



*After leading one of the world's most well-known brands for the past 12 years, Jacques Rogge has stepped down as President of the International Olympic Committee. His time at the helm began with controversy at the Salt Lake City Winter Olympic Games in 2002, but Rogge, who represented Belgium in yachting at three Olympic Games, was born to sail rough seas. Through a series of ethical policies and shrewd financial decisions, he was able to navigate the IOC to some of its most profitable years and to restore confidence in the Olympic movement.*

*Having chosen a career as an orthopaedic surgeon, Rogge dedicated himself to athlete health long before his time with the IOC. As President, he was the embodiment of Olympism, serving as a role model to both sportsmen and leaders. As he takes his leave, he tells our Editor-in-Chief Dr Nebojsa Popovic, himself an Olympic Gold medal winner, about how his role as a doctor influenced his role as a leader, and life after the Games.*

AN INTERVIEW WITH

# JACQUES ROGGE

## IOC HONORARY PRESIDENT

– Interview by Dr Nebojsa Popovic

***Are you tired? Was it a tough job to be the President of the IOC?***

No, I'm not tired. I never considered this a tough job; I considered it a privilege.

***Which of the roles that you performed in your life was the most difficult: Olympic athlete, orthopaedic surgeon or senior manager?***

It is difficult to compare the three but I would say the most difficult was being a high level athlete because I think difficulty can come from having competition. I would say I experienced the most competition as an athlete.

***Did your professional practice as a doctor help you in any way to be successful as President of the IOC?***

Yes, definitely. My medical training helped me very much because I learnt to listen to people and to listen to all their messages, whether they come through body language or their voice. As doctors we have to make a diagnosis and to find the issue, and then we prescribe

a form of treatment. To do this, we have to listen and identify the issue, and then make a managerial decision. However, I think the most important task, which is less about being a doctor or a manager, is that you need to get the buy-in of your stakeholders who, in this case, are the patients. If your patient does not buy into your prescribed treatment, it will not be a success.

***In your opinion, what is the primary role of the physician looking after elite Olympic athletes?***

There's only one role and that is to protect the health of the athlete. That is of paramount importance.

***What is your opinion about the dilemma regarding the role of the doctor in enhancing the performance of an athlete vs protecting the health of an athlete?***

Personally, I have never been involved in the performance-enhancing role of sports medicine. I was not a physiologist; I mostly worked as an orthopaedic and traumatology surgeon. But yes, some

**2013**

IOC Presidency came to an end (September)

**2002**

Became first IOC President to stay in the Olympic village (Salt Lake City)

**2001**

Elected as President of the IOC (July)

**1991**

Became a member of the IOC

**1989-2001**

President of the European Olympic Committees

**1989-1992**

President of the Belgian Olympic Committee

**1976**

Competed in his 3rd Summer Olympics yachting event (previously 1968, 1972)



doctors are faced with a dilemma between performance-enhancing and health-protecting. They must focus on protecting the athlete's health; that is the most important thing and the number 1 responsibility.

*Is it dangerous to the health of an elite athlete today to train and compete? Do we push them too much?*

It is dangerous for an athlete to compete at a high level if he does not have the right entourage. By that I mean he has a good coach who protects his health, a good team around him and definitely also good sports medicine doctors. I think that this is an important aspect to protecting the health of an athlete.

As far as pushing too much, there is a certain amount of push that comes from the athletes themselves. We have to protect them from going too far but, of course, everyone in the entourage must respect the health of the athlete and make that the priority.

*Is it still possible for a non-professional athlete to win an Olympic medal?*

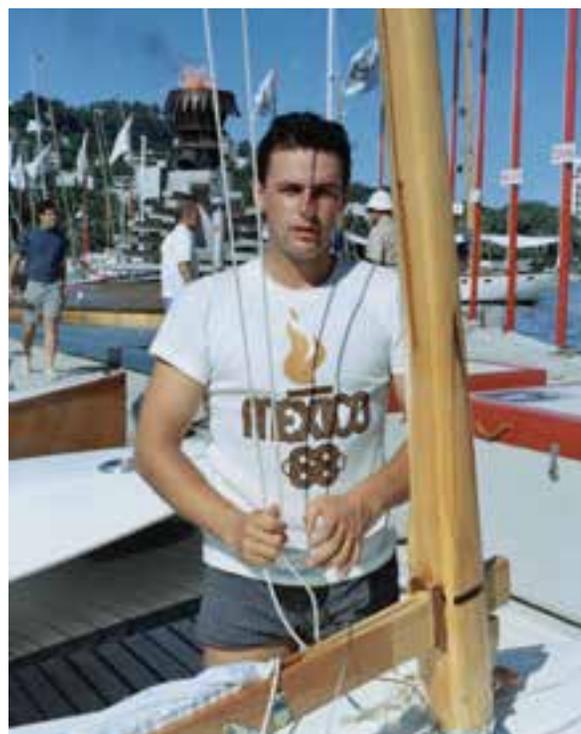
It is possible but it is very difficult. It is not easy. I know of many examples – even at the last games in London there were many athletes who were true non-professional athletes who won medals. But they were more the exception than the rule because it requires a lot of discipline. It also requires a lot of talent to be able to do that.

***There's only one role of a doctor and that is to protect the health of the athlete***

***Is the IOC doing enough to promote physical activity and exercise around the world? If not, what more could be done?***

I think that the IOC has always been at the forefront of the support for 'sport for all' and physical activity. We have identified this as one of our priorities for action. We have financially supported our 204 Olympic Committees and we work with them to promote physical activity. We have close contact with those working in education as well as the political world to support physical activity during and after school. We have also created the Youth Olympic Games so I would say we are very active.

In regards to your question of what more could be done, we have to persuade everyone that physical activity, especially for young people, is of great importance. When I say everyone, I mean that we have to persuade parents that their kids must move, we must persuade the world of education to have physical activity at school, we must persuade the sportspeople themselves to be receptive and supportive of 'sport for all' and the public authorities also have to do their job. So, it is a multidisciplinary approach.



**Image:** Jacques Rogge preparing to compete at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico.



**Image:** Jacques Rogge waving the Olympic flag next to the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, and the Mayor of Beijing, Guo Jinlong, during the closing ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

**How do we convince young athletes that it's not all about the medals, taking into account the hype around medal winners?**

It is not always easy. This is something that the IOC especially focuses on. Beside the athletic programme the IOC has a big education programme which teaches young athletes about the values of sport. We teach them that sport is very important for their future life. You're right that it cannot be reduced to medals only because sport is an education tool for everyone.

**What advice will you give to your successor, Thomas Bach, regarding the improvement of healthcare for elite athletes?**

I'm not someone who will give advice unless the advice has been requested! But I know that President Bach is very keen on sport for all and physical activity and I know that he will listen to the proposals of the IOC Medical Commission in this respect.

**What are you going to do now?**

Many things. Firstly I will spend more time with my family, which I am very much looking forward to. I will be able to practice sport actively, more than I could during my mandate because I had to travel so much and I had no time. I have a huge pile of books to read and DVDs to watch. I will still watch sport with great enthusiasm and I will be actively engaged with sports organisations, not as a person with responsibility but as a spectator. And finally I will support my grandchildren and their love of sport.

*Thank you, Mr President.*

*Nebojsa Popovic M.D., Ph.D.*



**Image above:** Juan-Antonio Samaranch congratulates Jacques Rogge as he takes over as the President of the IOC in Moscow, Russia.

**Image right:** New IOC President, Thomas Bach, applauds outgoing IOC President Jacques Rogge after the announcement of his election in Buenos Aires.

