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### Democratization and governance in international sport: addressing issues with athlete involvement in organizational policy

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## **Democratization and governance in international sport: addressing issues with athlete involvement in organizational policy**

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Leaders of national and international sport organizations are increasingly recognising the importance of involving stakeholders in the development of policies. In the governance of international high performance sport, an important group of stakeholders includes athletes. The purpose of this paper is to highlight and discuss the increasing role high performance athletes are playing in the development of policies in international sport organizations.<sup>1</sup> We examine how representation and deliberative participation in policy-making allow high performance athletes to not only be represented at policy meetings, but also be involved in the formation of policies that affect them. To showcase athletes' representation and participation in sport policy, a number of international sport examples are presented (i.e. winter and summer Olympic international sport federations as well as the International Olympic Committee, the International Paralympic Committee, and the World Anti-Doping Agency). Several organizations have incorporated more athlete-centred practices that have allowed for greater involvement from athletes. In investigating these cases, we discuss and critique issues, and provide practical recommendations surrounding athlete representation and participation in deliberations and their impact on the policy and decision-making processes of their international sport federation.

**Keywords:** athlete-centred; decision making; deliberative democracy; international sport federations; policy making; representation

Un creciente número de organizaciones deportivas nacionales e internacionales está aceptando la importancia de dar voz a todos los estamentos del deporte en los procesos internos de toma de decisiones. En las estructuras de gobierno del deporte de élite uno de los estamentos más importantes deberían ser los deportistas. El objetivo de este artículo es analizar y valorar el papel, cada vez más importante, que los deportistas de élite juegan en la toma de decisiones de las organizaciones deportivas internacionales. El artículo analiza la manera en que diversas estructuras de representación y participación en los debates y la toma de decisiones permite a los deportistas no sólo sentirse representados, sino también ser partícipes de las políticas de la organización. El estudio presenta ejemplos de varias organizaciones deportivas (p. ej. Federaciones olímpicas de invierno y verano, el Comité Olímpico Internacional, el Comité Paralímpico Internacional y la Agencia Mundial Anti Dopaje). Varias organizaciones deportivas han conseguido una mayor participación de los deportistas mediante la puesta en marcha de políticas y estructuras que tienen en cuenta sus necesidades y su realidad. Mediante nuestro análisis crítico de estas estructuras el artículo ofrece recomendaciones para mejorar la representación y la participación de los deportistas en la toma de decisiones de las federaciones deportivas internacionales.

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**Palabras clave:** Federaciones deportivas internacionales; democracia participative; toma de decisiones; representación; diseño de políticas; deportista

國內與國際運動組織的領導人漸漸意識到，讓利益相關人士(stakeholders)參與政策發展過程的重要性；而參與國際高競技運動(high performance sport)治理的利益相關人士中也包括了運動員。本文旨在突顯並討論高競技運動員在國際運動組織的政策發展上，所逐漸扮演的重要角色。我們檢視高競技運動員是如何透過出席各種委員會及審慎參與政策制定等方式，使自己能發揮影響力，以參與制定影響他們自己的政策。為了展示運動員在運動政策上的代表權和參與情況，本文呈現了一些國際運動的案例(例如，冬季與夏季奧運國際運動總會、國際奧林匹克委員會、國際帕拉林匹克委員會，以及世界反運動禁藥組織)。許多組織都新納入以運動員為中心的業務，使他們能有更多的參與機會。在研究這些案例時，我們討論並且評論重要議題，同時在以下這些方面提出實用的建議：運動員在各委員會的代表權和參與權，以及他們在國際運動總會之政策制定與決策過程中的影響力。

關鍵字：國際運動總會；以運動員為中心；審慎的民主制；政策制定；決策；代表權

国内、国際スポーツ機関のリーダーたちは、様々な方針を展開させるためにステークホルダーが関わることの重要性についてこれまで以上の認識を示し始めている。国際的な競技スポーツのガバナンスにおいては、ステークホルダーの中でも重要なのはアスリートである。国際スポーツ機関の政策展開にハイパフォーマンス アスリートが担うより多くの役割に焦点を当て、検証をすることが本稿の目的である。政策決定に代表として出席の仕方、討議への参加の在り方次第で、ハイパフォーマンス アスリートがただ単に代表として政策会議に出席するだけでなく、アスリート自身に影響が出てくる政策形成に対していかに関わることを検証する。スポーツの政策にアスリートが代表し参画していることを示すため、いくつかの国際スポーツ組織(冬季、夏季オリンピックスポーツの国際スポーツ競技連盟、国際オリンピック委員会、国際パラリンピック委員会、世界アンチドーピング機構)の事例を取り上げる。組織の中にはアスリートの関わりが大きくなるよう、アスリート中心主義を取り入れている。これらの事例を検証するに当たり、課題について議論し批判をした上で、アスリートが代表となり討議へ参加すること、また国際スポーツ組織の政策意思決定プロセスへの影響に関する実践的な提言を行う。

キーワード 国際競技連盟；アスリート中心主義；討議民主主義；政策決定；代表

## Introduction

In many parts of the world, there is growing demand for participation in public (and organizational) policy decisions (Alford and Friedland 1975, Schwochau *et al.* 1997, Jarley *et al.* 2000, John 2009, Newig and Fritsch 2009). As Katwala (2000, p. 7) argued, 'the shape of global governance and power is changing – increasingly educated, assertive and networked citizens expect to have a say on issues which they care about'. In the context of international sport federations (IFs), there have been calls for more sport governance research as a result of 'concerns about the management of amateur sports organizations' (Hindley 2007, p. 2) and the need for 'a systematic approach to sport governance' (Forster 2006, p. 72).

Hindley (2007) suggested that the ways in which international sport is governed and the highly publicized failures of the governance of international sport organizations (e.g. corruption in the International Olympic Committee's [IOC] bidding process at the Salt Lake City Olympic Winter Games, rules and norms governing drug use in the International Association of Athletics Federations, and the financial irregularities involving the President of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association) have, however,

brought the issue of stakeholder representation and accountability of sport officials into critical focus (see also Jennings and Sambrook 2000, Sugden and Tomlinson 2005, Mason *et al.* 2006). A history of stakeholder distrust of sport leaders exists wherein many elite athletes feel that their priorities and values are not being represented in key policy decisions (Katwala 2000, Hindley 2007). Hindley (2007, p. 2) questioned stakeholders' involvement in the governance of organizations explaining that 'within international sports federations (IFs) and national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) the notion of stakeholding has raised a number of pertinent questions concerning how the interests of groups such as athletes, volunteers and supporters are articulated'. Furthermore, Hindley (2007, p. 8) called for the need to 'evaluat[e] mechanisms for stakeholder participation – for example, coach/athlete associations, supporter groups – how are their views represented?' Along similar lines, Katwala (2000, p. 2) contended that efforts to reform governance will require inclusiveness where sport's key stakeholders maintain a central role in 'the decision-making processes, seeking to reconcile their vital interests on the basis of the values of sport as a whole'. He further questioned 'how the business of sport can be governed effectively and accountably, how all those involved in sport can have a stake in the decisions that affect them, and how these objectives can be achieved in a market economy and increasingly democratic global society' (Katwala 2000, p. 7).

In recent years, an important group of stakeholders in sport – high performance athletes – have started to play an increasing role in the development of sport policies and decisions affecting them.<sup>2</sup> For example, research on Canada's sport system outlines the efforts that sport organizations have undertaken to become more inclusive and to involve athletes to a greater extent in their organization's policy and decision making (cf. Thibault and Babiak 2005, Jackson and Ritchie 2007, Kihl *et al.* 2007). In the context of international sport organizations, there is also evidence that athletes' involvement in the policy-making process is increasingly being considered in the management and operations of these organizations (cf. Forster and Pope 2004, Forster 2006, Mason *et al.* 2006). This outcome was briefly discussed in Mason *et al.*'s (2006) research on corruption within the IOC. As the IOC was attempting to redress some questionable organizational practices in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it chose to become more athlete-centred by providing greater representation of athletes on its Athletes' Council and increased athlete input and participation in its decision-making processes (i.e. in the evaluation process of the bid cities). Houlihan (2004, p. 421–422), however, has argued from a different perspective that:

... sport policy is generally made for, or on behalf of, athletes, rarely in consultation with athletes, and almost never in partnership with athletes ... The few governing bodies of sport that do provide a voice for athletes do so either through limited membership of the body's decision-making forum or through the formation of an 'athletes committee/commission' linked to the main forum, but safely quarantined from any significant decision-making opportunities.

