

Jens Sejer Andersen

Opening speech – Play the Game 2011 in Cologne

Sehr geehrte Gäste, liebe Kollegen, Freunde...

Distinguished guests, dear colleagues, friends...

For our German hosts, today the 3 of October represents a landmark in their history, and it is with pleasure that I start this address by congratulating you on this holiday.

For those of us who are not so fortunate as to be Germans and have a day off today, but old enough to remember what happened a little more than 20 years ago, this date is also part of our history.

This day is a reminder that the absolutely unthinkable can happen overnight. At the time we saw to our amazement how one of the most gigantic, powerful, heavily armed and seemingly untouchable political systems can collapse within a few months when its moral foundation crumbles, when the glue that bind it together is fear and mutual distrust, and when ordinary people start voting with their feet.

That message may ring as an undertone in the debates we are going to have over the next four days.

Also in sport the unthinkable happens. On the 3 October last year, who would have dreamt that later the same month world leaders would start questioning the way FIFA handles the affairs of football?

Who would have believed that the endemic corruption in FIFA which investigative journalists and whistleblowers have raised at Play the Game conferences for more than a decade, would suddenly become general knowledge for the average football fan?

Last but not least, who would have thought that most efficient amplifier of the wrongdoing in football politics would be the top leadership in FIFA itself by the way it mismanaged the elections of World Cup hosts and of the FIFA president?

No journalist, no politician, no Play the Game conference, could have communicated the story more convincingly than FIFA has done. It is said FIFA longs for the Nobel Peace Prize – I think they we should give them the one for literature.

Talking about literature: While October last year was a defining month for world sport, it was also the month in which one of the most popular books of the year appeared, a tiny leaflet written by the 93-year old German-born French former diplomat Stéphane Hessel, a man who survived torture in Nazi

concentration camps, took part in the resistance during the 2nd World War and a few years later co-authored the Universal Declaration of Human rights.

“Indignez-vous!” – translated into “Empört Euch!” or “Time for outrage” – is the title that this very senior political figure has sent across three generations to the youth of today, and the youth has responded by the millions.

Hessel does not send a message, he is the message: The values that he and the French resistance fought for, the values that the post-war society were built on, and the values that drove the declaration of human rights – these values are ignored and opposed by the financial and political elites of today:

A fair distribution of wealth, a free press, empathy with the weakest and restrictions to the power of money. Freedom yes, but not the unlimited freedom of a fox in the henhouse.

It seems that just like in society, sports organizations are increasingly ready to give up on their much acclaimed values when money talks. Organised sport faces an existential choice: Will it act to raise the quality of life for billions of ordinary people by developing fun and educational practices – or will it commit itself to a serve as an entertainment industry at the service of the global financial and political elites?

Perhaps the choice has already been made, so what can we do?

Stéphane Hessel brings no prescription and no solutions, other than he wishes for us all that we find a reason to become outraged, because this drives us to become strong and engaged.

So does international sport offer reasons for outrage?

In my view, yes, almost on a daily basis.

Let me just mention three events from this last week.

The First Deputy President of the Bahrain Olympic Committee and President of the Bahrain Football Association Shaikh Salman bin Ibrahim bin Hamad Al Khalifa has been appointed a member of the FIFA 2014 World Cup Organising Committee.

Shaikh Salman is a part of the sporting system that has been actively used to oppress athletes and dissidents. When the Arab spring came to Bahrain, the President of National Olympic Committee, Prince Nasser, spearheaded a aggressive political campaign that send famous sports personalities to prison at great risk of torture. Their crime was to be popular and protesting at the same time.

Half a year later, many athletes are still dragging on in prison. The International Olympic Committee has had no reaction against this flagrant abuse of sport for political oppression, and FIFA is now giving its consent by promoting a member of the royal family to an important committee.

In Germany and the USA, events happening one generation ago have stirred controversy last week. Here, a group of historians have documented that West German doctors were encouraged by the state to experiment with doping so they could keep up with their East German rivals in the Olympic medal hunt. Prestigious names were involved, and the controversy now goes if these names should be published?

In the USA, another hero of the Cold War era, the coach of the gymnastics team that won multiple medals at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, is now being accused by two former team gymnasts of abusing them sexually while they were teenagers and under his command.

In both cases, the news of this week only confirm what has been circulating as hearsay and for a long time neglected by the relevant sporting authorities. You may wonder why it has taken one generation to get these stories out in the public domain.

Could it be because the political and financial ambitions that drive sport overshadow any interest in truth and human dignity?

