



## UNITED STATES OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE

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**2020 U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Assembly  
Susanne Lyons - General Address - Oct. 8, 2020  
\*remarks as prepared\***

Good morning, and thanks to all of you for participating in this very special, and very unique, assembly.

It's important that we find ways to come together, both when times are good and when times are uncertain.

This year is different in so many ways, and there is no question 2020 will be a year we talk about well into the future – for the impact on our communities and the way we live, and for the unprecedented impact on global sport and our Olympic and Paralympic universe.

But for all of the challenges, I am humbled and thankful to say that this community – our Olympic and Paralympic family in the United States – has shown tremendous resiliency.

And at the same time we have been managing major issues in real time, we never lost sight of the promises and benefits of implementing substantial reform, and we should be proud of the way we advanced and strengthened our movements by establishing a roadmap that will better support Team USA athletes to help them achieve success – both on and off the field – today, tomorrow, and for years to come.

To appreciate our journey over the past year, we need to reflect on the unprecedented environment we find ourselves in today.

This is a time of great uncertainty. The Tokyo Games had to be postponed as the world worked to understand and mitigate the effects of a global pandemic.

The postponement represents an incredible loss of opportunity for the athletes of the world, putting aside years of preparation and setting off another year of planning and training. For some, the postponement meant the end of their athletic dreams. For all, the challenges to training, qualification and mental preparation are very real.

For the Tokyo Organizing Committee, and the people of Japan, who put so much effort and pride into welcoming the world after seven long years of work, they are now forced to reconsider a new Games plan for one year later. There is nothing easy about this delay; their resolve is admirable.

And for the USOPC and the NGBs and all our partners – to say the impact is significant would be an understatement.

The postponement has forced us all to consider the way we work, the programs we fund, and the way we staff our organizations. It has created significant financial challenges both for the USOPC and the NGBs.

I want to thank Sarah Hirshland, my partner at the USOPC, for leading her team and the organization with incredible focus and vision. Collectively, we had to make some very difficult budget decisions, but we did so with the knowledge that we needed to adapt or face more serious outcomes.

Despite significant cuts, her team strove to keep the majority of NGB and athlete support funding intact and have added resources for important areas like athlete mental health and training support during this pandemic.

Thanks to thoughtful planning, our community is prepared for a reimagined Tokyo Games next summer – a compressed Games schedule that takes us to Beijing in the spring of 2022 – and the goal of maintaining healthy Olympic and Paralympic movements as we look to the incredible promise of welcoming the world to Los Angeles in 2028.

Let's look back at some of the changes we've made in the past year. You will recall that following the Gymnastics abuse crisis, we established an independent Commission led by Lisa Borders to make recommendations for USOPC and NGB reform. In August of this year, Lisa Borders, and members of her independent commission, reviewed our policies and practices, and released a one-year review of our progress. They came back with a report card that showed that we are listening, and we are acting.

To use Lisa's words, "What we are seeing now is a willingness to create a more inclusive environment in the USOPC's decision-making process. It's clear the USOPC listened, learned and has begun implementing significant steps, thereby, leading through a promising new paradigm."

The scorecard found that we had completed 24 out of 30 recommendations and have six more in progress.

This progress is no accident. It's driven by recognition that we need to be serious about listening, engaging and integrating athlete perspective when decisions are made.

In November of 2019 we passed the most sweeping governance reforms in recent USOPC history. This included expanding athlete representation on our board, and direct election of representatives from the AAC, NGBC and USOPA. That was phase one.

Since then, we've also passed phase two, which includes specific provisions for athlete representation and NGB certification. Phase three will move us even further forward on the important topics of NGB boards and committee structures.

Combined, the three phases of reform represent a dramatic shift in our organizational principles and structures.

