

The Starting Line

The *WomenSport International* Newsletter

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(NOTE: This is not the entire newsletter, but a sample of its contents)



From the Exec's Desk

Libby Darlison,

The [United Nations 4th World Congress](#) was the biggest international gathering of women ever in the world and was particularly significant for those of us interested in furthering opportunities for girls and women in sport and physical activity since, for the first time, sport and physical activity have been included in the [Platform for Action](#), the document produced by the Conference to improve the status of women globally.

Since Beijing, I have been asked to speak to many women's groups, sport and nonsport, about the 4th World Conference and the NGO Forum. For those who did not attend the 4thWCW their major desire is to know not only what the Conference and its outcomes really mean to them and the organisations to which they belong, but also how things actually happened in terms of producing the **Platform for Action**, what the platform actually says and what those words mean, i.e. the content and what it was like to be there.

In the belief that **WSI** members might also be interested in these questions and more importantly, in how we can use and build on what happened in Beijing to ensure that girls and women really do see the results of the commitments that their governments made, we have included a feature about the NGO Forum and the Conference which is designed to help it all make sense - no matter where you live or what sort of organisation you are involved with.

Although the 4th World Conference has been dominating the international stage recently, much has been happening in other areas and there is a great deal of good news to report.

The successful International Forum on the Female Athlete Triad in Atlanta (USA) in September resulted in **WSI** and the IOC Medical Commission establishing a Joint Task Force to further pursue health-related aspects of women in sport. This is quite a breakthrough for women's sport and the combination of these two bodies bodes well for real change to occur. In addition, we are planning a comprehensive educational campaign to be launched around the time of the 1996 Olympic Games.

We continue to work hard internationally to ensure a more equitable representation of women in decision making positions within sports organisations. If there is one thing that history has taught us, it is that as long as women are not a part of the decision making process, in any field, we cannot expect our interests to be taken into account. In this

regard it is pleasing to see that both the IOC and the Commonwealth Games Federation, arguably the two most influential international sports bodies, are taking significant steps to increase the representation of women in all areas of their organisations as well as in their associated bodies.

The opportunity for every girl or woman to pursue the sport or physical activity of her choice, to achieve to the best of her potential, and to be fully supported in her efforts, whether it be local recreational sport or international competition, is still a long way off. The progress toward gender equality in sport may be slow at all levels and in all areas but it is happening, and the more of us who realize its importance and are prepared to work to achieve it in whatever way we can, the sooner it will happen. If we do not have the courage of our convictions and do nothing to bring about change in the hope that others will do the hard work for us, we can expect to be disappointed.

The Starting Line is becoming an important communication link for many women around the world and we are keen to see it expand in this capacity. If you have some information about successful programmes designed to increase the involvement of girls and women as participants, administrators, coaches, etc. or about any other programme or issue you think readers in other countries might like to know about, we will be happy to publish it.



By now most of you would have realized that the [United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women](#) was held in September this year in Beijing. What you may not have known was that the Conference was the first of its kind to acknowledge in writing the importance of sport and physical education for girls and women. The three statements about sport and physical activity and the additional references in the **Platform for Action** - the Conference action plan to improve women's global status - have important ramifications for all of us. In this article I would like to take some time not only to talk about the significance of the Conference and the Non Government (NGO) Forum, but to suggest what each of us can do to ensure that the commitments made by governments in the **Platform for Action** are translated from words to action.

The NGO Forum

The Non Government Forum is traditionally held in conjunction with the Government Conference. Approximately 36,000 women attended the Non Government Forum, the biggest ever international meeting of women. The Forum, which represents the voices of the world's women, was rather like a huge exchange mart of ideas with over 300 workshops being held each day in addition to seminars, plenary sessions, tribunals, strategy sessions, caucus meetings, cultural performances, and numerous informal

gatherings and demonstrations - all designed to address the range of global problems affecting women such as violence, poverty, structural adjustment, illiteracy, health, human rights, etc. NGOs attending the Forum worked effectively together to push governments and private sector organisations from their often conservative, politically cautious positions to a point where the voices of the women of the world were reflected in their deliberations and decisions.

