Courageous anti-doping fighter got AWARD

The Play the Game Award 2007 was given to Sandro Donati for his lifelong commitment to eradicating doping.

Facts about the award

What is the Play the Game Award?

The Play the Game Award is presented to an individual or a group of persons who have, professionally or as volunteers, made an outstanding effort to strengthen the basic ethical values of sport and to realise one or more of the following aims:

- to encourage democracy, transparency and freedom of expression in sport
- to create awareness of the role of sport in society at a local, national and international level
- to draw a many-sided picture of sport
- to support the right of the individual to choose and influence his or her daily sporting activities

The award is presented to persons who have shown remarkable personal courage and commitment to creating a better sports community, for instance by uncovering corruption, doping or other malpractices in sport, or by inspiring more joyful and healthy sports practices for people in general.

The award consists of a piece of art and a speaker’s invitation, including travel, room and board, for the next Play the Game conference.

by Kirsten Sparre

“Sandro Donati has pioneered a quest for integrity and truth in sport. First he spent decades working as a coach, and then from that vantage point he saw what was happening in his sport in terms of doping, and commenced an incredibly courageous voyage through the dark deep waters of organised crime and drug dealing.”

So stated previous recipient Laura Robinson when presenting the 2007 Play the Game Award to Sandro Donati, who is currently an advisor to the Italian Minister of Social Affairs.

In 1974, Sandro Donati started coaching speed and middle distance runners. He did his post-secondary education at the University of Lyon, and became a professor of sport science.

“by the 1980’s he saw that doping in Italy was supported by the Italian Olympic Committee. When he tried to do something about it, he quickly became persona non grata. But this isolation did not stop him; if anything he researched with even more energy and intelligence until CONI could no longer deny the systematic use of drugs in Italian track and field. He rejoined them in 1992,” Robinson said.

Donati is today an international expert on doping and also on trafficking of drugs, which led him to investigate organised crime and put his career and life in danger.

“But at the same time he continued to publish articles on methodologies in training and the philosophy of sport and the active body. His work has been used by the Italian Nordic and Alpine Ski teams, the rowing, volleyball, basketball, roller-skating, fencing and swimming teams. Sandro Donati is the definition of a renaissance man – one of balance and a graceful but active intelligence,” Robinson said.

Sandro Donati was surprised and happy to receive the award via the phone.

“I am very glad for your prize. I am glad that I have a lot of very high quality friends like you. It is important to me. Play the Game has helped me many times when I had problems and helped break the isolation, I have experienced,” Sandro Donati said.

Laura Robinson, a Canadian freelance journalist who received the Play the Game Award in 2002 for her exposé of a culture of sexual abuse in Canadian junior ice hockey, handed over the award at the closing ceremony of the conference in front of delegates from 50 countries.