

INTRODUCTION

This year is the 100th anniversary of women athletes participation in the Olympic Games. In 1900, at the Games of the II Olympiad in Paris, women made their debut. Historians do not agree on the number of women nor the sports, but it is agreed that fewer than two dozen women took part, and that they competed in no more than five sports. This year in Sydney, at the XXVII Games of the Modern era, women will compete in 25 sports and men in 28. At least 38% of approximately 10,382 athletes at Sydney will be women. What a difference the 20th century has made, certainly on the field of play.

We all owe an enormous debt of gratitude to those who worked so hard over the years to make this possible. The world of sport has been greatly enriched through providing women with the opportunity to experience sport at the highest level. Now, those of us who are present at the beginning of the 21st century have the duty to take the next steps for sport.

After the Centennial Olympic Congress, Congress of Unity, held in Paris in 1994, the IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch convened a working group to determine what issues were most important for immediate action. Women's participation in the world of sport was clearly an important challenge. Work quickly progressed and at the IOC Session before the Games of the XXVI Olympiad, the Centennial

by Anita DeFrantz*



Games in Atlanta in 1996, the IOC resolved to make certain that women became part of the decision-making boards in the world of sport and also adopted the strict principle of equality between women and men.

The world of sport reflects society. The role of women in today's society has evolved dramatically during the past 100 years. Sport has experienced this evolution, but not fast enough. Women have been ready to excel in every endeavour, but the opportunities to do so have been meager. The IOC has established as a goal that women comprise at least 10% of the decision-making boards throughout the Olympic Movement by 31 December 2000, with the goal increasing to at least 20% by 2005. The IOC met the 'at least 10%' goal in 1998. Many National Olympic Committees (NOC), regional organizations and many International sports federations have also accom-

plished this action. There is much more work to do, however, for global success.

We must continue to encourage sports organizations to provide opportunities for women. Since 1996, Olympic Solidarity, working through the NOCs has offered training programmes and seminars for women athletes, coaches and sports administrators. It has been a privilege for me to see the excitement and enormous potential for the future of sport generated through these seminars.

The articles that follow provide an overview of the history of women in sport in a variety of international settings. They also present us with the many challenges left to overcome. My hope is that these articles will spark interest and move you to think about solving some of these issues.

I believe that sport belongs to us all. Sport is a part of our nature as human beings. The future of sport for us all clearly depends on developing new resources. In order to ensure access to sport for all humanity, we need more coaches and managers and spectators and supporters at every level. There is a saying: *women hold up one half of the sky*. For sport to grow, women must take on the responsibility to hold up one half of the sky for sport.

*IOC Vice-president; Chairwoman of the IOC Working Group 'Women and Sport'.