

A New Vision for the IOC: Anita L. DeFrantz

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Someone recently asked me what single word I would use to describe the International Olympic Committee (IOC). I didn't hesitate for a second and responded "corrupt."

When he asked me if I had any hope that it could be reversed, I answered even more quickly: "only if Anita DeFrantz decided to run for the IOC presidency and wins."

The best news I have heard about the IOC in years was that she declared herself a candidate on February 4 at the IOC's meetings in Dakar, Senegal.

With scandal after scandal rocking the IOC and the Olympic Movement over so many decades, I fear the those associated with the Olympics have fallen further from their lofty perches than any other category of athlete from pros to college student-athletes to youth sport parents. While there have been plenty of athletes either suspected of or proven to have done something unethical to improve their performance, the worst corruption has come from the top: IOC members brokering their influence for personal gain.

Throughout it all, DeFrantz's well earned reputation for integrity, courage and fairness helped her to stay above the fray.

The IOC went on with its business in Dakar after Anita DeFrantz threw her hat into the ring of the oldest old boys network in sport (she is the first woman and the first person of color to even be a candidate for the IOC presidency). One of its first orders of business was to refer the cases of two of its members to its Ethics Committee. Mohamad Hasan was sentenced to a two year jail term for embezzlement in his native Indonesia.

Lassana Palenfo, a top general in the Ivory Coast's military junta, was recently charged with embezzling more than \$3 million and with trafficking in "arms and munitions of war." The worst part about this news is that I was not surprised in the slightest at such charges being brought against IOC members. These cases provided yet another example of why the IOC desperately needs Anita DeFrantz to become its next president. Why DeFrantz?

First, let me start by saying I have known Anita since her days as a vice-president with the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee for the 1984 Games. I was the chair of the American groups that had mobilized to boycott South Africa in sport and asked to meet her with Sam Ramsamy, then the international leader of the campaign to boycott South Africa in sport. Sam was a South African exile who is now President of the South African Olympic Committee and himself a member of the IOC.

South Africa had not competed in the Olympics since 1960 but there were strong rumors that they would be getting hearings at the pre-Olympics meetings of various international federations. Sam and I were in Los Angeles a month before the Games began to work to be sure the representatives of apartheid sport did not gain access to any meetings or have any public forums.

Anita, risking her status as a VP of the organizing committee where she was the only senior African American or woman, immediately helped in our campaign and the South Africans were shut out. Her principled position made her stand out among American sports leaders, most of whom thought we should not be "mixing politics and sport in the case of South Africa."

That, of course, was a code for their own support of white South African sports officials.

But I had seen her courage and willingness to stand on principle four years before when she stood up to President Carter's decision to boycott the Moscow Olympics. What courage it took then for an African American woman to publicly oppose an American President on his decision to use sport to punish the Soviet Union for its role in Afghanistan!

She has never stopped fighting for what she believes is right. Named by the Los Angeles Times as a "Southern California Rising Star" in November 1988, she has far exceeded that designation in terms of her share of the power in sport and is now considered by almost everyone as the single most powerful and influential woman in sport.

She has won dozens of honors that reflect her integrity as much as her influence, extraordinary skills and broad experience. DeFrantz's keen intellect has been acknowledge with nine honorary doctorates.

Anita started late in sport when she went out for rowing at the age of 18 at Connecticut College. After only four years, she was a member of every national team from 1975 to 1980. Anita won a bronze in the 1976 Games and a silver in the 1978 World Championships in rowing, was a finalist in the World Championships four times and won six National Championships. She was a competitor, hard worker, and ultimately a champion on the waterways.

An attorney by education if not practice, she was elected to the IOC in 1986 and after 11 years became the first woman in the 103-year history of the IOC to be elected as Vice President. Three years later Anita DeFrantz became the IOC's First Vice-President. She is also the president of the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, which is managing Southern California's very rich endowment from the 1984 Olympic Games to help children have better lives through sport.

All of these things make Anita DeFrantz supremely qualified to be the next IOC president. As a woman of color, she will have a hard road to win the presidency. As someone who would never buy the votes of delegates, she will have to win in non-traditional ways.

She will be opposed by powerful men. But she would be the only choice for anyone wanting a clean slate from which to operate the organization along with a promise to return the Olympic Movement to its founding ideals.

I was drawn into the Olympics for the first time with the 1960 Rome Games. Shortly before the Games I had been deeply shaken by an afternoon at the Nazi concentration camp in Dachau where I witnessed for the very first time what man was capable of doing to man in the name of race, religion, gender, nationality and ideology.

Then the Games in Rome opened a window on what the Olympics were supposed to be: global citizens whose race, religion, gender, nationality and ideology became irrelevant. Those athletes lived within the one circle of humanity on the fields of sporting competition, even if for a brief time.

Fourteen years old at the time, this vision made me want to be involved in the world of sport. It has been part of my life ever since. It saddens me to think that my 11 year old daughter Emily would have been turned off to sport if I had taken her to Sydney where stories of corruption battled for headlines with the actual competition.

I hope that Anita DeFrantz is elected as IOC President in July so I can take Emily to the 2004 Games with the belief that she would be inspired to make sport part of her entire life. For me, this vote is critical.

Without Anita DeFrantz, the corruption and the image of corruption will run unabated. With her, I have a genuine hope for our Olympic athletes inspiring young people that they can all live within that one circle of humanity.

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