

## REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY TO THE 2018 FIL CONGRESS (66<sup>th</sup>) IN BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA

For the last 24 years I have had the honor and privilege to serve as General Secretary of the FIL. As you all know I have made the difficult decision not to seek re-election at this year's congress. With the demands on my regular full-time job and those of General Secretary in today's modern sports world, it is simply too time challenging to serve in both capacities and provide the attention they both deserve and need. However, I leave the position as General Secretary satisfied that I helped change the FIL and made our sport better over that time.

As you can understand it is impossible at a moment like this not to think back over that time period and reflect. I therefore hope you will indulge me and allow me to use my report to you today to share some of my thoughts for my time as General Secretary.

President Fendt and I were elected to our respective positions at the same congress in 1994 in Rome, Italy. At that time the FIL was in the fledgling stages of creating an office with a staff of two; had no television agreements; very limited sponsors and an uncertain future in the Olympic Movement. Today, I am proud that we have our own federation headquarter, a full staff, a reserve fund, full sponsorship participation and solid television agreements in place.

Although I do not and cannot claim to take credit for several of the changes that have taken place during my time period, there are a few I have been a part of which I believe have had a profound impact on our sport and that I would like to highlight today. To me, the most important change was the introduction of the single entity helmet. I am truly convinced this has saved lives and prevented many serious injuries. For those who were around at that time, you will remember the eggshell helmets many of the athletes wore previously that offered absolutely no protection. This being the case, you would think that the introduction of a safer helmet would have been well received, but I can tell you it was a struggle to get it passed. Today, I could not image anyone being opposed to this change.

Another monumental program introduced in my time period was the track vouchers. Like the single entity helmet, this was the idea of President Fendt. Track vouchers, which today numbers over 12,000,

have allowed so many nations to get the runs they need in order to safely compete in our sport. We are an expensive sport, without these the track vouchers, many nations would be forced to cut down on training simply for economic reasons.

One of the most significant changes in my time where I can take some credit is the introduction of team relay into the Olympic Games. It was the first new discipline in the Olympic Games for luge in 50 years. Today we know it as probably the most exciting event we have at the Olympic Games. But again, its introduction was not easy. After having applied for its inclusion over several Olympic Games periods, we were headed for another rejection leading up to the Olympic program decisions for the Sochi Games. Through our many sources at the IOC we were given a tip that we would once again be rejected. With that information President Fendt and I flew to Mexico for the ANOC meeting to attempt to get a personal meeting with IOC President Rogge to see if we could change his mind prior to it being officially rejected again. Despite the ANOC meeting being a meeting for the NOCs worldwide and most of them trying to get a one-on-one meeting with the IOC President, we were able to meet him. In that meeting we were indeed able to convince the IOC President to give us one more look. With that, the IOC dispatch a team that upcoming winter season to review the team relay at our World Championships in Cesana. For those who were there, you will remember that we ended up having an issue where the start gate did not open and we had to cancel the event. Not exactly the showcase opportunity we had hoped for. Once again we had to do some expensive lobbying with the IOC in order to get another chance. This eventually came with the WC final in Sigulda with the IOC President in attendance. This event was a great success. When the decision to include team relay came later that year during the IOC Session in London, I will not forget the several IOC members we had been working with came up to President Fendt and myself prior to the announcement saying to us that they were not able to tell us the result of the IOC vote, but that we would be happy when we heard it. And they were right.

I was also very proud to have chaired the structure working group a few years back. The result of the recommendations of this group caused, among others, the streamline of the Executive Board and the various commissions. The reforms made by the FIL based on our recommendations can be seen throughout our organization today and have allowed us to operate much more efficiently.

It is also many years since I was tasked with the responsibility of overseeing the development program. Prior to taking this over, there were no organized application system for the national federations and no

set standards. As a result, financial and equipment support were often given at various times of the year based on how persistent a person would be. This made for a system difficult to control. Today we have eliminated most of this and through the application support system. We are now better able to track the progress of those receiving the support of the FIL and provide a concrete timeline when support will be provided. We have also been able to dramatically increase and expand the support given over the years being accommodations, transportation, equipment, flight support just to name a few. Although, in the end, there is never enough.

