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PEACE AND SPORT

THE MAGAZINE



A MESSAGE OF PEACE

from H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco

THE AFRICAN GREAT LAKES REGION

Sport beyond borders

MONACO FOR SAFER SPORT

Isabelle Berro-Amadeï
Interview

DIDIER DROGBA

FROM THE HEIGHTS OF WORLD FOOTBALL TO A COMMITMENT TO PEACE

PEACE AND SPORT

EDITORIAL

Peace is built on the field.

As Peace and Sport approaches its 20th anniversary, it remains guided by its founding conviction: sport can bring people closer together, foster dialogue and help create the conditions for a culture of peace. This conviction takes on its full meaning when translated into concrete action, tailored to local realities and sustained over time.

We must, however, remain clear-sighted. Sport does not create peace by its very nature. A playing field, a ball or a competition are not enough to bring about lasting change in society. Sport can nevertheless create spaces for people to meet, encourage interaction and help rebuild trust. To become a genuine tool for education and social cohesion, it must be underpinned by a clear purpose, an appropriate methodology and a long-term commitment.

"WE MUST, HOWEVER, REMAIN CLEAR-SIGHTED. SPORT DOES NOT CREATE PEACE BY ITS VERY NATURE."

This approach takes shape at the very heart of communities, where educators play an essential role. Through sport, they can pass on universal values such as respect, cooperation, listening and acceptance of differences. They help young people develop their relationships with others and find their place within a group. Particularly in environments affected by tensions, inequalities or a lack of opportunities, they contribute to creating structured and supportive educational spaces.

Local organisations also play a decisive role. Their knowledge of the territories in which they operate, of people's needs and of community dynamics enables them to tailor initiatives to their specific contexts. The relationships of trust they build with young people, families and communities are crucial to ensuring that initiatives remain relevant and sustainable.

Peace and Sport's experience across a range of contexts has also taught us that lasting action cannot rely solely on a succession of one-off events. It requires continuity, structured approaches and strong relationships with local stakeholders. Its impact sometimes emerges gradually—in changing behaviours, in the quality of the relationships that are formed or rebuilt, and in young people's capacity to find their place within a group.

The Champions for Peace are an integral part of this dynamic. Their journeys, public profiles and ability to mobilise others can help raise awareness of certain realities, shine a light on local initiatives and engage new audiences. Their commitment takes on particular significance when it supports the day-to-day work of educators and organisations.



This complementarity is essential. Athletes can open doors, attract attention and bring greater visibility to a cause. Local stakeholders, meanwhile, possess the knowledge, experience and presence needed to sustain this momentum over time. It is through this combination of inspirational power and on-the-ground expertise that sport can fully play its social role.

Peace and Sport seeks to foster these synergies. Our role is to connect committed athletes with communities, strengthen the capacities of educators and organisations, provide them with appropriate methodologies and tools, and encourage the sharing of experiences across territories. Our aim is not to take the place of local stakeholders, but to help create the conditions they need to structure, develop and showcase their work.

This 2nd issue of Peace and Sport – The Magazine emphasizes these individuals and organizations' central role. In the African Great Lakes region and elsewhere, it highlights women and men who harness sport to advance education, dialogue, empowerment and social cohesion. Their experiences remind us that lasting change often begins in everyday moments: during a training session, through the guidance of an educator, in the commitment of an organization, or when an athlete uses their public profile to support a local initiative.

As we approach our 20th anniversary, our ambition remains to continue listening to these stakeholders, learning from their experiences and strengthening their capacity to act. Because sport cannot establish peace on its own—but when used methodically and sustained over time, it can make a tangible contribution to creating the conditions in which peace can take root.

I invite you to explore these pages and discover the women and men who bring this conviction to life every day.

Joël Bouzou, OLY
President and Founder
of Peace and Sport

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MONACO
SUPPORTING GLOBAL
GOVERNANCE
FOR PEACE THROUGH SPORT

In a world constantly marked by conflict, social divisions and declining dialogue, it is up to us to preserve the spaces that can bring people together and restore trust. Sport is one such spaces.

Through the universal language it embodies, sport can transcend borders, bring different societies closer together and remind us that respect for common rules forms the foundation of all community life. It cannot, on its own, resolve the crises we face. However, it can help to prevent divisions, foster mutual understanding and strengthen social cohesion.

However, this capacity must never be taken for granted. Sport must be accessible, ethical, inclusive and protective. It must place the dignity of every individual, and particularly that of children, at the heart of its organisation.

It is therefore our duty to establish a system of governance for sport that is proportionate to its influence. Governments, international organisations and the sporting movement must work together to guarantee its integrity, protect those who take part in it and harness its potential in the service of development and peace. No single actor can bear this responsibility alone.

Multilateralism is not merely a principle: it is the very means by which we can share our experiences, define common standards and provide collective responses to challenges that transcend national borders. Sport must play a full and active part in this endeavour.

True to its tradition of dialogue and solidarity, the Principality of Monaco has been working for many years to secure recognition of this contribution within international institutions. At the United Nations, it co-chairs, alongside the State of Qatar, the Group of Friends of Sport for Development and Peace, with a view to keeping this matter at the heart of international dialogue and encouraging States to rally around shared commitments.

This work stems from a firm conviction: the size of a state does not determine the extent of its responsibility, nor does it limit its ability to propose solutions or its willingness to bring people together. Monaco intends to play its full part in the search for international solutions based on cooperation, the rule of law and the protection of the most vulnerable.

“ INDEED, DECLARATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS ONLY TAKE ON THEIR FULL MEANING WHEN THEY ARE TRANSLATED INTO ACTION.”

Monaco’s first presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, from 15 May to 10 November 2026, reflects this resolve. It places ethics in sport, children’s rights and the strengthening of international cooperation at the heart of the Principality’s priorities.

The Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport, to be held in Monaco on 3 and 4 November 2026, marks an important milestone in this effort. Dedicated to building a safer and healthier sporting environment for all children, the conference aims to bring positions closer together, strengthen common frameworks and advance the collective responsibility of sporting institutions.

For nearly twenty years, Peace and Sport has also contributed to the Principality’s international influence by promoting, from Monaco, dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders in the sports movement, international organisations and civil society.

Peace and Sport’s work contributes to strengthening Monaco’s unique position within the peace through sport sector: that of a state which, through dialogue, helps to foster a shared vision of sport’s social role and to translate principles into concrete initiatives.

Indeed, declarations and resolutions only take on their full meaning when they are translated into action. Their implementation relies on the mobilisation of all relevant stakeholders, with a view to promoting more responsible policies, more protective organisations and practices that meet the requirements of integrity, safety and respect for human rights.

The Principality will continue to pursue this ambition with determination. It will continue its efforts to ensure that sport is fully recognised as a tool for dialogue, cooperation and peace, but also as a space subject to high standards of integrity, safety and respect for human rights.

The reflections and initiatives brought together in this second issue of Peace and Sport – The Magazine bear witness to this momentum. May they inspire our collective action and remind us that, in the face of the divisions of our time, our ability to work together remains our greatest strength.

H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco
Patron of Peace and Sport

THE AFRICAN *GREAT LAKES* REGION

Sport beyond borders

In this densely populated region encompassing Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, borders can unite as much as they divide. They are crossed by families, trade and cultures, but also by displaced populations and the consequences of conflict. Sport does not erase these borders. It can, however, create opportunities to cross them in a different way, turning encounters into a first space for building trust.

EMOTIONS **THAT TRANSCEND** *SPORT*

On March 31st 2026, a single goal secured the Democratic Republic of the Congo a place at the World Cup in North America at Jamaica's expense. More than half a century after the country—then known as Zaire—last took part in the tournament, the Leopards' qualification sparked a wave of enthusiasm that went far beyond the sporting result. In this vast country, marked by profound regional disparities and ongoing conflicts in its eastern provinces, the national team offered a rare moment of collective unity for the duration of the competition.

A few months earlier, Kigali had hosted the first UCI Road World Championships ever held on the African continent. For one week, the streets of the Rwandan capital brought together the world's leading cyclists and crowds eager to witness this historic event. Beyond the competition itself, the championships brought new visibility to African cycling and demonstrated Rwanda's ability to host a major international sporting event.

