



## **Power of Sport Summit 2009: Call to Action**

### **Introduction**

On June 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Sport in Society at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, hosted its second annual **Power of Sport Summit**, with the theme *Sport and Social Responsibility*. The event brought together academics, practitioners, administrators, and advocates for discussion, inspiration, and collaboration on the intersection between sport and social justice. With a focus this year on sport and social responsibility, the Summit challenged participants to define the role of athletes, coaches, corporations, and other relevant actors in using sports to better society. The event built upon the “scholar-educator-activist” framework adopted for the 2008 Summit, which involved using the passion and experiences of all attendees to facilitate learning and incite action.

Through interactive discussions, participants sought to both delineate the most pressing issues within the field of sport for social change and determine concrete ways of addressing them. As the outcome of these discussions, the following Call to Action was created through a collective effort. It offers an overview of topics and themes that emerged from the Summit, including general action steps. It also details priority areas regarding the following topics: Youth Development through Sport, the Role of Government in Sport for Social Change, Best Practices and Evaluation of Programs, Student Voice, and Research.

### **Action Steps**

We believe in the powerful ability of sport to change attitudes and lives, but we recognize the need to address those challenges that still remain for achieving equality and justice in sport. We call for greater diversity among coaches, athletic directors, sports writers, and other actors in the athletic workforce.

We acknowledge that sport and social responsibility have implications on both a personal and corporate level. We define the pillars of sport and social responsibility as consisting of labor relations, environmental management and sustainability, community relations, philanthropy, diversity, and corporate governance. We note the growth of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, but we call for greater research on the impact of CSR programs upon recipients and society at large. We believe that CSR programs must be initiated from the top-down, but also that the success of CSR programs depends upon the values of those people within corporations—that organizations be mission-driven and values-led.

We believe that sport can play a role in promoting social responsibility worldwide, through Sport for Development and Peace programs. We recognize that there are a variety of ways to design a program model, but that such a model should be created using a participatory approach. We encourage Sport for



Development and Peace programs to understand the local communities in which they plan to work. We further acknowledge the important role of coaches in instilling the highest values of sport in children.

We encourage companies to continue to look for innovative ways of operating corporate social responsibility programs, which we deem important to the lives of athletes, students, and communities at large. We believe that athletes and teams are inherently responsible for giving back to their fans. We recommend undertaking interdisciplinary studies to better understand issues related to marketing, health care, the environment, and economics, in order to create more meaningful CSR initiatives.

We recognize the ever-present barriers that women face in attempting to become coaches and athletes at the elite level—barriers that relate to finances, location, negative gender labels, gender stereotyping, family values, a lack of role models, and media bias. We call for expanded efforts to engage men in encouraging women to become elite coaches and athletes.

We recommend creating greater opportunities for athletes with disabilities, recognizing that inclusion is a human right. We encourage the use of innovation in designing technologies that will better assist those with disabilities. We stress the need to improve awareness of TBI/patient-centered care and address challenges of ignorance, fear, and hopelessness in order to improve health policies for both athletes and veterans.

We acknowledge the role that sport plays in both long and short term crises. When deciding whether or not to host sporting events in the aftermath of a crisis, we recommend considering that every community has different needs and that there can never be a perfect solution to the crisis. We encourage the use of sporting events to educate communities about crises occurring in another part of the country or world.

We recognize that instituting Youth Olympic Games (YOG) could educate the youth on the power of sport and promote Olympism among younger generations, but we caution against launching these games given the potential for exploitation of youth talent and the creation of unfriendly competition. We further note that bringing elite club leagues into urban areas could provide urban youth with safe places to play, but would also disrupt the “free play” already at work.

We acknowledge that sport is not currently being played in a post-racial society and that there continue to be severe stereotype threats within college sports. We speak out against the media’s depiction of the Africans as undeserving and savage within the “soccer slave trade,” in which African players are promised false opportunities abroad. We commend Major League Baseball for taking steps to inhibit the duplicitous efforts of certain scouts, who recruit players from such countries as the Dominican Republic to play professional baseball in America.

We believe that major sporting events can bring about social change by offering an opportunity to conduct fundraising activities and connect elite athletes to their communities. We encourage placing greater attention upon promoting student-athlete community service, and we recognize five important



components to such efforts: support for student-athletes from university staff, religious affiliation, funding, and ownership of service programs by the student-athletes, and evaluation and reflection.

We recommend that organizations involved in sport and health programs utilize an eight-step approach to analyze health policy and link it to health outcomes: 1) define the context, 2) state the problem, 3) search for evidence, 4) consider different policy options, 5) project the outcomes, 6) apply evaluative criteria, 7) weigh the outcomes, and 8) make the decision. We promote this eight-step process as a means through which organizations can find creative new ways of identifying project goals and solving problems.

