M of revenue. In 2021, the very next summer games year, we raised \$36M from donors – we doubled our growth rate. We had over a 100% (actually 106%) growth rate in just one quad and we hope to keep doubling it each quad going forward.

And so, as we move toward LA28, we will launch the most significant fundraising campaign ever specifically designed to provide Team USA and National Governing Bodies with new resources.

So, that's a summary of our aspirations as we journey to LA28 – athlete excellence, sport advancement and community growth.

Yes, it's very ambitious, as it should be.

And we know it will not happen unless we are consistently taking action to make it happen. That is our obligation to the Movement and that is our obligation to you and those you represent.

So, look for us to keep coming to you with a steady stream of actions designed to propel us all forward with those three priorities.

We hope you're encouraged by these and see them as a sign that we are truly committed to being good partners, worthy of your full trust and acting in the best overall interests of our U.S. Olympic and Paralympic community as a whole.

And what are we asking in return?

Keep going. Keep doing the good work you are doing.

Keep tapping into your love of sport.

Keep fighting the good fight.

And keep pushing us forward into the future.

I have all the confidence in the world that you're going to do just that.

I have great conviction that we at the USOPC are stepping up our game when it comes to providing you the support you need to compete and win.

I have great conviction that if we all truly work together, then we will collectively overcome our challenges and fully capitalize on our opportunities.

And I have great conviction that after 2028 comes and goes, we will be able to look back and once again say:

"We did it. We did it."

I thank you for all you continue to do for athletes, for sport, and for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement.

Thanks, everyone and I look forward to being able to join you remotely throughout the week's activities.

Thanks!