In Burundi, the achievements of Vénuste Niyongabo, Olympic 5,000-metre champion in 1996, and Francine Niyonsaba, silver medallist in the 800 metres in 2016, also hold a special place in the country's collective memory. Their performances gave Burundi figures capable of bringing people together far beyond the world of athletics.

These moments do not make tensions, inequalities or the consequences of crises disappear. They nevertheless demonstrate how sport—and the passion it inspires—can create shared points of reference in societies where history and politics have often contributed to fragmented identities.



A REGION SHAPED BY *POPULATION MOVEMENTS*

The African Great Lakes region is not a precisely defined geographical or political entity. In this section, the term primarily refers to Burundi, Rwanda and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, while also taking into account their close ties with Uganda and Tanzania.

National borders shape political and administrative life, but they do not fully reflect the realities of these territories. People trade, work and maintain family relationships on both sides of border crossings. Languages and cultural practices circulate between lakeside communities, border towns and rural areas. Between Bukavu and Rusizi, Goma and Gisenyi, and Burundi and Tanzania, the border is both a dividing line and a space of everyday life. The United Nations has developed several programmes aimed at strengthening social cohesion and interaction within these cross-border communities.

Regional crises also follow these patterns of movement. The histories of Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are distinct and must not be conflated. The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the Burundian civil war and the successive conflicts in eastern DRC each arose from their own political and historical dynamics. Their consequences, however, have crossed national borders through refugee movements, the presence of armed groups, diplomatic tensions and the destabilisation of border areas.

Eastern DRC remains the region's main centre of instability today. Recurring clashes, violence against civilian populations and the activities of armed groups continue to cause displacement both within the country and towards neighbouring states. This cross-border dimension explains why exclusively national responses remain insufficient and why regional cooperation continues to be essential.

STRATEGIC RESOURCES *AT THE HEART OF* **COMPLEX TENSIONS**

The Democratic Republic of the Congo also occupies a central place in global mineral supply chains. Copper and cobalt are mainly extracted in the south of the country, particularly in the former mining region of Katanga. These resources have become essential to numerous industries, especially digital technologies and the energy transition.

The mining landscape in the east of the country is different. The provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri and Maniema contain deposits of gold and the minerals known as the "3Ts": tin, tantalum and tungsten. Their extraction provides an income for many communities. In some areas, however, control of mining sites, informal taxation and cross-border trafficking can also help finance armed groups and prolong violence.

Natural resources alone do not explain these conflicts. Governance, political representation, access to land, security and relations between states also play major roles. Mineral wealth nevertheless intensifies competition in territories where institutions sometimes struggle to protect local populations and ensure that the benefits are redistributed fairly.

This paradox places the region at the heart of global challenges: some of the resources required by modern economies come from territories whose inhabitants remain highly exposed to poverty, displacement and insecurity.

CROSSING *BORDERS* **DIFFERENTLY**

In this context, sport offers no direct response to the political or economic causes of conflicts. It operates on a different level: that of perceptions, behaviours and relationships between people.
A sporting activity can bring together, on the same team, young people from different territories, communities or nationalities. It establishes a shared framework, creates a common experience and allows participants to discover one another beyond political rhetoric or narratives inherited from conflict. The encounter may be limited in duration, but it can change how a border—and the people living on the other side of it—is perceived.

The African Great Lakes Friendship Games by Peace and Sport illustrate this approach. By bringing together young people from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they do not seek to deny the differences or tensions between their respective territories. Instead, the Games enable them to share an initial experience: travelling, taking part in the same activities, sharing meals and engaging directly with one another.

For some participants, simply crossing the border is already an important step. For many years, it may have been associated with instability, danger or the unknown. Travelling for sport gives it a different meaning: the border becomes a gateway to an encounter, rather than merely the boundary separating two countries.

The impact of such an event cannot be taken for granted. A competition lasting only a few days is not enough to transform relations between communities in a lasting way. Its value lies in the connections it can initiate and in the ability of organisations, educators and participants to nurture them after returning to their communities.

CONNECTING *SPORTING FIGURES WITH* **LOCAL INITIATIVES**

Sport also has prominent figures who can bring visibility to these initiatives. In the African Great Lakes region, elite athletes often enjoy recognition that extends far beyond their discipline. Their involvement can draw attention to a cause, encourage young people to participate and amplify the impact of work being carried out locally.
This influence becomes particularly valuable when it goes beyond symbolic messaging. It can support established organisations, facilitate new forms of cooperation and help secure recognition for the expertise of local stakeholders.

The stories presented in the following pages illustrate this connection.

In Burundi, Vénuste Niyongabo has built on his Olympic career through his commitment to young people and to promoting peace through sport.

In Rwanda, AKWOS Organization uses sport to strengthen the participation and empowerment of women and girls.
In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, those involved in Je joue pour le Congo harness football and its leading figures to support initiatives focused on young people and the country's reconstruction.

These initiatives differ in their histories, structures and objectives. They nevertheless share the same underlying approach: using sport to build a relationship, then turning that relationship into more sustained action.
In the African Great Lakes region, peace continues to depend first and foremost on political choices, cooperation between countries, the security of local populations and the work of institutions. Sport cannot take the place of these responsibilities.

It can, however, open pathways where borders are still experienced as dividing lines. It provides a space in which young people, educators, organisations and athletes can meet before learning to act together. It is at this modest but tangible level that sport makes its contribution.



PEACEMAKERS: DRIVING PEACE THROUGH SPORT

VÉNUSTE NIYONGABO

From olympic gold to social engagement: the fight of a lifetime

Burundi's first-ever Olympic Champion and a Peace and Sport Champion for Peace since 2009, Vénuste Niyongabo has never regarded his title as a finish line.
From the track in Atlanta to the African Great Lakes Friendship Games organised by Peace and Sport, and later the creation of his Foundation, he has gradually transformed his medal into a responsibility towards the young people of his country.



A VICTORY THAT BECAME *A NATIONAL SYMBOL*

On August 3rd 1996, Vénuste Niyongabo won the 5,000 metres at the Atlanta Olympic Games, becoming Burundi's first-ever Olympic medallist. On the track, his thoughts were focused on the race, the clock and the years of training that had brought him to that finish line.

Several thousand kilometres away, however, his country was in the midst of a civil war. His victory therefore took on a significance that he did not immediately grasp.

"I thought I had won a race. I didn't know I had given hope to an entire country."

In the months that followed, Burundians told him that the fighting had reportedly stopped for a few hours while people watched the final. He knew nothing of this at the time. In the United States, he simply thought he had won an Olympic event.

When he returned to Burundi in 1997, he discovered what his medal represented. The President of the Republic, government ministers and an immense crowd were waiting for him at the airport. One encounter left a particularly lasting impression: a member of parliament from the rebel movement came forward to shake his hand.

"***He simply said to me: 'You won that medal for all of us. We were fighting in the bush, but we knew that you represented us too.'***"

Vénuste Niyongabo then understood that his victory had temporarily transcended political and community divisions. It no longer belonged solely to the athlete. It had become a collective symbol - and, with it, a responsibility.

THE MEDAL YOU CARRY *AFTER THE GAMES*

The end of a sporting career often involves a difficult transition. Once the competitions are over and the applause has faded, athletes must find a new direction. For Vénuste Niyongabo, that direction gradually emerged through the stories of those who had experienced his victory as a moment of hope.

For several years, however, he remained primarily focused on his athletic career. Only with hindsight did he come to understand that the meaning of his journey extended far beyond the result he achieved in Atlanta.

"***That medal no longer belonged entirely to me. Even today, when I look at it, the race is not the first thing I think about. I think about the responsibility it gave me.***"

In 2009, an encounter opened a new chapter. During a visit to Burundi, Joël Bouzou invited him to join Peace and Sport's Champions for Peace Club. Vénuste Niyongabo still knew little about the Organisation and wondered what this new role would involve. His first field mission alongside Joël Bouzou enabled him to understand its significance.

Until then, he had mainly associated peace with political leaders, diplomats and international organisations. He discovered that sport could operate on a different level: that of human relationships, perceptions and trust between people who, in some cases, no longer spoke to one another.

CROSSING A BORDER *LONG ASSOCIATED* WITH FEAR

His first mission as a Champion for Peace took him to the African Great Lakes Friendship Games in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The journey was a short one. Yet it involved crossing a border he had never crossed before.

