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How IOC's Pound sees anti-doping, marketing efforts evolving

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RICK BURTON

There's no question that Dick Pound, a swimmer on the Canadian Olympic team (Rome 1960) and longtime International Olympic Committee member, has played a significant role in designing the commercial underpinning of the IOC. And since Pound's efforts have included the creation of The Olympic Program and management of the World Anti-Doping Agency, we went to Pound, one of the IOC's most outspoken members, to ask for his thoughts on TOP and WADA on the eve of London's historic 2012 Summer Olympics.



NORM O'REILLY

It was soon after Montreal's 1976 Games that Pound was elected president of the Canadian Olympic Committee, followed in 1978 by full IOC membership. He was later selected chairman of the IOC's Marketing Commission and installed as the founding president of WADA.

From 1999 to 2007, Pound not only led WADA administratively but was its face and voice, engaging in memorable debates with America's professional sports leagues, elite cyclists and uncooperative international federations. Under his leadership, significant progress was made in the fight against doping, although many in sports hated Pound for his dogged pursuit of each entity's dirtiest chemical secrets.

While the IOC was no doubt thankful he was placing anti-doping on the world's front pages, Pound bore the brunt of league attacks, athlete stonewalling and player-union deflection.

So where are we in 2012?

"WADA's active role remains the same," said Pound. "We've got to monitor, fight, improve our labs, identify shortcomings and give credit where it's deserved. But we're not there yet. What WADA risks losing as it becomes more established are the excitement and willingness to confront organized cheating."

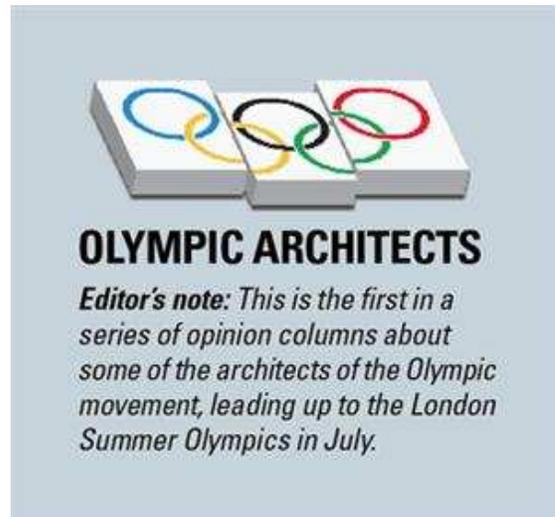
It's notable Pound uses the words "excitement" and "willingness to confront," but it's his zeal that separates Pound from his peers and has made him an Olympic outlier ... a man for his seasons.

WADA faces a changing environment in which public perceptions and awareness are "decent" but drug-story fatigue is making it harder to keep WADA on the world's front pages. How to change that? Pound provocatively suggests the active involvement and engagement of Olympic sponsors and sports event sponsors, parties that

support sports and are adversely affected by a culture of doping.

He also thinks the decreasing number of positive doping tests is creating an illusion. He bases that on the facts that "there have been cutbacks on the number of tests, many testing protocols are still poorly structured and that 'cheaters' remain ahead of the testers in many aspects."

While we might lack true insight about testing protocols or cheaters, as parents and industry veterans, we can comfortably ask: Who do you want watching your flock at night ... a committed person or a comfortable person? The same holds with marketing. After 30 years of TOP, do you stick with something comfortable or commit yourself to the warts-and-all review?



IOC member Dick Pound advocates vigilance on anti-doping efforts and diversity in marketing.

Photo by: NEWS.COM

The TOP concept was first unveiled in 1983, by Horst Dassler of Adidas. Shortly thereafter, IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch tapped Pound to drive a worldwide sponsorship agenda and create a protocol where global sponsorship rights were efficiently bundled. The IOC's objective was to make the concept operational by the 1988 Games in Calgary and Seoul. When it started, TOP generated less than \$100 million for the first quadrennial cycle. By 2012, TOP was generating more than \$1 billion. Today, TOP provides 11 sponsors with exclusive Olympic brand rights in all jurisdictions where the IOC acknowledges national Olympic committees.

But is TOP still doing a good job? Or is the Olympic brand possibly losing some of its relevance for sponsors seeking to connect with young consumers?

"Well, I certainly think some of the events we've added are giving back value and attracting youth," Pound said discussing specific Olympic events like snowboarding, mountain biking and freestyle skiing. "And, it's not impossible to conclude that after all the effort of bringing younger people into contact with the Olympic Games, we've expanded the Olympic brand. TOP's roster illuminates that."

Can a nearly 30-year-old concept, still dominated by American sponsors (six of the 11), hold up?

"Because TOP is an international program and because we've been careful about picking companies that are really international in scope, we're in a position to generate benefits globally for them in almost all economic circumstances. This works because, if things are, say, bad in the U.S. economically, they may be going well in other parts of the world and vice versa. That has been one of the key success factors of TOP. It's almost like it's a way of balancing it out economically. It's a form of financial hedging."

Asked whether TOP would get overhauled in the future, Pound replied, "The choice of attractive and exclusive categories, allowing our partners to use global strategies, with flexibility in particular markets for shaping their

specific messages, is key. Whether TOP will change, well, frankly, we put everything on the table about three or four years ago, to review the many alternatives and considered whether we should have a completely new paradigm, or maintain what we have now. Upon review, we realized we actually have a pretty good formula and have benefited from all the attributes I just mentioned. So we opted not to change merely for the sake of change.”

Nonetheless, change is coming and it will start with the portion of the TOP agreement that gives the U.S. Olympic Committee roughly 20 percent of most TOP deals. That the USOC could secure that agreement in the 1980s speaks to the importance of U.S.-based sponsors buying into a global concept and the USOC knowing foreign sponsors would want to reach into U.S. pocketbooks. But with many IOC members openly acknowledging the Olympics will not return to the U.S. until TOP and U.S. broadcast rights revenue is redrawn (and redistributed), TOP is likely to get a facelift.

Will that happen before the London 2012 Games? Probably not. But Pound, an architect of so many Olympian platforms, thinks London will offer enormous opportunities to countries, sponsors and athletes alike to shine on the world stage. And somewhere behind the scenes he'll be working on agendas that push the Olympic movement forward.

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