

Refreshing an old love affair

By Jens Sejer Andersen, Editor-in-Chief



When media professionals and sports researchers from 52 countries gathered in Copenhagen in November 2000, they came to refresh the emotions of a very old couple.

The delegates at "Play the game" brought new life to an ancient love affair, the one between the body and the spirit, the athlete and the story-teller - or to be more accurate, between the meaning and the movement.

Since ancient times, men and women have used dance, games, sports and other movement cultures to express the ideals and values that exist in their hearts and minds.

And many social thinkers and political leaders have for centuries known that if you want to implant certain thoughts in the minds of people, you would have to start with the body.

So the love between the meaning and the movement is rooted in a common dream:

The dream that the two of them together could create a good society and that they would be cornerstones of democracy.

This is why the meaning and the movement - the media and the sports world - should share a common interest in freedom of expression.

The media need this freedom in order to help each individual citizen

achieve a better understanding of his or her role in society, to help express inner beliefs - and to bring forward different viewpoints.

The sports world needs this freedom so that each citizen can find or create the kind of movement culture that suits his or her personal values in life, and so that the individual athlete can influence the development of the movement culture.

Thanks to the efforts of both critics and criticized, "Play the game" was a breakthrough for open debate and dialogue in sports. It proved that there is much more meaning to the movement than money

But freedom of expression has come under serious pressure in the past three decades.

Those who lead the explosive commercialisation of sports and sports media do not measure its success in terms of dialogue, understanding and community building.

Their basic interest is business - and democracy with all its outspoken and unpredictable conflicts, is often considered as bad for business.

That is why the IFJ, ISCA and SIU

invited the media and sports world to "Play the game".

We wanted to break the silence, we wanted to create a new forum for international exchange and dialogue, in brief: we wanted to promote democracy in sports and media.

Many people deserve our thanks for giving a decisive helping hand: The donors. The dynamic and open-minded group of participants.

And not least: The many world-class speakers who were ready to share their knowledge and opinions with a very modest financial reward, if any.

A special respect must be paid to those speakers who ran a risk by choosing dialogue instead of silence - those who came to criticize the sports establishment thus risking their jobs, as well as those who came to defend it thus risking their prestige.

Thanks to the efforts of both critics and criticized, "Play the game" became a breakthrough for open debate and dialogue in sports.

It did not turn the world completely around - but it did for some time stir the blood of an old couple. It proved that there is much more meaning to the movement than money.

We hope that you, too, will feel refreshed when reading the following stories from "Play the game".

If so, we invite you to search for much more information at www.play-the-game.org.

There, you will find almost all papers given at the conference - and you can register for news about the next conference, scheduled for November 2002.

We would like to invite you to Copenhagen once again, to celebrate the love for sport and journalism, to tell the story... and Play the game!

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Jens Sejer Andersen
jsa@dgi.dk
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REPORTERS
Steen Ankerdal
Steen Bille
Kasper Lindberg
Karen Balling Radmer
Marie Venø Thesbjerg
Jonna Toft
Per Vinther (freelance)

TRANSLATIONS
Marcus Dylan Hoy (freelance)
PHOTOS

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