"***Athletics had taken me all over the world. And yet, I had never crossed the border separating Burundi from its neighbour the Democratic Republic of the Congo.***"

At the time, accounts of violence, armed groups and population displacement fuelled widespread concern. Those close to him feared for his safety, while he himself did not know exactly what he would find on the other side.

When he arrived in Uvira and then Luvungi, however, the scene he witnessed was entirely different. Hundreds of people were waiting to welcome the delegation from Burundi. Children had climbed trees to catch a glimpse of the visitors. Young Burundian and Congolese participants met, played together, shared their songs and taught one another their dance steps.

"***At that moment, I understood that sport had opened up a space where everyone could finally be themselves.***"

The experience did not make the tensions between the two countries disappear. It did, however, demonstrate that a border associated with fear could also become a place of passage and encounter. For a few days, the young people no longer discovered one another through narratives of conflict, but as teammates and playmates.

For Vénuste Niyongabo, this is precisely where the power of sport lies. It does not require people to speak a particular language. The rules are shared, the gestures are understood, and the relationship begins through a tangible experience: playing, cooperating, winning or losing together.

"MY DREAM IS NO LONGER TO WIN. MY DREAM IS TO PASS SOMETHING ON."

BUILDING *A LEGACY* IN BURUNDI

Over the years, one question became increasingly pressing: what would remain once the international events had ended and partner organisations were no longer present?

This question led Vénuste Niyongabo to establish his own Foundation. His aim was not to create an organisation centered on himself or his Olympic journey, but to develop a Burundian structure capable of working with communities over the long term.

Sport remains the starting point. It makes it possible to reach children, build relationships and identify their needs. Yet the difficulties observed on the ground often extend far beyond participation in sport: nutrition, access to education, healthcare, vision screening and support for families.

The Vénuste Niyongabo Foundation has therefore developed a broader approach, building bridges with partners and professionals able to provide appropriate solutions. Sport initiates the relationship; the support that follows must take the whole child into account.

This evolution has also transformed the former Champion's understanding of success. In elite sport, victory belongs to the person who crosses the finish line first. In social action, it belongs to an entire community and is measured over the long term.

"***My dream is no longer to win. My dream is to pass something on.***"

Vénuste Niyongabo now hopes that his Foundation will one day be able to continue its mission without depending on him. In his eyes, training educators, supporting young people and fostering the emergence of a new generation of committed leaders constitute a more important legacy than the medal he won in Atlanta.

Exactly thirty years after his Olympic title, his finish line has shifted. It no longer lies at the end of a race, but in the ability of Burundian communities to take ownership of the project, sustain it and pass it on.

"***That will undoubtedly be the greatest medal of my life.***"



AKWOS *RWANDAN* WOMEN

step into the game

For more than 25 years, Félicité Rwemarika has used sport to help women and girls build confidence, defend their rights and take on positions of responsibility. Through AKWOS, she has transformed the playing field into far more than a place to practise sport: it has become a gateway to education, independence and participation in decision-making.



"YOU BELONG HERE."

Félicité Rwemarika loved sport from an early age. Her father played football and volleyball, but she soon realised that girls did not receive the same encouragement as boys. That experience has remained with her ever since.

*"**Sometimes, what a girl lacks is neither talent nor ability. She simply needs someone to open the door and tell her: 'You belong here.'**"*

It was with this conviction that she founded AKWOS in 1998. In a Rwanda still rebuilding after the 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi, the organisation set out to use sport to support women and help restore connections within communities.

The obstacles were numerous. Sport was still widely regarded as an activity reserved for boys and men. Some families, believing they were protecting girls from perceived risks, considered their participation inappropriate. Equipment and opportunities to play were limited. Above all, women were almost entirely absent from coaching, sports administration and decision-making bodies. As a result, girls had very few role models with whom they could identify.

Creating teams was not enough. Families, community leaders and sometimes women themselves had to be convinced that they could not only play, but also coach, referee and lead.

More than twenty-five years after AKWOS was founded, Félicité Rwemarika can appreciate how much progress has been made. More girls and women now participate in sport, while Rwanda has also advanced women's leadership. Yet the transformation remains incomplete: stereotypes persist, access to resources is still unequal, and greater efforts are needed to ensure the safety of female participants.

THE PLAYING FIELD *AS A STARTING POINT*

For AKWOS, enabling a woman to step onto a playing field is never an end in itself. It is the beginning of a process that can transform how she sees herself and her place in society.

*"**For many girls, taking their first step onto a playing field is also a step towards confidence, independence and discovering their own voice,**"* Félicité Rwemarika explains.

A team creates a sense of belonging, requires collective organisation and gives each member responsibilities. Participants learn to speak up, defend a decision, organise an activity and support the other members of the group. Girls who were initially very reserved gradually become captains, mentors and role models for younger participants.

Training sessions and sporting events also serve as educational platforms. Alongside sporting activities, AKWOS addresses subjects that can sometimes be difficult to discuss directly, including gender-based violence, early pregnancy, women's rights, health, equality, peace and family relationships.
Sport creates an initial space of trust. Participants can then be connected with training programmes, support networks and new opportunities. AKWOS has notably expanded its work among women living in rural areas through projects combining sport with agriculture, cooperatives and income-generating activities.

This approach responds to a practical reality: a woman's ability to participate sustainably in sporting and community life also depends on her material circumstances. Access to skills, an income and a support network strengthens her decision-making power within both her family and her community.

Sport does not automatically guarantee empowerment. When supported by the right framework, however, it can open a pathway towards education, economic independence, positions of responsibility and more active participation in society.

FROM THE PLAYING FIELD **TO DECISION-MAKING BODIES**

Enabling more women to play is essential, but it is not enough. For Félicité Rwemarika, participation can only produce lasting change if women also contribute to the decisions that shape sport.

"If women are present only as players but remain absent from coaching, refereeing, administration and leadership positions, the decisions that affect them will continue to be made without their perspective. We must enable them to move from the playing field into decision-making roles."

AKWOS therefore seeks to create pathways into coaching, refereeing, first aid and sports administration. As early as 2013, the organisation introduced training programmes designed to develop young female players' skills in leadership, coaching and refereeing.

This continuity is essential. A girl watching a match should be able to imagine herself not only as a player, but also as a coach, referee, executive or leader of an organisation. Representation makes visible pathways that were previously difficult to imagine.

Félicité Rwemarika's own journey embodies this evolution. In 2016, her commitment was recognised with the International Olympic Committee's Women and Sport Trophy for Africa. She became an IOC member in 2018, taking her work from Rwandan communities to international sporting institutions.

Her message is clear: celebrating women's participation is no longer enough. Genuine investment must be made in their training and leadership.

DEVELOPING **LOCAL LEADERSHIP**

The relationship between AKWOS and Peace and Sport is built on the complementary strengths of an organisation deeply rooted in Rwandan communities and Peace and Sport's methodological expertise and ability to mobilise committed partners. This partnership makes it possible to develop initiatives tailored to local realities, instead of applying solutions designed from afar.

For Félicité Rwemarika, the sustainability of these initiatives necessarily depends on strengthening local stakeholders. ***"It is not enough to bring a project into a community and then leave. We must develop local leadership, train coaches and mentors, strengthen institutions, and enable women and girls to become agents of change themselves."***

The challenge is therefore not so much to carry out one-off interventions as to transfer skills and create the conditions communities need to continue developing these initiatives independently.



CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES **FOR INCLUSION THROUGH SPORT**

The progress made in Rwanda should not obscure the challenges that remain. Social attitudes continue to limit certain pathways. Women's sport remains underfunded, and the connections between community participation, training and access to positions of responsibility need to be strengthened. Preventing harassment and violence also remains essential to ensuring environments in which girls feel respected and protected.

After more than twenty-five years of commitment, Félicité Rwemarika draws her motivation from individual transformations: a girl speaking up for the first time, a player becoming a coach, or a participant discovering an opportunity she had never imagined possible.

She also knows that these changes do not happen overnight. Progress is made one girl, one woman, one family and one community at a time.

"My dream is that, one day, we will no longer have to convince anyone that women and girls belong in sport. It will simply be considered normal. Until then, we have a responsibility to keep opening doors and to make sure they remain open for those who come after us."

