

Adopting 2020 USATF Bylaw Amendments Keeps Olympic Dreams Alive and Strengthens the Athlete Voice

Athlete welfare is at stake: We're unwilling to risk our dreams to call a bluff.

2020 has tried the patience and fight in all of us. In the face of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, athletes continue to face a crippling uncertainty and a lack of stability. With the hope of Tokyo 2021 still fixed in the eyes of our teammates, many of us continue to find innovative ways to train despite impossible circumstances. Our AAC's promise—to be the voice of athletes and advocate for measures that promote their welfare—has never been more timely.

Concerns over governance and athlete safety as well as other notable issues within American Sports have impacted millions of parents, coaches, athletes, and NGBs alike. Naturally, these incidents attract the attention of government officials elected to protect the integrity of Olympic sport. In response to these issues, the USOPC has required changes to NGB governing principles to move purposefully toward athlete safety and success.

Many of us agree that USATF's governance structure has a strong system of checks and balances. It is also true that these guardrails make us unique among many NGBs and make it difficult for any one person to control the organization. The AAC stands by those asserting that athlete empowerment is one of the many benefits created by our governance model. We see no reason to think that our voice as athletes will not continue to strengthen overtime. That belief is bolstered by the proposed bylaw amendments, which add valuable athlete influence to ongoing discussions within USATF.

For some, these new principles have fostered an illusion that the athlete voice will be suppressed within the governance process. This assumption reflects a misunderstanding of the proposed principles, and disregards AAC's presence within USATF and the USOPC. With multiple athletes serving as voting members on the USATF Board of Directors, Associations, and Committees, the voice of athletes has never been louder. The notion that these members of the Board don't represent the best interests of the athletes, or have been "co-opted," is false. The amendments proposed by the USOPC call for an additional group of athletes to join the Board of Directors, expanding athlete representation, not reducing it.

AAC Leadership is a representative body of athletes from all ages, backgrounds, and disciplines. We send representatives to every committee within USATF and have leaders in USOPC AAC. The athlete's voice is stronger than ever. Athlete representatives at every level help form policy, discuss athlete impact, and vote on every important issue within the USATF membership. We are informed, involved, and invested in the success of USATF. Athletes depend on the stability of NGB certification to receive USOPC funding and maintain our viability with USATF sponsors, fueling the pursuit of our Olympic Dreams. These important bylaw amendments expand the scope of our voice within our sport. AAC Leadership supports these changes.

The power of our organization rests in the diversity of thought within our membership, but we are only as strong as our lines of communication. We take exception to being spoken for without first being spoken to. We are open for dialogue because we are better together.

The athletes of AAC would like all USATF members to know that we support these bylaw changes and we urge all voting delegates to vote “yes” on legislation that will make our voice stronger and USATF more secure.

We are the Athlete Voice. We are the AAC. We are Team USATF.

Handwritten signatures of Kara Winger, Kendall Spencer, and Lauren Freshman.Handwritten signatures of Michelle Carter, Ryan Wilson, and Wallace Spearmon.

Kara Winger, Kendall Spencer, Lauren Freshman, Michelle Carter, Ryan Wilson, Wallace Spearmon
with the support of USATF Athletes Advisory Committee Leadership