

Jens Sejer Andersen

Opening speech – Play the Game 2007 in Reykjavik

Dear President Grímsson,
WADA President Pound,

Distinguished guests, colleagues and friends

In one of his fairy tales, the French author Jacques Prévert tells about a young ambitious dromedary who dreams intensely of attending a conference some day.

When at last the dream comes true, the dromedary goes around boasting to his friends: “Tomorrow I am going to a conference, you see what kind of dromedary I am”.

But as it happens, the conference is not at all what the dromedary expects. The only thing happening is that a fat monsieur speaks endlessly from the podium about the difference between camels and dromedaries. Over and over again he explains that the dromedary only has one hump, whereas the camel has two.

After a few hours, our young dromedary gets enough, runs to the podium and bites the speaker. As he escapes running away from the hall, the young dromedary can hear how the audience and the speaker shout a classic French abusive term at him: “Sale chameau!” - Dirty camel!

I hope, ladies and gentlemen, that in the next few days we will show better expertise in what we are talking about, and that although disagreements will arise, there will be no biting or backbiting.

Because what we have on the agenda are issues that one of the world's most powerful sports leaders has described as "challenges of a terrifying magnitude".

It is worth listening when a man like Thomas Bach who is at the helm of 27 million German athletes and a Vice President of the International Olympic Committee needs to use so strong words to describe the threat that doping and corruption pose to the future of sport.

Ten years ago, when we held our first Play the Game conference, such a remark was unthinkable from a world sports leader. Neither doping nor corruption was regarded as issues that required thorough reflection and debate, and taking them up publicly was considered an insult on the holy movement of sport.

At our 1997 event, the internationally renowned physiologist Bengt Saltin said that when he looked at the blood parameters of skiers and cyclists he could not help thinking of a drug called EPO. His concern was reported in a handful of newspapers and quickly forgotten, until one year later the Festina scandal in Tour de France changed the view of sport and doping for good.

Also at our first conference, an English reporter was met with disbelief when claiming there was widespread corruption within the IOC. In the great global family of sport and sports media, this was regarded as an unheard extremist viewpoint.

One year later, the Salt Lake City scandal was out for the world to see, and the IOC was obliged to tighten up internal control.

The English journalist was Andrew Jennings, and later this week you can decide for yourself whether or not he is an extremist. He has now thrown his professional love on FIFA, but there is little evidence that the love is returned. FIFA has banned Andrew Jennings from all its events and regrettably FIFA has also declined to send any representative to speak on any issue here in Reykjavik.

Some things haven't changed over ten years, but some have.

We can no longer claim that doping is an issue that is suppressed in the public sphere. The coinciding of the Festina scandal in Tour de France doping and the IOC bribery scandals in 1998 paved the way for strong public intervention in an area that was regarded as a sanctuary for the sports movement alone.

Ever since its start in 1999, WADA has set new standards for transparency and for involving the public in its mission. The current process of revising the global anti-doping code can be followed step by step on the WADA website, and even sensitive documents – such as letters in relation to the recent pull-out of a presidential candidate – are on public display.

WADA and you, Mr. Pound, deserve credit for that.

There are still a lot of unresolved problems with regards to doping, and the anti-doping system has grown so complex and powerful that it must accept seeing itself tested by critics and opponents - also at this conference.

The same advance can not be noted in the combat of the other threat to the values of sport: corruption. On

the contrary, corruption seems to be growing in its many forms: Match fixing, trafficking, money laundering, secret commissions and outright bribery to name a few.

Neither public law nor the organisations' own democratic assemblies seem to be helpful.

In recent years we have seen how a Lausanne court confirmed that the President of the International Volleyball Federation falsified the economic records for the year 2000 in order to conceal a personal bonus of 5 million Euro in that year alone. But Mr. Ruben Acosta was acquitted since the judge found no criminal intent. Later Acosta was re-elected by acclamation and with standing ovations, after he carefully ensured that no one was allowed to run against him and no votes allowed to be cast.

In FIFA, the executive committee reacted promptly when one of its African members was caught in the act of selling 12 tickets on the black market during the 2006 World Cup. Simultaneously, the committee had evidence that its Senior Vice-President Jack Warner was involved in selling 5,400 tickets illegally, but the blame was placed on his son, and at the recent FIFA congress the scandal was not even mentioned with a word.