This is precisely the path that AKWOS is working to create. The playing field is the first door. Beyond it lie confidence, education, independence and the power to participate fully in the decisions that transform a community.



JE JOUE POUR LE *CONGO*

The leopards' collective show of solidarity

Right hand over the mouth, left hand miming a gun to the temple…

In 2024, during the semi-final of the Africa Cup of Nations, the players from the Democratic Republic of the Congo drew the world's attention to the violence ravaging the east of the country. This powerful gesture became the starting point for a concrete campaign with the creation of JJPC – I Play for Congo.

Founded by Manu Madhot and sponsored notably by Congolese international Gédéon Kalulu, the organisation enables elite sportspeople of Congolese origin to support local communities.

From building a school in Goma to helping women who have been victims of violence re-enter the workforce… In two years, JJPC has already mobilised 64 professional footballers of Congolese origin. We spoke to Manu Madhot and Gédéon Kalulu, who now aim to rally even more athletes behind this cause.

PEACE AND SPORT:

Why did you want to follow up on the gesture made by the Congolese players during the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations?

MANU MADHOT:

Following the gesture by the national team players, we saw many footballers of Congolese origin – particularly those playing in France, Belgium and England – taking up the cause in turn. We then realised that the situation in the DRC affected far more people than just the national team players. It was this epiphany that led us to set up Je Joue Pour le Congo (hereafter JJPC).

The idea is to enable all Congolese sportspeople – whether by nationality or origin – to get involved in supporting the country, regardless of whether they wear the national team's jersey or not.

Many athletes enjoy significant media exposure and wish to use it to support a cause. But their careers leave them with very little time, and they are not always equipped to devise or oversee a social project. They therefore need a dedicated organisation capable of identifying reliable partners, selecting projects, monitoring investments and reporting on the results achieved. This is precisely the role that JJPC aims to fulfil: transforming their desire to make a difference into concrete, meaningful and sustainable actions.

GÉDÉON KALULU:
Manu has genuine experience in humanitarian work and project coordination. For our part, as footballers, we are fortunate to enjoy a high level of visibility. We can attract attention, mobilise our network and give greater visibility to an initiative.
But this visibility is not enough. We need support from people who know the situation on the ground and understand how to set up a project. Our experiences complement one another: each of us contributes our skills so that our commitment is as effective as possible.

PEACE AND SPORT:
WAS THERE ALREADY A STRUCTURE IN PLACE ENABLING ATHLETES TO COLLECTIVELY SUPPORT THE DRC BEFORE JJPC WAS SET UP?

MANU MADHOT:
Several players had already set up their own associations or were supporting projects individually. But there was not yet a comprehensive initiative bringing together athletes from different backgrounds around a shared ambition.
Our aim was precisely to create this collective, whilst allowing everyone to get involved at their own level. By bringing players together, we can give greater impact to their actions, pool our skills and ensure better monitoring of the projects.

PEACE AND SPORT:
Sixty-four professional footballers of Congolese origin have already taken part in the association's activities. How did this mobilisation come about?

GÉDÉON KALULU:
It all happened very naturally. When I presented the project to the players, they immediately expressed their desire to join us. Many were already looking for a practical way to help, without necessarily knowing which organisation to turn to, or how to ensure that their contribution would have a real impact.
Once the initiative was underway, word of mouth played a significant role. Players outside our immediate circle of friends got in touch and wanted to be part of the effort. They realised that JJPC enabled them to act collectively, whilst relying on an organisation capable of selecting projects and monitoring their implementation.

PEACE AND SPORT:
Gédéon Kalulu, you are one of the association's patrons. What connection do you have with the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

GÉDÉON KALULU:
My parents come from different villages in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I grew up in France, but Congolese culture has always been very much a part of my family life. This dual culture is part of my identity and is a real source of richness.

During the Covid pandemic, something clicked and I decided to join the Congolese national team. Wearing the jersey of my parents' country of origin fills me with immense pride. Playing for your country is priceless: I see it as my mission to represent the DRC as best I can and to convey what that jersey stands for.

PEACE AND SPORT:
In your view, do footballers have a particular responsibility as members of society?

GÉDÉON KALULU:
I am convinced they do. Before we are footballers, we are citizens and children of our country. Our media presence, our experience and our network give us a unique capacity to make a difference. It is important to use this influence for the benefit of young people.
Football is one of the most popular sports in the world, and particularly so in Africa. Young people look up to us, identify with us and sometimes dream of following in our footsteps. The jubilation that accompanied our qualification for the World Cup, and then every match played by the national team, shows the place this team holds in the hearts of the Congolese people.
The players are fully aware of this. We want to give our very best on the pitch, but also to extend this commitment into our daily lives. Organisations such as JJPC enable us to act and get involved in a responsible way.

PEACE AND SPORT:
Since the organisation was founded, do you feel that players are more aware of the realities faced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?



GÉDÉON KALULU:
We have seen a real change. Players are keener to find out more, to understand the needs and to help those most in need.
It must be acknowledged that athletes sometimes live in a bubble. We are very much surrounded and protected, because our primary mission remains to perform on the pitch. This can distance us from certain realities. But we are still human beings, sensitive to what is happening in the world and, even more so, in our own country.
Whilst we can be role models for young people, we too need role models, awareness-raising and support. We must understand that an action which may seem symbolic to us can have a considerable impact on a community. We also need help to better understand the realities on the ground, so that our commitment addresses specific needs.

MANU MADHOT:
More players want to take action to support the DRC. They realise that they can have an impact on society beyond the world of sport, but they need a link with local organisations and support to develop their commitment.
This is also JJPC's mission: to connect athletes with the realities on the ground, to offer them meaningful projects and to show them that everyone can contribute, regardless of the time or resources they have available. We want to ensure this momentum continues in the long term and to build an organisation that will continue to evolve beyond the people who founded it.

PEACE AND SPORT:
What projects do you now wish to develop within JJPC?

MANU MADHOT:
We have set up a new unit designed to provide personalised support to certain players in designing and implementing their own social projects. Our role is to help them structure their approach, identify reliable partners and monitor the progress of their initiatives.
We have done this with Grace Geyoro, as well as with Alexis Beka Beka, who is funding the drilling of wells in villages around Lubumbashi.
In the future, we hope to continue engaging as many players as possible. The larger the group grows, the greater its impact. For local communities, simply knowing that well-known sportspeople are mindful of their situation and choose to stand alongside them already sends a very powerful message.

PEACE AND SPORT:
Which organisations are you working with in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

MANU MADHOT:
We are currently supporting four local organisations: three in Goma and one in Kinshasa.
Agir RDC and the Programme d'Appui aux Initiatives Féminines RDC provide assistance to victims of armed conflict, particularly women, by supporting them towards socio-economic reintegration that enables them to rebuild their lives.
The Pawa Foundation works to promote access to education for children in North Kivu and South Kivu. Solidarité Batoto, for its part, supports teenage mothers living on the streets.
These organisations work daily in close contact with local communities. Their knowledge of the situation on the ground is essential: they identify needs, develop solutions in collaboration with the communities and ensure the long-term monitoring of projects.

PEACE AND SPORT:
What actions have you taken so far?

MANU MADHOT:
After the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations, we travelled to Goma to meet with local organisations and develop projects with them.
Alongside the Pawa Foundation, we funded the construction of a school in a camp for internally displaced people. We also covered the teachers' salaries so that the children could continue their education in suitable conditions.
For women who are victims of gender-based violence, we funded equipment directly linked to the training courses they had attended. For example, every woman trained in sewing received a sewing machine so that she could set up her own business and gradually become more independent.

PEACE AND SPORT:
How are these initiatives funded?

MANU MADHOT:
Mainly through fundraising. Initially, the players themselves contributed to funding the projects. But we also wanted to enable the public to get involved alongside them.
Each player therefore donated a shirt to the charity so that it could be given to a donor. For example, someone could donate ten euros and be in with a chance of receiving a shirt signed by Cédric Bakambu or another Congolese player taking part in the initiative.
This approach enables everyone to join the movement, regardless of the amount they contribute. It also creates a direct link between players, supporters and the projects being supported on the ground.

Manu Madhot :
Formerly head of the Classico Sport Foundation, Manu Madhot now supports athletes – particularly footballers – in developing their social commitments through La Passerelle, the charity he founded.

