

Athletes set gold standard for helping disadvantaged kids

Right To Play emphasizes the role of sport as an educational vehicle for children in developing countries

By ANDREA HAYLEY
Epoch Times Staff

Former Olympic athletes, international humanitarian leaders, and the private sector have come to the Vancouver Games in full support of Right To Play, an NGO with a mission to teach life skills to children in disadvantaged countries by engaging them through sport.

Shortly after moving to Canada in 2000, Former Norwegian Olympic four-time gold medalist Johann Olav Koss founded Right To Play with the express purpose of teaching children through play.

Right To Play's temporary home during the Olympics is in a pavilion called World Of Play at Concord Place in Vancouver's False Creek waterfront area. Pictorial displays, multi-media, and a games room for kids educate 10,000 visitors a day about Right To Play's work in 23 countries.

"It's been a great way to kind of achieve things," says Koss.

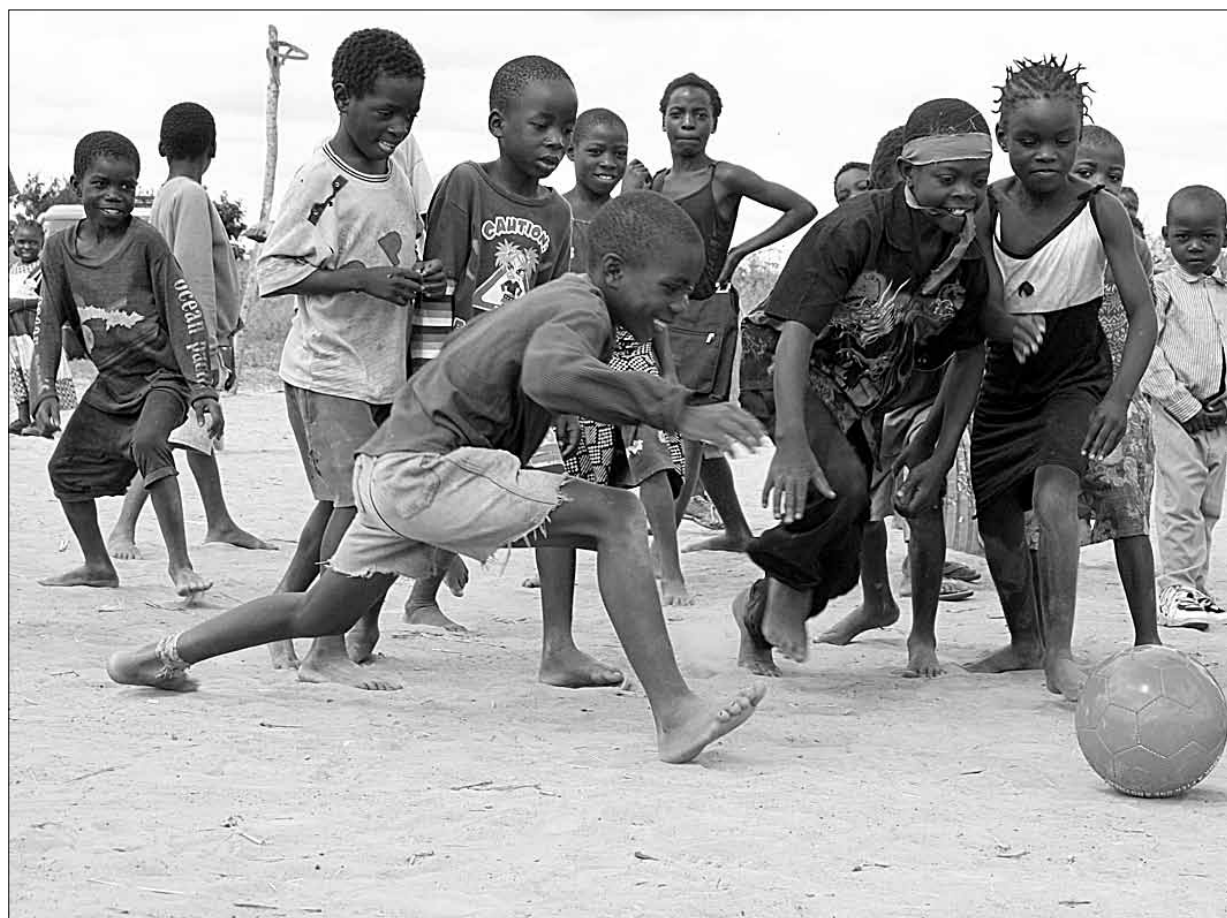
Headquartered in Toronto, Right To Play has more than 350 athlete-ambassadors from 40 countries, some of whom have been busy during Vancouver 2010 engaging and inspiring school children in Surrey as part of a sponsorship with Surrey City government.

