4th December 2014 - Sport: Governance

**Baroness Grey-Thompson (CB):** My Lords, I am delighted that the noble Lord, Lord Moynihan, has secured this debate.

When I hear the word “governance” I think of openness, transparency, diversity and equality, but also monitoring, evaluation, ticking boxes and lots of paperwork. Sadly, as the noble Lord, Lord Triesman, so eloquently explained, most of the time the international federations receive media attention because of an absolute lack of good governance. The worst offenders are blasé, arrogant and wrongly believe that great performances on the field of play allow them to behave completely unacceptably behind the scenes.

Back in 1996, I sat on the English Lottery Awards Panel, which had the privilege of allocating £20 million per month to capital projects and which challenged outdated rules of membership. When the National Lottery Act changed, I moved to UK Sport. At the time many national governing bodies were well meaning, but funding forced them to modernise. Unfortunately, a few still need to move forward. We need to find ways—whether through changing their lottery funding or through other methods—to encourage them to behave better. National governing bodies have many responsibilities; protection from concussion is one, but also they influence how physical literacy is taught in schools. Education and sport must work much more closely together. While there are examples of good practice, teacher training at primary level needs to be revolutionised.

A recent report showed that in 30% of sports men are paid more than women, and I cannot even begin to describe the unparliamentary language used to describe me when I suggested that there should be greater equality. In business it is accepted that a diverse board is more successful. Why, then, do six national governing bodies still have no women on their boards? Only 49% have met the 25% target. Can Her Majesty’s Government say what work is being done in this area? Perhaps it is time for a Title IX equivalent.

National governing bodies also have a responsibility to develop disability sport at all levels; it is not an add-on. Disabled children must have access to physical activity in schools—they cannot be sent to the library. I was recently told about the case of a young wheelchair user who wanted to play badminton but was rejected by the club because she was told that her wheels would mark the floor. Wheels do not mark the floor any more than trainers—that is simply discrimination.

I would also like to see those who host major events take disability access as seriously as LOCOG did in 2012. I am delighted that the noble Lord, Lord Holmes, is in his place and commend his work. At the Games, I was actually able to sit with my family and had a line of sight, which, if you are a wheelchair user, is not as common as you would expect. I also commend the work of Level Playing Field, which does excellent work in this area to highlight the lack of accessibility within Premiership football clubs.

I have worked with some really exciting and innovative organisations but have also had the experience of sitting on the ill fated UCI Independent Commission to look at the case of Lance Armstrong. Here was an international federation that made the pretence of wanting good governance. I was going to say that it invested rather a lot of money, but in fact it spent it on doing nothing. The commission did not receive a single document from the UCI. Cycling, and all sports, deserve a federation that not only says the right thing but does not ignore its responsibilities. Perhaps the best thing to come out of the commission was that it led to a change in leadership—which was not what we set out to do.

What we cannot forget is that most people in sport are volunteers. They had the biggest influence on my own athletics career, but we expect a lot from them; we expect them to revalidate their coaching awards and to do child protection, first aid and health and safety. Join In recently produced some research in which it assessed that an estimated 45% of volunteers within the 150,000 sports clubs in England are engaged in governance roles, such as committee members. Sport would not survive without these people. The research report, *Hidden Diamonds*, found that each sports volunteer generates more than £16,000 of social value every year, which equates to a staggering £53 billion of social value when it is scaled up. Governance volunteers are among the most active and giving, and 70% of them give their time at least once a week. These people should be praised, encouraged and thanked. It would be wonderful if those involved in sport at the highest level behaved like some of the people working at the grass roots because, without them, sport as we know it would not exist. I look forward to future debates on this subject.