Gédéon Kalulu :
A 28-year-old Congolese international, Gédéon Kalulu plays as a right-back for the Leopards. Having come through the ranks at Olympique Lyonnais and played for AC Ajaccio and FC Lorient, he now plays for Aris Limassol in Cyprus.

RUTH GBAGBI *THE ECHO OF THE* KHARTOUM APPEAL

In October 2005, the Ivory Coast had been living through a conflict that divided the country in two for three years. From Khartoum, after the Elephants qualified for their first FIFA World Cup, Didier Drogba called on Ivorians to lay down their weapons. In the Koumassi district, a young Ruth Gbagbi heard his message. More than twenty years later, the two-time Olympic medallist and Champion for Peace is now making her own commitment to ensuring that sport opens new opportunities for young Ivorians.



IN KOUMASSI, *AN APPEAL THAT* RESONATES

Since the armed uprising of 19 September 2002, northern Ivory Coast had been controlled by the Forces Nouvelles, while the south remained under government authority. Despite several agreements and ceasefires, the country was still divided, and the prospect of lasting peace remained uncertain.

It was against this backdrop that, on 8 October 2005, the Elephants secured their first-ever World Cup qualification in Khartoum. In the dressing room, the players interrupted their celebrations, gathered in front of the cameras and fell to their knees. Didier Drogba then spoke:
"Ivorians, from the North, the South, the Centre and the West […] forgive one another! […] Lay down your weapons."

In Koumassi, Ruth Gbagbi heard the appeal. She was only eleven years old, but the scene left a lasting impression on her.

"I remember it very clearly. It was all anyone in the neighbourhood could talk about! Drogba was the idol of an entire generation. Hearing him call on Ivorians to unite and make peace was incredibly powerful."

His words resonated so deeply with Ruth because they reflected her own experience of the conflict.

"Even though I was still young, certain images and feelings have stayed with me. I remember the gunfire from six o'clock in the evening onwards, when all life came to a standstill."

For her, peace has therefore never been an abstract idea.

"I never want my country to experience such a situation again. When you grow up in those conditions, you understand that peace is neither abstract nor guaranteed. It is our most precious possession—something we must preserve, pass on and defend."

The Khartoum appeal did not bring the Ivorian conflict to an end on its own. After the 2007 Ouagadougou Political Agreement, the country experienced another deadly crisis between 2010 and 2011. Yet for a few minutes, a team made up of players from different regions and communities offered Ivorians a shared image and used the emotion of sport to convey a message of peace.

"For me, that gesture demonstrated the power of sport as a vehicle for social cohesion. It can bring together people from different backgrounds. It also showed me that an athlete is defined by more than what they achieve on the field."

AN OPPORTUNITY RECEIVED, *AN* OPPORTUNITY TO PASS ON

At that time, sport already played an essential role in Ruth's life. When she was nine years old, her mother enrolled her at the La Source taekwondo club in Koumassi. When her family's financial difficulties threatened to bring her journey to an end, her coach decided to train her free of charge.

"He came to my home and told my parents that I needed to return to training. He changed the course of my life. He already saw a future Ivorian champion in me."

That confidence would lead her to two Olympic medals, in Rio in 2016 and Tokyo in 2021, as well as a world championship title in 2017. But the opportunity she received as a child also gave rise to a sense of responsibility: enabling other young people to pursue their ambitions.

"When I was young, someone gave me an opportunity when they could simply have accepted that I was giving up. I know that other young people are inspired by my journey. So why not support them and give them the courage to pursue their goals?"

After becoming a Champion for Peace, Ruth began working alongside Peace and Sport before creating her own foundation. Through training camps for young Ivorians, she seeks to ensure that social background, limited financial resources or a lack of equipment do not become insurmountable obstacles.

"Some young people believe that, because they come from modest backgrounds, they will never be able to reach the highest level. My commitment is to help them believe in their potential."

Less spectacular than an appeal delivered in front of the cameras, this daily work represents another expression of peace through sport: creating spaces where young people can build their confidence, enjoy equal opportunities and find their place in society.

FROM KHARTOUM *TO* DAKAR

This commitment to passing on her experience will take on particular significance at the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games. Selected by the International Olympic Committee as an Athlete Role Model, Ruth will support young athletes during the first Olympic event ever held on the African continent.

"It is an opportunity to share my story with the younger generation: starting with very little, experiencing highs and lows, but continuing to move forward."

In 2005, Ruth Gbagbi watched the idol of an entire generation use his public profile to call for unity. In 2026, it is now her turn to share her experience with young people across Africa. The same conviction now connects Khartoum and Dakar: a few words, a gesture or an opportunity can endure through the years, take root and become a commitment in its own right.

"I REMEMBER IT VERY CLEARLY. IT WAS ALL ANYONE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD COULD TALK ABOUT! DROGBA WAS THE IDOL OF AN ENTIRE GENERATION."

IN CONVERSATION
DIDIER DROGBA

From the heights of world football to a commitment to peace

UEFA Champions League winner and the Ivory Coast national team's all-time leading goalscorer, Didier Drogba built an extraordinary career shaped by a vision of football capable of reaching beyond the boundaries of the pitch and uniting an entire country. More than twenty years after joining his teammates in an appeal for peace, the Vice-President of Peace and Sport reflects on this defining moment and shares his vision of the role athletes can play in society. He also discusses the conditions athletes need to fulfil their potential and place their influence at the service of the wider community. Beyond symbolic gestures and major international events, his conviction remains unchanged: although football cannot build peace on its own, when used responsibly it can be a powerful vehicle for dialogue, education and social cohesion.

« FOOTBALL DOES NOT SIGN PEACE AGREEMENTS. BUT IT CAN REMIND A DIVIDED SOCIETY THAT IT STILL HAS SOMETHING IN COMMON. »

In 2005, the Ivory Coast had just qualified for the first World Cup in its history. In the dressing room, you joined your teammates in calling on Ivorians to lay down their weapons.
When you watch those images today, what comes to mind?

The first thing I think about is the emotion. We had just achieved something incredible: qualifying the Ivory Coast for its first-ever World Cup. The entire country was watching us. Everyone was happy. But we also knew what Ivorians were going through at that time.
Our team brought together players from all over the Ivory Coast. We did not all share the same history, religion or background. Yet whenever we were together, none of those differences mattered anymore.
We were a team. We were Ivorians. So, we wanted to say to people: "Look at us. If we can live together, why can't our country do the same?"
We had not prepared anything. It truly came from the heart.

Over time, this story has sometimes been summed up as follows: "Didier Drogba stopped the war in the Ivory Coast." Are you comfortable with that claim?

No, because it would be untrue and presumptuous. I never stopped a war, and neither did the national team.
Many people were working to restore peace in the country: political leaders, associations, citizens and others. It is important to recognise and respect all that work. What we were able to do, at our own level, was convey a message.
For a while, Ivorians from every background united behind the same team. I believe it reminded them of something essential: despite the difficulties and divisions, we still belonged to the same country.
Football has that power. It does not solve every problem, but it can bring people closer together.
"Football does not sign peace agreements. But it can remind a divided society that its people still have something in common."

Two years later, you campaigned for the national team to play in Bouaké, a city particularly affected by the crisis. Why did that match matter so much to you?

Because words also had to be followed by action. Bouaké occupied a very important place at that time. Playing there with the national team inevitably carried a special meaning.
As soon as we arrived, we understood what the match represented for the local population. Huge numbers of people had gathered: families, children and people who had simply come to watch "their" team play.
Throughout the match, the entire stadium sang for the Ivory Coast. Those are images I will never forget.
When you experience a moment like that, you understand that football's impact can extend far beyond the result displayed at the end of the ninety minutes.

Is this where the limitation of major sporting events lies: they can generate a powerful sense of collective emotion, but that feeling may fade very quickly?

A match lasts ninety minutes. A World Cup lasts a few weeks. A society, however, is built over several generations.
The danger would be to believe that a major event can be enough on its own. It cannot.
What interests me is what remains after the spotlight has faded. Do young people have better access to sport? Do educators have better tools? Have communities that were not speaking to one another learned to come together? Has the event created opportunities that will last for five or ten years?
That is what a genuine legacy looks like. Without that continuity, all we will have done is enjoy a wonderful celebration.

need to be supported in their social engagement just as effectively as they are in achieving peak performance on the pitch.
Their role is not only to inspire young people, but also to support those who work every day—educators in particular. They are the ones who remain present within communities, day after day. It is through this sustained collective commitment that things can truly begin to change.



