

# Opening speech, Play the Game 2017

*Henrik H. Brandt, director of Danish Institute for Sports Studies/Play the Game*

Dear Alderman of the City of Eindhoven, dear Director general of Democracy of the Council of Europe, dear WADA president, dear speakers, dear guests, dear delegates.

My name is Henrik Brandt – I am the director of the Danish institute from Sports Studies and Play the Game – and in this capacity, I have the honor on behalf of the staff and board of our institution to welcome you all to this 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Play the Game conference – the first of its kind hosted in the Netherlands.

Yesterday when we arrived, we could enjoy the sight and the sound of dozens of field hockey and football matches right in front of the hotel. You could hear the sound of the sticks and the outcries of joy from the children and youngsters outside when goals were scored.

Let us not forget that the joy of sport and movement is what it is all about.

Allow me therefore to mark the opening of this conference by looking back 40 years till the time when I was a kid myself – I was about 10 years old, practicing sport myself - and believing everything I watched on the TV-screen.

I tend to remember the Olympics and the World Cups from those days very clearly since we had just gotten one of those modern TV's – probably from a Philips factory that used to be located in this area...

One of the heroes of those days was the Cuban runner, Alberto Juantorena, who won both the 400 and the 800 meters at the 1976 Olympics and who set a world record of 1.43,4 in the 800 meter the year after in 1977....

40 years after, that record is long gone

But the time is still world class - the present world record in 800 meters of 1.40,91 by the Kenyan David Rudisha is an improvement of just about 2.5%. Rudisha would have beaten Juantorena by about 20 meters.

Why do I mention this?

Because we all know which kind of effort and investment it takes to improve a world record by just over 2 % in a period of over 40 years.

We are talking about investment in science, training methods, technical innovation, sports facilities, equipment, new technologies, education and support structures,.

And sometimes – I heard some rumours about it in previous Play the Game conferences – it may also take investment in some less ethical methods...

I came to think of the evolution of the 800 meter world record last week in Brussels when I attended a seminar in the quite new and very interesting network, European Platform for Sport Innovation (EPSI).

A representative of the Nova Child innovation cluster in France talked about the development in schools in a country where they had registered the average times of the school children in the 800 meter dating 40 years back.

And do you know what?

In spite of all this investment in sporting performance and excellence, all the legacies from large events and all the inspiration from the sporting heroes of then and now, the time of the school kids in the 800 meter in that country was one minute slower on average today than it was 40 years ago.

One minute.

That means that the school kids of today would be almost 200 meters – half a lap – behind me and my school friends when we were kids 40 years ago...

Doesn't that sound a bit scary?

And even though the situation is probably not as bad in all countries, you could also look into some scientific graphs of trends and tendencies on obesity and overweight over the last 40 years on a global scale – and even in the Netherlands – and see how child and adult obesity and overweight has grown in an almost epidemic way all over the world since the days of Alberto Juantorena.

I wouldn't just blame just sport for this decline in general physical ability.

We are up against big societal change.

But still:

While society has invested enormous efforts in developing sport and by doing so achieved a lot of improvement at the top level...

– it becomes blatantly clear that sport has failed to deliver in many ways.

It leaves us with some tough questions to face and to put on the agenda!

Dear media people here today. Dear researchers, Dear sports representatives, Dear representatives of national and international authorities and policy makers:

Where were you while this development happened?

Where was organized sport?

Was it too obsessed with money, mega events, political prestige and power?

Did it forget to reform itself, in order to better deliver on the challenges created by change in the society around us?

This is indeed a very tough question. And it is one of the good reasons why we are particularly happy to organize the 10<sup>th</sup> Play the Game conference in Eindhoven and the Netherlands.

What you have to offer here is in my opinion an ability or at least a will to rethink – for example in a city like Eindhoven, which has undergone such transformation during the last 40 years from an industrial city and home of Philips to the present status as ‘Brainport’ and hub of knowledge, design and technology..

