



International
Olympic
Committee

The President

Opening Ceremony of the 141st IOC Session

Mumbai, 14 October 2023

It is a great honour to welcome you all to the 141st IOC Session in Mumbai. We are so pleased to be in India, a country on the rise in so many respects, including in Olympic sport.

Your presence here today, dear Prime Minister, is a testimony to this growing importance of Olympic sport in your wonderful country. This is why I am offering you a very warm welcome - thank you for gracing us with your presence.

India is an inspiring place to hold our IOC Session – a country that combines a splendid history and a dynamic present with a vigorous confidence in the future. Let me express our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to our gracious host, our dear colleague and friend Nita Ambani, for welcoming us so warmly in this truly impressive setting.

Already during our short time here, we could get a first impression of the excellent ways you, dear Nita, are promoting sport and athletes in India. What you have achieved in both business and sport is simply remarkable. Through your Reliance Foundation you are bringing the Olympic values to millions of students, giving them the opportunity to build their lives in and through sport. You are spreading the Olympic spirit across your vast country and in this way you are making the world a better place through sport.

Thank you, Nita.

Another illustration of the growing Olympic spirit is the outstanding performance of the Indian athletes at the Asian Games in Hangzhou. Congratulations to India on its record breaking medal haul – this is something that the entire Olympic community in India can be very proud of. In this respect, I would also like to congratulate the Olympic Council of

Asia, under the leadership of acting President Randhir Singh, and of course the Chinese hosts for the once more brilliant organisation of these Asian Games.

At this Session we will have a discussion which may give another boost to this growth here in India, when we speak about a certain sport, which I heard enjoys a certain level of popularity here: cricket.

Our thanks also go to the Indian Olympic Association and its President P.T. Usha, for the warm hospitality with which they have welcomed us. This IOC Session should give you at the IOA a timely impulse on your journey of change and reform of Indian sport in every respect.

India, with its dynamic and forward-looking young population, provides an appropriate setting for our IOC Session. Because we are here to chart the course for the future of our Olympic Movement. Therefore, I do not want to dwell too much on the past. Let us turn to the future.

“In this future, the Olympic Games will likely become more inclusive, featuring a broader range of sports and athletes, and promoting diversity and gender equality. The Olympic Movement may also adapt to changing societal values, addressing issues such as athlete mental health and social justice, and striving to be a force for positive change on a global scale. Ultimately, the future of the Olympic Games promises to be a compelling fusion of tradition and progress, maintaining its status as a unifying global event while adapting to the changing values and expectations of the modern world.”

This very convincing analysis was obviously written by someone very intelligent and visionary. So it cannot be me.

Who else do you think the author might be?

Sorry, for once, it is not Pierre de Coubertin.

What you just heard was generated by AI – Artificial Intelligence.

I am using this example to make it clear that our continued success depends on how we embrace the ever accelerating development of digital technology and in particular AI. This makes our Olympic Agenda 2020 imperative “change or be changed” even more urgent.

I am very grateful to you, Prime Minister, that we had the opportunity to exchange about this in an inspiring way just now.

Every challenge comes with opportunities and risks. We need to seize these opportunities and manage these risks. Allow me to give you some examples which I envision in this respect:

AI has the potential to revolutionise the training of the athletes. Training programmes for athletes will be developed by AI. This will offer the athletes an extremely individualised training plan, drawing on every intimate detail of the athletes’ physical and mental conditions, to optimize their performance. But what does this mean for the protection of all these intimate data? What will this mean for the role of the human coach?

AI has the potential to revolutionise judging and refereeing. In some sports, you can already see the beginning. For the football fans among us, I just say: “VAR”. For the tennis players: “Hawk-Eye”. What will AI mean for other sports, where until now human judgement is deciding over victory or defeat? Gymnastics, figure skating but also boxing come to my mind. And of course the most illustrious example of all: fencing. In all these and many other sports, the big question is: will AI replace or support the human referee?

AI has the potential to revolutionise the organisation of the Olympic Games. As we all know, the Olympic Games are the most complex event in the world. AI will help to reduce, streamline, and optimise the work of Organising Committees in all aspects of planning and running the Games – down to the smallest detail. Running the Olympic Village more efficiently, managing spectator-flows, transportation and venues... The list goes on. All of this will make the organisation extremely efficient. But do we really want to lose the human touch? Will this diminish the Olympic spirit? How can efficiency and the human spirit be reconciled?

AI has the potential to revolutionise sports broadcasting. The Olympic Games Paris 2024 will be the last Olympic Games of the pre-AI era. At the latest by the time of the Olympic Games Los Angeles 2028, you will need far fewer people to produce and broadcast much higher quality content. What will this mean for the broadcast centre of the Olympic Games? Will we still need one?

