



International
Olympic
Committee

The President

IF Forum 2024

Lausanne, 21 October 2024

- Delivered by IOC First Vice-President Nicole Hovertsz -

Please let me first of all convey the greetings of the President of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, whom I have the honour to represent. He unfortunately could not be here with us today as he is currently travelling in Africa, but he is very much looking forward to hearing the outcomes of this IF Forum. He asked me to deliver this speech on his behalf.

Dear Olympic friends,

This IF Forum is taking place in exciting times: the sensational Olympic Games Paris 2024 are still fresh in our memory and the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 are just around the corner.

In Paris, the best athletes of the world showed us that the Olympic Games are about sport, but also about so much more than sport. The Olympic Games Paris 2024 were younger, more urban, more inclusive, more sustainable. These were the very first Olympic Games with full gender parity and the first Olympic Games fully in line with Olympic Agenda from start to finish. For all these reasons, we can truly say: the Olympic Games Paris 2024 were Olympic Games of a new era.

With the great success of the sports competitions, the summer Olympic IFs among you played an essential part in writing this new chapter of Olympic history. This is something that you can rightly be very proud of – forever. Thank you once again, for this, your great contribution to the success of the Olympic Games Paris 2024.

You are already benefitting from the great success of Paris. Across the Olympic Movement, social media figures went absolutely through the roof. IFs alone generated over 4 billion engagements by sharing content related to the Olympic Games Paris 2024. Overall, social media engagements increased by almost four times compared to Tokyo 2020. What is more, with the Olympic Qualifier Season, this amplification now starts already well before the actual start of the Games. What all these record-breaking figures show is the enduring appeal of the Olympic Games from which we all benefit. Because the Olympic brand gives a rocket-boost to your sports, thereby driving users on your digital platforms to new heights, above and beyond what we could see at any other event, including your world championships. This and other digital data will be included in the sports reviews which we will share with you in due course.

Very soon it will be the turn of the Winter Olympic IFs to showcase Olympic Winter Games of a new era. The Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 will be the first Olympic Winter Games to fully benefit from our Olympic Agenda reforms from start to finish. Together with all our Italian partners and friends – together with all of you – we are all looking forward to Olympic Winter Games that will pulsate with Italy's passion for sport and highlight Italy's unique culture and heritage.

Building on this momentum, this IF Forum is therefore a timely moment for the entire IF community to chart the course of the future of sport. As the theme of the IF Forum highlights, it is indeed an important moment to look ahead at what innovation and change are needed to be “future-ready” – because the times, they are a-changing.

There is a new world order in the making – a new world order with more geopolitical, social and economic uncertainties. A new world order in which artificial intelligence and the digital revolution are turbo-charging the winds of change.

Therefore an essential part of being “future-ready” is to embrace this change. The rapid development of AI is affecting every aspect of our lives, including the world of sport.

When you look at this pace of change, you realise just how vital it was that we launched our Olympic AI Agenda earlier this year. With our Olympic AI Agenda, we are breaking new ground, by providing a holistic approach of how the world of sport can embrace the potential of AI.

Our values are at the heart of this approach. This means: AI technology must be available for everybody in our Olympic community. Not just for a privileged few. Like sport itself, it must be available to all people. AI can give more people better access to sport. AI can spread the benefits of sport more widely and more equally.

This is why we invite the entire IF community to join us on this journey of harnessing the transformative powers of AI for sport. This is what the Olympic AI Agenda is designed to do: defining a vision and guiding principles of how we in the Olympic Movement can seize the great opportunities that AI presents to all of us.

This is not just abstract theory. This is a reality right now. We have already identified over 180 use cases for AI across the Olympic Movement. AI can help to identify athletes and talents in every corner of the world. AI can provide more athletes with access to personalised training methods, superior sports equipment, and more individualised programmes to stay fit and healthy. AI can revolutionise judging and refereeing, thereby strengthening fairness in sport. AI can improve safeguarding in sport. AI will make organising sporting events extremely efficient; it will transform sports broadcasting and will make the spectator experience much more individualised and immersive.