The athlete voice is elevated to its rightful position – officially integrated into our organization – and that will make us stronger. It also puts the burden of responsibility on our partner organizations to be thoughtful about who they place in these critical leadership roles to ensure that this opportunity for impact is not wasted. And through enhanced audit standards and NGB certification, we will increase the effectiveness of all of the NGBs and raise the bar for sport administration in this country and globally.

The purpose of these many changes is to help us achieve our mission: to allow Team USA athletes to achieve sustained competitive excellence and well-being.

At the end of the day, athletes want to excel and achieve their maximum performance potential, and our job is to help them get there through funding, programs and support for their bodies and their minds.

Over the past two years, the Olympic and Paralympic movements have gone through a necessary period of deep introspection – in many ways brought on by the advocacy of our athletes.

The bravery of abuse survivors that led to the start of this significant evolution included a Congressional review two years ago and resulted in an important milestone last month when the House passed the

Empowering Olympic, Paralympic, and Amateur Athletes Act of 2020. The Senate is expected to pass its own version of this bill imminently. The Bill ensures that the governance structure of Olympic and Paralympic sports in the United States will receive renewed oversight aimed at protecting young athletes from abuse.

It also calls for an oversight commission charged with a top-to-bottom examination of the USOPC and the 1978 Amateur Sports Act, aims to increase athlete representation in governing bodies, and calls for more funding and independence for the U.S. Center for SafeSport.

We welcome additional collaboration with the commission in an effort to look more broadly at the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic movements – specifically what steps can be taken to consider its longevity and health for years to come as we serve not only current but future Team USA athletes.

We worked with the bill sponsors to address concerns, give input, and help ensure that actions recommended and entered into the legislation would serve the intended purpose. We are satisfied with the collaborative process, and we support this legislation. But we did not wait for the bill to pass to begin our reforms, and we have already implemented many of the changes contemplated in the bill.

Yet no measure of true progress related to the safety of Team USA athletes is complete without mentioning the ongoing mediation with the Nassar victim and survivor community. We remain steadfast in our resolve to reach a fair and equitable settlement with the survivor groups. We regret that the process has gone on this long, and that the complexities of this type of mediation have delayed resolution for the athletes and their families.

So, what does the coming year look like? How do we implement change in a way that allows our organizations – the USOPC and the NGBs, and most importantly our Team USA athletes – to reach our full potential?

We must start by embracing the change and the tremendous opportunity before us. Last year I talked about evolution and Jurassic Park. I know this year feels a bit more like Apocalypse Now.

But this week, as the many constituents meet, we are seeing the real and immediate impact of new governance structures come fully into view.

It's clear there are some critical issues to consider and resolve as a part of our five-year plan, including future pipeline and youth sport development, high performance support and long-term financial stability.

With an incredibly important and unprecedented stretch before us – two Games in 18 months, with many risks and unknowns – strong and diverse leadership, guided by new perspectives, experiences and backgrounds, will be critical.

At the board level, we need leaders who are ready to lead courageously, act selflessly with integrity, empower others and be held accountable. I look forward to the new leaders who will be joining our Board in January.

As we consider our role as sport leaders in the United States, we also need to be very aware of our role in the global sport environment. It's no secret that the world is looking to us to lead. The USOPC and NGBs have an important role to play, but our reputation as a country internationally is at times complicated.

We've worked very hard to cultivate relationships with international leadership. Through collaboration, we earn trust and respect, and we build consensus. And, we pledge to working tirelessly with our international colleagues as we advance critical topics such as anti-doping, athlete compensation through Rule 40 and athlete demonstration through Rule 50 all in the very near term.

Rest assured that we will always take an athletes-first position, and we will always stand up for Team USA athletes. We will never allow our athletes to be pawns in political or bureaucratic games.

Much of the work internationally is the work of diplomacy. Just because it is not always conducted publicly or spotlighted in the media, does not mean that significant negotiations and advocacy are not occurring.

We ask for your faith that we are driving issues that are important to you in the way that we believe we can be most effective.