AI has the potential to revolutionise the spectator experience. Augmented and Virtual Reality are already changing now how fans consume sport. AI is going to accelerate and enhance this. The spectator experience will be dramatically more immersive and more customised to the individual. In the end, every spectator can be the director of their own viewing experience. Will spectators still look for the experience together in a stadium? Or will they prefer to enjoy it just by themselves at home? Will there still be the collective memory of the iconic sporting moments that live in the hearts of generations of sports fans, like us?

These are just a few features of this AI future. Over the past year, I have delved into the literature and asked experts to find out what opportunities AI will bring to sport. After reading countless articles and books, and speaking with some of the brightest minds, I can tell you, not one of them is at this moment thinking about the impact of AI on sport.

Here is our opportunity. If we are starting this discussion now, we can still contribute to shape this AI future for sport.

As we did with Olympic Agenda, we can change before we are being changed. If we do not address this issue now, then the purely technological and commercial interests will come over us like a tsunami.

To seize this opportunity it needs a change in mindset. The younger generation has a completely new way of thinking. They are living digital lives right now. We must not ignore their thinking if we do not want to jeopardize our own future. We must empower them to guide us with their young mindset. We have to be in the driver's seat. We have to devise a holistic analysis of the opportunities and risks of AI – and then take action immediately. I am happy to inform you that this work is already underway. If things go well, you may see some first consequences of this already in Paris. And we will learn about it tomorrow during our Session.

For the medium to long-term future, our newly established AI working group of experts will guide us. They have the task to prepare an extensive overview of the opportunities and risks of AI for the Olympic Movement – going far beyond what I have just tried to outline.

The imperative of our Olympic Agenda 2020 is “change or be changed”. Another important principle is: sport needs to go where the people are. This is true for both worlds – the real and the digital one. Today sport has to compete for the time and attention of young people. Therefore, we have to reach out to the youth where they are in this digital world. This is not just a technological imperative. This is also a demographic imperative.

The launch of the Olympic Channel in the framework of Olympic Agenda 2020, was our first step in this direction. This has proven to be very successful. Today we can be very

proud that our digital platform Olympics.com has seen hundreds of millions of unique users since the beginning of the IOC digital journey, with an all-time high of about 200 million unique users only during the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. Also on social media we have seen significant growth, with 110 million followers across our channels and a monthly average of half a billion social media engagements.

Industry leaders are noticing our progress. One example is that we were just now awarded with the YouTube Creator Award, joining the elite club of their most popular channels.

Another dimension of this digital revolution is esports. There are 3 billion people playing esports and gaming around the world. It is estimated that over 500 million of them are interested specifically in esports which includes virtual sports and sport simulations. What is even more relevant to us: a majority of them are under the age of 34.

This is why we took the strategic decision to engage with esports in a holistic way. We chose an approach that would allow us to be active in the esports space while staying true to our values that have guided us for over a century. With respect to esports, our values are and remain the red line that we will not cross. Our crystal-clear position is gaining more and more respect in the esports community. One of the leading publishers even adapted their popular game to conform fully with our Olympic values – so that players shot at targets, not at people.

Our first approach to this community was the organisation of the Esports Forum 2018 in Lausanne. Next, we set up an Esports Liaison Group to have a platform to engage with all the esports stakeholders. Following this, we developed the Olympic Virtual Series in 2021 – our first pilot venture in esports. Building on the learnings from this Olympic Virtual Series, we then launched the Olympic Esports Week in Singapore earlier this year.

In Singapore we saw proof that our holistic approach is working. We successfully brought together the Olympic and the esports communities. A highlight was the thrilling live finals, created in collaboration with IFs and publishers. Over 130 players from across the globe came together to compete in the Olympic spirit on the global stage, in 10 mixed-gender category events. Players were cheered on by a full house of fans, with all the action streamed online. Overall the Olympic Esports Series attracted over 500,000 unique participants. The Olympic Esports Series generated more than 6 million views of live action over all channels, with 75 per cent of views from people aged 13–34.

This was a promising start. But it is just that: a start. It is like in any sport: after the promising start, the real race still lies ahead.

To compete successfully in this race, I have asked our new IOC Esports Commission to study the creation of:

“Olympic Esports Games”.

AI and esports – these are our two opportunities. To seize these opportunities and to manage the risks, we need a new mindset. We need the mindset of the young people. We have to trust and to empower them, because the pace of change will be exponential.

It is “change or be changed” once again.

In all these changes, we have to be guided by our values as expressed in our Olympic Agenda 2020+5. Since its adoption in March 2021, it already had a significant impact on the IOC and the wider Olympic Movement. This is why a major focus of this Session will be a midway evaluation of what we have achieved so far – and we will look ahead at what still needs to be done.

In this respect, the Olympic Games Paris 2024 will be an excellent demonstration of the enduring relevance of our values in our times.

