Script & Shot log

THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (IOC) OFFERS THE FOLLOWING VIDEO NEWS RELEASE TO ALL NEWS AGENCIES, BROADCASTERS AND ALL ONLINE PLATFORMS FREE OF CHARGE

STORY HEADLINE: 40 years on International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach reflects on the boycott of the Olympic Games Moscow 1980

LOCATION: Olympic House, Lausanne, Switzerland

DATE: 16 July 2020

LANGUAGE: English

Broadcast quality footage available at the IOC Newsroom: http://iocnewsroom.com

STORY SCRIPT:

On the 40th anniversary of the Olympic Games Moscow 1980, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach reflected with sadness on the boycott of the Games that denied athletes the opportunity to achieve their Olympic dream.

A US-led boycott reduced the number of participating nations to 80, the lowest number since 1956, as part of a series of measures to protest against the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

President Bach, who won Olympic Gold in fencing for West Germany at the Olympic Games Montreal 1976, represented West German athletes in the public debate over whether the country should join the boycott. In the end, they were one of the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) to stay away from the Moscow Games, and it is something that still saddens President Bach.

He said: “The boycott of Moscow has achieved nothing at all. And this has been admitted also by all the major actors, at least in Germany, who were there at the time, who already a couple of months later in conversations told me, ‘We made a mistake. This was not the right thing to do.’ And even the then Chancellor, who was really pressing us at the time in favour of the boycott, took until 2008, but then he finally admitted that it was a mistake.”

“And you can see the facts. The Soviet army, which was the reason for the boycott, remained in Afghanistan for nine more years. And the athletes then were hit in many countries, not only by the boycott of 1980, but also by the boycott of 1984, which was the revenge boycott.
“So you had, in fact, two generations of athletes losing their Olympic dream, having prepared for years for nothing. And being sanctioned and punished for something they have nothing to do with, and what they would never have supported.”

As well as West Germany joining the boycott, Canada and Japan supported the sanction which was instigated by the USA and its President, Jimmy Carter.

Some governments, like those of Great Britain and Australia, supported the boycott but allowed the athletes to decide for themselves whether to go to Moscow.

President Bach hopes that such a situation never arises again and that athletes are not denied the chance to fulfil their Olympic ambitions.

He said: “Anybody who is thinking about a boycott should learn this lesson from history; a sports boycott serves nothing. It's only hurting the athletes and it's hurting the population of the country because they are losing the joy to share the pride of the success with their Olympic team. So what is a boycott for? It's against all the Olympic spirit. It's against all the values we have in sport and what we are standing for in sport.”

Now, as the world should have been preparing to celebrate the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, President Bach believes the Olympic Movement will help heal nations ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic when the postponed Games take place in the Japanese capital next summer.

He said: “The role of the Olympic Games is to unify the entire world in a peaceful competition, without any discrimination, be it racial, be it social, be it cultural, be it political. And this is what we achieve. We have athletes from all 206 National Olympic Committees and of the IOC Refugee Olympic Team united in this competition, living together in one Olympic village, without any kind of discrimination, exchanging opinions, discussing. And in this way, creating an atmosphere of friendship and of understanding, of respect and solidarity. And this is what we call the Olympic spirit.”

The postponed Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 will now take place from July 23 to August 8, 2021.

**SHOTLIST:**

**00:06 SOUNDBITE: Thomas Bach, IOC President (English Language).**

*Question: You represented the West German athletes in the public debate around the Moscow 1980 boycott, what are your memories?*

“This was a very tough time and to make the athletes' voice heard, at this time it was almost impossible.

“We had to realise that on the one hand, the athletes were not really heard within the sports organisations. And on the other hand, we had to realise that also the sports..."
organisations, the National Olympic Committees or the IOC had very limited political influence, to say it diplomatically. I could also say almost none. And there was a very heated debate among the athletes first. In the first meeting, I presided as what we would consider now to be the chairman of the Athletes’ Commission. I had to offer my resignation if a majority would be in favour of a boycott. And then we finally came together and supported the majority of the athletes, because we wanted to go to Moscow. “And then in the public, it was really hurting sometimes. We think we are fighting for a good cause and then I was insulted as a communist, as somebody who would be responsible for the fate of all the people in the Soviet Bloc and so on. “So it was not easy. And even then the German Chancellor in a meeting ... then at the time initiated the meeting with high-ranking military to show the map where you had tanks, pipelines and everything, and building up a scenario where he’s then said in the end, something like, ‘And if you wanted to risk there a third World War, then you better go to Moscow.’ And they also said no Western athlete, no Western statesman will put his foot on the soil of Moscow for a long time. And two months later, the first ones were already there. So it was really a tough experience.”