But a match only lasts ninety minutes. How can we ensure that this emotion leaves a lasting impression?

That is precisely the central challenge. A match can bring people together for an evening, but without sustained human and financial investment, the same problems will still be there the following day.
We must therefore go further. For me, what matters most is the support mobilised by event organisers and athletes before, during and—above all—after the event.
Do the associations working in neighbourhoods every day receive enough support? Are athletes, particularly footballers, trained for these missions and given the tools they need to engage effectively?
For years, a famous player could visit, speak to children and attract media attention. That was important, but the player would then leave. Today, if they are to make a genuine social impact, athletes

After every World Cup, the question of the competition's legacy returns to the forefront. How can we tell whether a major event has genuinely been beneficial?

Of course, a World Cup should be a celebration. When I was a player, I also dreamed of taking part in these competitions.
But once the event is over, we need to look at what remains.
If, ten years later, children can practise sport in better conditions, if more educators have received training and support, and if neighbourhoods have benefited from new infrastructure, then yes, we can speak of a legacy.
A full stadium for a month is magnificent. But enabling children to practise sport for ten or twenty years is even more important.

Society is placing increasing demands on athletes, expecting them to become involved in issues beyond sport. Does a champion necessarily have a duty to take a stand?

I do not believe anyone can be forced to get involved. Every athlete is different and, before being a champion, each is first and foremost a person, with their own story, sensitivities and convictions.
We must nevertheless recognise a reality: fame and media attention bring considerable exposure. When you are a well-known athlete, your words, actions and choices are observed. That influence is a form of power and, as the famous saying goes, "with great power comes great responsibility."
When I was a player, I saw children wearing my shirt, copying my movements and imitating my goal celebrations. When you see that, you understand that your behaviour can have an influence. Everyone remains free to decide what they wish to do with that responsibility.
At one point in my career, I realised that I should no longer simply accept this visibility but use it as an opportunity to help. To be useful, however, that commitment must be sincere, structured and sustained over time.
If you only become involved when the cameras are present, people realise it very quickly. Credibility is built through consistency, far beyond the spotlight.

Was this realisation also what led you to establish your Foundation in 2007?

Exactly. Football has given me an enormous amount. It enabled me to live my dream, play for major clubs, represent my country and enjoy a great deal of success.
At one point, I asked myself: "How can I help improve the daily lives of Ivorians and contribute to Africa's development?" That is how the Foundation came into being.
When you have lived in the Ivory Coast and understand the realities faced by some children and families, you are aware of the scale of the need. We began by acting in areas including healthcare and education.
Over time, I came to understand that helping was not simply a matter of giving money.
You need to build strong projects, listen to the people working on the ground and, above all, ensure that every initiative is sustained over time.

You are also Vice-President of Peace and Sport. How does this responsibility complement your commitment and give it an international dimension?

Peace and Sport adds a complementary, international dimension to my commitment. For nearly twenty years, Joël Bouzou and H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco** have championed a powerful conviction: sport can be a genuine tool for peace, if decision-makers choose to invest in it over the long term. It is a vision I fully share.
As Vice-President, I contribute my experience as an athlete and my understanding of different cultures, acquired while playing across four continents. My journey enables me to mobilise athletes, but also to raise awareness among leaders and decision-makers throughout my global network about the role they can play.
I am also one of the Champions for Peace, a unique club bringing together more than one hundred athletes from a wide variety of sports, countries and backgrounds. Meeting, sharing our experiences and exchanging ideas are essential. Each of us has our own story and way of contributing, but we share the same determination: to place our influence and experience at the service of peace.
This commitment is also a constant source of learning for me. The encounters that take place during the Peace and Sport International Forums, as well as field initiatives—particularly in Colombia and Cyprus—inform my thinking and broaden my approach to action.
This complementarity is what gives the Organisation its strength. A champion can attract attention and open doors. But to turn that initial momentum into tangible and sustainable action, athletes, local stakeholders, institutions and decision-makers must be brought together.

As part of this commitment, you have met young people in many countries. Have you witnessed the tangible effects of sport?

Yes, of course. And those effects sometimes emerge through very simple things.
You arrive with a ball, and the children begin to play. At first, some of them do not know one another and may not even speak the



same language. Yet after a few minutes, they manage to play together. That is the true power of sport.
Of course, a ball will not solve all their problems. But it will have created an encounter and established an initial connection. With the guidance of a good educator, that encounter can then become a starting point for learning respect—particularly respect for rules—and how to live better alongside others.
That is how I understand the role of sport.

It is commonly assumed that sport naturally transmits values. Do you believe this is true?

Not automatically. Football can also cause tension. We see it in stadiums and sometimes among the players themselves.
Everything depends on how it is practised and supervised.
Within a team, you must learn to respect your teammates and accept their differences. You must learn how to lose, but also how to win without humiliating your opponent.
These lessons may seem simple, but they are essential. This is precisely where the role of the coach or educator becomes so important.
It is their guidance that can turn sport into a genuine tool for education and the transmission of values.

You captained the Ivory Coast and became a role model for an entire generation. What message would you like to give the young African players who are now establishing themselves among the stars of world football?

First, to make the most of every moment, because a career passes very quickly.
But also—and above all—never to forget where they come from. When you become successful, many things around yourself change. Yet in your city or neighbourhood, there will always be young people watching you and dreaming of following the same path.
You do not need to establish a major foundation to begin taking action. You can support the club where you trained, meet with children or help a school.
Everyone can contribute something at their own level. What matters is taking the first step and sustaining that commitment over time.

After everything football has given you, what continues to fuel your determination to give back through sport today?

I have forgotten neither where I come from nor everything football has given me.
Through this sport, I have had the opportunity to experience extraordinary moments. I played for major clubs, represented my country and took part in World Cups—everything I dreamed of as a child.
Today, if my journey can help open a door, give a young person confidence, or support those who work on the ground every day, then I want to place it at their service.
I do not believe that change comes from grand speeches alone. Sometimes, change begins very simply: by giving a child somewhere to play, someone to guide them and a reason to believe in themselves.

NICOLAS NKOULOU

PROTECT, EDUCATE, EMPOWER

Former captain of the Indomitable Lions, goalscorer in the victorious 2017 Africa Cup of Nations final and capped 81 times by Cameroon, Nicolas Nkoulou built a career that took him from Mfou to some of Europe's greatest football grounds. After training in Cameroon at Kadji Sport Academies, he continued his development at AS Monaco before playing for Olympique de Marseille, Olympique Lyonnais and Torino FC in Italy.

Several months after bringing his playing career to an end, the former defender opened a new chapter by launching the Nicolas Nkoulou Foundation in Cameroon. Held in Mfou and Yaoundé on June 24th and 25th 2026, the two inaugural days brought together several hundred young people, former Indomitable Lions players, institutional representatives and civil-society stakeholders.

Through his foundation, Nicolas Nkoulou hopes to transform his experience and public profile into progressive, coherent and sustainable support centered on three priorities: protecting, educating and empowering Cameroon's children and young people. As a strategic partner, Peace and Sport is supporting him in structuring the Foundation's initiatives, delivering training, raising funds and mobilising partners. It is a new mission he will also pursue as a member of the Champions for Peace club.



Several months after retiring from professional sport, you launched your foundation in Cameroon. What does this new beginning represent?

NICOLAS NKOULOU:
Above all, it is about passing something on. My journey and experience have enabled me to acquire values that have remained with me and made me the man I am today: hard work, respect, discipline, humility, generosity and perseverance.

Football gave me an extraordinary career. Now it is time to pass on what I received, particularly to younger generations. At every stage of my life, someone extended a helping hand to me. Without those people, I would probably never have come this far. Today, I want to extend mine.

Your journey took you from Mfou to Monaco and then to several leading European clubs. Why was it important to establish the Foundation in Cameroon?