He further criticized the IOC's Athletes' Commission as being micro-managed and the representation of athletes as being a tokenistic one. Along similar lines, Jackson and Ritchie (2007, p. 407) determined that 'despite claims by policymakers and other stakeholders within the sport system that athlete-centeredness should be a central priority, athletes have not been significantly involved in decision-making processes with respect to a policy [on anti-doping] that significantly affects their working lives'. These arguments notwithstanding, in this paper we suggest that the presence of athletes around the decision-making table indicates that they are having a growing influence on policy making and that representation

is a necessary first step to more involved decision making and voting rights. Finally, in this paper, we argue that this phenomenon of athlete involvement in decision making has been shifting at the international level and between governing bodies in recent years.

Enhancing public participation can improve the quality and legitimacy of decisions in government, and other public bodies (Barnes *et al.* 2003). Although sport organizations are not public organizations (they operate in the non-profit sector), the principle of public participation can be applied where the 'public' refers to stakeholders who have interests in the activities of the organization. Athletes are an important stakeholder group for sport organizations and, as such, their participation in the policy-making and/or decision making process can enhance the quality of these policies and/or decisions. In fact, providing athlete representation and inclusion in sport organizations' deliberative practices should ensure that high performance athletes' needs are positioned at the focal point of agenda setting, as well as being included in discussions about decisions and policies that most affect them. While many sport organizations have definitely afforded opportunities for athletes to have increased representation and a seat at the decision-making table, a number of questions remain. For example, what processes are undertaken for the selection of representatives? How can sport organizations ensure that minority voices are not marginalized and their needs are met? To what extent are athlete voices evident in the decision-making process within international sport organizations?

Kihl *et al.* (2007) noted the importance of examining sport policy through the lens of deliberative democracy and particularly its use in analysing athlete-centredness within the policy process. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to highlight the increasing deliberative role athletes are now playing in the development of policies in international sport organizations. In particular, using deliberative democratic theory and the principle of representation and participation, we aim to demonstrate that high performance athletes are not only represented at policy meetings, they are also becoming engaged as participants in the formation of policies that affect them. Through the use of various case studies, issues surrounding athlete representation and deliberative practices are discussed and critiqued. Before we present the evidence of athlete involvement in policy making in sport organizations, however, we review the concept of deliberative democracy and one of its key principles – representation – to help understand the issues.

### ***Deliberative democracy***

The word 'democracy' is derived from two Greek words: *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). Heater (2004, p. 22) explained the foundational logic of democracy by writing 'good government is based on the will of the people, that ultimate political power should lie with the people as a whole'. Traditionally, democracy was used 'to describe such a system of representative government' (Hindess 2000, p. 34). According to Hindess (2000, p. 34), however, we are now faced with two opposing views of democracy: (1) 'open public debate and the direct participation [or through representatives] of the people themselves in governmental decision-making'; and (2) 'the separation of the people from their government with a necessary minimum of popular participation'. For the purposes of this paper, we adhere to the first view of democracy – 'open public debate and the direct participation of the people themselves in decision-making' or, in other words, deliberative democracy. This direct participation may take many forms; for example, face to face discussions, or electronic or online communication. A focus on deliberation, therefore, 'allows us to perceive participation and representation not as two alternative forms of democracy but as related forms constituting the continuum of political action in modern democracies' (Urbinati 2000, p. 759).

Fundamentally, deliberative democracy is a process that requires the justification of decisions made by citizens, their representatives, and/or the state (Gutmann and Thompson 2004). We draw from Gutmann and Thompson (2004, p. 7) and define deliberative democracy as:

... a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future.

Collective decision making should therefore include all those affected by a decision and/or their representatives.

Participation in this deliberative process promotes rational collective decision making where decisions are based on inclusive and fair deliberations that take place among free and equal citizens (Benhabib 1996, Habermas 1996, Dryzek 2000, Gutmann and Thompson 2004). Habermas' (1995, p. 117) notion of discourse ethics encompasses this rational decision-making process which is defined as:

... a joint process of ideal role taking ... Under the presupposition of an inclusive and non-coercive rational discourse among free and equal participants—everyone is required to take the perspective of everyone else where the common values and interests of all the relevant stakeholders are uncovered.

Citizen deliberations follow a process of 'thoughtful interaction and opinion-formation' (Habermas 1996, p. ix) where individuals rely on reasoned argumentation. Alternatives are weighed and decisions are rationally justified to become more informed regarding a group's/individual's general interests and policy justifications. Individuals engaged in deliberations are obliged to provide a sound rationale for their decisions. Gutmann and Thompson (2004, p. 133) argued that 'citizens owe one another justifications for the institutions, laws, and public policies that collectively bind them'. Justification entails mutual reason-giving, that is, reasons reciprocally accepted as 'good' reasons should be recognized by all deliberators in quest of an agreement.

Citizen participation enhances the legitimacy of government decisions as public policies are designed based on a variety of participants' viewpoints, which reflect their values, interests, and experiences. Policy decisions therefore require that representatives are provided a place and opportunity to actively discuss issues and become informed of the better argument (Habermas 1996). Decisions are based on the assumption that policy issues are open to ongoing discussions if questions arise during policy implementation and/or evaluation.

### ***Representation***

In determining legitimate representation and deciding who is most affected by a policy decision, a problem of scale arises as it is often unfeasible for everyone to be included in policy discussions (Habermas 1996, Gutmann and Thompson 2004, Parkinson 2006). Representatives are therefore selected to speak on behalf of citizens unable to be involved in the deliberative process. Who is represented, what process is used to determine selection, and what stakeholders are represented will vary according to the purpose of the deliberative body (Catt and Murphy 2003, Parkinson 2006). Parkinson (2006, p. 35) stated that 'the memberships that individuals consider relevant, the representatives' roles vis-à-vis their principals, the selection process, and the issue of proportionality all depend on the topic at hand and the aims of the representative body'.

Legitimate representation also requires that representatives are both authorized by, and accountable to, their stakeholders. As Gutmann and Thompson (2004, p. 30) explained:

. . . citizens [in our case, high performance athletes] rely on their representatives to do their deliberating for them, but representatives are expected not only to deliberate among themselves but also to listen to and communicate with their constituents, who in turn should have many opportunities to hold them accountable. The advantage of this approach is that the deliberation by leaders who have been tested by experience . . . is likely to be more informed, effective, and relevant. The disadvantage is that most citizens become mere spectators . . . Moreover, and perhaps most critically, representative democracy places a very high premium on citizens holding their representatives accountable. To the extent that they fail to do so, or are prevented from doing so, their representatives may fail to act responsibly, or even honestly.

In general, three types of representation exist: (1) an agent who acts on behalf of his [her] principal (i.e. principal-agent model); (2) a person who shares some of the characteristics of a class of persons (descriptive representation); and (3) a person who symbolizes the qualities or identity of a class of persons (symbolic representation) (Birch 1971, Pitkin 1972).

First, principal-agent models are typically used in the context of decision-making deliberative processes, where delegates are selected through voting (Pitkin 1972, Parkinson 2006). Parkinson (2006) contended that the principal-agent bond requires back-and-forth discussions between the principal and their agent(s). Young (2000, p. 128) considered this representation as a relationship where she argued that ‘we should evaluate the process of representation according to the character of the relationship between the representative and the constituents’ and the failure of representative systems can be attributed to the lack of connection between representatives and their agents. The relationships between athletes and their agents are critical for holding them accountable for their decision making. The principal-agent model also includes selected representation where delegates are appointed from deliberative authorities. Selected representation is generally used for information gathering and not decision making. Legitimacy issues are created due to concerns relating to accountability and hierarchical power. Appointed representatives are not accountable to citizens but to the authorities who appointed them.

Second, descriptive representation is typically used to select an individual who embodies some important characteristic of the citizens he or she represents (Parkinson 2006). For example, a female athlete would represent other female athletes and a Paralympian would represent other Paralympians. Phillips (1995) maintained that descriptive representation is critical because these individuals signify identities that are politically and normatively important.

