Richard Pound is not one to mince words. In one of his final public appearances as President of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), he told participants in Play the Game flat out that he had one key wish for his successor: “He has to be as mean and confrontational as I am. This is not a Mr Nice Guy job.”

Pound had been invited to the conference to reflect on his eight years at the helm of an organisation set up by governments and the Olympic movement to combat the problems of doping in sport. As one of very few members of the IOC, Pound not only accepted the invitation from Play the Game but also spoke freely about the challenges ahead for WADA: “We have to maintain government interest in this and it is difficult as they have the average attention span of a fruitfly. The international sports federations must also be prodded. There are a huge number of international federations that do not comply with the WADA code and should be excluded from Beijing for that reason,” Pound stated.

He refrained from naming the errant federations believing that WADA can better convince them to shape up if the sword of publicity still hangs over their heads. But ultimately, federations that do not have out of competition tests should be told that they cannot be part of the Olympic Games.

“The IOC should use the leverage,” Pound said, reflecting the lack of compromise on doping that has characterised his presidency and gotten him into many public fights with federations and athletes who have taken offence at his outspokenness.

First step to catch up

Pound agreed to help the IOC set up an independent international anti-doping agency back in 1999 when the world of sport was reeling from the Festina scandal after the French police - in the words of Pound - found “industrial quantities of doping substances” with officials from the Festina cycling team.

Pound said he would be president for two years but hung on for eight, and during that period he has overseen the establishment of a unique organisation composed of governments and individuals from the sports movement. WADA has adopted a World Anti-Doping Code, instituted a system of sanctions for athletes using doping, and undertaken a wealth of research on doping methods in order to be able to catch offending athletes.

“Our initial work was to catch up with the runaway train but we have to change attitudes. We have an extensive education programme and I think we can do it in sport. It will take a while - at least a generation - and we have to work pretty hard. But we will get there,” Pound said.

Pound places the principal responsibility for doping squarely with individual athletes. “99.9999 per cent of the time, doping is an organised process. Taking EPO is not an accident, paying for designer drugs is not an accident. It is deliberate cheating for the purpose of winning and it has to be confronted. It is not going to go away by itself.”

The personal responsibility of athletes aside, Pound agrees that in many cases athletes are not the most guilty in cases of doping.

“Most sanctions are against athletes but that is because we do not have enough evidence against others, such as doctors, or ways to sanction them. That is one of the reasons we need governments because they can tell doctors that it is a professional offence if they prescribe drugs for non-therapeutic use. We must find ways to deal with the enablers, but the athletes bear the responsibilities,” Pound stated.

As a parting shot, Pound said that he had no problems with lifelong bans on athletes: “I don't see a moral problem with a lifelong ban for doping. If you do it again, I am sorry there is no excuse: Go somewhere else, don't play with us!”