Right To Play was previously Olympic Aid, a legacy of the organizing committee of the 1994 Lillehammer Games. Koss was lead ambassador back then when he donated his medal winnings and challenged fellow athletes and the public to contribute.

An unprecedented \$18 million was raised which was used to support developmental aid projects in Sarajevo, Eritrea, Guatemala, Afghanistan, and Lebanon.

"That was an amazing, life-changing experience for me, and after the Games I was then off to continue the legacy of Olympic Aid to other, future Games," says Koss.

Olympic Aid thrived, generating large donations for international



Children in Zambia have fun with Right To Play's signature red ball. The ball bears the organization's philosophy, "Look after yourself; look after one another." RIGHT TO PLAY

aid. At the 1996 Atlanta games, a partnership with UNICEF raised \$13 million, and vaccination programs for 12.2 million children and over 800,000 women in 10 countries were carried out as a result.

"Originally the Olympic Games was only kind of an income generator, like a fund-raising mechanism," Koss says. "It was really natural to what I believe in, and then we started Right To Play."

'Right To Play essentially empowers kids, makes them understand the power they have within.' — Daniel Igali

The concept of play as a human right is gaining tremendous credibility in humanitarian circles. At the

Salt Lake City Olympics in 2002, a round-table discussion entitled "Healthier, Safer, Stronger: Using sport for development to build a brighter future for children worldwide" had United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan giving the keynote address.

For the Vancouver Olympics, the University of British Columbia put together a five-part dialogue series highlighting sport and development. Speaking on Feb. 17, well-known activist Stephen Lewis noted that "every single country on the face of the earth, save two, have ratified a convention which elevates the right to play to a human right. It is not merely a phrase. It is a human right."

Right To Play ambassador Daniel Igali, who won the gold for Canada in the men's freestyle wrestling at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, got involved because he wanted to make a difference.

"Right To Play isn't about giving red balls to kids so they can just run around. Right To Play essentially empowers kids, makes them understand the power they have within, give them life skills, give them deductive skills, makes them forget

about where they are and focus on what they can be ... Right To Play does that consistently," he says.

Fundamental to the organization's success is a commitment of volunteer aid dollars to the training of volunteers to mentor children according to the organization's curriculum and philosophies.

"What we're doing is going into the community and training individuals to become coaches and teachers in the games and in the sports programs," says Koss.

"We have evaluation and constant re-training and updates and make sure that every coach has a protective role over the child, so they understand about child protective issues and respect for one another and the values we believe in."

The positive effects of Right To Play's approach are extensive. United Nations reports have acknowledged the organization's success in war torn countries in limiting the numbers of child soldiers recruited to rebel groups or military service from refugee camps.

"They are happier, they believe in coming back home, but changing the country to a peaceful country instead of a war country," Koss says.

MD criticizes Olympic sponsors Coke, McDonalds

By BRAD BUSSCHE
Epoch Times Staff

The head of the Childhood Obesity Foundation says the association of corporations such as McDonalds and Coca-Cola with the Olympics sends an unhealthy message to children.

Although Olympics' organizers promote physical activity and positive health spin-offs from the Games, increased consumption of sweet drinks fast food could have the opposite effect, said Dr. Tom Warshawski.

"I think that it is unfortunate to see these particular corporations benefitting from such a close association with the Olympics," he said.

"It is far more likely that as a result of viewing the Games and advertising, the majority of the population will be motivated to consume their products than significantly increase their activity levels."