Finally, symbolic representation entails a person who embodies the characteristics of a group of people, such as Australian Aboriginal Olympic athlete Kathy Freeman, signifies hope, national identity and citizenship (Rowe 1995). Parkinson (2006, p. 30) argued that ‘such symbols can be extremely important for legitimation because people feel they have had an impact on a decision . . . if they see the symbols they identify with having impact’. While descriptive and symbolic representation are important representative types, they are limited in making substantive and procedural legitimacy claims because they lack principal-agent ties of accountability (Parkinson 2006).

In addition, representation is a system where voting and bargaining are used to determine how citizen (athlete) interests will be heard. There is no doubt that athlete representation on committees provides a platform for athletes to participate in decisions, actions and policies. It often depends, however, on their capacity for coalition-building, bargaining and influence, a process in which athletes can rarely afford to engage (particularly in terms of time given

their onerous training and competition schedules). According to Habermas (1996), bargaining typically involves compromises, threats, promises and compromises. This is particularly problematic when such powers are not equally distributed (Habermas 1996). We need to consider the extent to which the voice of athletes is heard. We also need to consider to what extent deliberations that frame policy are characterized through a process that ensures athlete participation in policy development, implementation and evaluation. Such an approach is based on principles of strengthening civil society through citizen engagement and giving those previously excluded a voice (Putnam 2000, Dyreson 2001, Marinetto 2003, Clarke 2005, Llewellyn 2005). Citizen engagement, however, requires the education of all citizens by providing the necessary information so that they understand issues and are able to participate in deliberations on key policy issues and is characterized by ongoing discussions throughout the policy process (Phillips and Orsini 2002, Delli Carpini *et al.* 2004, Gutmann and Thompson 2004, Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005).

The concepts of deliberative democracy and representation have been applied to the context of governance at the level of nations, government, and political systems. If we were to transpose these concepts to the governance of non-profit organizations instead (e.g. IFs), we believe we could better appreciate recent changes in sport organizations where high performance athletes have started to serve (or are currently serving) more prominent roles in the governance of their organizations particularly on organizational issues that affect them directly.

The issue of governance in organizations has been gaining increasing popularity in recent years (cf. Guo and Musso 2007, Parker 2007, Stone and Ostrower 2007, McIntyre Hall and Suess Kennedy 2008). Governance is defined as 'the way in which power is exercised: who has influence, who decides, and how decision-makers are held accountable' (Plumptre and Graham 2000, p. 3). The relationship between deliberative democracy, representation, and governance has been drawn in the organizational literature. Several authors have used these concepts to study relationships between organizations and governments (Rothschild and Whitt 1986, Harley *et al.* 2005, Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006). As Mansfield and Pevehouse (2006, p. 137) noted, 'international organizations have become increasingly pervasive features of the global landscape' and some of these organizations play a role in the collaboration between various countries.

### ***Democratizing sport***

Increasing democratization of sport organizations involves the voices and concerns of all organizational actors including athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, managers, other IFs and other internal stakeholders. This democratization also includes actors who may have been considered until recently stakeholders in the external environment (e.g. media/broadcasters, sponsors and governments of various countries). For athletes, in particular, a number of issues relating to their performance are pertinent and merit their input. These issues may be related to team selection, resource allocation, programming priorities, competition schedules, training conditions and expectations, judging concerns, athlete funding, having an athlete representative at the level of the executive committee and/or board of directors, and/or penalties for doping infractions. As noted by leaders of the national organization for athletes by athletes in Canada, AthletesCAN, 'athletes need to be part of the development of these policies and practices, as well as the decision-making bodies that ratify or approve them' (AthletesCAN 2004, p. 17). Athlete representation is therefore critical to ensuring that their interests are considered in organizational decision making.



In order to investigate the increasing democratization of sport at the international level, we review the establishment of athletes' commissions/committees at all of the IOC-recognized IFs. We then discuss three cases in-depth which we feel effectively highlight this trend. In the next section, we describe the methods we followed in order to collect data on the existence of athletes' commissions/committees within winter and summer IFs.

## Methods

In order to uncover which IFs had and which ones did not have athletes' commissions/committees, we initially reviewed the websites of all IFs. For the most part, we were able to easily identify IFs with athletes' commissions/committees as the information was typically included in the governance and structure of the organizations on their websites. Several organizational documents were also available online such as constitutions and by-laws, organizational charts, and committee structure and these assisted us in determining important elements of IFs' athletes' commissions/committees (e.g. composition of the commission/committee, selection of individuals serving on the commission/committee, link of commission/committee to the structure of IFs). In addition to our consultation of websites, we personally contacted members (volunteer executives or paid staff) of these organizations via electronic mail to determine, or clarify, the role athletes play in policy and governance discussions. In cases where contact information was available on the IFs' websites for the chair of the athletes' commissions/committees in winter and summer IFs, they were contacted via electronic mail and asked to answer the following questions: When (i.e. year) was the commission/committee created? How are members selected (i.e. elected or appointed by whom?) and who are these members (i.e. role: current/retired athletes or non-athletes)? How long is their term (number of years) on this commission/committee?

In cases where information about the chairs of athletes' commissions/committees was unavailable on the website, a member of paid staff was contacted. When no mention of athletes' commission/committee was made on the website, we also contacted a member of paid staff via electronic mail and they were asked if such a commission/committee existed for their IF. In total, 33 electronic mails were sent (7 winter IFs; 26 summer IFs). Out of 33 IFs, responses were received from individuals (volunteer executives or paid staff) from 19 IFs (58%), while individuals from 14 IFs (42%) did not respond. On the topic of this research and data collection process, it is important to note that these represent a first step in research on athlete involvement in the governance of IFs. Data were collated and are presented in Tables 1 and 2

## Results and discussion

Table 1 demonstrates the existence of athletes' commissions among the seven international winter sport federations, how athletes are selected on these commissions, and additional information related to the IFs' athletes' commissions. Table 2 provides similar information for the 26 international summer sport federations.<sup>3</sup>

Out of these 33 IFs, 24 (73%) have athletes' commissions/committees. A total of four winter and five summer IFs did not have athletes' commissions/committees as part of their governance structure. For the IFs where data were available ( $n = 17$ ), the average year of the creation of these commissions/committees is 2000 (range 1989–2010). Of the 24 IFs with athletes' commissions/committees, most ( $n = 17$ ; 71%) have, as part of their composition, athletes and/or recently retired athletes as members. Furthermore, the athletes serving on these commissions or committees are, for a majority of IFs ( $n = 13$ ; 54%), elected by their

Table 1. Athlete representation in international winter sport federations.

International Federations Winter Sports	Athlete Commission	Notes
International Biathlon Union www.biathlonworld.com	Yes	Athletes' Committee was established in 1993. It is composed of four athletes (two male and two female athletes) who are appointed by members of the Executive Board based on a proposal from the athletes (athletes vote for the athletes who will represent them). Athletes are chosen for a four-year term.
International Bobsleigh and Tobogganing Federation www.fibt.com	Yes	Athletes Advisory Committee is composed of three athletes (one elected by bobsleigh athletes; one elected by skeleton athletes; and one appointed by the Executive Board). Athletes who are elected by athletes serve a four-year term. Members may be invited to attend Executive Committee meetings to discuss certain related matters.
World Curling Federation www.worldcurling.com	No	There is no Athletes' Commission – however, there are opportunities for current and retired athletes to be involved in the governance of the WCF.
International Ice Hockey Federation www.iihf.com	No	
Fédération Internationale de Luge de Course www.fil-luge.org	No	There is no Athletes' Commission but athletes are represented on the Sport Commission and the Technical Commission – two key commissions of the organization. Athletes are also consulted if necessary by members of the Congress and members of the Executive Board.
International Skating Union www.isu.org	No	Athletes (or recently retired athletes) are represented (appointed and/or elected) on the Technical Committees of the organization.
Fédération Internationale de Ski www.fis-ski.com	Yes	Athletes' Commission was created in 1996. It is composed of 12 athletes (two male and two female alpine athletes; one male and one female cross country athlete; one ski jumper; one nordic combined athlete; one male and one female freestyle athlete; one male and one female snowboard athlete). Athletes are elected by athletes for a four-year term.