And as we look toward to welcoming the world to Los Angeles in 2028, and the exciting prospect of a Winter Games returning to Salt Lake City, the relationships formed through cooperation and respect will help us tremendously in the future.

I'd like to close today by reminding each and every one of us – myself included – to celebrate the great privilege we have to work in the Olympic and Paralympic movements. We are surrounded by inspiration and examples of endeavor, perseverance and excellence. We have the distinct honor and obligation of serving the athletes of Team USA.

And on that note, I want to take a moment to thank the leadership of the NGB Council, Athletes' Advisory Council and USOPA as they reach the end of their terms. Max, Han and Dick, you have led through challenging times, provided candid, honest feedback, and, most important, been great partners in progress.

And to our outgoing Board members, Robbie Bach, Bill Marolt and Whitney Ping. I offer my sincere thanks for your dedication to the movements. You've given your time and your expertise to this work and this community, helping us better navigate the present, and best realize our great future potential.

As we take on the challenge of self-evaluation and the hard work of changing out-of-date policies and recalibrating to face the issues of today and tomorrow by creating new opportunities and solutions, we can be encouraged in knowing that all of our actions will have a profound impact on Team USA athletes.

Our success is measured by their success, both in life and in competition. Our commitment to athlete safety and wellness is measured against the direct and honest feedback we receive from them. Our actions taken to support high performance are scored on the field of play.

We know they are giving their best. We owe it to the elite athletes of today, and to the generations of athletes yet to come, to give ours.

I thank you for your time and solidarity.



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**2020 U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Assembly  
Sarah Hirshland - General Address - Oct. 8, 2020  
\*remarks as prepared\***

Good morning and let me add my thanks for coming together today for the 2020 U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Assembly.

I want to open this morning by also sharing my sincere appreciation to both Han Xiao and Max Cobb who have served their respective councils with dedication and commitment.

I owe each of them a debt of gratitude for the time and patience they have given me over the past two years as I listened, learned and asked a great deal of questions. They were each gracious and also candid when it was appropriate, and I know I speak for many in saying thank you for serving this community. You have both made an immeasurable difference. And because of your openness and honesty, I believe we made significant progress together at a critical time in our movements' history.

Another volunteer who continues to give generously of her time is Susanne Lyons, our President and Board Chair. Thank you, Susanne, for your perspective this morning, but more importantly for your leadership and partnership.

As you just heard, we took on a lot of important work related to our organization and the broader Olympic and Paralympic movements over the past year. Susanne's full commitment and leadership was needed, and she never shied away from our responsibility to serve all of you.

And, let me also thank each of you, many who are also volunteers. Individuals like Dick Fosbury, whose commitment to USOPA is extraordinary, for the contributions you have made to the movements over the past year. Life has demanded going above and beyond, and this community, collectively, has done so in countless ways.

In a normal year, we would be in person, in meeting rooms and banquet halls, gathering as we typically do to catch up, share ideas, reflect on the past and plan for the future.

We would no doubt still be basking in the glow of the Tokyo Games – sharing stories of performance, triumph, adversity, learnings from our individual and collective Tokyo experiences – in awe of the amazing spirit of Team USA.

While I sincerely wish we were together, I know we will have that day and it will be a great celebration.

But today we are living in a very different world, and this is our “new normal.” We are separated by necessity as we continue to take care of ourselves, the communities where we live and work, and our greater Olympic and Paralympic family. And yet we continue to prepare for what will now be an unprecedented Games window that includes Games in Tokyo and Beijing.

Despite the physical distance between us, it's imperative that we stay connected, keep moving forward, and embrace this opportunity to be together, even virtually, to make the very best of our annual assembly.

This has truly been a year like none in recent history. Our hearts break for all who have suffered loss during this pandemic, and with equal compassion, we honor those who are bravely serving on the

frontlines. We cannot underestimate the unique challenges so many are facing, and we must continue to be compassionate and patient with one another – now more than ever.