We believe that sport and social responsibility can be defined in a number of ways. Alone and in combination, sport and social responsibility are evolving concepts and practices that inspire and motivate individuals and communities to act towards improving inclusiveness, human relations, and access to resources. The intersection of sport and social responsibility involves playing to unite societies and embrace humanity. Socially responsible athletes bring back lessons to their communities, acting as peace-makers and team-builders. Social responsibility starts with passion that is directed and educated about the needs of the community within which one is working, together with the will and the avenue to create the dynamic, beneficial impact on the community.

We recognize the world's efforts to use sports in mobilizing against South Africa's policy of apartheid in the 1960s as one of the most profound examples of the power of sport in bringing about social justice.

We celebrate the ideals of excellence, friendship, and respect promoted through the Olympic Movement, and we support the role of the Olympics in addressing social issues and human rights. We were proud to host a walk on June 19<sup>th</sup> for Olympic Day, the worldwide commemoration of the first International Olympic Committee meeting and the founding of the modern Olympic Games.

We believe that athletes can and should act in a socially responsible manner and that they possess the ability to influence policy. We encourage educating coaches and others at the "top" about the importance of community service activities for athletes. We also recommend that athletes gain a solid understanding of the communities in which they will be volunteering before they begin their work.

We recognize the importance of government involvement in sport for social change programs. We commend and endorse the efforts of foreign governments to integrate Sport for Development and Peace programs into their national policies. We encourage improving the intersection between the "sport" and "development" worlds, so that programs labeling themselves as "Sport for Development" go beyond simply establishing sporting activities and integrate development objectives into their missions.



### **Priority Areas**

We call for the modification of youth sports development programs to render them more inclusive, more facilitative of “play” among younger age groups, and more careful about introducing competition to children. We recognized the potential of alternative sports (skateboarding, snowboarding, BMX, etc.) to offer best practices, given their popularity among the new generation of youth. We urge launching a municipal pilot youth development program that would move away from the currently problematic youth sports development model, and we suggest educating parents, coaches, and administrators on the importance of revising the current program model. Finally, we recommend increasing the involvement of corporations and policy-makers to improve youth sports development programs.

We wish to commend President Obama for creating the Office of Olympic, Paralympic, and Youth Sport, and we will work to become more involved in the deliberations over the responsibilities of this office. We recommend expanding sporting opportunities and increasing support of grassroots sports programs for children with disabilities. We suggest re-evaluating the representation among minorities, women, and the persons with disabilities on the Olympic and Paralympic committees. We call for greater financial support of sport-related research and educational coaching opportunities. We recognize the necessity of collaborating with key sport organizations to promote the positive development of sport and physical activity on a governmental, non-governmental, and international level.

We acknowledge the need to disseminate best practices and improve program evaluation. We recommend designing evaluation tools that take into account the qualitative/subjective impact of programs upon participants, rather than solely the quantitative impact. In order to render qualitative data more acceptable to donors, we encourage educating donors so that they might better understand the intangible value of sport for social change programs. We propose establishing an evaluation team to assess quantitative and qualitative data of programs as a neutral third party. We further recommend building a website that would allow organizations to share lessons regarding their best practices and key learnings.

We believe that the sport for social change community would strongly benefit from the commitment and energy of students. We therefore support launching Students for Sport in Society, an initiative that would create student groups on college and high school campuses across the country. We recommend initially launching the student groups at Northeastern University. This would allow Sport in Society to develop a working model of the club, using the first group as a recruiting platform for other interested students and schools in the area while also attracting the interest of potential donors. We suggest addressing concerns of student group sustainability both by emphasizing collaboration between Sport in Society and the local student groups and by encouraging groups to train younger students in leadership positions. We believe that after launching the initiative at Northeastern, Sport in Society will be able to expand its student groups to other campuses at an appropriate pace.



We recognize the essential role of research as a platform for action and the basis for programs within the field of sport for social change. We recommend both improving the coordination among research initiatives and taking steps to seek out institutions that might be interested in conducting research around sport and social change. We acknowledge the opportunities and further potential of using Sport in Society as a research hub. We encourage using President Obama's newly created Office of Olympic, Paralympic, and Youth Sports to generate greater funding opportunities for research and to increase the legitimacy of research in the field of sport for social change. We finally suggest exploring ways of improving the awareness and use of research studies by media and policy organizations.

### **Conclusion**

We, the participants of the 2009 Power of Sport Summit, have learned from and been inspired by the experiences and insight offered by our colleagues. We have challenged each other to expand our views and to act as leaders in our work. Beyond learning, we have also gone further to both define our next steps and commit ourselves to taking action on these steps. We leave the Summit with a determination to carry through our commitments and thereby profoundly advance the sport and social change movement.