



A hasty judgement

by Don E. Porter*

With a US Senate hearing scheduled for next week, here comes government again playing overseer to the world, yet not really knowing what is going on. The fact that the Olympic scandal is drawing considerable media attention gives politicians much-wanted and -needed air time. I think that many will agree we already have too much government in our lives and unfortunately in sports, both in the United States and abroad. At the recent World Conference on Doping in Sport in Lausanne, Switzerland, the USA and several of its partners-in-arms tried to lay blame on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) when, in fact, those political appointees themselves came with stained hands. The US presence and position during the conference were reprehensible, especially considering that country's own house was not in order.

In the midst of all the hullabaloo about the conduct of the IOC one senses a general conclusion: the media and many others already have the answers as to why the IOC should be "tarred and feathered". There seems to be a lynch-mob mentality among certain US politicians and others, which could backfire when it comes to selecting host cities of the world's major sports events including the Olympic Games.

This is a classic rush to judgement without considering the side effects that it could have on the United

States. The fact is that there is growing resentment toward the US on the part of the international sports community. At risk could be the US's opportunity to host the Olympic Games in 2012, the 2007 Pan American Games, various world championships, and other international events.

For example, Long Beach, California, recently lost its bid for the 2003 world swimming championship to Barcelona. I am not saying this is part of a "get even with the US" syndrome; but if we don't find a way to get along better with the rest of the "teams" we can start counting ourselves out of hosting major international events and holding representative positions in international organizations. You say: so what? Well just wait and see what happens when your favourite cities spend millions of dollars bidding to host certain major international events, and fail to get them.

Much of the to-do about the Olympic scandal must be taken in its proper perspective. The sad part of this entire episode, or scandal, or whatever you desire to label it, is that there are many people who have an axe to grind with the IOC. Many of these are due to past or present relationships that were not or are not always the best; others are due to a power play in which individuals seek to exploit

the IOC to their own ends. What it comes down to is "power, position and money". For example, look at the US Olympic Committee (USOC). The USOC would like to be a bigger power broker in the Olympic Movement. They most certainly would like a larger share of the big dollars the Olympic Movement generates.

However, the USOC has done little to help its own cause. For example, it has failed to gain or hold leadership positions within the IOC, as well as in many of the International Olympic sports Federations (IFs) and other international organizations. For years the USOC has sat back and done little to groom or position USOC national governing bodies for posts or representation on international governing bodies.

For years there was a power play within the USOC to see who would receive the two coveted positions as IOC members. As time and money were spent battling and politicking for those positions, the US was losing the struggle at the other end. Few IF president or secretary-general positions were gained or held, and important commission appointments and officer positions in federations, regional or continental bodies were being lost.

Currently, in addition to the two IOC members, the US has two Olympic IF presidents and two secretaries-general. By comparison, we may take the example of Italy. Italy has four IOC

members, six IF presidents or secretaries-general, and holds key positions on international commissions and panels. What's wrong here, you might ask? What is wrong is that we (the USA) are so worried about a few upper positions that we continually lose opportunities for important major positions in IFs and other organizations.

On the subject of Olympic IFs, it is important that they have a larger role in any restructuring or change in the IOC. They should play a major role in selecting the candidate cities for the Olympic Games. Who knows better than the IFs about technical requirements, venue and facility needs, and the actual operations of their sport in the Olympic Games?

Regardless of the past wrongs the IOC may have committed, it is making a positive and direct effort to right them. The US should be helping rather than trying intimidation tactics (Senate hearings, sponsors rattling sabres, etc.) to gain the respect, positions and money it feels it deserves.

It is not the intent here to defend those who have made grave errors

that have harmed the Olympic Movement. However, let's face it, perception sometimes is stronger than reality. Many of the allegations of wrongdoing are based on facts and circumstances that are insignificant in comparison to the numerous overt acts by governments and businesses that rarely draw the attention of the media. If they do, they are forgotten until the next war or police action comes along.

IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, whether he rides in limousines or receives a shotgun, has done less in this vein than business CEOs and politicians do on a regular basis. I am defending the man (Samaranch) not the system that has provoked and compounded the problems. It is the system that is broken and obviously needs fixing.

Somehow, we never hear about the good things the IOC and Samaranch have done over the years. The humanitarian aid and financial support the IOC has provided many countries is something you do not read or hear about because it is a

positive force, and some people do not like the IOC to receive credit for positive actions.

The IOC's support of sports development, especially in developing countries, and as an advocate for youth and women, somehow misses the spotlight. The IOC has been a forerunner in these important areas of world society. With the Games in Sydney close to 500 days away, it is time we focus on making changes where they are needed. Most importantly, it is time to stop the back stabbing and character assassination, and to work toward a better and more positive relationship among all who are part and wish to be part of the Olympic Movement.

*President of the International Softball Federation (ISF), secretary-general of General Assembly of International Sports Federations (GAISF), member of the Executive Council of the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF), vice-chair of the USOC International Relations Committee.

News flash

El Salvador

The fifth session of the Salvadorian Olympic Academy took place on 21 and 22 November 1998, with help from the IOC's Olympic Solidarity assistance programme. The many partici-

pating athletes were able to attend lectures by Felipe Muñoz Kapamas of Mexico, known as "El Tibio", who won a swimming gold medal at the Games of the XIX Olympiad in Mexico in 1968, and Francisco Aguilar Chang, a Guatemalan Olympic historian.

Thanks to another Olympic Solidarity programme three athletes, Patricia Damaris Sosa (weightlifting), Veronica Quijano (athletics) and Maureen Kaila Vergara (cycling), and two coaches, William Vaquerano (table tennis) and Diego Muyschondt

(equestrian), were given grants to train abroad.

The Central American and Caribbean Sports Organization (CACSO) has chosen the city of San Salvador to host the 19th CACSO Games in 2002.