

Rogge says time is right for women's boxing at Games



At yesterday's unveiling of the commemorative bust of Lord Killanin in Howth were (from left): Ronnie Delany, Lord Killanin's son Redmond Morris, president of the IOC, Dr Jacques Rogge, and Pat Hickey, president of the OCI.

Photograph: Dara Mac Donail

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IAN O'RIORDAN hears from IOC president Jacques Rogge, who was in Howth yesterday, why women's boxing my well be included in the Olympic Games

THE INTERNATIONAL Olympic Committee (IOC) always play its cards close to its chest. It rarely give anything away, not until they have to, but when IOC president Jacques Rogge says the time is ripe for women's boxing to be included in the Olympics we can probably guess how they're going to play this one.

Perhaps it was because Rogge was speaking in Dublin, fresh from unveiling a commemorative bust of former IOC president Lord Killanin at the offices of the Olympic Council of Ireland in Howth, and no doubt aware the question was loaded towards the hopes of two-time world champion Katie Taylor come London 2012. "There is a proposal of the International Boxing Federation on the table, but not yet finalised," he explained. "That is for four women's categories, and nine men's categories. There are currently 11 men's categories, so they would diminish those to nine, by reshuffling the weights. And add four new women's categories, which would mean 13 categories in total."

Rogge, a physician by profession, pointed towards the medical issues that had previously halted the IOC's decision to introduce women's disciplines to what can be a dangerous sport.

"They made their first application in 2005. We examined the situation, but at that time they did not have enough universality, and they did not have enough countries. And also, from a medical point of view, there was a big discrepancy, in the same weight category, between the skills and the level of the women. You would have very sophisticated boxers against very junior boxers, in the same weight category, which in boxing is dangerous.

"So we said they'd have to wait a few years. Now we are four years later. We've studied it again with the medical commission of the IOC, and they have said no problem, from a medical point of view. And we are satisfied that there is a far better universality. So conditions are totally different. The timing is right, because the sport has evolved a lot, both in universality, and also the homogeneity within each weight bracket."

Ultimately, the decisions rests with the IOC executive board, rather than the full IOC Congress: "That's because it's a discipline within a sport, not a new sport. The full Congress votes on new sports, but the executive votes on new disciplines within a sport. So once the proposal is finalised, it will be decided by the executive board in December."

The IOC are also examining proposals from seven sports which hope to make the cut for 2016: “Two of those were excluded after Beijing, baseball and softball, but have the right to apply again, but also golf, squash, rugby, roller-skating, and karate. Out of those, the executive board will propose two sports to the IOC session in October.”

Rogge was more reserved on the issue of where those 2016 Olympics will be staged. The IOC has completed its evaluation of the four candidate cities – Rio de Janeiro, Madrid, Tokyo and Chicago – and the announcement will also be made in October. Economic factors will be considered. “The IOC always goes to safety, which is not entirely economic safety. So the IOC will consider the situation of the cities seven years from now. But that is a difficult thing. It’s always a bit of a guess. Today, I don’t think there is any difference in the economic stability between the four countries. Everyone is in dire straights . . . what I have heard from the evaluation commission is that all four cities are capable of organising a very good Games.”

Rogge, a Belgium native, sympathised with Ireland’s increasing difficulties in winning medals at the Olympics. “First of all, since the break up of the Soviet Union, you now have 15 Republics, with the same sport detection system. So instead of three Soviet athletes, you have 45 Eastern European athletes. And they take a lot of medals. Secondly we’ve seen big efforts in the developing countries to organise more sports. In Athens, we had 62 countries that won medals. In Beijing there were 87. That’s a huge increase, which does make it more difficult for countries like Ireland. But from an IOC point of view this is good. We want universality as much as possible.”

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