02:55 SOUNDBITE: Thomas Bach, IOC President (English Language).
Question: How did you feel after the West German decision to join the boycott and what consequences did it have for you?
“I was terribly disappointed that the voice of the athletes had not been heard. That I could even make my speech in the final General Assembly of the National Olympic Committee, that nobody did really listen anymore, that they were bowing to the political pressure coming from all sides, and that they were not ready to stand up for the interests of sport. “And on the other hand, then the reaction was ... it’s hurting so much and what can you do that such a boycott would never happen to future generations of athletes. And at this time, I got the offer from the then president of the German National Olympic Committee, Willi Daume, whether I would be ready to join the NOC as an individual member. “And he also changed the statutes of the National Olympic Committee so that as a representative of the athletes, I was then a member of the Executive Board. And this was the motivation why I said yes to him right away. “This should never happen again to future generations of athletes. And this is what still drives me today to give all the clean athletes of the world, the chance to participate in Olympic Games.”

04:58 SOUNDBITE: Thomas Bach, IOC President (English Language).
Question: Do you remember what you did 40 years ago when the Games were on and you couldn’t participate?
“I don’t have much memory. I even do not know whether at the time the Games were broadcast in German TV. I have some images of the Games, but I could not say that I was really following them closely.”

05:25 SOUNDBITE: Thomas Bach, IOC President (English Language).
Question: 40 years later, do you think the boycott of Moscow 1980 has achieved anything?
“The boycott of Moscow has achieved nothing at all. And this has been admitted also by all the major actors, at least in Germany, who were there at the time, who already a couple of
months later in conversations told me, "We made a mistake. This was not the right thing to do." And even the then Chancellor who was really pressing us at the time in favour of the boycott, it took for him until 2008 but then also he finally admitted that it was a mistake. And you can see the facts. The Soviet army, which was the reason for the boycott, remained in Afghanistan for nine more years. And the athletes then were hit in many countries, not only by the boycott of 1980, but also by the boycott of 1984, which was the revenge boycott.

“So you had, in fact, two generations of athletes losing their Olympic dream, having prepared for years for nothing. And being sanctioned and punished for something they have nothing to do with, and what they would never have supported.

“So there, anybody who is thinking about a boycott should learn this lesson from history; a sports boycott serves nothing. It's only hurting the athletes and it's hurting the population of the country because they are losing the joy to share, the pride, the success with their Olympic team.

“So what is a boycott for? It's against all the Olympic spirit. It's against all the values we have in sport and what we are standing for in sport.”

07:52 SOUNDBITE: Thomas Bach, IOC President (English Language).

Question: What is the role of the Olympic Games today?

“The role of the Olympic Games is to unify the entire world in a peaceful competition, without any discrimination, be it racial, be it social, be it cultural, be it political. And this is what we achieve.

“We have the athletes from all 206 National Olympic Committees and of the IOC Refugee Olympic Team united in this competition, living together in one Olympic village, without any kind of discrimination, exchanging opinions, discussing. And in this way, creating an atmosphere of friendship and of understanding, of respect and solidarity. And this is what we call the Olympic spirit.”

08:50 Rights Free News Access video content from the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games Moscow 1980

-- ENDS --

© Copyright International Olympic Committee 2020. This content is the exclusive property of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). IOC-VNRs are for bona fide news reporting purposes only and all rights required for their production have been cleared. Terms and Conditions of the IOC Newsroom and Olympic.org apply.

For more information, please contact the IOC Media Relations Team: Tel: +41 21 621 6000, email: pressoffice@olympic.org, or visit our web site at www.olympic.org.