

FOCUS

WOMEN AND SPORT

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‘Together Stronger’: Women make new advances in Olympic arena

As the 5th World Conference on Women and Sport takes place in Los Angeles, it is worth considering women’s increasing prominence at an Olympic level – an advance that has been facilitated by the IOC’s continued drive for gender equality. The increase in women’s participation at the Olympic Games will be showcased at the London 2012 Olympic Games – the first in which women will compete in every sport on the Olympic programme, as women’s boxing makes its debut on the Olympic stage.

This important landmark highlights just how far female participation has come since 1900, when women first competed at the Games. Back then, only 22 women took part – out of a total of 997 athletes – and they competed in just five sports. Female participation has increased steadily since then, with women accounting for nearly 43 per cent of participants at the 2008 Games in Beijing, compared with 23 per cent at the 1984 Games in Los Angeles and just over 13 per cent at the 1964 Games in Tokyo.

The IOC’s commitment to gender equality extends well beyond the sporting arena, as it continues to support the promotion of women in sports administration positions.

The IOC is also working with partner organisations, including more than 20 United Nations agencies, to use sport as a tool to promote gender equality, which is one of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. Recent projects include the implementation of leadership courses for women on all continents.

While there is still work to be done, it is clear that progress is being made, as exemplified by Manisha Malhotra, the winner of the World Trophy of the IOC Women and Sport Awards. The 5th World Conference on Women and Sport will highlight the efforts being made to strengthen women’s representation both on the sports field and in leadership positions.

World Trophy – Ms Manisha Malhotra

An inspiration to many, Manisha Malhotra’s commitment to helping disadvantaged Indian girls progress through sport has earned her international acclaim. Following a professional tennis career that saw her compete in the 2000 Olympic Games, win mixed doubles silver at the 2002 Asian Games and five singles and seven doubles titles on the ITF Circuit, Ms Malhotra (pictured, right) sought to give something back to her country.



Ms Malhotra had always believed that Indian women had the talent to succeed in sport and that with the right kind of support they would excel. She started by helping women in archery, wrestling, boxing, badminton, athletics, squash and shooting and was soon travelling all over the country – visiting some of India’s most remote areas – in order to find talented individuals among the socio-economically deprived.

Passionate about empowering girls and young women through sport, she cared for many of the girls herself, inviting them into her own home and taking responsibility for their safety and well-being.

Determined to make a difference, Ms Malhotra also hired female sports coaches to train the athletes and encouraged women to enter the sports-related fields of physiotherapy, fitness and sports psychology. She also helped establish and run the Mittal Champions Trust, which promotes sport and its values and offers Indian athletes the opportunity to excel on the world stage.

As Chair of the Sports Committee of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India, Ms Malhotra has worked tirelessly to promote women leaders in all aspects of sport in the economic sector.



The IOC Women and Sport Awards

The IOC recognises and celebrates the efforts made by an individual or an organisation to promote gender equity through the IOC Women and Sport Awards. This year six awards (one world and five continental) are being given for outstanding achievements to encourage and strengthen the participation of women and girls at all levels in the sporting world.

The Continental Winners of the 2012 IOC Women and Sport Awards

Africa: Ms Peninnah Aligawesa Kabenge (Uganda)



Ms Kabenge has inspired and motivated both male and female administrators in her country. In 1988, she

became the first female technical employee of the Sports and Recreations department of the Makerere University – due to her contribution as a student sports leader in encouraging fellow female students to participate in sports. She rose to become head of the department, as well as the Secretary General of the Federation of Africa University Sports, and continued to advocate for equal opportunities for girls in sports and physical activities, something that is culturally not supported in most regions of Uganda. In addition, she has used her position as Secretary General to ensure that women and girls benefit from the various training opportunities on offer.



Americas: The Bradesco Sports and Education Programme and Centre (Brazil)

The Bradesco Sports and Education Programme Centre caters specifically to the educational needs of young girls and teenagers, aged from eight

to 18. It uses sport as a tool to teach the values of a healthy lifestyle and to prepare them to become conscientious citizens through its extensive “education through sport” programme. Each year around 2,000 girls receive free assistance from the Centre, with the majority of the beneficiaries coming from economically and socially marginalised families. In addition the Centre runs a sports development programme, which has produced some of Brazil’s best-performing athletes over the years.

Asia: Ms Zaiton Othman (Malaysia)



Ms Othman, the product of a traditionally conservative environment, overcame immense challenges to become an outstanding international athlete. A one-time heptathlon champion, she is now a professional coach and member of the Malaysian NOC’s Women and Sport Commission. As well as helping to organise events to promote the recognition of women in sport, Ms Othman also organises camps,

seminars and workshops for girls and adult athletes. She also established a department of athlete welfare in the Sports Council, which provides counselling for girls and trains women coaches. Among many other activities, she contributes to talent identification of girls all over the country and participates in radio and TV broadcasts to promote women in sports.

Europe: Ms Aikaterini Nafplioti-Panagopoulos (Greece)



When appointed by her country as an ambassador to the Council of Europe for sport, tolerance and fair play, Ms Nafplioti-Panagopoulos focused her energies on developing women’s participation in sports as athletes and administrators. As President of the Pan-Hellenic Women’s Sport Association, she has promoted equal participation in sports competition and administration and organised seminars and conferences to promote gender equality. Ms Nafplioti-Panagopoulos also helped establish a grant for young and promising female athletes

and initiated the Kallipateira Fair Play award for women athletes and for supportive mothers of Olympic athletes.

Oceania: Ms Roseline Blake B.E.M (Cook Islands)



Ms Blake has been involved in sport at all levels for nearly 40 years and, as Secretary General of the

Cook Islands NOC, has been a pioneer for women in sport in her country. She was the first woman to be elected as Secretary General of the Cook Islands NOC and was also the country’s first female chef de mission when she led the Cook Islands team to the 2000 Olympic Games. Ms Blake is also the founding member of the Polynesian Women in Sport Committee and an advocate for promoting women in sport development in the Pacific region. She has conducted successful women in sport leadership and management seminars in her country and has been rewarded several times for her devotion to sport and to the promotion of women in sport.

“As we inch closer to equality in participation on the world’s greatest sporting stage, we must redouble our efforts to encourage further involvement of women in decision-making bodies in sport. This remains a key mission of the IOC Women’s and Sport Commission.”

Anita DeFrantz, IOC member and Chair of the IOC Women and Sport Commission



“It is important that every opportunity is used to advance the cause of women in sport and I congratulate the deserving recipients of this year’s Women and Sport Awards for their exceptional efforts to increase the number of women taking part in sports at all levels, both on and off the field of play.”

Jacques Rogge, IOC President