We still have many issues to resolve in the development program. We are at a stage where we are missing the link of being able to assist many of our athletes reaching the next level. This can only happen with a more specialized focus on those athletes through better coaching and equipment. I hope this will one day be the reality.

Ironically, perhaps the biggest task of the General Secretary is the one that often goes the most unnoticed and that is the dealings with the various stakeholders in the Olympic Movement. From IOC and its Executive Board, to Olympic Solidarity, AIOWF, ASOIF, GAIFS, SportAccord, WADA, to name a few, these are organizations that one way or another impact us and we have meetings with. I have always joked that my job as General Secretary typically begins when our winter season is over. There are so many meetings, all of which are important to us. I am proud and I believe I leave my role as General Secretary with the FIL stronger than ever in our relationship to these organizations within the Olympic Movement.

For all the good things that have happened in my time as General Secretary there has also been some difficult times. It is without a doubt that the most difficult, sad and tragic event was the death of Georgian athlete Nodar Kumaritashvili during training leading up to the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver. It is an episode that will stay with me for the rest of my life. Yet the grief I feel about this is nothing in comparison to the grief the family (and you Felix) have experienced and continue to experience. One of the more moving events in my life was to travel to the Republic of Georgia to meet with his parents and go to his memorial and burial site. This tragic event in Whistler was also a time where I believe the FIL showed a true resiliency. From the difficult decision whether or not to cancel the event altogether to working up a solution that met with the acceptance of the various parties

involved, we were in the end able to stage the event. There were so many of you that stepped in to make it work despite the immense grief we all felt.

There are also unfinished tasks that I will leave behind. My biggest disappointment is not having achieved making Natural Track an Olympic discipline. Outside of President Fendt, I think few will appreciate how much time and effort we have spent trying to achieve this with the various stakeholders in the Olympic Movement. I was most hopeful of having reached this goal for the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Torino when we had countless meetings and promises (even in writing) from the Organizing Committee to include it, only to be turned down at a later stage. With that said, I am pleasantly surprised by both the 2020 Olympic Youth Games in Lausanne and the 2022 Olympic Winter Games in Beijing for their earnest interest in including natural track in meaningful ways. I can only state that I truly believe that the inclusion of natural track in the Olympic Game will be a good thing for the FIL and it is an objective we must continue to fight for.

There are also so many people I would like to thank.

First I would like to start by thanking you, the national federations for the trust you have placed in me over these years. I would like to thank Ioan Apostol for his tremendous work and cooperation with me on the development program. I would like to thank Hans-Jürgen Köhne for his work on the Youth Commission. I would like to thank my fellow members of the Executive Board. You have been great to work with. I want to thank the FIL Staff for their tremendous administrative support and work. I would also like to thank my fellow colleagues on the Presidium. To you Harald, for always keeping an eye on our budgets and making sure that Sepp and I did not go crazy spending money. To you Christoph, for really doing the day to day operational and administrative tasks of a General Secretary.

Finally, I do want to single out one person and that is President Fendt. Dear Sepp, It has been amazing working with you. We have worked so close for so many years and I feel we have accomplished so much of what we spoke of in our early days. We have also over time built a strong personal relationship that will last a lifetime. A President and General Secretary must work so closely together in order to be the most effective – I think we have accomplished that. Thank you again for your partnership and friendship.

From being an athlete on the Norwegian luge team, to coaching the 1984 US Olympic Team in Sarajevo, being a Vice President of the USLA, serving 10 years on the FIL technical commission and 24 years as

your General Secretary, it has been a fantastic journey. I am so grateful for the support and the friendships I have made over that time and I look forward to continuing to be a part of this amazing FIL luge family.