

## The International Olympic Committee Ethics Commission Decides How to Play Fair

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**On Tuesday 17th April 2001, Juan Antonio Samaranch, outgoing President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced the candidates for the Presidency race, the election of which will take place on July 16th in Moscow.**

The announcement followed a rather poorly attended press conference on Tuesday 2nd April, when the IOC Ethics Commission distributed its rules governing the behaviour of the candidates for the Presidency. The fact that the Ethics Commission has a role within this procedure raises a question about whether the IOC is really playing fair now and the degree to which ethics will become more present within its constitution.

When inquiring into the aims of the Ethics Commission, I was assured by Chairman Judge Mbaye it is open to “everything under the sun”, which I took as an

encouraging openness, rather than a vagueness in its definition of terms. However, one could be forgiven for feeling sceptical of the political context of the Ethics Commission, given that the basis for its formation was reactive to the scandals rather than proactively about ethics.

The question now hangs over how the IOC will utilise their newly formed Ethics Commission and whether the term ‘ethics’ will reflect anything like its use within academic discourse. It seems clear that the IOC needs to have ethics within its constitution beyond the political use of the term as a means for presenting an appearance of good practice. This is not to say that the IOC is not embracing good practice or that the Ethics Commission is not ensuring specific kinds of good practice.

Rather, it is to recognise that the kind of ethics that seems to be taking place within the IOC is not ethics as known to the average academic ethicist. The expertise within the IOC derives from non-ethicists who, undoubtedly, are

well versed with the values of Olympism, the underpinning philosophy of the Olympic Movement, but not necessarily in the process of ethical inquiry.

Of course, it is relevant to recognise that the IOC is an international (non-governmental) organisation and thus, to embrace a particular way of doing ethics might be problematic. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to expect some degree of ethical discourse and, perhaps, even expect an interest to conduct different kinds of inquiry that reflects its international constitution.

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Moreover, for the IOC, it seems useful that it adopts practices that ensure it is making its ethical decisions justifiable to the criticisms of academics. This would entail a real and financial commitment to the funding of ethical research that can submit the core values of Olympism to ethical scrutiny. The case is made even stronger by recognising that the IOC is the trustee organisation of the Olympic Movement. Thus, it would seem incumbent upon the IOC for it to develop this underpinning philosophy in order for their movement to keep moving!

Most certainly, it is not beyond the IOC to embrace a continuous reappraisal of its values. Such inquiry takes place within academic networks, with scholars from various disciplines engaging in Olympic Research. In this capacity, the IOC indirectly supports academic research through one of its derivatives, the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, which funds academic scholars to study the substantial archives of the Olympic Movement. As well, the 40-year old International Olympic Academy in Olympia holds seminars during the summer months for researchers and students to promote Olympic Research and understanding.

Through such research, the IOC can bridge the gap between academic theorising and ethical policy making. Thus, it is important to remember that the Olympic Movement is not only about sports. Rather, in keeping with its philosophy it places similar value upon the role of cultural expression and education more broadly.

The IOC can find strength in being seen to really have an interest in academic research to inform its ethical underpinnings and for such research to invigorate its practices. From here, it can seize the opportunity to demonstrate and justify its ethical decisions by the utilisation

of its Ethical Commission. Again, this needs to be done throughout the institution, if the organisation is to be seen as really taking seriously the business of ethics.

When asked about what qualities ought to characterise the next President, Juan Antonio Samaranch, recognised that the IOC has changed substantially in the 20 years of his Presidency and that it will be important for the elected candidate to be an "Executive President." The challenge for the

new President thus, will be to unite the disparate Commissions within the IOC. This can be achieved through Ethics by enabling a dialogue about core values, being reflective of them and the processes of administering them throughout the organisation. It entails giving substance to such abstract terms as 'fair play', 'respect', and 'honour' without simply restating the ideological aspirations of times passed.



*Speak No Evil, Hear No Evil, See No evil,*  
Photo taken at the IOC Ethics Commission Press Conference.