

IAAF YOUTH SPORTS SYMPOSIUM

Kenyatta University, Tuesday 11 July 2017

Speech by Lord Sebastian Coe, IAAF President

Vice Chancellor of Kenyatta University, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I delighted to attend this symposium “Enhancement of Youth Sports for Good Health and Well-Being”.

Running has a significant role to play in the fight against growing levels of obesity, heart disease and other health related illness occurring across an increasingly sedentary society globally.

Running is an open, inclusive activity which presents no boundaries to the individual on the basis of age or gender and, with the development of family and community based running culture, is a key ingredient in encouraging and sustaining a healthy life model.

It is not an exaggeration to say that running is the oldest sport and is a component of so many other sports. It is also associated with the maintenance of a healthy physiology and psychology.

Sports contributes to the virtues of fair play, character development and creates resiliency in dealing with crisis and the ability to problem solve. Sport is also the hidden social worker and a key group in the community to many

displaced young people in all parts of the world - from inner city gangs to refugees.

Sport, more often than not, is a mirror on society, reflecting what is good in society and also what is broken. We often turn to sport to inspire change in other industries and to drive messages of unity, courage, excellence, achievement and human ideals. So when sport has a crisis of confidence we are compelled to rebuild and repair quickly.

I don't think sport is fighting for its life as some have suggested. Sport is stronger than that mainly because of the people in it. Sport would not have survived three weeks let alone 33 centuries if it had been based on anything else than hard work, focus, and talented coaching and athletes that were prepared to dedicate half of their young lives on the pursuit of excellences.

But sport does have to address a triangle deficit ...of Trust, Relevance and Leadership. A triangle that is probably familiar to most industries in this room. These are not unique headings for sport.

- Remaining relevant is a survival necessity of any good company, brand or product
- Rebuilding and retaining trust is another side of the triangle
- And the last side is establishing and enabling strong and resilient leadership

This is not just the sport I am leading, track and field. It is all sport. In fact it could apply to almost every industry sector at some point.

It is for this reason that one of our underlying objectives is to help develop Athletics' limitless potential to contribute to the common good of society. To be successful we must attract children at a young age and nurture their interest in and love of exercise. The goal is to establish healthy life style habits early which will continue into and throughout adult life. With these ingrained, youngsters then have the physical ability to choose to pursue a career in competitive sport, be part of the sport in another capacity – coach, official, administration, or just to exercise recreationally.

Kenya topped the overall medal table at the 2015 IAAF World Championships in Beijing, testimony to the incredible amount of running talent in Kenya and how its been nurtured and developed.

A symposium of this nature provides a platform for the exchange of knowledge in these pertinent areas of talent discovery and development.

During my running career I competed against Kenyan runners on many occasions. I found them to be, first and foremost, gentle and humble off the track but extremely competitive on the track. There is therefore a lot that we can learn from Kenyan running.

What is equally encouraging and inspiring is what Kenyan athletes have done by way of 'giving back' to the society as role models.

For example, Tegla Loroupe has become an ambassador of peace, Paul Tergat has been a UN World Food Programme (WFP) "Ambassador Against Hunger" since his retirement, while Lornah Kiplagat is a great inspiration using her resources to develop a state of the art high altitude training centre for athletes.

Coming right home to Kenyatta University, another former running star Mike Boit, now a professor here, has directly and indirectly assisted over 200 bright students to gain admission to some of the world's greatest universities in the United States and Canada. What is incredible is that the majority of these students come from underprivileged home backgrounds. Last year, his projects assisted students from South Sudan and Uganda.

Mike, who earned his degrees in Eastern New Mexico, Stanford University and the University of Oregon on sport scholarships, is a strong advocate of track scholarships.

In support of Mike's mission and vision, I wish to take this opportunity to encourage African Universities to offer track scholarships as a way of improving the level of sport on the continent of Africa, to highlight the importance of education and to enhance cultural exchange.

We must offer better education opportunities to our athletes. This is the most effective way of proactively fighting the use of illegal drugs in sports and helping all athletes be accountable for themselves, their health and fitness and ultimately take responsibility for the sport they all love. This includes research to come up with better training methods and sports nutrition, as an alternative to the use of performance enhancing drugs that expose our youth to life-threatening conditions.

Therefore, I encourage Kenyatta University and other research institutions in the region to use the legacy left by the World U18 Championships as the impetus to improve research in the area of sport sciences. To lead in this area.

If I end on one point, I would like it to be about leadership. The world of sport ... in fact the world in general is craving good leadership. Shared structures and coalitions are not working as there is no accountability. Athletes and

individuals continue in their pursuit of glory, as a society we still value that. The difference with athletes is their hard work, their dedication, their relentless pursuit of a goal. The journey is as important as the goal. Our leaders need to learn this. Our future leaders – all of you – need to understand this. We want a goal and we want to see and understand the journey towards that goal. Not a trail of broken promises, discarded ideals and a litany of unaccountable ‘It’s not my fault’ wailing. Leaders of the future will lead by actions not rhetoric. They will be chosen because they offer something different.

I deeply appreciate Kenyatta University for coming up with the brilliant idea of hosting this symposium - a leadership idea - for inviting me to attend and for allowing me the privilege to open today’s session.

Thank you for your attention.

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