

AthletesForum

IOC President Thomas Bach answers the following question about athletes' representation:

Jenni Screen (Australia/ Basketball/ FIBA Athletes' Commission): In the landscape we have right now, there is not only athletes' commissions anymore, there is also players' unions as well, all doing what they think is right to their athletes, so my question is three parts:

What is the position of the IOC towards athletes' unions and independent athletes' commissions? Perhaps what are some recommendations to international federations, that are finding themselves in this situation? And thirdly - in that one part question - do you see the ability to both coexist and if so how?

Thomas Bach: "Let me, I have to give a personal experience. I was a member of the first IOC athletes' commission and I was the what you now would call the chair of the athletes' commission in Germany at the time, when we had to fight against a boycott of the Games by German athletes. And there - in both in this national athletes' commission and the international athletes' commission - what we were always fighting for... was to sit at the table. To sit at the table where the decisions are taken. Because we realized that otherwise we really cannot push your things through. I could give hundreds of interviews against the boycott, to no effect. We lost - we had the boycott. You could write letters; you always have to find somebody then in an executive board whom you can trust and say- why don't you push forward and so on. So what we were fighting for all the time was – to sit at the table and to make your voice heard there and then to have a vote, there! This from my personal experience is the most powerful way how you can represent athletes. And then - of course when you do this - you must have a legitimacy. You cannot just go there and say 'I am talking in behalf of the athletes'. You have to be accountable also to somebody. That means you have to be elected. And then if you have this support from the athletes through an election, then you have a very powerful position in this executive board. Because then you can really speak on behalf of the athletes. It does not mean that always your position is being shared by 100% of the athletes, but you have the task and the legitimacy by the election – there - to present the opinion to present then majority opinion and then you are accountable for it, when it comes to re-election or when it comes to next general assembly of the athletes or within your athletes' commission. There - This gives power. This gives opportunities.

So on the other hand this does not exclude that you consult. Of course you would consult and listen to athletes who are not of your opinion – be it with regard to a subject – be it with regard to the organization of athletes' representation. You should always listen, you should always be inclusive, but at the same time you should also have confidence in your position, because you are elected and it gives you legitimacy, and because this gives you legitimacy, because this gives you support of your fellow athletes. So - to try to sum it up- the most powerful and most effective representation – I think we as – I still say we – it is some time ago - as athlete you can have is to sit there where the music plays. And there to have a voice and to have a vote. And then when it comes to cast this vote in difficult subjects then of course- there I think that is normal- democratic procedure there you consult with as many as possible and then you form your opinion within your athletes' commission and then you go to the board and then you can rightly say – here we are- this is the athletes' opinion and this is what we are going for."