We can not know the true extent of corruption in sport, but it seems to be increasing. In general, experts consider the dark number in corruption – the cases that are hidden – to be 95 percent.

If what we see is only five percent of the corruption in sport, and if the visible five percent provoke no reaction, we may soon hear international sports leaders say to each other: “Do you remember when it was

doping that threatened our credibility? Oh yes, those were the days?”

The remedies to bring down corruption are at hand, and there is much inspiration to be gained from the anti-doping work. No urine test can reveal if a sports leader has taken bribes, but there are alternatives.

Corruption, just like doping, thrives best when protected from the light of the day.

Thus, corruption suffers when exposed to full transparency, strong democratic procedures and regular external control.

A third threat that may prove to be just as terrifying as doping and corruption, although much more legal, is the global tendency to sit down and remain seated in front of tv and computer screens. I assume you know what I mean.

When I grew up, I learned to connect countries like India and China with under-nutrition and hunger. Today, as the Western lifestyle goes East, the biggest health concern in these countries is obesity and diabetes.

Throughout the world, millions of children lead a life without resources for sport and playful activities. In more privileged countries, millions of children no longer see sport as the only possible spare time activity.

Is it the fault of the children if they do not adapt their lives to sport – or can sport learn to adapt to the lives of children? This is a question we will raise in the next few days.

Sport can be a wonderful learning place and bring joy and development to the individual, the local community, the nation and to mankind.

But the positive values of sport will be undermined if the sports community does not face its challenges with realism. Sport cannot overcome doping, corruption and lifestyle changes by sending decrees from lavish headquarters in legal sanctuaries.

Sport must turn to the surrounding world and seek to cooperate with public authorities, universities, the media, fan trusts, NGO's and other stakeholders.

In that spirit we have given this conference the headline "Creating coalitions for good governance in sport".

The best contribution you and Play the Game can give to this end, is to bring your expertise, experience, facts and viewpoints into the public domain, thereby increasing the transparency, strengthening the democracy and practising the freedom of expression in world sport.

This is what we look forward to in the days to come, and I thank you all in advance for the efforts you have made to come here.

Usually at Play the Game, we wait until later in the programme before giving thanks to people who made it all possible. However, I must make an exception in the case of our local partners, Ungmennafelags Islands, the Icelandic Youth Association, UMFÍ.

Last year at this time, Play the Game was in a very difficult situation. We did not have enough money to

complete the working year 2007, and realising a 5th Play the Game conference was a distant dream. We had no partners for it, no place to hold it – and the chairman of our board had to leave after taking up another leading position in sport.

Our only hope was that UMFI, who had expressed some interest, would assume the practical and economic responsibilities of co-hosting a conference. And UMFI did.

For a youth organisation in a country with less than 300,000 inhabitants, this is a huge, courageous – and expensive – step, and I hope that you will feel rewarded when these five days are over.

For Play the Game, it became more than a rescue operation. It has been a privilege to set up the conference in a country marked by 1,000 years of democratic tradition, a strong corruption-free culture and a social and humanistic approach to sport.

Meeting Iceland and the Icelanders have been immensely inspiring. I think you will all get your share of that inspiration when we have been through the social and cultural activities that UMFI and our wonderful partners at Congress Reykjavik have planned for the week to come.

Thank you, UMFI, for choosing Play the Game as one of the ways to celebrate your 100th anniversary, and congratulations!

The cooperation with Iceland is only the first step in a process of internationalising Play the Game – a process on which the future of Play the Game depends. We

hope you will find the conference so relevant that you will give priority to the networking evening Wednesday night, where we will discuss how Play the Game and other ways of networking can be strengthened and secured.

Ladies and gentlemen: For the future as well as for the present, Play the Game depends on your active presence in the sessions, your commitment to the issues, your appetite for new facts and viewpoints, your willingness to give and take in the debates and your readiness to engage with the person next to you.

Play the Game means “play fair, play by the rules” – a call not only for the sports field, but also for the discussions we are going to engage in.

Let’s show that we are able to distinguish between camels and dromedaries, that we can confront each other without biting and enrich each other and the international sports debate, in other words:

Let’s Play the Game!