And you may ask: Are there stories today, that the sports establishment knows of, but that we won't hear about until Play the Game in 2037?

Hopefully, many of the stories that were intended to be shelved will be told by you over the coming four days.

For the past 15 years, Play the Game has served as a kind of asylum for untold stories, or should I say stories of the unheard, and the need for such asylum has unfortunately not decreased.

But the goal of Play the Game is not only to report the wrongdoing, the conflicts and the undesirable, but also to develop the debate, bring about solutions and encourage to creativity and constructive action.

This is why, at the end of this conference, we shall for the first time suggest a conference conclusion which we so far calls "The Cologne Consensus".

A draft will very soon be given to you as a hand-out, so you can reflect and become part of the debate. We hope we can find a form that will express a general request for change without taking anyone here hostage for conclusions that you may not agree to.

Over the coming four days you will meet more speakers and more participants than ever before at Play the Game conference. The other day I was asked by a local newspaper which speaker I looked most forward to, and I could respond without hesitation: Rector Tokarski.

His words has signalled that at last, after so much waiting and so many preparations, we could finally come to the heart of the matter.

So professor Tokarski, thank you much for the warm welcome you have given Play the Game from the first time we met and until today, and on behalf of Play the Game and the Danish Institute for Sports Studies please receive our gratitude for the impressive workload that the organizing team has taken on since the beginning of the year.

From the overall programme visions to the tiny practical details of the colors of the name badges, the organising team has committed itself to ensuring development and quality. And we have done our best to follow.

Thanks also to the cream of the over 5,000 students that sweat here at the German Sport University Cologne. No less than 85 of them have offered some extra sweat this week, so you can have your coffee, your meals, your shuttles, your conference bag, you name it.

It is no secret that in contrast to the international sport organisations we are talking about, Play the Game is anything but profitable. Even if we wanted to be corrupt, it would be very difficult with the little money we have at hand.

We depend heavily on public subsidies from different sources, and allow me to thank a number of our main donors:

Our founding donors at the Danish Ministry of Culture. Our permanent partners at the Danish Gymnastics and Sports Associations. Our German donors at the German Federal Ministry of Interior, the German Research Foundation, the Ministry of Family, Children, Youth, Culture and Sports of Nordrhein-Westfalen, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Federal Institute of Sport Science and the Rheinenergie Foundation.

From Denmark we received support from the National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark, Team Denmark and Danish Federation of Company Sports, the Danish Union of Journalists - and also the Norwegian Union of Journalists have given support.

A record number of donors, a record number of speakers, a record number of volunteers, a record number of participants – in a sports world obsessed with records this could immediately be understood as a success.

However, if Play the Game relied on quantity we would have been out of business long ago. Our aim is to raise the quality of the sports debate and of sports governance, and to that end we depend entirely on your assistance in a number of ways.

Not only do we hope that you will be very generous when sharing your own talent, your knowledge and ideas with the rest of us. We also ask you kindly to be open and receptive to the talent that others would like to share with you.

This year we face the logistical challenge that we have had to squeeze more speakers than before into a programme shortened by one day – which means that we at some points have up to four parallel sessions.

To make this challenge a good experience for everybody, we hope that you will actively seek out some of the sessions that you would usually regard as marginal for your interest, even when the alternative is an hour the wonderfully warm October sunshine.

This will be a much appreciated way of giving your fellow conference participants your support. There is a fair chance that you will be – as we say in my province – disappointed to the good side.

Inspiration from the unexpected is a constant risk at this 7th Play the Game conference. However, I must admit that you may also become overwhelmed by what you will hear from the around 140 speakers in the days to come.

Match fixing, illegal betting, corruption, organized crime, white elephants, political oppression, discrimination, violence, waste of public money, lack of awareness of grassroots sport, infinite cases of abuse and betrayed values.

There is only one thing to say about these stories: They are not invented for the occasion. They are real, and they constitute a real threat to the human values that matters to most of us, and that we strive to realize through sport, play and exercise.

Instead of ignoring the sad realities that form part of today's sports world, let's take them on in the spirit of Stéphane Hessel and regard them as wonderful opportunities to engage and get strong.

Faced with the variety and magnitude of the challenges that sport is facing, we can make Stéphanes concluding slogan ours:

To create is to resist, to resist is to create.

Play the Game 2011 welcomes you all to resist whatever you may find the saddest of realities of sport today, we invite you to show a lot of creativity and we ask you to open a door for the unthinkable to happen.

In other words, we welcome you to Play the Game.