Note: Information used for this table originated from the websites of the winter sport federations. In some cases, the information was obtained via email communication with executive members or staff of the IFs. These organizations manage the sports/disciplines included in the Olympic Winter Games programme. Please note that we have retained the names (and spelling) of the committees focused on athletes' interests as they are used by each individual IF.

peers. A total of nine IFs (37%) did not disclose if athletes (current or recently retired) are elected by their peers and two IFs (8%) appoint the athletes who serve on the athletes' commission/committee. Representation by sport disciplines, by gender and by different regions in the world are important elements in the composition of these athletes' commissions or committees. The length of term on the commission or committee is typically four years, which corresponds to the Olympic and Paralympic cycle. From some IFs, it is clear that the IOC's Athletes' Commission has guided the development of their athletes' commissions or committees.<sup>4</sup> The IOC's direction to sport organizations to create athletes' commissions as part of their governance may have influenced some IFs to establish commissions to represent the interests and concerns of athletes. For example, in an organizational document

Table 2. Athlete representation in international summer sport federations.

International Federations	Summer Sports	Athlete Commission	Notes
International Archery Federation <a href="http://www.archery.org">www.archery.org</a>		Yes	The Athletes' Committee is composed of five athletes. Four are elected at the World Outdoor Target Championships from the different disciplines (men recurve; women recurve; men compound; and women compound). One athlete is elected at the World Field Championships. All five athletes serve a four-year term.
International Association of Athletics Federation <a href="http://www.iaaf.org">http://www.iaaf.org</a>		Yes	The Athletes' Commission was created in 1989. The commission is composed of 19 members who serve a four-year term. Of these members, seven are appointed by the IAAF Council, and 12 members are athletes elected by their peers.
Badminton World Federation <a href="http://www.internationalbadminton.org/">http://www.internationalbadminton.org/</a>		Yes	The Athletes Commission was created in 2009. It is composed of five members. Three of these members are elected by an athlete's organization that is recognized by Council and two members are elected by athletes attending Olympic Games. The Chair of the Athletes' Commission serves on the Council. From 1978 until 2008, an organization called Badminton Players Federation served the athletes but had limited impact on the operations of the BWF.
Fédération Internationale de Basketball <a href="http://www.fiba.com">www.fiba.com</a>		No	
International Boxing Association <a href="http://www.aiba.org">http://www.aiba.org</a>		Yes	The Athletes' Commission was created in 2010 and is composed of seven athletes. No details were provided about their selection/election.
International Canoe Federation <a href="http://www.canoeicf.com">www.canoeicf.com</a>		Yes	The Athletes' Committee was created in 2005. It is composed of six members (all retired athletes) from different disciplines (two from slalom; two from flatwater; and two from non-Olympic disciplines). Since 2007, members (slalom and flatwater) of the committee are elected by athletes. The two members from the non-Olympic discipline are appointed by the Board of Directors. All members serve a four-year term. The committee has one vote on the organization's Board of Directors.
Union Cycliste Internationale <a href="http://www.uci.ch">www.uci.ch</a>		No	
Fédération Équestre Internationale <a href="http://www.fei.org/">http://www.fei.org/</a>		Yes	The Athletes Committee was created in 2007. The committee is composed of nine athletes representing different disciplines (para-equestrian; eventing; vaulting; driving; reining; jumping; endurance; and dressage). Members serve a four-year term.
Fédération Internationale d'Esgrime <a href="http://www.fie.ch/">http://www.fie.ch/</a>		Yes	The Athletes Commission was created in 2006. It is composed of 12 athletes who are elected by their peers. Disciplines (two each from sabre féminin, sabre masculin, fleuret féminin, fleuret masculin, épée féminine, épée masculine) and all zones (Europe, America, Africa and Asia, and Oceania) are represented.
Fédération Internationale de Football Association <a href="http://www.fifa.com/">http://www.fifa.com/</a>		No	

Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique <a href="http://www.fig-gymnastics.com/">http://www.fig-gymnastics.com/</a>	Yes	The Athletes Commission was created in 2000. It is composed of six athletes representing different disciplines (trampoline gymnastics; rhythmic gymnastics; aerobic gymnastics; acrobatic gymnastics; men's artistic gymnastics; women's artistic gymnastics). Gymnasts of each discipline elect a current athlete (or recently retired athlete). Athletes serve a four-year term. The president of the Athletes Commission serves on the Executive Committee without voting privileges. The president also serves on the Council with voting privilege.
International Handball Federation <a href="http://www.ihf.info/">http://www.ihf.info/</a>	Yes	The Athletes Commission was created in 2005. It is composed of 10 athletes (five men, five women).
International Hockey Federation <a href="http://www.fihockey.org/">http://www.fihockey.org/</a>	Yes	The Athletes Committee is composed of eight members. One of these members (athlete representative) serves on the Executive Board of the organization.
International Judo Federation <a href="http://www.ijfjudo.eu/">http://www.ijfjudo.eu/</a>	Yes	The Athletes Commission was established in 2009. It is composed of nine athletes (and recently retired athletes). Five athletes (one member per continental union) are elected during the first World Championships following the Olympic Games. Four athletes are appointed by members of the Executive Committee.
Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne <a href="http://www.pentathlon.org/">http://www.pentathlon.org/</a>	Yes	The Athletes Committee was created in 1993. It is composed of four athletes elected by athletes. There are no limits on the length of time elected athletes can serve on the committee. In future elections, only one member can be elected per continent to ensure geographical representation. Athletes serving on the Athletes Committee are invited to attend various meetings of the organization (e.g. technical committee, business affairs committee).
World Rowing Federation <a href="http://www.worldrowing.com/">http://www.worldrowing.com/</a>	Yes	The Athletes Commission is composed of nine members. These members may be recently retired athletes. They serve a four-year term.
International Sailing Federation <a href="http://www.sailing.org/">http://www.sailing.org/</a>	Yes	The Athletes' Commission reports directly to the Executive Committee. It is composed of 10 athletes representing each discipline (men's and women's windsurfing; men's and women's one-person dinghy; men's one-person dinghy heavy; men's and women's two-person dinghy; men's two-person dinghy high performance; men's keelboat; and women's keelboat match racing). These athletes are elected by athletes for a four-year term.
International Shooting Sport Federation <a href="http://www.issf-sports.org/">http://www.issf-sports.org/</a>	Yes	The Athletes Committee is composed of seven members. Four are elected by athletes participating at the World Championships and three members are appointed by the Executive Committee to ensure balance between regions, gender, and disciplines. The chair of the Athletes Committee becomes a voting member of the Executive Committee.
International Swimming Federation <a href="http://www.fina.org">www.fina.org</a>	Yes	The Athletes Commission was created in 1991 and is composed of 13 members. No details are provided on the selection of these members.
International Table Tennis Federation <a href="http://www.ittf.com/">http://www.ittf.com/</a>	Yes	The Athletes Commission was created in 1993 and is composed of 10 members. The Chair and Deputy Chair (former athletes) are appointed by the Executive Committee, one athlete per continent (nominated by their Continental Federation [6]) and two athletes nominated by the Junior Commission.

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

International Federations Summer Sports	Athlete Commission	Notes
World Taekwondo Federation <a href="http://www.wtf.org">http://www.wtf.org</a>	Yes	Athletes Committee – no details are provided on this committee.
International Tennis Federation <a href="http://www.itftennis.com/">http://www.itftennis.com/</a>	Yes	The Athletes Commission was established in 2001. It is composed of 10 members.
International Triathlon Union <a href="http://www.triathlon.org/">http://www.triathlon.org/</a>	Yes	The Athletes' Committee was created in 1989. 10 athletes are elected for a two-year term. Of these members, five must be men, five must be women and these must come from each of the five continents. In addition, two elected athletes serve on the Executive Board.
International Volleyball Federation <a href="http://www.fivb.ch/">http://www.fivb.ch/</a>	No	
International Weightlifting Federation <a href="http://www.iwf.net/">http://www.iwf.net/</a>	No	
International Wrestling Federation <a href="http://www.fila-wrestling.com/">http://www.fila-wrestling.com/</a>	Yes	The Athletes and Hall of Fame Department was created in 2003. It is composed of 10 members of whom two are FILA Bureau Members. No details are provided on the selection of the members of the department.