It is probably not by accident that the European platform for Sport Innovation EPSI, whose seminar I attended the other day in Brussels, was co-founded by one of our local partners, Rene Wijlens from the Sports & Technology cluster here in Eindhoven.

- on the same line we find our local partners from Sports eXperience, one of the first accelerators for sports startups in Europe
- they introduced us to the people from the more than 50 sports/media related companies and startups assembled in the fascinating SX Building – a hub for sport, media and marketing here in Eindhoven, which we will visit on Tuesday.
- We have also been inspired by the representatives of Mulier Instituut, the Knowledge Centre for Sport Netherlands, Fontys Sporthighschool and other knowledge institutions in the Dutch sports environment
- from ARKO Sports Media and its Sport & Strategie magazine,
- from the NOC/NSF,
- and not least representatives of the City of Eindhoven and some of the innovative field labs here in the Genneper Parken,
- and let us not forget the generous support to Play the Game from the Dutch ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport ... and many more

All in all. Dutch sport will have its challenges as well but there is a lot of innovative thinking going on. And we need that.

From Play the Game and the Danish Institute for Sports Studies we are very much on the same page:

We are on a permanent mission to promote:

- a more democratic,
- a more ethical,
- a more knowledge based,
- a more inclusive,
- a more open and innovation friendly sports environment

in Denmark – where we have our origins – and in the rest of the world through Play the Game.

This is why the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Play the Game conference found its home here in Eindhoven and the Netherlands. We liked the mutual inspiration, the atmosphere and the forward thinking here. You will get a chance to experience it by yourself in excursions and activities over two evenings.

We also like the tendency of many Dutch people to be quite blunt and go right to the core of the issues.

Yet, we need to be respectful to each other...

But let us get the issues and the opinions on the table. Let us discuss with each other with an open mind.

Let us confront the issues

- and through that let us look for better solutions...

There are all the hard issues like doping, corruption, match fixing, harassment, excessive mega events, downright crime in sport, political abuse, and all the other hard topics, we will discuss in the coming days.

But don't forget the softer issues, the soft bellies of sport and of the world population...

At the EPSI conference in Brussels last week, we heard presentations about the potential of sport from representatives of almost all areas of society and of the European institutions, not just youth, culture and education, but also growth, regional development, health, social cohesion etcetera ... They all see a huge potential in sport for delivering on all kinds of societal challenges.

Society in many countries actually wants sport to deliver more than today in many areas. This is a message you do not only hear from Brussels but certainly on a global scale as reflected in the International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport – and the Kazan Action Plan on the same. We are going to discuss these topics later in the week.

But unfortunately in many ways you could argue that in spite of good intentions and many declarations over the years, many sports organisations have themselves been overtaken by half a lap on the 800 meter.

They have been unwilling to or unable to reform themselves and to engage with their own stakeholders and wider society in general.

This is why Play the Game and this conference has so much focus on good governance in sport.

Sport simply needs to be better run –so the children of the future can also run better.

Sport must keep up with societal and technological change.

- It is time to look for new methods,
- It is time to look for improved governance in the sports organisations,
- It is time to embrace new innovations not just in elite sport but in the ways, we deliver, practice and develop sport...

- It is time to encourage new forms of stakeholder engagement in the running of sport.

We are here in a city of disruption, knowledge, technology and rethinking to look for some of the answers for the future.

If sports organisations are not able to reform themselves and to deliver a much better and more compelling product in the future, they will lose relevance to an extent we probably cannot imagine yet.

This is why we opted to call the 10<sup>th</sup> Play the Game conference 'Riding waves of change'.

I believe that if we combine our efforts here in Eindhoven and when we get back to our daily work and our home countries, we actually have the potential to contribute to real and positive change in sport.

Good luck with that mission to all of you.

Once again welcome – and thank you so much for being part of Play the Game 2017.