



Name: *NIELS NYGAARD*

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Why are youth sport events important for the Olympic Movement?

Taking care of the Olympic Summer and Winter Games, and making sure that they are dealt with successfully, is the most important task for IOC and The Olympic Movement.

Olympic Games is a fantastic and unique event, where athletes from the whole world come together to make superb athletic performances.

As side effects of the Olympic Games, we achieve a number of very positive things: peace, mutual understanding, equality (gender, race, religion and political and sexual observance), health, caring for the environment and the possibility to highlight the importance of the youth.

International youth events are important to inspire young talented athletes to stay in competitive sport. Today there are so many opportunities outside sport for young people, and events like the continental Youth Olympic Festivals and the coming Youth Olympic Games, help to keep a number of young athletes dedicated to their sports.

Besides that, there are 2 main reasons for The Olympic Movement to stage youth events:

- 1) “Product development” of competitive sports, to inspire and influence the international federations to make necessary adjustments in their programs, so that athletes and

spectators will still find it attractive to participate in and follow and watch the Olympic Games in the future.

- 2) Enhance the importance of the youth to secure a fruitful development of the world.

Youth events should inspire the participants and other young people to understand and promote the importance of peace, equality, health and environment in order to influence older generations to make the right decisions.

How can youth events achieve the goals of product development and fruitful world development?

The International Federations have to realize the necessity to ensure product development of their sports and have to see the benefits of using the youth in the process. Therefore youth events shall not only be a “duplicate” of the traditional world championships and other international and national events, but should always include some new elements. To help getting ideas for these “new elements”, the international federations should involve some young people in the process. These young people should not only be recruited among the young elite-athletes of their respective sports, since many of these will already have been “brain-washed” to do their sport the traditional way. The international federations should therefore recruit some young people from other environments and backgrounds to get inspiration to build in new elements in their sport.

In connection with youth events an effort should be made to involve the young athletes in discussions and projects concerning peace, mutual understanding, equality, health and environment. These discussions and projects should involve some practical examples, so that the young people can relate themselves to the discussions and projects. Alongside the involvement of the young participants, an effort should be made to convey a number of cases and good examples to the outside world. This could be done by people from universities and media, and should include a number of examples of athletes from different countries working peacefully together, of benefits of exercise to better your health and of initiatives to take care of the environment.

Next year the first edition of Youth Olympic Games will take place in Singapore. I believe that many of the goals and suggestions that I have mentioned, have been taken into consideration for the games in Singapore. As far as product development, I think many international federations still have a long way to go, to really try to include new elements in their sports. As far as the cultural elements, I think IOC and the organizers are doing a great effort. It remains to be seen though, whether the young athletes will actually involve themselves wholeheartedly in the activities, as most of them will probably devote most of their energies, to make good results.

It will be very interesting to learn from Youth Olympic Games in Singapore and to use the experiences from there to make good youth events in the future.