Note: Information used for this table originated from the websites of the summer sport federations. In some cases, the information was obtained via email communication with executive members or staff of the IFs. These organizations manage the sports/disciplines included in the Games of the Olympiad programme. Please note that we have retained the names (and spelling) of the committees focused on athletes' interests as they are used by each individual IF.

retrieved from their website, the past President of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), Ichiro Ogimura, believed that former table tennis champions should lead the federation and he 'wanted to have the ITTF on the same model as the International Olympic Committee in the field of administration' (ITTF 2002, para. 2). For the International Handball Federation, the Athletes' Commission was created in 2005 to act as a link between the athletes and the organization, 'in accordance with IOC regulations' (International Handball Federation 2007, para. 2). Along similar lines, the International Bobsleigh and Tobogganing Federation explained in an organizational document retrieved from the website that their Athletes Advisory Committee was restructured in 2005 in order 'to follow the IOC model' (Gardella 2005, para. 1).

Athlete involvement in decision making is important to many IFs. As an example, the International Sailing Federation recently (2009) developed a website for their athletes ([www.sailorvoice.org](http://www.sailorvoice.org)). This website informs athletes regarding upcoming events and meetings where sailors' input may be needed and provides athletes with an opportunity to comment on their IF's organizational and technical activities. In fact, a number of IFs promote and invite athlete input on their website (e.g. International Canoe Federation 2007, Fédération Internationale de Ski 2009, Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne 2009).

The quest for sport governing bodies to become more athlete-centred is of interest to most IFs. For example, the International Triathlon Union wrote:

... the role of athletes in the decision-making process of ITU has been a fundamental principle of our organisation since its creation in Avignon, France, 1989. The inclusion of 2 elected athletes on the ITU Executive Board has strengthened the role of the athletes and is an integral part of our continued success as an International Federation striving to be 'athlete-centered.' (International Triathlon Union 2009, para. 1)

The status of athletes' commissions in 33 winter and summer IFs provided us with an overview regarding of the extent to which athletes are considered in the governance of these organizations. In the following section, we pursue our analysis of athletes' commissions by focusing on three multi-sport/multi-service international federations. More specifically, we investigate the extent to which the IOC, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), and World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) consider athletes in the governance of their organization. We selected these cases because they represent powerful organizations (particularly the IOC and the WADA) that have the potential to influence and direct policies at the international and national levels, and they also represent very visible changes in governance and athlete representation. In fact, we have presented earlier evidence that the IOC has directed IFs and other sport organizations to establish athletes' commissions within their structure (IOC 2003). Given the influence of the IOC over IFs, and the reliance of IFs on multi-sport/service organizations such as WADA, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the IPC, their practices with regards to governance and structure may serve as guides for IFs.

### ***The International Olympic Committee – Athletes' Commission***

The IOC was created in 1894 and is responsible for the governance and promotion of the Olympic Movement. The IOC is responsible for the Summer and Winter Olympic Games and supports National Olympic Committees, IFs, and other sport-related organizations to perpetuate the Olympic values (IOC 2009a). As part of its governance, the IOC has an Athletes' Commission. This Athletes' Commission serves as a link between the IOC and the athletes. Although the IOC Athletes' Commission was established in 1981, it was not until

1999, following the corruption and scandal within the IOC, that greater athlete input was sought in the running of the Games (Jennings and Sambrook 2000, Mason *et al.* 2006). As former Olympian, Sebastian Coe, noted:

... when most organisations believed that athletes had no greater role than simply turning up, Samaranch [IOC president at the time] recognised that you could not have an organization that did not have athlete input. ... The IOC probably has more sports men and women representation on it than any other organisation. And if you asked most competitors, within the Olympic movement, they would recognise that Samaranch probably did more than any single person to include athletes in that decision making process. (British Broadcasting Corporation 2000, para. 17)

The IOC Athletes' Commission is composed of 19 members, of which the majority (12) are elected by the athletes themselves (eight athletes from summer sports; four from winter sports). The remaining seven are appointed by the IOC President 'to ensure a balance between regions, gender and sports' (IOC 2009b, para. 1). Two elected members from the Commission represent athletes at the NOC General Assembly and also have voting rights within the Assembly (IOC 2003). The IOC leadership promotes the responsibility of athletes to express their concerns and provide recommendations for unsolved problems. The Athletes' Commission:

... is a consultative body of the IOC and a link between the active Olympic athletes and the IOC. It ensures that the athletes' points of view are taken into account in IOC decisions. It ensures respect of the rights of the athletes within the Olympic Movement and draws up recommendations to that effect. (IOC 2001, p. 1)

The Commission meets regularly to address issues that affect them. In addition to regular meetings, the International Athletes' Forum is organized every two years. At the third International Athletes' Forum, held in 2007, IOC President Jacques Rogge invited the athletes to:

... express yourself – be it bilaterally or on the platform offered to you. Tell us what you think, what you want, what you feel, so that we can integrate your recommendations into our policies. So that we can work together for the good of the athletes. (IOC 2007, para. 5)

In these forums, members of the commission, athletes and representatives from a number of sport organizations discuss athletes' viewpoints on different issues. Additionally, the IOC president has appointed several athlete representatives to serve on 23 different IOC commissions where athletes can communicate their perspectives on issues such as the media, the Olympic programme, ethics, women and sport, and the Olympic Games (IOC 2005).

Furthermore, the IOC's executive board<sup>5</sup> is currently comprised of five former Olympic athletes (four male; one female); one male serves as President, one male serves as Vice-President, and the remaining representatives hold member status. While these former athletes may be considered suitable representatives for current Olympic athletes, they may not be attuned to current athlete concerns and these former athletes represent a very narrow number of sports, which may limit their ability to serve as appropriate representatives for the range of Olympic summer and winter sports and athletes. The members of the IOC executive board were also elected by their peers (i.e. members of the IOC) not by athletes and they may not therefore feel accountable to athletes, or feel constrained to serve their interests and address their concerns particularly well.

On this topic, there have been discussions regarding the voting procedures for the IOC's Athletes' Commission and issues that could apply to the procedures used for the elections of athletes in other IFs (cf. Jennings and Sambrook 2000, Alvad 2008). On the topic of the timing of elections of athletes to serve on the IOC's Athletes' Commissions, Jennings and Sambrook (2000, p. 347) reported on an athlete's concerns 'to hold elections during the [Olympic] Games when athletes' minds must necessarily be on more pressing issues was sadly ill-timed'. Along similar lines, recent calls to reform the IOC's Athletes' Commission's election were made. Specifically, Alvad (2008, para. 5) reported, 'as present rules stand, the election campaign runs for just two weeks before the actual election and is subject to a list of procedures making it difficult for some of the candidates to lead an active and effective campaign'. Furthermore, given security restrictions and the location of certain sport venues at the Olympic Games, athletes vying for a position on the IOC's Athletes' Commission cannot move freely in the Olympic Village or access athletes at their training and competition venues to lobby them (Alvad 2008). As part of recommendations for changes to election procedures, some athletes have proposed online campaigns (on the IOC's website) prior to the Olympic Games where candidates can share their election platform/manifesto with the athletes and then athletes during the Games can make informed decisions as they vote for their representative on the Athletes' Commission.

In a 2008 newsletter of the FIS, the Chair of the IOC Athletes' Commission, Pernilla Wiberg, outlined the impact that the Athletes' Commission had on some of the decisions of the IOC and other sport organizations. She explained that the 'IOC Athletes' Commission often serves as a sounding board for WADA to aid development of the anti-doping procedures' (Fédération Internationale de Ski 2008, para. 3). She also noted that the Commission made 'great strides in facilitating more involvement by athletes at different levels including 'taking better care of the athletes in the Olympic Movement' (Fédération Internationale de Ski 2008, para. 3). In addition, the Commission is involved in the evaluation of bids from cities wishing to host the Olympic Games and it monitors the organization of the Olympic Games and its programme. Members of the Commission are also involved in the fight against doping supporting a number of initiatives put forth by WADA. Recently, the Athletes' Commission has helped athletes in their transition to life after sport (IOC 2009c). As Wiberg noted, 'one of the greatest examples of this work [of the Athletes' Commission] is the contract between IOC and Adecco [a private firm that provides human resource services for public and private organizations], which provides career opportunities for Olympic athletes either during or after their competitive careers' (Fédération Internationale de Ski 2008, para. 3).

