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International Conference

Graz, 5/6.12.2003.

**CROATIAN OLYMPIC COMMITTEE**



*WOMEN AND SPORT COMMISSION*

- Report -

Ms. Iva Gavez, chairwoman



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Croatia is a small country. It has a population of little more than 4 million. The majority are women, 55%.  
Croatia is a politically young country but with long history and culture, reaching more than 14 centuries back.  
Croatia is a country with long Olympic sport history, reaching more than 110 years back.

The well-known saying states that there is no successful community without these three fields strongly combined. Women, sport and culture, among others. So how come there are many countries in which there is a low percentage of female athletes? How come women are not to be found in many national sport federations or in their decision-making bodies? Sport is a great way of character building, of improving physical and mental health. Sport builds the awareness of cooperation, tolerance, and hard work. Sport teaches us about the road to success, shows that it is often bumpy, but teaches us to appreciate success greatly. Sport implements basic social skills. Sport is a great mentor of cultural behavior. In order to increase the number of sport participants, male or female, there is an undeniable need of including both women and man in all sport bodies. So why isn't it so?

The beginnings of the olympism in Croatia date from 1894, when Franjo Bučar founded the modern Olympic movement in this part of Europe. Since the first days of the International Olympic Committee, he dedicated himself to including Croatia into it. On his initiative, the Croatian sports federation was renamed into the National Olympic Committee situated in Zagreb, and he was its president till 1927. He was also a member of the IOC. The great impulse to the idea of olympism was given by Franjo Bučar's book "Olympic Games in Stockholm in 1912."

Although a young organization, the need and the willingness of the Olympic Committee to improve the status of female athletes in Croatia has been shown at the very beginning of its existence. In the year 2000, the IOC's Regional Seminar on Women and Sport was held in Zagreb. Croatian Olympic Committee is a non-governmental body, struggling to change and impose the Sports law in order to improve the financial situation and the benefits, which will be used by the athletes.

In Croatia, the sports with the biggest number of female participants are gymnastics, volleyball and handball, percentages being 65%, 60% and 46% respectively. Concentrating on the number and percentage of female executive board members, we notice that gymnastics sports federation has the biggest number, 10 women making 31%, in tennis sports federation 3 women making 8%.



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As we look at higher levels in various sports, we can see that women tend to leave sport after an active career, reason being often the hard way to make a living out of sports. Women, i.e. female athletes, orientate on their education and profession, having been faced with many obstacles in their sport career and the very beginning of for example coaching, advising or referee career, as well as at the very attempt of a board member or general assembly membership application. Another reason of so few women in the decision-making bodies is a well-known attitude of the society and male officials in leadership positions, making it hard to improve those statistics.

It is our strong belief that various but adequate sport activity is important to implement on children from the early ages in order to make it possible for them to continue practicing sport maintaining the habit, the philosophy and enjoying the benefits of sport on one hand and giving them a good basis for becoming successful top athletes on the other. A person involved in sport from the early years, realizes that sport is a way of living and that it opens many possibilities for making a living and contributing to sport in the same time. Therefore, in every occasion, we strongly defend the 'Sport for All' idea, disregarding the comments that it only refers to recreational sport. The topic of this year's European Sport Conference, held in Dubrovnik this September, was "Making Sport attractive for all"; and great effort was made in covering recreational and high level sport, as well as sport leadership. The European Women and Sport Open Meeting, held on the same occasion, orientated on the adequate topic for women, "Making Sport attractive for all Women". The discussions on three sub-topics, Self-development through sport, Sport at the top; and then?, and Women in decision-making positions, showed the problems women face in all stages of sport, but also various experiences and possible solutions.

One of the projects of the Croatian Women and Sport Commission is also a concern about the physical education in schools. In many schools, the physical education teachers are male. Having in mind that girls in their early teenage years experience many physical changes and that physical education teachers are often well involved in the above-mentioned girls' acceptance of these changes, the general belief among physical education teachers is that female teachers should teach girls, and male teachers should teach boys, if we want to strengthen their link with sport, continue or start their bondage with sport.

The important fact is that the Croatian Women and Sport Commission is not a decision-making body but a counseling one. Therefore, the Commission has started a



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project of gathering the information and opinions of the teachers themselves in order to build a strategy and a plan, which will be introduced to the Ministry of Education and Sport. Only then can the situation hopefully be changed.

The Commission has planned to organize another one of the Seminars, intended for athletes, their coaches, parents and people involved in sport in general. It is our belief that it is an opportunity for them to find the immediate answers on the every-day questions and solutions for all the obstacles they run into. The topics "Female athletes and their Health"; and "Female athletes and the Media"; have already proven to be important. The Seminar with the topic "Athlete - Coach - Parent relationship"; is yet to be organized. The topics for the Seminars are often the result of talking to female athletes, noticing the issues that bother them. People who have had personal top-level sport experience can greatly contribute to helping young athletes and it is always our intention to include them in the Seminar and to hear their experiences and advice. The athletes then realize that what they hear is worth remembering and using as a method of reaching a goal.

It is important that the presence of the Women and Sport Commission is noticed and that its actions are welcomed.

Sport is a way of living. Sport teaches us how to act, how to think, how to struggle, how to earn results, how to appreciate them. Sport teaches us how to fight everyday fights and how to accept the outcomes, whatever they might be. Sport can have the influence on career, on family, on an innovation, on management, on culture, on life. The bigger awareness we have, the better society we will live in. And isn't that what we all want?