A year ago, before the realities of this pandemic altered sport and severely impacted our Olympic and Paralympic community, our commitment to change was underway. We were evaluating our purpose, our processes and our potential.

We started our journey to excellence with all of you.

It has been a lot of work – a lot of hard work – yet it was necessary and important work, and we made it a priority because it was the right thing to do.

We took on significant efforts in the areas of building an athlete-first culture, focusing on athlete well-being and safety, and on organizational accountability and transparency. And we never took our eye off the ball when it came to empowering athletes to achieve competitive excellence.

By truly listening – by inclusion and acceptance of all viewpoints, by being creative, being resilient, building consensus, and moving forward with shared purpose – I am proud of all we've accomplished together.

Those same principles have guided us over the past six months as we altered our plans, adapted our lives and doubled down on supporting one another. In times of uncertainty, the spirit of Olympism and the power of Paralympism have been a bright light for us all.

When faced with adversity, we came together and confronted the realities of a global pandemic with both fact-based and creative solutions.

We can never overstate the impact we have suffered through the cancellation of events, the reduction of jobs that impacted our colleagues and friends, and the elimination of programs built to advance sport. But we must remember that the decisions we made were disciplined and thoughtful, and made only so that we could fulfill our promise to the athletes of today and tomorrow.

We prioritized the safety and security of our people and took a fact-based approach that focused on the inevitable return to sport. We collaborated on medical standards – for multi-sport events, for training, for travel and for a return to competition. And we shared them widely in support of all those who administer sport.

The standards have helped keep our community safe. And we keep learning as we expand access and have more athletes training and competing at home and abroad. As we learn, we will evolve, and we will share. This is a success story so far, but we have to remain vigilant because we know that the pandemic's impact will continue well into the future.

Our commitment to keeping athletes and our community safe must never waver, nor can our support of their ambition.

To that end I want to applaud the immense creativity of the NGBs and sport organizations in adapting to an altered environment. Whether through virtual competitions, modified coaching and training techniques, or fan engagement initiatives, the resilience and persistence of our sport partners deserves our collective applause.

Amidst this response to the pandemic, we also seized an unprecedented opportunity to shine a bright light on our values. Together, we committed to take a stand to fight racism within sport and our country.

We assembled the Council on Racial and Social Justice, bringing together athletes from across our sport community, leaders from our organizations and outside experts, to help engage and encourage, and importantly, define outcomes and next steps by early 2021.

This is an example of our community listening, recognizing frustration and honoring pleas for understanding and support. This important work will have a lasting impact, and we are grateful to all who raised their hand to identify solutions and recommendations for change.

I am proud of Team USA for taking a big first step toward being true advocates for social justice. The leadership we have seen demonstrates the strength of our diversity and reflects the very best of our collective impact.

We should also celebrate the collective support this community has shown for those who have suffered financial hardships.

Our national sport organizations, while faced with their own untenable revenue loss, have stepped in to help their clubs and membership so that local and grassroots sport development can continue.

And as our Team USA athletes' earning opportunities vanished, many organizations jumped in to help. International Federations, NGBs and the USOPC all rose to the occasion.

And this is just the start, because, simply put, we need to find more ways to expand in order to support and drive all the aspirations we have for sport in this country.

We need to channel our energy into discovering and implementing new ideas, and collectively finding ways to grow the pie – to infuse more money into the Olympic and Paralympic movements.

And then, importantly, we need to be efficient, transparent and purposeful with our investments. We've made progress in this area as demonstrated in our most recent impact report and sport benefit statements, but now we need to adopt this as a new way of operating.

We are facing unexpected challenges, but I want to recognize the silver lining of our recent experience and encourage us to embrace it as a guiding force for our future work.

The global pandemic and the postponement of the Tokyo Games has required us to change the way we communicate and the way we work together.