### ***International Paralympic Committee Athletes' Council***

The IPC is 'the global governing body of the Paralympic Movement. The IPC organizes the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games, and serves as the International Federation for nine sports, for which it supervises and co-ordinates the World Championships and other competitions' (IPC 2010a, para. 1). The organization was founded in 1989 and in its inception one of the councils created was the Athletes' Council. The Athletes' Council is composed of nine elected members serving four-year terms. Six of these athletes are from summer sports and three are from winter sports. Each athlete must have competed in a Paralympic Games within the previous eight years to be eligible to serve on the Council. The Athletes' Council Chair also serves on the IPC executive and thus has voting rights. The main objective of the Athletes' Council is:



. . . to provide effective input into decision-making at all levels of the organisation. To this end, the IPC AC works to ensure effective athlete representation on all IPC committees and commissions as well as to create other opportunities for athlete representation both within and outside the IPC. (IPC 2010b, para. 1)

Members of the Athletes' Council provide input in IPC decisions and athletes are represented in a range of standing committees (e.g. anti-doping, audit and finance, Paralympic Games, sport science and women in sport). All standing committee members however, are appointed by the IPC governing board and any decision-making power must be authorized through the IPC governing board (IPC 2010b).

### *The World Anti-Doping Agency Athlete Committee*

The WADA was established in 1999. Its mission is 'to promote, coordinate and monitor the fight against doping in sport in all its forms . . . Its key activities include scientific research, education, development of anti-doping capacities, and monitoring of the World Anti Doping Code' (WADA 2010a, para. 1). In 2005, WADA's Athlete Committee was established to represent the views and rights of athletes worldwide, while providing insight and oversight into athletes' roles and responsibilities as it relates to anti-doping. Chaired by Russian ice hockey champion and WADA Foundation Board Member, Vyacheslav Fetisov, the committee is comprised of 17 Olympic and Paralympic athletes from around the world (WADA 2010b). The process for selecting these athletes involved a call for nominations from sport organizations and governments. From the nominations, athletes were then selected and appointed 'based on a number of factors, including equal distribution, where possible, of representation between regions, sport and gender' (WADA 2005, para. 4).

Members of the WADA Athlete Committee assist in raising awareness about anti-doping, the promotion of Play True (a campaign dedicated to reduce the use of performance enhancing drugs), as well as actively liaising with, and providing feedback to, government, regional and national leaders about anti-doping initiatives (WADA 2010b).

Democratization of international sport organizations may have led to increased collaboration between countries and WADA is one example where regional offices and the head office are located on different continents to increase the presence of the organization in various regions of the world; and where governments of different nations have bought into the fight against doping in sport and are financially supporting the activities of the organization. WADA is also a good example of the increasing collaboration between countries as international organizations of various sports, beyond the winter or summer Olympic programmes (including 'amateur' sport as well as commercial/professional sport teams/leagues), are also collaborating with WADA to address doping issues in sport. Currently, a number of agencies and individuals are responsible for overseeing WADA's activities, including representatives from: the IOC (n = 4), Association of National Olympic Committees (n = 4), Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (n = 3), Association of International Olympic Winter Sports Federations (n = 1), General Association of International Sports Federations (n = 1), IOC Athletes' Commission (n = 4), IPC (n = 1), and public authorities from Europe (n = 5), Africa (n = 3), the Americas (n = 4), Asia (n = 4) and Oceania (n = 2) (WADA 2008).<sup>6</sup> From this list of organizations overseeing WADA's operation, there are at least four athletes, as members of the IOC Athletes' Commission. Table 3 provides a synopsis of the features of the IOC, the IPC and the WADA and how their organizational structure includes athlete involvement.

Table 3. Summary of athlete involvement in the IOC, the IPC, and the WADA.

Organization	Athlete Representation on Executive Committee of the Organization	Athlete Committee	Role of Athletes on the Athlete Committee (and organizations)
International Olympic Committee (created in 1894)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chair of the IOC Athletes' Commission serves as a voting member of the Executive Board.</li> <li>Members of the Athletes' Commission are serving in other IOC commissions and working groups</li> <li>The Athletes' Commission liaises with the Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games to ensure athletes' concerns are considered (IOC 2009d).</li> </ul>	<p>Athletes' Commission (created in 1981) is composed of 12 athletes elected for eight years and up to seven athletes are appointed by the IOC president to ensure balance between regions, gender, and sports. 'A representative from the World Olympians Association and a representative of the IPC are ex-officio members' (IOC 2009b, para. 1).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To make sure athletes' interests are protected (IOC 2009d, para. 1).</li> <li>To 'represent athletes within the Olympic Movement and also upholds the rights and obligations of the athletes'. It also 'makes recommendations to the IOC's executive bodies' (IOC 2009d, para. 3–4).</li> </ul>
International Paralympic Committee (created in 1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chair of Athletes' Council serves as an athlete representative on the Governing Board (14 members) as an ex officio member with voting privileges (IPC, 2010c).</li> </ul>	<p>Athletes' Council (created in 1989) is composed of nine Paralympic athlete representatives (six athletes from summer sports and three from winter sports) and one IOC Athletes' Commission representative (IPC 2010b).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To represent the voice of Paralympic athletes and serves as the link between IPC decision makers and Paralympic athletes. The Council provides input into decision making.</li> <li>To ensure 'effective athlete representation on all IPC committees and commissions as well as to create other opportunities for athlete representation both within and outside the IPC' (IPC 2010b, para. 1).</li> </ul>

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

Organization	Athlete Representation on Executive Committee of the Organization	Athlete Committee	Role of Athletes on the Athlete Committee (and organizations)
World Anti-Doping Agency (created in 1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Chair of Athlete Committee attends the Executive Committee meetings.</li> </ul>	<p>Athlete Committee (created in 2005) is composed of 17 athletes including chair (WADA 2010b). Athletes are appointed based on regions, sport, and gender (WADA 2005).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To represent 'the views and rights of athletes . . . while providing insight and oversight into athletes' roles and responsibilities as it relates to anti-doping. Its members have a key role in helping WADA understand the challenges vulnerable athletes face and how WADA can best lead in developing strategies to not only detect, but also deter and prevent it' (WADA 2010b, para. 1–2).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● One athlete of the IOC Athletes' Commission serves on the Executive Committee (12 members)</li> <li>● Four athletes as members of the IOC Athletes' Commission serve on the Foundation Board (38 members) (WADA 2010d).</li> </ul>		

### **Issues with deliberative democracy and representation in sport**

While this paper suggests that athletes associated with international sport governing bodies have more representation in decision making and greater involvement in policy processes than they did several years ago, and have influenced policy decisions, several elements requiring greater analysis are identified. Chief among them are the following: representation and accountability; type of representation; potential for impact; and process challenges. We discuss these issues below.

#### ***Representation and accountability***

While we highlighted above the increasing number of athlete commissions within IFs, questions may arise regarding the ‘legitimate’ representation of these athletes. In particular, legitimacy issues related to determining the appropriateness of appointed versus elected representatives, determining an acceptable process for representative selection, determining the number of athletes that should serve as representatives and determining what constitutes a quality representative.

A key starting point in examining the legitimacy of an IF’s athlete representation is assessing the implications of elected versus appointed representatives. Elected athlete representation, in theory, allows for both authorization and accountability; representatives can be instructed to follow strict instructions and be responsive to the athletes’ wishes they are representing or be given the freedom to make decisions based on the better argument. With either representative role, athletes have the ability to hold their representatives accountable through criticism or removing them from the position. Appointed representatives in contrast, are assigned their role based on their level of expertise or a particular characteristic; as a result, they lack a legitimising bond where the stakeholders being represented lack the authority to hold the representatives accountable. Parkinson (2006, p. 35) argued that appointed representation is a dangerous approach because typically ‘the relationship between organizers and participants is often hierarchical . . . the organizer holds the power and manages the agenda, while the participants are subordinate, providing information rather than being active citizens in self-government.’ While the IOC and other IFs might have good intentions about inclusivity by appointing individuals to serve as representatives to under-represented groups (e.g. women, age, race and culture) on various committees, a legitimacy concern arises because appointed representatives are unaccountable to their stakeholders. For representation and accountability, our recommendation is for IFs to hold elections for all athlete representative positions as well as the election of individuals from inadequately represented groups to create an accountability bond between representative and stakeholder.