Amongst the thousands of workshops held at the Forum were several on sport, conducted by organisations as diverse as the All China Sports Federation, the Women's Sports Foundation USA, Kenyan Sports Administrators, Atlanta Plus, and the National NGO Association of Zimbabwe. Although few in number, the workshops provided the opportunity for discussion and debate and highlighted how much work needs to be done, particularly in the developing world, before we can say that women are treated equally and fairly in sport and physical activity - a fact that is reflected in the **Platform for Action**

The UN 4th World Conference on Women

The Government Conference provided the opportunity for 187 member states of the United Nations to gather together and debate the contents of the **Platform for Action**. Up to one-third of the **Platform** was still in brackets at Beijing and this was the only language which could be debated and changed. Anything unbracketed was considered agreed upon and unchangeable, including the wording on sport and physical activity - a result of the lobbying done at the preliminary Conference in New York earlier in the year.

As might be expected when governments of very different political and religious persuasions gather together in an attempt to agree on fundamental global issues, especially those to do with women, there was much debate and considerable disagreement. Particularly contentious issues included sexual rights, reproductive rights, aspects of human rights, particularly the recognition of the universality of women's rights, inheritance rights, and sexual orientation.

The statements on sport and physical activity in the **Platform** are as follows:

Strategic Objective: B. 4. Par. 85. Actions by governments, educational authorities and other educational and academic institutions.

(m) Provide accessible recreational and sports facilities and establish and strengthen gender-sensitive programs for girls and women of all ages in education and community institutions and support the advancement of women of all areas of sport and physical activity including coaching, training, and administration, and as participants at national, regional, and international levels.

Strategic Objective: C. 2. Par.108. Actions by governments in cooperation with non governmental organisations including the media, the private sector and relevant international organisations, including the United Nations bodies, as appropriate.

(f) Create and support programs in the educational system, in the workplace, and in the community to make opportunities available to girls and women of all ages on the same basis as they are for men and boys.

Strategic Objective L.4. Par 280. Actions by Governments, international and non-governmental organisations.

(d) Promote full and equal participation of girls in extracurricular activities such as sports, drama, and cultural activities.

There is also mention of physical activity in the introduction to the health section with reference to the assistance with specific problems such as osteoporosis. There is further mention elsewhere in the health section which stresses that particular attention must be given to the needs of girls, especially the promotion of healthy behavior, including physical activity.

Where do we go from here?

It is important to understand that the power of the **Platform for Action** to impact on women's lives as well as its effective implementation at international, regional, and local levels is potentially great, but it depends largely on the ability of women and women's organisations to make themselves familiar with its contents and then to lobby and work with their governments and relevant non-government organisations to ensure that the commitments made in the **Platform** are kept and put in place.

If we let this opportunity go and do nothing about it, the **Platform for Action** will simply continue to become another remote and inaccessible international document which is seen to have little, if any, relevance for women's lives, particularly at the local level. I would urge each one of you to contact the organisations with which you are associated, ask them what they intend to do to ensure that the commitments made in sport and physical activity are implemented, and encourage them to tell other members about the Conference and the **Platform** and its significance for women in sport and physical activity. In addition, you should encourage them to develop a strategy for implementing the commitment in the **Platform**. If they do not know about the **Platform for Action**, a copy can be ordered from UN/DPI, S-1005, United Nations, New York, NY 10017 USA. Fax 1 212 963 4556, or from [this web site](#).

Remember, the framework is there, the wording is strong, the commitment has been made. All we need to do is 'pick up the ball and run with it'.



From Around the Globe

Denmark

In Denmark women and men are engaged in sport in fairly the same degree. In 1993 47% of all men and 49% of all women participated in sport on a regular basis. But if you ask if you are a member of a Sport Club you will get quite a different picture. Only 33% of the

men and 29% of the women are members of Clubs; the others practice their sport in a non-organisational setting or in fitness/aerobics centers.

