

# The Starting Line

The *WomenSport International* Newsletter  
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*(NOTE: This is not the entire newsletter, but most of its contents)*



*From the Exec's Desk*

*Libby Darlison,*

As we approach the WSI elections it is a good time to reflect on how much has been achieved since our inception. Though only a young organization which has had to constantly address the usual challenges of a non-governmental organization (NGO) of funding and human resources which has been made more difficult by being a truly international group, we can be proud of what we have achieved.

WSI has worked with a range of national and international organizations to advance opportunities for girls and women in sport and physical activity. Over and above our lobbying and networking activities we have conducted forums and workshops, produced educational materials, and are in the process of developing a series of books on physical activity and health for a lay audience.

One area in which we want to improve is getting more members actively involved in our activities. During the coming year we will be developing a more inclusive structure which will involve greater participation by members of the Advisory Board and appointing committees in areas of concern to WSI. We would like very much to hear from you if you are interested to becoming actively involved with WSI. Let us know your area of expertise and how you would like to assist WSI in achieving its goals. We are very appreciative of your support during these formative years. Please stay active and involved! Don't forget to vote!

## **World Health Organisation to Promote Physical Activity**

WSI was one of approximately 20 organizations from around the world recently invited to attend an international meeting organised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the subject of physical activity and health.

The main purpose of the meeting was to identify areas of collaboration to promote physical activity and health. Participants agreed to establish a Consultative Group on Active Living which would collaborate with WHO and support its actions based on the five following objectives. To:

- Strengthen worldwide advocacy on physical activity for health;
- Provide support for the development of national policies, strategies and programmes;
- Help promote community programmes and capacity building;
- Develop local, national, regional and international support networks involving public and private institutions;
- Foster the dissemination of current knowledge related to active living and support the development of new knowledge.

The message being given by the WHO that you don't need to be an athlete to maintain good health is backed up by increasingly persuasively research which indicates that half hour of physical activity approximately five days a week is needed to maintain good health, however that activity can be carried out in 15 or even 10 minute blocks and can be readily integrated into daily living.

WHO assistant Director-General D. P. Napalkopv told the meeting that there is strong evidence that "regular physical activity provides people of all ages .... with substantial health gains (that are) physical, mental and social and contribute significantly to increased quality of life." He added that the growing sedentary lifestyle and the changing burden of disease, the large proportion of youth and the increasing longevity throughout the world "makes it necessary to identify health enhancing strategies that are safe, effective and low cost - such as increasing physical activity."

The Chair of the meeting, Dr. Ilkka Vuori, Director of the UKK Institute for health Promotion Research in Tampere Finland, stressed that the health gains through physical activity can be produced by activities that are "moderate in amount and intensity, simple to perform and carry minimal risks to health." He added that exercise for fitness and sport training may be an excellent means for the elite athlete to stay fit, but it is accompanied by the risk of injury; meanwhile a regular walk, traditional games or gentle exercise for someone who is not athletically inclined is the best way to retain a high degree of physical and mental health."

Dr Ilona Kickbusch, Director of the Health Promotion, Education and Communication Division of WHO, stressed that "Health-enhancing physical activity needs to be integrated into everyday life and should be promoted and organised in supportive environments, at school, in the workplace and in the community."

This is good news for those women who do not want to play sport, or find it difficult to do so, yet want to stay physically and mentally healthy and is consistent with research in women's sports magazines which indicates that women are generally less interested in competition and statistics but more interested in health issues, information on body shape and image, and the social and mental benefits of participation in sport and physical activity.

One challenge still to be overcome with respect to the health benefits of physical activity is the situation of many people in the developing world, the majority of whom are

women, who spend much of the day walking, often up to 20 kilometers, to secure enough timber or water to cook the food which will provide the energy to repeat this task the next day. One cannot say that such women do not participate in sufficient physical activity but it is certainly not exercise which is freely chosen or which delivers social or emotional benefits or adds to quality of life.

Other participants at the meeting included the International Olympic Committee, the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, the Institute of Sports Medicine in Sao Paulo, Brazil, the Centre of Disease Control, Atlanta USA, the centre for Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, NSW, Australia, the Health Education Authority of the United Kingdom, UNESCO and the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health. In addition to WSI other NGOs attending included the International Federation of Sports Medicine, the International Life Sciences Institute, the International Council for Sports science and Physical Education, Rotary International and the World Federation of Sporting Goods Industry.

It is expected that the first meeting of the International Consultative Group on Active Living is expected to take place in the autumn of 1997.

## **International Women's Sports Festival**

The first International Women's Sports Festival was held in Sydney, Australia during March-April of this year. Over 800 women participated in the event which was organized by WomenSport Australia. The Festival provided an opportunity for recreational athletes to compete alongside elite international athletes. Seminars and workshops provided an opportunity for women to gain experience in coaching, sports medicine, and decision making.

