

Speech Bentele on 29.09.2022

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you very much for the invitation and the exchange today.

For a functioning, diverse and vibrant society, sport is an important engine, you could say it is almost like a racing / sports car.

As a girl who was born blind, movement has always been a way for me to get to know myself and my abilities and to expand my range of motion. Through outdoor exercise on the bike, the skis, or the pony, I have learned that I can do much more than people around me give me credit for. I have understood that I achieve success in sport and thus gain the respect of other people, who then strengthen and support me in my development.

This is exactly the support I have received from my parents, coaches and accompanying runners. I wish this support to all people, regardless of whether they have a disability or not.

It is obvious that people with disabilities need a framework that enables them to participate in sports. In my 15 years on the national cross-country skiing and biathlon team, I always had the German Paralympic team as an important support, my coaches and accompanying runners worked with me to help me develop a better technique, build up strength and gain endurance.

The beginning for children or adults, as we all know, is not at the Paralympics, the beginning is in the family, the school, the sports club.

It is even more important to me that today, as a member of the Presidential Board / (or Presidium) of the German Olympic Sports Confederation (short: DOSB), I can work together with the voluntary and full-time staff in German sport to advocate for precisely these supporting conditions. For us in the DOSB, creating the right framework means that we want to implement sport for all, which is why we have included the implementation of inclusion as a priority goal in our statutes. All member organisations have unanimously declared their support for the importance of implementing inclusion.

Inclusion is an attitude. With this unanimous approval, the organisations in German sport have made it clear that they want to strive for more diversity. However, it is obvious that accessibility in minds and in sports facilities will not be achieved tomorrow.

In addition to accessibility, the basis for the implementation of inclusion is the day-to-day encounter of people with and without disabilities and thus the reduction of existing uncertainties and fears. Sport is particularly well suited for such low-threshold encounters; doing sport together is fun, enables new experiences and, of course, sport is healthy and conveys important skills for everyday life. For us as an umbrella organisation, the support of the sports associations is therefore crucial if we want to create more opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in sport.

It is our declared goal to increase the number of inclusive sporting activities. This also requires well-trained coaches who live inclusion and create opportunities for all people to participate.

It is also important to reach people with disabilities who want to do sport or need assistance to find their way into sport. Especially in the last two years, when the Corona pandemic has kept us all very busy, many people have stayed away from sport. We need to change this as soon as possible.

In order to win people for sport and the associations for inclusion, the DOSB advises its member organisations, creates opportunities for exchange, for example in the annual expert forum, and has acquired project funds for inclusive sport projects in cooperation with a large foundation "Aktion Mensch" (currently 11 projects with a volume of almost 2 million euros are starting).

The motto of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities is crucial here: "Nothing about us, without us". True to this motto, the sports associations for people with disabilities support this development with their expertise. In addition to the support of the associations, the commitment of people with disabilities in the sports structures is also essential. Therefore, the recruitment of full-time and voluntary staff, whether with or without disabilities, is a crucial factor of success.

This is where the DOSB's flagship project "Event Inclusion Managers in Sport" comes in. Currently, 24 people with severe disabilities are employed in sports associations who are responsible for making sports events largely barrier-free and inclusive. They can name their own needs and create best practices of how the participation of people with disabilities can be implemented as athletes, coaches, spectators and volunteers. These actions should be a role model and inspire others to follow suit, which is why we need good public relations work.

In order to make inclusive sport visible, we are also intensively participating in the Special Olympic World Games 2023 in Berlin, which are intended to have a high-profile impact on society.

However, inclusion also needs political support and appropriate enabling conditions, for example communication barriers need to be overcome by funding sign language interpreters for the hearing impaired.

In the end, all of us here on the podium are athletes or sport-changemakers. Therefore, we want to see results, maybe even win the gold medal in the discipline of inclusion at some point. For this to be possible, we need a strong team.

I am happy that many in Germany and beyond want to join this team.

Thank you very much for your attention.