#### ***Type of representation***

Appointed representation in various IFs also generates another concern about the perpetuation of the athletes’ lack of voice and input that may persist with organizations that appoint specifically chosen athletes to represent all athletes. In particular, the sheer number and range of athletes being represented requires examining whether athletes are being fairly represented in terms of the model of representative selection. It is almost impossible and unrealistic to expect all athletes (or all stakeholders involved in sport – coaches, volunteers, officials, participants, administrators, other sport organizations, governments, media, sponsors and so on) to come together as one deliberative body to discuss their thoughts and views on all issues. Thus, to address this scale problem, the international sport system has adopted

two approaches. One approach encouraged by the IOC is a somewhat decentralized system that includes small scale representative units in the form of individual IFs and within these federations are athlete commissions/committees (Tables 1 and 2). The various IF athlete commissions/committees provide a greater opportunity for athletes in specific sports to engage in individual participation around their respective sport issues. Policy problems have ‘implicit scale characteristics,’ or ‘inherent requirements for different levels of resources, political support and compliance’ (Stone 2002, p. 367). Small units have the capability to generate superior policy decisions because more individuals are given the opportunity to participate in governance and local problem solving. Generally, smaller deliberative units are more effective in addressing local issues since people close to the situation are involved in deliberations about issues and solution development, rather than individuals at the national/international level who are generally removed from the situation and therefore tend to possess less insight about policy issues and their resolutions (Sundquist and Davis 1969, Stone 2002). However, the IOC is a highly centralized system that holds the majority of decision-making authority. In order to enhance athletes’ influence in IOC/IF governance, the respective organizations should consider providing more jurisdictional power to the athlete commissions/committees.

The second approach is a descriptive or mirror representative model (Pitkin 1972, Young 2000) where fair representation is based on mirroring or copying whole groups such as athletes. Representatives are chosen from the population of athletes in national teams (or those who are ‘retired’ from competition and thus may have more time to engage in ‘political’ activity) – reflecting an assumption that there is uniformity amongst athletes – simplifying their interests by aggregating them. It is assumed that they have similar interests (e.g. the need for training resources, desire to finish on the podium) and that this similarity trumps all differences (e.g. gender, age, ability, socioeconomic status, sport and region). There is no single athlete perspective; athletes cannot be assimilated – yes, there is a ‘definition’ of elite athlete, and they have similar interests but this does not exclusively define them. Therefore, athletes’ thoughts, opinions, perspectives, experiences, beliefs, values and priorities vary. In addition, different sports may yield different concerns, issues and interests – team/individual sports, established/new sports, men/women sports all incorporate athletes with potentially divergent views and interests. While it is important to include representatives of all those affected (both minority and majority athlete groups) by a policy in the decision-making process, a descriptive representative model however generally employs a voting system where interests heard through individual votes and, as a result, the majority rule principle further marginalizes minority voices and perpetuates the majority (Young 2000, Parkinson 2006). Scholars have therefore argued that representation should ensure that a range of viewpoints be present at the discussion table (Young 2000, Phillips and Orsini 2002, Catt and Murphy 2003, Newman 2005). As an alternative to a descriptive representative model, we recommend that the international sport organizations/board members consider athlete representation based on the notion that athletes are individuals who have different ideas/perspectives, opinions and interests that need representing. It is our position that the choice of who the athlete representatives are, is critical. Representation of athletes’ interests is best achieved not by seeking ‘mirrors’ of themselves, but rather selecting individuals who share their views and who have the ability to effectively advocate their cause and the cause of their peers. They must share the athletes’ convictions and their plight.

Representatives who are uninterested or do not have the time to be well versed in the issues cannot guarantee they will be able to give voice to the views they represent. The choice of recently retired athletes as representatives may address these concerns. They have more years of experience in the sport system, they are familiar with the issues and they have the time to

invest in the committees' work. Athlete advocacy and interest groups can also play an important role in representing the plurality of athletes' interests, perspectives, and opinions in deliberations. Rebeck (2000, p. 96) noted that 'when such groups can mobilize enough popular support, or convince the media or some powerful politicians of the importance of their issue, they have an important influence on policy'. Even though a policy of representation provides a platform for athletes to influence decisions, actions, and policies, whether or not this policy has created the space for athletes to influence decisions that affect their lives may be questioned because not all athletes are what Urbinati (2000) called 'good representatives' – one who is an advocate and is thus able to deliberate passionately and also be open to the arguments of others in order to make the best decision or policy (Habermas 1996).

This reflection on representation in the deliberative democratic policy process is not meant to suggest that there is no place for more inclusive participation of all athletes. Such direct involvement has many benefits and does have a role in contributing to athlete-centred high performance sport. The assembly of citizens (in our case athletes, international athletes' commissions) to discuss policy is an important part of developing a deliberative democracy (Gutmann and Thompson 2004). In fact, the IOC Athletes' Commission holds a forum for athletes every two years. We recognize that athlete participation and/or representation has made an important contribution toward making the system more athlete-centred, however what is missing is the 'reflective' process of this structural change. For Habermas, critical evaluation through discourse is necessary to ensure that policies and procedures consider the interests of all of those whom they affect.

The unique circumstances of elite athletes must be considered when developing such a 'representation' policy. Can full-time elite athletes devote an incessant effort toward ensuring that athletes are the focus of decisions both in the broader high performance sport system (e.g. IOC, IPC and WADA) and their specific sport (e.g. their IF)? Thus, we recommend that participation in the decision-making process is necessary but not sufficient for a deliberative democratic approach to an athlete-centred system. A deliberative democratic approach not only recognizes that representation is necessary; it also considers the type of representation, that is, representation must recognize the plurality of, in our case, elite athletes. Furthermore, as part of our recommendation, we argue that representation should not only be considered in the narrow sense that is, people sitting at the political decision-making 'table' involved in formal opinion- and will-formation, representation should also be considered in the broad sense where people are not only involved in the creation of legitimate decisions and policies but are also involved in deliberations regarding the interpretations and applications of these policies and judgments. Indeed, 'thanks to deliberation, the common good can be seen as a cooperative construction of the whole community and as the outcome of ongoing persuasion and compromise that never ends in a permanent verdict' (Urbinati 2000, p. 772).

### **Potential for impact**

There is no doubt that athlete representation on committees provides a platform for athletes to influence decisions, actions and policies. It depends, however, on their capacity for coalition-building, bargaining, and influence, a process in which athletes often cannot afford to engage (particularly in terms of time). Habermas (1996) argued that bargaining is particularly problematic when such powers are unequally distributed. Furthermore, when discourse ethics is not used to establish fair procedures by which negotiations and bargaining power is evenly distributed then those in power ultimately hold the trump card in policy decisions (Habermas 1996). As Kihl *et al.* (2007, p. 22) argued:

... providing athletes with more 'voting' rights is perhaps the approach that has been adopted and unquestioned as 'the way' to ensure an athlete-centred system and realise a democratic organisation that provides athletes the opportunity to be involved in decisions that affect their lives.

As our preliminary analysis of IFs demonstrated, 71% of the organizations with athletes' committees have athletes serving on these committees and, as such, these athletes have a voice in the decisions that affect them but this voice does not necessarily translate into a vote on the executive committee (typically the highest decision-making bodies) of the organization. The circumstances of high performance athletes (i.e. training full-time and perhaps working to meet financial needs) means that they are not able to focus on representing the needs of athletes at decision-making tables and thus bargaining power is not equally distributed such that their 'interests can come into play and have equal chance of prevailing' (Habermas 1996, p. 167). Thus, we concur with Gutmann and Thompson (2004, p. 31) who stated, 'we find the practical and ethical arguments against direct democracy compelling for most cases of decision-making at the national level'. We are not suggesting that there is no place for more inclusive participation of all athletes, for such direct involvement has many benefits and does have a role in contributing to a more athlete-centred system.

Do athletes have the capacity for coalition building, bargaining, and influencing policy – is power equally distributed? In theory, athletes have some power because they are an essential element in the success of international sport events – but they have not mobilized as a collective nor do they have a union or other advocacy group, nor have they put pressure on organizational leaders by threatening to protest, strike or boycott events. They are relying on the good will of sport organizations (e.g. IOC, IPC, WADA, IFs, media organizations) and their leaders to consider their interests and it is questionable whether there is real consideration of their diverse interests in decisions and policies that affect them? Whilst IFs, National Olympic Committees, and most, if not all, international multi-sport organizations have modified their structures to include athlete representatives, this has not meant that the individual and collective values of athletes are given priority (cf. Houlihan 2004, Jackson and Ritchie 2007, Kihl *et al.* 2007). Whilst athletes' advocacy organizations have lobbied for change: have educated athletes about their responsibilities and role as active subjects in the sport system; and held forums inviting athletes to participate in discussions about athletes' issues, this use of representative democracy can be seen as a way of aggregating athletes' interests. In the end, most IFs' athletes' committees are a mechanism of providing advice to the leaders of the organization. There may still be only one vote for athletes on the decision-making body of the IFs (i.e. Executive Committee or Board of Directors of the IFs). As a result, athletes' abilities to influence policy making and/or decision making may still be severely limited. To enhance athletes' impact on organizational decisions, we recommend IFs adopt appropriate mechanisms for athletes to voice their concerns and to provide advice on how to address these concerns. Leaders of IFs should also recognize that providing athletes with one vote may not result in outcomes that favour an athlete-centred approach.