In Denmark there are two main sports organisations. In the largest, the National Olympic Committee and Sports Federation of Denmark, 37.6% of the members in 1994 were women. Of the Committee members, 14.9% were women. This poor representation of women among leaders is also present in the federations which have the most female members. For example, the Danish Gymnastics Federation has 81.7% active female members, but only 33.3% of the committee members are women.

This imbalance is one of the reasons The Sports Federation of Denmark as early as 1983 set up a "Women and Sport Advisor" and a Working Party, "Women and Sport" which should deal with the problems in sport specific to women. This meant a focus on women's issues in sport, science and related areas, and made the women and sport issues more visible in the sport organisations and in the media. Unfortunately, both the Advisor and the Working Party were abolished in 1993 and replaced with an equal opportunities committee and no Advisor.

Denmark may be 'in front' in terms of women's participation in sport but there is still a long way to go before women have the same opportunities to participate in sport and the same opportunities to be a leader in sport which is still the domain of male culture and perspectives.

Canada

The [Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport \(CAAWS\)](#) has published three provocative and timely publications which can be ordered in French or English for \$15 from: CAAWS, 1600 James Naismith Dr., Gloucester, Ontario, Canada K1B 5N4.

- *Women in International Sport: Advancing Gender Equity*: Provides the 'what' and 'why' of gender equity and 'how' to help international federations understand the issues.
- *Evening the Odds: Tobacco, Physical Activity and Adolescent Women*: Discusses the role of smoking in the lives of adolescents, physical activity as an alternative, link between tobacco, activity, and weight, and suggestions for teachers, coaches, and parents.
- *Making an Informed Decision About Girls' Participation on Boys' Teams*: Options and long-term considerations.

Egypt

An international conference on women and sport, convened by Prof. Dr. Nabilah Ahmed Abdel Rahman, was held recently in Alexandria, Egypt. The Conference resulted in the formation of the Arab Women's Sport Association which has been established to liaise between Arab countries with particular reference to:

1. Enhancing women's participation in sport.

2. Preparing women and developing their skills to serve as sports leaders on both the national and international level.
3. Ensuring Arab women's representation in all sports organisations at all levels.
4. Preparing women and developing their skills to serve as sports administrators, coaches, and referees.

Conference recommendations include:

1. The formation of national Women and Sport Associations.
2. Appropriate representation of women on Boards of Directors of sport federations and Olympic Committees.
3. The Arab League of States to call upon all governments to support the movement of women and sport through decisions to be implemented by the Council of Arab Ministers of Youth.

It is to be hoped that this conference will add weight to the growing movement to ensure that Arab and other Islamic women who do not presently compete in the Olympic Games or in other open international competitions due to religious prohibitions will be able to do so. Creating opportunities for all girls and women to achieve their maximum potential in sport and physical activity, something that can only be achieved in competition with the best athletes in that sport or activity, is strongly supported by WSI.

Colombia

As this Newsletter goes to press, the Conference convened by Asociacion Colombiana de Mujer Y Deporte (Colombian Association of Women and Sport) will be well underway. The national conference organized by Lic. Clemencia Anaya Maya will address a range of social and cultural issues through presentations and panel discussions, including the reasons for the creation of a national women and sport association, the historical development of international women and sport organisations, involvement of women in the Olympics, and the relationship of women to sport and sport to women.

WSI was able to assist the Colombian Association of Women and Sport by providing the keynote speaker for the Conference; a role that is part of the ongoing assistance and support we provide to women and sport organisations around the world.

Germany

Six hundred delegates from around the world attended a recent conference, "Images of Sport". Keynote papers addressed the development of sport on every continent but there were no women keynoters. There was, however, a workshop on women and sport on the last afternoon which attracted about 50 delegates. Presentations were given on women and sport in Medellin, Colombia and on the Brighton Declaration. Celia Brackenridge, a member of the **WSI** Advisory Board, spoke on "The Glass Ceiling" and developing networks for women leaders in sport.



