

The “AIRSPORTS”, FAI and the World.

Past – Present – Futur.

Mr. President, members of the Board, dear delegates and friends. This will be my 10th and last General Conference. For me time for reflection but I would like to share some of my experiences over those years with you .

First of all being actively involved in my favorite Airsport Skydiving. I started skydiving in France in 1962, competed in 3 classical World Competitions (1968-1970-1972) and 4 Formation skydiving World Meets (1975-77-79-81) And I am still skydiving.

For 25 years I worked within the IPC, 14 years as Chairman of the RW Subcommittee. Those were the formative years of competitive Formation Skydiving and judging.

Professionally I worked for the international electronics company “Philips” and have been part of the board financing and overseeing our substantial Sportsponsoring program at that time.

From my early days in Skydiving I have had many functions in our Dutch NAC, the last 12 years I was a member of the Board of our NAC, responsible for all Airsports and the relation with our NOC/NSF (National Olympic and Sport Federation) and thus with all 72 Sport Federations in the Netherlands.

The FAI – Airsports: THE PAST.

Aviation as a **sport** started in reality after WW II. So for this story the past means 1950 – 1980.

Flying for most people was expensive and exotic. Airsports like Gliding, Parachuting, Aero modelling were new and exciting. Skydiving was nicknamed: “The Space Age Sport”. Lots of fun to do and attractive for Media.

Sports in general were not very important, practiced at weekends and for the Monday-morning newspapers. “Avery Brundage” President of the IOC fought desperately professionalism in sports.

The FAI – Airsports had some important assets going for us:

1. Because of the Strong Central role of the FAI we had in every country the same competition rules!
2. Because of our link with Aviation we had access to free Air Travel tickets, and flying was then still very expensive. So we could organise World Championships all over the world.
3. In all countries we enjoyed strong backing by our governments, our military people and National Sport organisations. Providing for money and support.
4. We had a limited number of disciplines and World Championships. 5-6? Those few are well-known, sometimes even remembered to-day.

Let’s look at. 1972 as an example. The FAI – IPC with the USPA organised the 11th World Championships in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, USA . The government provided for 12 (!) Huey Helicopters for 500 flying hours.

Unthinkable to-day. But as a consequence the entry fee was low, airfare tickets for most teams were free.

The FAI – Airsports at present. 2000 – 2014.

We have grown dramatically in number of disciplines and now have some 100 World Champions annually! This is the result of New Technologies, new equipment and a very creative environment. Even within our disciplines however. nobody knows the names of our World Champions.

We have lost our relation with our SPORT hero's.
As Ronald Termaat from The Netherlands, vice-world champion in Gliding explains: "I know all the names of the past, but very few from the last ten years".

For the MEDIA and the General public it is totally impossible to understand our many different Airsport competitions.

We have lost in most countries support (money & means) from our Governements, our military institutions and financial support from our National Sport Federations.
Our World Championship competitions are paid for via the very high Entree's Fee by all participants.

THERE ARE SOME 75 INTERNATIONAL SPORTFEDERATIONS.

They all compete with us and each other for MEMBERS, MEDIA ATTENTION (TV) and SPONSORSHIP.

In 2003 we asked Professor Maarten van Bottenburg to analyse the position of the Airsports World Wide. He has written a well documented book: "**GLOBAL GAMES** / Hidden Competition. His conclusions were shocking, but based on facts and analysis. When you only looked at our Airsports our situation was ambiguous. When you look at the Airsports in relation with all other sports we were in a **steep decline**. He demonstrated that our decline started around 1980-1985.

As Airsports we have a strong elitist attitude. We only look at ourselves and are happy what with we see. Most International Sportfederations have such a elitist history but they have grown faster and learned to be succesfull in this "hidden" but dramatic competition with all other World Sport Federations.

Some International Sport Federations had the same problems we had, but they found clever solutions. Frequently by studying their rivals and adapting their rules and formats.

My presentation here is part of: Pt 23 of our Agenda "Open Forum" so I will be short and end with 4 examples from the past and present were I think we could learn from other Sports.

Example 1, World Championships Format.

In the fifties (!) FAI agreed on a General Rule for all our World Championships.

Every NAC could send their National Champion to our bi-annual World Championships. In this way our competitors could meet and learn from each other (and have a enjoyable time for those not really in contention.

At that time it made sense and was strongly supported by our delegates and competitors.

To-day I do not know of any other Sport Federation with the same set-up. The original positives have long be overshadowed with the **negatives**.

It makes for long, boring and expensive World Championships were the main purpose should be competing to win and establish the ranking of top competitors. For us at FAI it remains a format for Internal promotion, and having "A GOOD TIME.

All other sports have focussed on competitions to QUALIFY first. Either via competitions (team sports) and meeting qualification limits, times, distances etc.

When you look at VOLLEYBALL, Swimming etc the qualification competitions attract far more attention from MEDIA, the general public etc then the final World Championships.

Example 2.

For various reasons our Air Sport competitions are NOT attractive for live coverage by TV. Many studies and trials have all confirmed that situation. We should accept that and learn a clever way around that situation.

I know one SPORT with the same or even a worst position re: life-coverage. Let's look at SAILING. They have a limited 60 boats in a competition being 5 miles out at sea. You can hardly see them and when you film them you see 60 sails criss-crossing and it is totally unclear who is in the end no 1, 2 or 3.

Their sponsors asked for TV Coverage, their membership asked for coverage and they found a smart way to improve their position substantially.

Example 3.

The Olympics are the MOST successfull multi sport competition. Combining in 2008-2012 five very succesfull sportsfederations and disciplines with 22 small Sports.

What part of the Olympics have attractive by far the most attention by all sort of MASS and modern personalised media such as Internet related?

In a globalised world our Identity in the first place is related to our Country. So the MEDAL list has grown from a side show in the 60-ties to a central result to-day. Two or three countries aim for first place, in The Netherlands every sportperson knows that we aim for a position with the first 10 nations. This has improved dramatically the position of some “smaller”sports.

Did we consider such a medal list for our 2008 Turin – Italian organised World Air Games? If you understand the World Air Games as a competition it would be clear that Italy would have every opportunity to achieve there a number 1 NATION position. Would it have attracted Italian media attention?

Markus proposed “a Sport Laboratory” format for the development of the Airsports. An excellent idea. Important that we support his idea, but I would like to add some suggestions. Invite not only “officials” but also creative people interested with new and challenging idea’s Not only from within our Airsports but also from other International Sport Federations.

This is my last General Conference and only a short presentation. I have enjoyed all those years tremendously. First and most doing my thing in the air and competing at home and in the world. I have also enjoyed working in our Air sport organisations both at home in our NAC and in the World within FAI..

One final observation. The General Conference of FAI attracts annually some 50-60 nations and over a 100 highly qualified persons. Intelligent, powerfull and with lot’s of energy. They built FAI together with our staff in Lausanne. Sometimes in the past years I prayed they would focus their energy on major issue’s and not waste to much time on details.

But in general it has been fun, thank you all and lot’s of succes in the future.

Bert Wijnands,
FAI Delegate The Netherlands.
October 2014.