### ***Process challenges***

In cases where athletes are elected by their peers are they the ones who serve to represent? Are elected athletes equipped with the necessary skills and resources to truly make a difference? In other words, do they have the time, the information/knowledge, and the power to represent all their peers? As full-time athletes, their first (and possibly only) priority is to train and perform in international sport competitions. Recently retired athletes,

therefore, may be better positioned to serve as representatives because of their recent experiences and current understanding of the issues that most affect high performance athletes.

Although increasing citizen participation and democratization within sport organizations have meant that athletes (and other stakeholders) have had a voice in the making of sport policy, there are some costs involved for organizations. From a logistical point of view, the process of developing policies and making decisions will take more time and more resources; more time because more stakeholders at the table are involved in policy making, and more money is needed to bring these people together and to ensure that they have the necessary information, knowledge, and skills to actively participate in the process. In other words, developing policies and making decisions will be more challenging for an organization when it engages all of their stakeholders to take part in the process – an initiative that is well worth the investment if we are to have truly democratic organizations. It appears that the main mechanism of athlete participation in international sport organizations is through representation on committees. Kihl et al. (2007, p. 23) critiqued that approach in Canada, particularly with respect to the ‘extent to which changes have really translated into ensuring athletes’ interests are represented in the development, implementation and evaluation of decisions and policies that affect their lives’. To ensure athletes’ representation, are international organizations using other ways to demonstrate athlete involvement? For example, do they ensure the full participation of all athletes in seeking input and organizing athlete forums?

While involvement in organizational decision making is an important part of policy-making processes, athletes are still not fully able to voice their opinions on all matters. For example, a number of athletes have raised concerns about the political situation in China, at the recent 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Athletes from around the world were being instructed on what they could say (verbally or electronically (i.e. blogs) before, during and after the Games. For instance, some National Olympic Committees (e.g. Belgium, New Zealand, United Kingdom) were limiting athletes’ freedom of speech regarding China’s human rights’ record (cf. Amnesty International 2008, Little 2008, Wang 2008). This decision was re-considered following public outcry. Voicing concerns about the human rights record of China may not be related to the management of organizations but when stakeholders’ (i.e. athletes) opinions are censured, there is a possibility that leaders of IFs may limit athletes’ participation in other areas of the organization. As the most visible stakeholders of the IFs, athletes provide organizations with a perspective that may not always match the perspective of other stakeholders in the organization (e.g. coaches, officials, administrators, sponsors and media). To address process challenges, we recommend that IFs consider athletes with the interests, skills, and resources (e.g. time, expertise) to be encouraged to serve on athletes’ committees and represent their peers in the organizational decision making process. Finally, it is claimed that IFs should commit to making available adequate resources to ensure effective athlete involvement and participation in decision making.

## **Conclusion**

Athlete involvement in the management of IFs appears to have increased in recent years, however, their level of effectiveness or impact on decision making/policy making remains largely unknown. Additional research is needed to investigate the impact athletes have had on the governance of IFs. In the IOC, IPC and WADA, athletes have had more opportunities to be active agents in the policy- and decision-making processes of these organizations. It is important to note, however, that even with the increasing role athletes have played in these organizations, there is evidence where/when more consultation may be needed



(e.g. WADA's whereabouts rule).<sup>7</sup> Even though athletes were involved in consultations leading up to the implementation of this policy (WADA 2010c), several athletes have expressed concerns about the invasive nature of the rule (Associated Press 2009, British Broadcasting Corporation 2009, Gibson 2009).

Furthermore, instances where administrators and volunteers have spent excessive resources of the organization to accommodate themselves while athletes, coaches and/or officials did not have access to the same preferential treatment. For example, IOC members travel 'first class' and stay in 'five-star' accommodations while athletes do not. Olympic competition schedule designed to maximize the viewership for broadcasters and corporate sponsors rather than to accommodate athletes is another example where athletes' interests have not necessarily been of particular concern. If IFs aspire to represent a deliberative democratic system of governance (Habermas 1996, Gutmann and Thompson 2004), then a public arena must be created and sustained where citizens most affected by international sport policy(ies) (e.g. IOC travel policies and WADA's drug-testing policies) would engage in a process of thoughtful interaction and opinion-formation. These deliberations would require IF and IOC officials to provide a rational justification for their decisions to athletes and provide a space for athletes to openly challenge decisions in future deliberations. Ultimately, the IOC and/or IFs' adhering to a deliberative democratic system of governance would enhance their legitimacy as decisions would reflect stakeholders' values, interests, and viewpoints rather than reflecting the perceived administrative needs and values.

On the topic of reforms for international sport organizations, Katwala (2000, p. 92) argued that 'if sporting bodies wanted to take reform seriously, then the best first step would be for them to collaborate on creating an open and transparent multi-stakeholder forum on good sporting governance'. Katwala (2000, p. 9) further explained that reforms 'will have to be inclusive – giving sport's key stakeholders a central role in the reform and decision-making processes seeking to reconcile their vital interests on the basis of the values of sport as a whole'. It should be noted, however, that athletes are an important stakeholder of IFs. We consider the research presented in this paper as being exploratory in nature and representing an important first step in understanding the role athletes play in the governance of IFs. We have demonstrated that some of these international organizations have created athlete committees to ensure their involvement in decision making while other organizations do not consider athletes as part of their governance. The establishment of athletes' committees is one strategy to provide athletes with a voice in the organizations about issues that affect them, though it may not necessarily lead to a true athlete-centred approach. Future research on athlete involvement in the governance of sport organizations include interviews with athletes who serve on their organization's athletes' committee and athletes who have voting privileges on the executive committees of their IF. This research would help provide clarification on the role these athletes play and the impact they believe they have in the governance of their IFs. Athletes should also be asked about their perception of the most effective methods for their involvement in policies and decisions that affect them. More research on athletes' roles in IFs may lead to better governance of these organizations.

Additional considerations for future research should take into account the fact that other forms of athlete involvement may be warranted. This future research may require different theoretical perspectives in addition to that of a deliberative democratic approach to help maximize athletes' impact on policies and decisions that affect them. Indeed, the process of consultation may lead to different forms of participation in policy making and decision making that includes the voices of all stakeholders and that may help promote a deliberative democratic system sport system (Sam and Jackson 2006).

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2nd Annual World Congress in Sport Management and 2nd Annual National Congress in Sport Management, University of Peloponnese, Sparta, Greece in June 2007. The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of Lisa M. Kikulis for feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript.
2. The role athletes are starting to play in the development of sport policies and decisions has not been uniform across all sport organizations. In some cases, this role has been limited and/or contentious.
3. Please note that the separation of summer and winter sport federations in distinct tables is for ease of presentation only.
4. As part of its reforms, in 2000, the IOC recommended the creation of athletes' commission within all IFs and other sport-related organizations such as National Olympic Committees and national sport federations (IOC 2003). In IOC documents, calls for athlete involvement in sport organizations were made. 'Athletes should be well represented at all levels of the sports movement: IOC, IFs, NOCs and NFs' and the IOC encouraged the formation of Athletes' Commission' (IOC 2003, para. 1).
5. The IOC's Executive Board is made-up of the President, four Vice-Presidents, and ten additional members (IOC 2009e). All Executive Board members are elected by the Session, through secret ballot and a majority vote process, whereby they serve a four-year term.
6. These groups were not necessarily the ones involved in establishing WADA as an organization, but rather they are those who are involved now (WADA 2008).
7. The whereabouts rule is about high performance athletes having to inform the officials of their IF and/or their national anti-doping organization of their location for one hour daily (between the time of 0600 and 2300) for random out-of-competition drug testing (WADA 2010c).

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