Coke is the official "Beverage of Choice" for the Olympics while McDonalds is the "Restaurant of Choice."

"Unfortunately, if the Coke and McDonalds ads are effective, the Olympics will be a net loss in terms of fitness for the population," said Warshawski, a Kelowna paediatrician.

The Games are a "fabulous TV spectacle with high rates of viewership," he added. But when watching TV, children tend to eat and drink "what they watch and while they watch." A 13-year-old boy who consumes a 591 ml bottle of Coke would need to jog for 50 minutes to burn off that many calories, he said.

"The science tells us that it is

very difficult to work off the calories consumed by junk food and junk drinks ... As a result of the Games' sponsors, many more 13-year-olds will quaff the coke than run for 50 minutes."

Coca-Cola spokesperson David Moran told CBC News that the company has a policy of not advertising to children, adding that Coca-Cola is currently promoting smaller 110-calorie bottles. He also said some athletes drink Coke for the boost.

"A lot of athletes will tell you they'll actually drink Coke before or after they compete to get that energy boost and refreshment that [it] provides."

Meanwhile, McDonalds came under fire from the B.C. Federation of Labour for starting new workers at \$6.35 an hour.

B.C. Fed President Jim Sinclair said McDonalds "can find hundreds of millions of dollars to sponsor and promote the Olympics but they pay less than the lowest minimum wage in Canada to new workers."

"I talked to several McDonald's workers in the past few days who are making less than \$7 an hour and they are not impressed with the company," he said in a press release.

"These workers deserve a fair wage and respect. That's the real Olympic spirit."

In 2006, the B.C. government introduced a \$6 an hour training wage by lowering the minimum wage by 25 percent for new workers and immigrants.

Sinclair called on McDonald's to pay all starting employees a minimum of \$10 an hour, the wage necessary for a single person working full-time to reach the poverty line, according to the release.

Will this little GMO piggy get to market?

GMO CONTINUED FROM P1

Lucy Sharratt, coordinator with the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, doubts that Canadians are ready to embrace genetically engineered pork. She also questions whether Health Canada "has the tools to assess the safety of the Enviropig."

"If the so-called Enviropig is commercialized, the first major concern is the safety of Canadians who are consuming products from those animals," she said. "Health Canada does not have the trust of Canadians to approve this product or assess it for safety."

Regarding the risk of contamination, Sharratt notes the recent crisis in the flax industry after genetically modified seeds entered the regular seed supply, causing the European Union—Canada's largest flax market—to turn away shipments of Canadian flax. The EU has a zero-tolerance policy on genetically modified organisms.

The flax industry is currently scrambling to figure out how the so-called Triffid seed—developed by the University of Saskatchewan in the 1990s but ordered destroyed 10 years ago after farmers raised concerns that the EU would reject it—found its way into commercial crops.

In 2002, the University of Guelph had its own contamination incident in which the remains of 11 genetically engineered piglets were mistakenly sent to be rendered and wound up in feed for chickens and turkeys on Ontario farms.

After an investigation, Health Canada found that the security lapse posed no risk to either humans or poultry.

Cathy Holtzlander, community organizer with Saskatchewan-based Beyond Factory Farming, says rather than risking the unknowns inherent in commercializing the Enviropig, a safer way to address the problem of phosphorus pollution would be to reduce the concentration of hog-confinement facilities and the numbers of animals in them.

"The problem isn't with the pigs. The problem of hog operations polluting the water has to do with the whole industrialization scale that has been developed to raise hogs."

Holtzlander cites the current crisis in Canada's hog sector in which the government is paying millions of dollars to help farmers exit the hog industry as an example of why commercializing the Enviropig may not be such a good idea.

"The model of high-intensity large-scale hog production hasn't worked even from the point of view of profitability and survival of the hog industry," she says. "So it's a failed model,

and introducing a genetically modified pig to a failed model is not going to be beneficial, it's not going to solve that problem, and I really wonder about the impact."

She adds that the Enviropig is "yet another in a long series of technological fixes ... and what generally happens when you do this is you create another problem that requires another technological fix."