NICOLAS NKOULOU:
Because I have not forgotten where I come from. I grew up in Mfou, in a difficult environment with very limited resources. I played on those pitches and shared the same dreams as the children we met during the launch.
When my career began, I discovered another world. Within a few hours' flight, I could go from the yachts of Monaco to children playing football with tin cans. Whenever I returned home, that contrast always weighed heavily on me.
I often tried to help during my career, but one-off initiatives do not always reach the

people we want to support or respond precisely to their needs. The Foundation should enable us to identify priorities more effectively, structure our projects and ensure their continuity.

What role has the Principality of Monaco played in your journey and in shaping this commitment?

NICOLAS NKOULOU:
Monaco holds a very important place in my life. I arrived at AS Monaco as a young player after starting out at Kadji Sport Academies. The club helped me develop as a footballer, but above all, it helped me become a man.
I learned there that success is not simply about chasing a ball. It also brings responsibilities. One experience shortly after my arrival taught me, in particular, the importance of giving back what you have received. That lesson has never left me.
I feel profoundly Cameroonian, but I also belong to the Monaco family. It is therefore natural for this new venture to create a connection between Cameroon, where the Foundation works, and Monaco, where I learned many of the values I now want to pass on.

Why did you choose to place young people and education at the heart of your work?

NICOLAS NKOULOU:
Because education is essential. Women and men build societies. From childhood onwards, we must therefore give them the tools they need to learn, develop and take their place in the world.
Sport can play a very important role in this journey. It promotes health, but it also teaches people to respect rules, listen, work hard, express themselves and live alongside others. On a playing field, the same rules apply to everyone. Sport transcends borders and creates a common language.
Our ambition is built around three complementary priorities: protecting children and providing them with a safe environment; educating them by transmitting knowledge and values; and helping them grow, develop their potential and become independent.

The launch took place over two days, first in Mfou and then in Yaoundé. Why did you choose this format?

NICOLAS NKOULOU:
It was important to begin in Mfou, where everything started for me. The first day brought together several hundred young people for sporting activities, the distribution of educational supplies and opportunities to engage with families and local communities.
Former teammates and leading figures in Cameroonian football, including Alexandre Song, came to take part in the exhibition match. Their presence sent a powerful message to the young people: players do not forget their country and can come together to act.
The following day, the ceremony in Yaoundé provided an opportunity to present the Foundation to institutions, private partners, members of the diplomatic corps, the media and civil-society stakeholders. The two days complemented each other: the first was rooted in the community, while the second sought to create the partnerships required to sustain our work over time.



Why did you choose to seek support from Peace and Sport?

NICOLAS NKOULOU:
When entering the field of social action, you must show humility. I had the desire to act, had already assembled a trusted team and had laid the initial administrative foundations, but I had little experience in developing programmes.
It is not enough to say, "I am extending a helping hand." You need to know how to act, whom to work with, how to select projects, secure funding and measure results.
I learned more about Peace and Sport's work during an event organised by AS Monaco. I quickly contacted this Organisation because I needed a partner capable of guiding me and helping me transform my vision into concrete action. For me, this support is one of the project's foundations.

Benjamin Boukpeti, you represented Peace and Sport at the launch in Cameroon. What struck you most about Nicolas Nkoulou's approach?

BENJAMIN BOUKPETI:
First, his personal involvement. Nicolas is not simply looking to attach his name to a foundation. He asks questions, listens, accepts that he has things to learn and wants to understand every stage of the project.
He has retained the discipline and high standards that characterised him as an elite athlete. But he also understands that social engagement is a new profession and that, in some areas, he must begin again from the ground up. That humility is essential.
His journey from Mfou to the greatest international competitions is a tremendous source of inspiration. But what will give his commitment real strength is his ability to surround himself with a capable team, work with local stakeholders and incorporate his initiatives into a sustainable strategy.

How is Peace and Sport supporting the Foundation's development in practical terms?

BENJAMIN BOUKPETI:
The first step is to translate Nicolas's vision into a structured programme, with precise objectives, clearly identified beneficiaries and achievable initiatives. This work will then make it possible to secure public or private funding and build credible partnerships.
Peace and Sport can also provide its methodology, educational tools and training expertise. The objective is to train educators and teachers who can use sport regularly to transmit life skills and civic values.
The Organisation also mobilises its international network, particularly the Champions for Peace, sports federations and its partners. Finally, it supports the project's visibility and advocacy efforts to attract new supporters.
The challenge is to enable Nicolas to move from useful and visible initiatives to a progressive, coherent and sustainable programme capable of making a genuine difference in the lives of young people in Cameroon.

You have also joined the Champions for Peace club. What does this new responsibility mean to you?

NICOLAS NKOULOU:
It is a great source of pride, but above all, an additional responsibility. Joining this network enables me to exchange ideas with athletes such as Didier Drogba, who already have extensive experience in social engagement.
We can learn from one another, share our successes and difficulties, and unite our efforts. Today, athletes can become genuine agents of change. We must not remain mere figureheads.
As a Champion for Peace, I want to pass on everything sport has taught me and use my journey to inspire young people. My role is no longer to defend a penalty area, but to defend values and help create new opportunities.

What will be the Foundation's next step?

NICOLAS NKOULOU:
The beginning of the school year will be our first major milestone. Every child should have the tools they need to learn and begin the year in the best possible conditions.
Teams are currently identifying schools where educational kits can be distributed to several hundred children. This initiative addresses an immediate need, but it must not remain an isolated action. It should open the way to further projects in education, social inclusion, personal development and support through sport.
In the long term, our ambition is to build a sustainable programme in Cameroon and then share that experience across the African continent. We want to protect, educate and empower. That is how one-off initiatives can become a genuine legacy for future generations.



SÓCRATES AWARD

When football shows its true values

On October 26th, 2026, the greatest figures in world football will gather in London for the 70th Ballon d'Or ceremony. Among the honours presented, the Sócrates Award will offer a different perspective on football: one that celebrates players who use their influence to support initiatives extending beyond the pitch.

At the end of a year marked by the 2026 World Cup, discussions surrounding the Ballon d'Or will focus on trophies won and individual performances. The Sócrates Award poses a different question: what do champions choose to build with the visibility football gives them?

Created in 2022 by the L'Équipe Group and Peace and Sport, in association with Sócrates' family, the award recognises social initiatives led by figures from the world of football. Education, healthcare, the fight against discrimination, equal opportunities and support for vulnerable populations: the award-winning projects take different approaches but share the same ambition - to transform individual success into opportunities for others.

The Sócrates Award therefore shines a light on structured initiatives capable of producing tangible and lasting results.

CREATED IN 2022 BY THE L'ÉQUIPE GROUP AND PEACE AND SPORT, IN ASSOCIATION WITH SÓCRATES' FAMILY, THE AWARD RECOGNISES SOCIAL INITIATIVES LED BY FIGURES FROM THE WORLD OF FOOTBALL.



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SÓCRATES: *A NAME, A SET OF VALUES, A LEGACY*

Naming this award after Sócrates was no incidental choice. A doctor, captain of the Brazilian national team and one of the leading figures in 1980s football, Sócrates Brasileiro Sampaio de Souza Vieira de Oliveira used his public profile to defend democracy and social justice.

At Corinthians, he took part in the "Corinthian Democracy" movement, which involved players in the club's decision-making at a time when Brazil was still under military dictatorship. His commitment continued beyond his playing career, particularly through his support for young people in his country.

Sócrates embodied a vision of the champion that did not separate the athlete from the citizen. His legacy reminds us that an athlete's popularity can be used to open a debate, support a cause and help transform society far beyond the stadium.

" The media exposure enjoyed by athletes carries with it a duty to set an example and embrace social responsibility."

Joël Bouzou, President and Founder of Peace and Sport

FOUR WINNERS, *FOUR FORMS OF COMMITMENT*

The Sócrates Award's list of winners demonstrates that there is no single model for social engagement among football's leading figures.

2022 - SADIO MANÉ:
ACTING FOR HIS COMMUNITY

The inaugural winner, Sadio Mané, was honoured for projects developed in Bambali, his home village in Senegal. Among other initiatives, he supported the construction of a hospital and a secondary school, as well as programmes for young people and girls' participation in sport.
His work is rooted in direct knowledge of his community's needs and a desire to share some of the opportunities his career has given him.