As these and so many other examples illustrate: AI will not only affect just the one or the other sport. It will affect every aspect of sport, and it will affect the relevance of sport in society. This makes the task so complex that none of us can address it alone. This is why taking a holistic approach to AI is so important. In order to avoid parallel efforts, in order to build synergies, to reduce the costs and to maximise the benefits of AI for sport, it is in our shared interest to join hands.

This is why I can only encourage all of you to join us. Join us on our journey to be “future-ready”. Join us on our journey to bring together the transformative power of AI with the values-based world of sport.

Just think of all the ways that this technology can benefit your athletes, how it can help you to grow and develop your sport, to reach more people, to modernise your organisations to run more efficiently and effectively, so that you can focus time and resources on the really important things: your sport and your people.

We do not have the luxury of time to wait for the sea change to happen. The future is already happening right now, and we have to be ready to shape it with the shared values of sport. If we do not engage and embrace the change now, then the purely technological and commercial interests will come over us like a tsunami.

Another important dimension of being “future-ready” is esports. Whatever our views are on esports and gaming, the numbers speak for themselves. Globally, there are well over 3 billion people familiar with gaming, a figure that continues to grow by the day. While in 2021, the global gaming live-streaming audience was just around 800 million people, this figure will grow to 1.5 billion spectators next year. These are all young people.

We cannot ignore these staggering numbers. They make it crystal clear: if we want to continue to be relevant in the lives of young people, if we want to continue to inspire the next generation with our Olympic values – then we have to go to where the young people are. Therefore, to be “future-ready” also means: we have to go to esports.

This is why the IOC has decided to create Olympic Esports Games. With this, we are breaking new ground and are keeping up with the pace of the digital revolution. By partnering with the NOC of Saudi Arabia, a leader in esports, to host the inaugural Olympic Esports Games in 2025, we have also ensured that the Olympic values are

respected, particularly with regard to the game titles on the programme, the promotion of gender equality and engagement with the young audience, which is embracing esports.

The principles that we set out at the beginning of our journey in esports remain unchanged. For the IF community this means: those of you who already are engaged in an e-version of your sport that is considered for inclusion in the Olympic Esports Games will continue to be the first go-to partners for the IOC.

At the same time, in order to address the specific nature of the Olympic Esports Games, the IOC is creating a new dedicated structure within the organisation, clearly separate from the organisational and financial model for the Olympic Games. In other words, you can rest assured that our support for your sport in real life – the sport that involves physical activity of a human being – will remain unchanged.

In fact, the financial position of the IOC continues to go from strength to strength. The great success of Paris underlines once again the enduring appeal and attractiveness of the Olympic Games as the greatest sporting event in the world. Thanks to the financial support from our TOP Partners and Media-Rights Holders, we have already secured 7.3 billion US dollars of revenue for the next Olympiad from 2025 to 2028. Even for the Olympiad 2029 to 2032, we have already secured 6.2 billion dollars. With a full pipeline, these figures will only increase. Therefore, you can rely on a robust financial result also for the upcoming Olympiad.

Another principle that will remain unchanged in our esports endeavours: we will stay true to our values – the Olympic values of excellence, friendship, respect, solidarity and peace – that have guided us for over a century. Our values are and remain the red line that we will not cross. Also, the Olympic Esports Games will be guided by the respect for these values.

It is these, our shared Olympic values, that guide us in the Olympic Movement in these fast-changing times. As values-based sports organisations, being “future-ready” therefore also means: always keeping these values close to our hearts in everything we do. With these timeless values as our compass, we can look to the future of sport with great confidence. The times may be changing, but the relevance of the role of sport in building a better and more peaceful world for all has never been more important.

Also in this respect, our unity is our strength. As we look to the future, we must do everything in our power to preserve this unity in all our diversity. Only in this way can we continue to face the many challenges on the horizon and turn them into opportunities for the world of sport, always living our Olympic motto: Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together.