The athletes, the fans, the entire Olympic community – all of us are looking forward to Paris, which will truly be Olympic Games of a new era: younger, more inclusive, more urban, more sustainable. The first Olympic Games with full gender parity. The first Olympic Games inspired, planned and delivered in line with our Olympic Agenda reforms from start to finish.

We all feel great anticipation. Our expectations for these Olympic Games Paris 2024 are shared by billions of people around the globe. After the COVID pandemic, people are longing to come together again. They are longing to celebrate the Olympic spirit together again.

Our friends of the Paris 2024 Organising Committee are doing a fantastic job at bringing these first Olympic Games of a new era to life in all these dimensions.

The slogan “Games Wide Open” is about creating inclusive Olympic Games in all respects. Even spectators will have the opportunity to become participants. This is how we go to where the people are – now in the real world. Iconic monuments will be transformed into competition venues, bringing sport into the heart of the city. The public can take part in sports events, such as the “Marathon Pour Tous”, when 40,000 people will be able to run the same marathon route just hours before the Olympic athletes. Urban sports, like sport climbing, skateboarding or breaking, will feature prominently right in the city centre of Paris.

Already four years ago, Paris 2024 launched an ambitious programme introducing 30 minutes of daily exercise in primary schools throughout France. They are on track to reach more than four million children. With its “Terre de Jeux” initiative, Paris 2024 is promoting sport and physical activity in over 4,000 municipalities across France – again, taking sport to where the people are.

Another significant milestone will be: full gender parity at the Olympic Games for the first time in history. The IOC has allocated exactly 50 per cent of the quota places to female athletes and exactly 50 per cent to male athletes.

Paris 2024 is setting new standards also when it comes to organising more sustainable Games. Paris 2024 is aiming to reduce its emissions by 50 per cent compared to the average emissions of the previous Games. To achieve this, the Games will be powered by 100 per cent renewable energy. The Games will use 95 per cent existing or temporary venues. With these and other measures, Paris is very much on track to achieve this ambitious goal already six years ahead of the global 2030 target set by the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

In our Olympic Agenda 2020, we are speaking about the uniqueness and the magic of the Olympic Games. So I invite you to imagine for one moment the uniqueness and the magic of the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games Paris 2024. Imagine and dream with me about the spectacular sights, as the boats with the athletes float down the River Seine, past iconic landmarks – the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, the Louvre. Imagine and share the dreams of the athletes. Imagine their emotions, when hundreds of thousands of people are welcoming them to the Olympic Games, celebrating them from the river banks.

“Imagine all the people, living life in peace. You may say, I’m a dreamer. But I’m not the only one.” We all share this dream with the best athletes of the world coming to the Olympic Games Paris 2024.

There is not only an overwhelming response from all the athletes, but also from the public. This excitement is reflected in the ticket sales. The requests for tickets go far beyond the 7 million tickets that have already been sold. There is huge demand for the remaining 3 million tickets that are still to be released. People from 180 countries bought tickets so far, showing the global appeal of the Olympic Games.

The world's political leaders are also voicing their support for the Olympic Games and the values they stand for. The most recent example of this is the Declaration of the G20 Leaders at their Summit here in India. They said that they "look forward to the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2024 as a symbol of peace, dialogue amongst nations and inclusivity, with participation of all."

We are greatly encouraged by this commitment of the G20 Leaders – for the first time including the African Union – to the unifying peace mission of the Olympic Games. For this commitment, I would like to thank the host and chair of this G20 Summit, the Prime Minister of India, His Excellency Narendra Modi. We have a certain idea how difficult it is to reach a consensus in these divisive and confrontational times we are living in. Congratulations and thank you, Prime Minister Modi, for your leadership and your great support for the Olympic Games.

I would also like to thank the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, for his leadership and full commitment to the success of the Olympic Games Paris 2024, not only as a signatory of this G20 Declaration, but in particular for his confidence in the IOC to bring the entire world together in peaceful competition. In the same spirit, we know that we can count on our French friends, who will inspire us with their passion for sport.

This unifying mission also enjoys the support from the Non-Aligned Movement, which brings together 120 of the 193 UN Member States.

From so many conversations that I have with people and world leaders around the globe, I know how much they are longing for our unifying force in this highly divided and confrontational world. Our peace mission is more important than ever, with the far too many wars and conflicts that we are witnessing in our world today.

So let us all together make these Olympic Games Paris 2024 this symbol of peace, dialogue and hope for all humankind.

What better place than Paris to showcase Olympic Games of a new era.

Paris: the birthplace of our founder Pierre de Coubertin.

Paris: the City of Light.

Paris: the City of Love.

As Pierre de Coubertin, once said: “The Olympic Games are a pilgrimage to the past and an act of faith in the future.”

The Olympic Games Paris 2024 will be exactly this: a pilgrimage to our past in the hometown of our founder and a confident act of faith in our future.

In this spirit, we live our new Olympic motto: Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together.