Sports included basketball, volleyball, softball, martial arts, surfing, soccer, and hockey. The Festival has created a great deal of interest in many countries and it is expected that even greater numbers of women will participate next year - combining sport with an opportunity to see how progress toward the 2000 Olympics is shaping up and a holiday in a country which has something to offer everyone. For further information contact Heather Reid, Executive Officer, WSA: Fax 61-6-257-1402 or write to 26 Brigalow St., O'Connor, ACT Australia or Libby Darlison, Executive Director, **WSI**: fax 61-47-87-6906 or e-mail at [wsidarli@pnc.com.au](mailto:wsidarli@pnc.com.au).

## **IOC Requests National Olympic Committees Establish Women's Commissions**

As part of its commitment to advance opportunities for women in the Olympic movement, the [International Olympic Committee](#) has written to all National Olympic

Committees (NOC) requesting that they establish Women's Commissions in order to assist the advancement of women into leadership positions.

Response from the NOCs has been very positive, especially from the NOCs in the developing world where women have traditionally been underrepresented in positions of leadership in sports organizations. Careful evaluation of this strategy to determine its effect will be required. However, it is an important first step in opening up greater opportunities for women.

## **IAAF to promote Fuller Participation By Women**

The International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) Development Sub Committee has prepared a series of strategies designed to promote women in all aspects of athletics. Many of the activities are associated with the Year of Women in Athletics in 1998. However, others are designed to have a long term impact and will be conducted over several years.

The Sub Commission's proposals which include World and Asian Conferences, regional development plans, information kits, publications, etc have yet to be assessed by the full Committee. Watch for an update in a future newsletter.

## **Brighton - Mark II**

The Brighton Conference on Women and Sport was held in 1994. Conference participants were leaders and decision makers in sport from many different countries, and the Conference ratified the [Brighton Declaration](#).

The Declaration set out the principles to which both governments and the non-government sector, including international sports organisations, should adhere in order to achieve gender equity in sport. It was agreed at Brighton I that a follow up conference would be held in 1998. This Conference would not only review and report on progress over the last four years but would set the stage for the path forward.

**Brighton Mark II** will be held in May 1998. Two main themes of the Conference are:

1. To continue to advance the momentum and the progress already achieved by the international women and sport movement in all its different aspects, but especially through the adoption of the Brighton Declaration by the international sporting community.
2. To reach out and both develop and strengthen reciprocal links between all those international, regional and national organisations, both government and non

government, which may have a contribution to make towards advancing opportunities for girls and women in sport and physical activity.

In keeping with these themes keynote speeches will address topics such as "Politics , Power and Struggle in Sport," "A Better Future for Women and for Sport - Defining the Rules," " The Role of Sport in the Global Development of Women," and "Reaching Out and Effecting Change." In keeping with the recognition that sharing best practice and the development of strong networks at all levels are essential to bring about effective change, there will be many opportunities for individuals and groups to meet both formally and informally in order to share experiences and to present new knowledge.

Watch for more information in a future **WSI** newsletter.



## **From Around the Globe**

### ***National Seminar on Women and Sport held in Portugal***

A National Seminar on Women and Sport attracted 300 participants to Lisbon, November 14-16, 1996, to discuss the role of women in Portuguese sport. Sessions and workshops were held on women's access to sport and physical activity, the consequences of activity for women, school sport, and the development of female sport.

Speakers included Jennifer Hargreaves (England), Milagros Garcia (Spain), Kari Fasting (Norway), Kristina Thuree (Sweden), and Sylvia Jan (France) who shared their experiences in their countries or organizations.

The Congress endorsed the Brighton Declaration, forwarded their conclusions to appropriate groups, and created the Portuguese Association on Women and Sport.

### ***National Plan for Women, Sport and Physical Activity in South Africa***

With the support of the Australian Government **WSI** has been assisting the South African Government develop a four year National Policy and Plan for Women in Sport. Both the Policy and the Plan have been designed to ensure a stronger voice and role for women in South African sport. They were developed after widespread consultation with the Department of Sport (DSR), the National Sports Council (NSC) and the National Olympic Committee of South Africa (NOCSA), as well as with sports federations at all levels, the departments of Health and Education, and individual women and men. South Africa is one of five countries on the short list to host the 2004 Olympic Games, so it is

important that all the necessary systems and strategies, including gender equity, are put in place well before the final decision is made in September of this year.

The Plan, which is the 'working end' of the National Policy, sets out short and long term goals, the achievement of which will promote gender inclusiveness and advance opportunities for girls and women not only as grass roots participants or as elite performers but in all other capacities in sport - especially in leadership positions. In addition to the National Plan and Policy, South African women have also developed a National Charter for Women in Sport built around the key principles of the Brighton Declaration and established a National Council The Council reports directly to the Federal Minister.. Members represent all key sports groups and representatives from Health and Education in order to maximize resources and strengthen networks.

The model developed in South African takes into account specific cultural and historical traditions and practices and has a particular emphasis on ensuring opportunities for those girls and women who have historically been most disadvantaged and who have least access to resources. There is already considerable interest in the South African model from other African countries in Zone Six (ie Southern Africa) who are keen to ensure better opportunities for women. For further information contact Libby Darlison, Executive Director, **WSI**: fax 61-47-87-6906 or e-mail at [wsidarli@pnc.com.au](mailto:wsidarli@pnc.com.au).