

Wolfgang Baumann

“Sport: Re-Thinking Tomorrow”

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening,

honored guests, ladies, gentlemen, friends, from all ends of the world and of course to our hosts from the Vatican. I am connected from Frankfurt; Germany and it is my very great pleasure to be with you for this enlightening Webinar.

Once again, I like to thank the organizer for inviting me to speak and can only congratulate our host for launching this very significant series of webinars under the theme “Sport: Re-Thinking Tomorrow”.

I was asked by the organizer to explore on the topic

Giving the Best of Yourself: Sport as a role for Life

from the perspective of my experience and organization TAFISA which stands for “The Association For International Sport for All”.

My name is Wolfgang Baumann, and I am serving as TAFISA Secretary General. But I am also happy to say that I am elected Vice President of ICSSPE, the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education and also have a seat on the IOC Sport and Active Society Commission.

In the following 25 minutes or so I like to explore on the following issues step by step:

- TAFISA
- The Challenges
- The Reality
- One Vision – One Solution
- The Church as Key Player
- Conclusions

To start with, I like to say a few words on my organization. TAFISA is the leading international Sport for All organization with nearly 400 member organizations from 170 countries worldwide. We are formally recognized by IOC, UNESCO, WHO, EU, African Union amongst others. Just have a look at the following charts that explain briefly what TAFISA is.

On this background I am happy to shed some light on various aspects of the main theme of today as far as I can observe from my special position. Obviously, I am not speaking as a theologian, philosopher or medical doctor but a practical expert who is deriving his knowledge from practical, ‘on the ground’ experiences of Sport for All. For that reason my mission today is to describe strategies that very practically highlight the role of the church when it comes to fighting the challenges of today and to helping to create the post corona societies.

Looking back over the last hundred years, we can see that sports have grown into one of the most prominent cultural phenomena. Now as a mainstream of social life, it developed into a significant segment of today’s world. Sport is providing modern heroes and devils, lunch break topics, travel motives, business booms, professional careers, national identities, and theatres of mass entertainment. This has become the norm; an integrated segment of daily life. It influences how we spend our money, select our idols, use our time, enjoy public triumph and

endure public despair. In conclusion for many people across the world sports and in particular football has become their new religion and the football stadiums are the new cathedrals they are pilgriming to. But this is another story that cannot be dealt with today.

Modern sport was – together with the World Exhibitions of the outgoing 19th century – one of the first carriers of globalization. Its concept and organization spread throughout most of the world's countries at a rate never seen before. Modern sport was the first form of culture that had the same appearance, principles, rules, terms and fashion around the world – long before global entertainment, tourism or information technologies. Here, for the first time ever, the world was conceived as one.

Half a century later, a new wave in the development of modern sport began to take shape. From the second half of the 20th century, sport grew further along an additional - and globally extending – branch which is today referred to as Sport for All.

The three words SPORT FOR ALL stand for a vision that portrays an ideal condition in the future. A vision is a synonym of hope, not of reality. But a vision may develop a dynamic drive if it is nourished by human hope and action. In our case - the growing participation of all kinds of people, under all kinds of circumstances, and in all kinds of activities - being understood and shaped as Sport for All.

Sport for All - which started as an idea without prestige and publicity - has made remarkable progress and the term as a right to citizenship for the first time was formulated in the resolution of the Council of Europe, 1962. Today, Sport is not yet for “All” but it is for “more” than ever.

Having said this, however, today, our people and our world face challenges and threats on a diverse scale never seen before – from climate change to civil unrest, non-communicable diseases, isolation, oppression, poverty, terrorism and the threat of nuclear war. This is not an exhaustive but alarming list of contemporary and future challenges!

And this is now all overshadowed by the challenge number one the world is facing – COVID-19. These are not problems unique to any one demographic, geography, belief system or political status. These are global problems, faced by all of us, our friends, our neighbours, our families, our children. Without immediate and effective change, generations to come will not enjoy the world as we have done. The world they will live in will be a lesser world than ours. This is not only not fair, but unacceptable... and preventable.

Let me illustrate briefly what the challenge of physical inactivity means to our children:

If you take a look at the research that is out there and lay it over the lifetime of a kid, what reflects back is this really concerning deadly cycle. And we see that this starts to shape very early in a kid's life.

Research clearly reveals that inactive kids are:

- 30% more likely to be obese,
- They will score lower on tests,
- They will be significantly more likely to be held back in school
- as they transition into the workplace, they will have much lower productivity levels,
- they will cost their employer more,
- they will have more sick days, and then of course
- as an individual, really become a drain on the economy.

The most troubling thing is that we see the research pointing us toward the notion the behavior is passed on to the next generation: kids with two inactive parents are six times more likely to be inactive.

But the deadly circle reveals that our children may live five years less if we as parents, teachers, etc. will not manage to change their lifestyle.

And we cannot wait since COVID-19 is for example impairing the epidemic of physical inactivity amongst kids. Most recent findings from a survey carried out in Slovenia reveal that due to the three-month total lockdown in the country when schools, kindergartens, playgrounds, etc. were all closed the state of children's physical fitness has deteriorated with all the negative mental, social effects that go along with this.