Despite distance and a reliance on meeting virtually – relying on the balancing act of synching up full and complicated schedules – we are no doubt more connected as a community.

Much of this may be on account of the hard, honest conversations we've had, and the resulting need for deep consideration of – and commitment to solving – the significant challenges before us.

This pandemic has confirmed in all of us that we are willing and capable of taking on big issues, and that momentum is something we need to carry forward.

And when we needed an example to follow or inspiration to dig deeper or think bigger, none of us had to look very far.

Because Team USA athletes continually raise the bar, serving as models of resiliency, optimism, persistence and excellence for all who are facing the unexpected.

Sport introduces and develops those wonderful characteristics. And in those characteristics lies the great power and value of sport. Things all of us know well and believe in strongly.

Today however – as much as ever in history – requires us – the USOPC, and the Olympic and Paralympic community – to stand up and share those values. To stand up for sport growth and sport access universally.

The challenges ahead offer a daunting duty and awesome opportunity.

By focusing on sport development in this country, we can provide important perspective and then amplify the need for safe, consistent, positive access to sport – to the benefit of communities, society and to Team USA. This is truly our legacy.

We know where the barriers to participation exist:

- Access to sport for all
- Safety
- Fragmentation in sport administration
- Adequate funding
- Infrastructure

And we know that combined, these barriers are putting intense pressure on participation and sport development. And as we are seeing firsthand, the pipeline is at risk – from grassroots youth programs to the NCAA – and with it, the sustainability of elite sport in this country

But just as we know where the barriers exist, we can articulate a roadmap to attack them:

- Make sport participation safe – It needs to be a place free from abuse of all kinds (mental, physical, sexual) and a place that has absolutely no tolerance for racial discrimination.
- Make sport participation consistent and effective – Let's all work collaboratively on the development of national standards and hold all sport organizations equally accountable.
- Make sport participation a foundational part of society– Between Team USA, the USOPC, NGBs, MSOs and USOPA, we collectively have a very powerful voice and a very broad reach. We need to use it to generate impact beyond our individual organizations. We need to advocate for the benefits of sport for society.
- Make sport better – Continue to invest and improve high-performance best practices that allow us to field competitive and successful Olympic and Paralympic Teams to improve and advance the entire sport ecosystem.
- We need to think differently – more creatively – about funding sources and how to ensure that we have the resources required to set the global standard for excellence in sport.

This conversation and the action that comes from it is critical. And today we are committed to partnership with NGBs to advance pipeline and sport development.

We have spent our time over the last couple of years on foundational reform and improving our culture. It's incredibly important and it has made our organization better, our sport community safer, protections for athletes stronger, and has us positioned for future success. And that work continues.

However, if we have learned anything in recent months, we know it's time to leverage the work we have done to advance sport to the greater benefit of our society and most certainly to the benefit of Team USA.

Our collective future – a future that includes the awesome opportunity of the LA28 Olympic and Paralympic Games – in many ways depends on it.

As I think about what will make our time together this week, and in preparation for the next two years and two Games, successful, I am inspired by the innovation and optimism that is happening around us despite the circumstances.

We have much to be proud of in our commitment to excellence – to providing healthy, safe, cutting-edge opportunities to our elite athletes and supporting them during unique and trying times.

As we look ahead to the reimagined Tokyo Games next summer, and then to a Beijing Winter Games that will follow closely on its heels, we know we will have to be at our best – all of us – if Team USA athletes are to have what they need to be successful.

Being our best will mean being nimble, reconsidering things we've relied on for many years to fit a new and changing model. I look forward to the challenge, and know that we are positioned and inspired to meet it.

Our job – our charge – is to continue cultivating the environment to allow Team USA to thrive today and into the future, to ensure they continue to reflect the very best of our communities, and rightfully serve as a universal point of pride for this great nation.

Thank you for the time you will give this week and your unwavering dedication to the Olympic and Paralympic movements.