According to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), new products such as the Enviropig are "subject to a rigorous, science-based

'The problem of hog operations polluting the water has to do with the whole industrialization scale that has been developed to raise hogs'

— Cathy Holtzlander

review process" by Environment Canada, Health Canada, and the CFIA before being approved for use in food or feed or for release into the environment.

Should the product receive full regulatory approval in the future, "other essential considerations such as consumer and market acceptance have to be made before deciding if commercialization should proceed," the agency said in a statement.

The U of G's Enviropig research is funded by both government and industry, including Agriculture Canada and Ontario Pork.

Sharratt is critical of universities that use public money to develop genetically engineered technologies "without a mandate from the public."

"One of the deep problems with genetic engineering is that there's been no public consultation, and the spectre of the Enviropig signals the immediate need for public consultations on genetic engineering," she says.

"Health Canada and Environment Canada should be responsible for actually consulting Canadians on the future of genetic engineering instead of pursuing a costly assessment of safety for a product that I don't think Canadians will want at all and will in fact vehemently reject."

Videoconferencing to help inmates with mental health issues

By JOAN DELANEY
Epoch Times Staff

Thanks to innovative technology, a new initiative to provide treatment for federal offenders with mental health issues will soon be implemented in federal prisons in Ontario.

From a private room at the prison, inmates will be connected by video

to a psychiatrist located outside the facility. The specialist will provide care and treatment in the same way as if the two were in the same room together.

The service will be provided by the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN), one of the largest telemedicine networks in the world.

"It gives prisoners better access to mental health which they couldn't get normally to the same degree," says Dr. Ed Brown, CEO of OTN.

"It also reduces the requirement to take people out of the prison, and that's very positive from a number of perspectives as well because it reduces costs. Usually when you take a prisoner out you have to drive them out with some kind of armed guard and that takes several hours, and that certainly costs the prison system a bit of money."

While other telemedicine services have recently been introduced inside Ontario's federal prisons, this will be the first time psychiatric services will be provided to inmates via two-way videoconferencing systems.

According to Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), there is a growing prevalence of mental illness within the prison system. In 2008, nearly a quarter of female offenders and 13 percent of male offenders were identified as having a mental health disorder at intake. That represents an increase of 85 per cent and 86 per cent respectively since 1997.

The suicide rate among federally incarcerated inmates is higher than that of the general Canadian popu-

lation. Studies show that more than 90 percent of suicide victims have a diagnosable psychiatric illness.

Ian Irving, CSC's Regional Manager, Clinical Services in Ontario, said in a statement that expanding OTN's existing telemedicine services to include mental health is "the next logical step in providing efficient, quality health care delivery to the federal offender population."

"Providing offenders with mental health issues access to psychiatric specialists contributes to their rehabilitation and safe, successful reintegration into the community. That's the ultimate goal," Irving said.

Brown notes that a shortage of psychiatric specialists currently exists in Ontario.

"There's a general shortage of mental health providers; there's a general shortage of psychiatrists pretty much everywhere, and that's why we think telemedicine is important—not only does it provide access, but it really helps with the distribution of resources."

He adds that the system "also lends itself to the development of clinical models of care where you can create a team-based care system so the psychiatrist doesn't have to pull all the weight—they can work with other providers over a distance who can provide a lot of the local care and use the psychiatrist as required to supplement that."

A not-for-profit organization funded by the Government of Ontario, OTN provides telemedicine services to hospitals and other

health-care facilities across the province, including nursing stations in some remote First Nations communities.

'It gives prisoners better access to mental health which they couldn't get normally to the same degree.' — Dr. Ed Brown

"Basically we provide two-way TV video conferencing along with medical devices like hand-held patient exam cameras for a close-up of a wound or a rash, a digital stethoscope to listen to heart or lung sounds, the ability to look into your ears, nose, and throat through an ENT scope, and often x-rays, so that really a health provider can actually examine a patient and can come up with a treatment plan over a distance," says Brown.

OTN recently completed a trial involving more than 800 patients with one of two chronic diseases: congestive heart failure or chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder. The organization plans to use the success of the trial to expand to other therapeutic areas.

PUZZLES 4 PEACE

Guess the hidden saying, phrase or word(s) suggested by the graphic below

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