IOC Makes a Decisive Move Toward Gender Equality

At its recent meeting in Lausanne the Executive Board of the [International Olympic Committee](#) agreed to recommend to the next general meeting of the IOC in Atlanta, July 1996, that it "intensify without delay the promotion of the presence of women within sport and its technical and administrative structures" by:

- Ensuring that all National Olympic Committees reserve to women by December 31st, 2000 at least 10% of the offices in all their decision- making structures (in particular all legislative or executive organs), such proportion to reach 20% by December 31st, 2005.
- Strongly inviting all the International Sports Federations, the National Federations, and the sports organisations belonging to the Olympic movement to do the same.
- Amending the Olympic Charter to take into account the need to keep the equality between men and women.

While the targets the Executive Board is recommending may be considered low in some countries and in some organisations, for many more this involves a significant change in the gender balance of their operational structure. The IOC Executive Board is to be congratulated for not simply resorting to the usual language of 'encourage' or 'hope that' but instead demonstrating its firm commitment by taking a far more constructive and effective approach towards achieving gender equality.

Experience around the world both in and out of sport has shown that achieving gender equality is never an easy task, but that it is unlikely to ever occur unless the first step is the setting of targets. In addition to the setting of targets it is also crucial to have a gender equality strategy or policy firmly in place and to ensure within that policy that there are mechanisms for monitoring and accountability.

WSI will be encouraging the IOC to follow up on this important first step and has offered to work with the International Olympic Committee to develop an understanding of what now needs to be done within its member organisations in order to ensure that its targets are achieved.



Tennis Moves to Implement Commission Report

In response to concerns about the well-being of girls and women competing in international women's professional tennis, the Women's Tennis Council (WTC) last year formed an Age Eligibility Commission. The Commission's Charter was to recommend changes designed to promote career longevity and fulfillment and to minimize the physical, psychological, and developmental risks of women's professional tennis.

The Commission's recommendations have now been presented and adopted and the WTC has moved to ensure they will be implemented. One of the major steps in this process is the formation of an Age Eligibility Advisory Panel which is chaired by **WSI** member, Carol Otis, M.D. and includes **WSI** Executive Director, Libby Darlison. In addition, the WTC has taken the opportunity to implement a Player Development Programme.

The Player Development Programme has several components including:

- A three day player/parent orientation to start in 1997
- A mandatory physical examination
- Meet the minimal educational requirement of the country of residence
- 'Rookie Hours' involving 2 hours of one-to-one orientation in each of the following departments: operations, sports sciences and medicine, media, etc. to total 10 hours
- Agent registration
- Coach registration
- Developing in conjunction with the International Tennis Federation a 'Getting Started' Video

Future plans for the Programme include:

- Improved counseling services
- A mentor programme
- On-site socialization: including social, recreational, and educational activities for players

The establishment of the Panel and the Player Development Programme demonstrates clearly the commitment that the sport of women's tennis has taken to ensuring the health, well-being, and longevity of players. Our congratulations to the WTC for taking such positive action. It is to be hoped that other women's sports bodies will look to tennis as an example of what they could be doing to address the health and welfare of their athletes.



Commonwealth Games Move Toward Gender Equality

Under the guidance of Judy Kent, President of the Canadian Commonwealth Games Association and well-known gender equality consultant, the Commonwealth Games Federation has commissioned the preparation of a paper identifying the strategies it will need to pursue to increase women's participation in Commonwealth Games as athletes,

coaches, team officials and leaders. Work is proceeding amongst Commonwealth Sports Organizations to create an understanding of and receptivity to the strategies suggested in the paper which was discussed at the annual meeting of the Federation in early November. Final approval of the paper is expected at the 1996 General Assembly of the CGF.