Our all mission now is to create a better world through in particular Sport for All for the next generation to enjoy. There are many outstanding research and white papers, agendas and guidelines establishing the case for Sport for All and physical activity (SAPA), as well as global Sustainable Development Goals, and I encourage you to access these.

It is time we all take notice, take responsibility, take action, and, through Sport for All, commit to creating a better world for the next generation, by:

- Sharing: what is successful in one school, community or country should be available to others;
- Supporting: question not 'what is in it for us', but 'what can we do for others', and establish the exchange of experience between lesser and more developed states and countries;
- Acting: the time for talk is over. Lead by efficient and effective example. Act with integrity.

We firmly believe that the physical inactivity lever is a much bigger driver of the risk and opportunity than the world currently recognizes and is investing in today. The truth is that physical inactivity is a systemic issue – and no one can solve this alone. In short, we need to be working shoulder-to-shoulder with all others.

In conclusion, we need a new type of global solidarity in sport and beyond and to form new alliances and coalitions of all partners and stakeholders interested to join. And it has to come from ourselves and we cannot wait for others to take the lead. And this certainly also includes our task of helping to develop and prepare for the post corona societies all over the globe.

Let me quote Pope Francis in this context from his recently published Encyclical "Fratelli Tutti" where he says:

"Each day offers us a new opportunity, a new possibility. We should not expect everything from those who govern us, for that would be childish. We have the space we need for co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes. Let us take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies."

What does this mean for us as Christians and the topic of today?

To cite from a recent Vatican publication with the same title "Giving the best of yourself" is a fundamental theme in sports and Sport for All, as participants, volunteers, referees, etc. both individually and collectively strive to achieve their goals in the game. When a person gives his or her very best, he or she experiences satisfaction and the joy of accomplishment. The same

is true in human life in general and in living out the Christian faith. We all want to be able to say one day, with St. Paul, "I have fought to the end the good fight, finished my course, I have kept the faith." (2Tim4:7).

Thus, it is obvious that sport can be used in a life-enhancing, God-honouring way, or abused and misused in ways that corrupt its noble purpose. This statement affirms, cautions and calls for Christian accountability in one of the most powerful forces in cultural life today which is sport.

At first glance it appears that the title of today very much refers to the individual, the athlete in elite sport who is striving to win a gold medal at the Olympics, a title at a tennis tournament or world cup in soccer. But to my understanding and according to my practical experience there is more in the title when we consider the question what sport can contribute to society as a whole with the ultimate goal to make the world a better place.

What we need is a change of paradigm in terms of extension of perspective.

The new image of Sport for All correlates with a new understanding of its manifold benefits not only for the individual but also for society. The new message is that Sport for All is embedded into a social context. Extension of perspective implies to present Sport for All in the way that is not only beneficial for the individual but for the society as such.

Sport for All stands out for its inclusiveness, ability to invoke social change, central role in preserving heritage and culture, and its fundamental role for health and well-being. Sport is a critical piece of the global puzzle.

What does this mean for the church in a practical way? What are the specific contributions the church can pay in this field now and in particular after the pandemic is over?

The church has always been a strong partner of sports. Its commitment to sport has always been to ensure that Sport

- always remains an experience capable of giving meaning and value to people's lives that goes far beyond sport to be just a physical act and manifestation.
- at whatever level it is promoted or practiced, in any place or environment where it is organized
- must always be aimed at the integral formation of the person
- improving social conditions, and
- building of interpersonal relationships.

This is why the pastoral care of sport is fitting in many environments and can be promoted in many contexts.

Let me only name and explain some of the critical environments where there is a fundamental need for the church to support and to announce Christ's message. In a nutshell it is what Pope Francis means when he said, "It's beautiful when a parish has a sports club and something is missing without one". Here are the critical environments that have been identified in the document "Giving the best of yourself" and that I fully agree with:

- Parents as first teachers
- Parishes
- School and universities

- Sport clubs and associations
- Media
- Sciences
- New places of sport

And finally, pastoral care of sport needs an educational strategy as well as an active role of relevant and committed stakeholders such as

- Sport educators
- Family and parents
- Volunteers
- Priests and consecrated people
- Etc.

Each group needs its specific strategy to make the pastoral care effective and to give it their best.

To conclude, Sport for All have developed over the years, and the world is in need of it more than ever. TAFISA can guide and assist organizations in developing their local, regional and national grassroots sports and physical activity movements. As well as our own practical programs and expertise, we have a vast network of members and partners who bring local knowledge and on-the-ground experience to enrich the Sport for All movement. With appropriate international recognition, encouragement and investment, the Sport for All sector can collaboratively solve problems we may not be equipped to solve alone.

Also in this light the special commitment and role of the church in partnership with sports is more important than ever before – in particular when it comes to create the post corona societies.

Coming to the end I like to quote Saint Josefmaria Escriva who finds the right words when he says

„...and again another failure, and a third failure, and a third failure and finally, yes! They made it. Well, we, with God's grace, which is the best, the only vaulting pole a Christian has, with God's grace, we can leap over anything at all“