2023 - VINÍCIUS JÚNIOR:
FIGHTING RACISM THROUGH EDUCATION

Regularly subjected to racist abuse, Vinícius Júnior chose to turn his public advocacy into action. Through the Instituto Vini Jr., he develops educational solutions for children attending Brazilian state schools. His commitment therefore brings together two causes: confronting discrimination in football and tackling the educational inequalities that help perpetuate it.



2024 - JENNI HERMOSO:
ADVANCING EQUALITY

The first woman to receive the Sócrates Award, Jenni Hermoso was honoured for her commitment to gender equality and women's rights in football.
Her journey demonstrates how a female athlete's visibility can help bring attention to experiences that were minimised for many years and drive change within sporting institutions for future generations.

2025 - THE XANA FOUNDATION AND LUIS ENRIQUE: :
TRANSFORMING GRIEF INTO SOLIDARITY

Established by Luis Enrique and his family in memory of his daughter Xana, who died from a rare form of cancer, the Xana Foundation supports seriously ill children and their families by providing medical, financial and psychological assistance.
By recognising a foundation, the Sócrates Award also acknowledges the value of a collective project whose impact extends beyond the individual who initiated it.

DISTINGUISHING IMPACT *FROM COMMUNICATION*

The growing number of foundations, charitable campaigns and public positions taken by athletes represents an important development. Yet not every initiative automatically produces lasting change. Fame attracts attention. But it guarantees neither the quality of a project nor its relevance to the populations concerned.

This is precisely where Peace and Sport contributes to the selection process. The Organisation assesses the quality, coherence and credibility of the initiatives before submitting a shortlist of projects to a jury that includes representatives of the Sócrates family and the L'Équipe Group.
"When we created the Sócrates Award, we wanted it to have genuine meaning and not become a public-relations exercise," explains Vincent Garcia, Editor-in-Chief of France Football.

The technical expertise involved makes it possible to identify robust projects and distinguish structured commitments from primarily promotional initiatives. Beyond the amount invested or the athlete's popularity, the assessment considers whether the project addresses genuine needs, the quality of the partners involved, the continuity of its activities and its ability to strengthen local stakeholders.

This rigorous approach is essential. A champion can bring visibility to a cause, mobilise resources and open previously closed doors. They cannot, however, replace the educators, associations and professionals who work with beneficiaries every day. Their commitment becomes genuinely transformative when it amplifies the work of these local stakeholders instead of taking their place.

FROM INFLUENCE TOWARDS RESPONSIBILITY

The Sócrates Award does not expect footballers to solve society's crises on their own. It does, however, recognise a reality: their voices, resources and ability to mobilise others give them an influence that extends far beyond their sporting careers.

That influence can remain focused on cultivating a personal image. It can also become an embraced responsibility, expressed through serious projects and supported by organisations capable of sustaining action over time.

The journeys of Sadio Mané and Vinícius Júnior, both leading figures at the most recent World Cup, illustrate this continuity between international performance and local commitment. Mané works in his home community to advance healthcare and education. Vinícius Júnior transforms his experience of racism into action promoting equal opportunities for young people in Brazil. In both cases, their commitment extends far beyond words spoken in the spotlight.

The next winner will be announced in London on October 26th. Their identity remains unknown, but the significance of the award already extends beyond its list of recipients. By placing social engagement at the heart of football's most prestigious individual awards ceremony, the Sócrates Award is helping to broaden the criteria by which a champion's greatness is judged.

The Ballon d'Or honours those who have dominated a season. The Sócrates Award reminds us that a champion's legacy can also be measured by the opportunities they choose to create for others.

1- Vinicius Junior • 2- Jenni Hermoso • 3- H.S.H. Princess Charlene of Monaco presents the 2025 Award to the Xana Foundation • 4- Rai and Sadio Mané





AI-generated image

TOWARDS **GLOBAL** *GOVERNANCE FOR* **PEACE** *THROUGH* **SPORT**

Around the world, actors from diverse backgrounds are joining forces to make sport a catalyst for dialogue, cooperation and social transformation. International institutions, sports federations, grassroots organisations and innovators: each, in their own way, contributes to developing new initiatives and building meaningful partnerships.

This section shines a spotlight on those who turn the potential of sport into concrete action for peace and development.

RES SPORTIVA
PUTTING *KNOWLEDGE* AT THE SERVICE OF IMPACT

On 9 June, Res Sportiva unveiled its first International Panorama. Launched in March 2025, the association's mission is to collect and analyse data in order to improve understanding of social innovation through sport. Its ambition is to identify the main trends and determine the conditions in which sport can contribute sustainably to social transformation.

Divided into two volumes, this landmark report first examines "social innovation through sport" before exploring the conditions required for "scaling up." In total, this collective initiative involved 936 organizations from 81 countries: 753 grassroots organizations and 183 stakeholders that help fund or support their work.

This diversity of stakeholders and experiences encapsulates Res Sportiva's ambition: to produce and share knowledge, showcase inspiring practices and foster cooperation between organizations and countries.



SPORT, *FAR MORE THAN A LEISURE ACTIVITY*

The first lesson from the Panorama is unequivocal: 90% of the grassroots organizations surveyed primarily use sport as a tool to address educational, social, environmental or health-related challenges.

Access to sport remains a core objective for 64% of the organizations, while competition is a priority for 32%. However, these two dimensions are no longer necessarily the sole purpose of their work.

Football is the most widely used sport, cited by 45% of organizations, ahead of basketball, volleyball and athletics. The Panorama nevertheless highlights another significant trend: 43% of organizations offer several sporting activities. More than the choice of any particular discipline, the movement is therefore defined by the way sport is connected with non-sporting objectives.

The main areas addressed confirm this development. Physical health is a focus for 76% of the organizations surveyed, education for 75%, women's inclusion and gender equality for 72%, mental health for 68%, and youth empowerment for 66%.

Sport does not, however, automatically produce positive outcomes. Its impact depends on the intentions guiding each project, the educational methods employed and the conditions in which activities are supervised.

Innovation therefore lies not in reinventing football, basketball or rugby, but in connecting sport with educational, social or health-related initiatives: opportunities for dialogue, awareness campaigns, academic support and the development of psychosocial skills.

COOPERATING TO **STRENGTHEN IMPACT**

This connection relies heavily on cooperation. Among the organizations surveyed, 71% work with schools, primarily through extracurricular programmes; 70% collaborate with sports clubs; and 54% work with healthcare stakeholders.

Integrating sport into formal school curricula nevertheless remains less common. Worldwide, only 53% of primary schools have teachers specifically trained in physical education.

The Panorama describes a movement that has grown in maturity but has yet to achieve stability. Most of the organizations surveyed have existed for more than ten years and employ at least one member of staff. Yet 30% operate with an annual budget below €100,000, while only 10% have more than €1 million at their disposal.

This fragility limits their ability to plan, train their teams and measure results over time. It demonstrates that the growing recognition of sport's social impact must now be accompanied by more stable investment and long-term partnerships.

SCALING UP **WITHOUT LOSING IMPACT**

Accelerating sport's social impact requires the continued professionalization, documentation and sharing of effective practices.

This is the focus of the Panorama's second volume, dedicated to scaling up.

Scaling up is not limited to the growth of a single organization. Almost half of the organizations surveyed are expanding their activities into new towns or villages, but very large-scale expansion remains rare: only 2% operate in more than 100 locations. At the same time, 54% seek to share their methods with other stakeholders, while more than 70% are diversifying their activities to reach new audiences.

Scaling up can therefore take several forms: extending an initiative into new territories, transferring a method to other organizations, improving the quality and impact of an existing programme, or adapting it for new beneficiaries. Geographical growth is neither the only path nor necessarily the most relevant.

Growth also entails risks. The Panorama identifies three principal concerns: declining quality as activities become more difficult to monitor; mission drift when funding opportunities draw an organization away from its original purpose; and governance tensions between a central organization and its local partners.

These difficulties are compounded by the multiplication of tasks, increased pressure on teams and the risk of burnout among leaders.

To address these challenges, four models are analysed: centralized, licensed, franchised and flexible. None provides a universal solution. Their success depends on the ability to preserve the quality of methods, train educators, adapt programmes to local contexts and provide lasting support.

The message is clear: growth does not necessarily mean greater impact.

THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR:

"GROWTH DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN GREATER IMPACT."

PEACE AND SPORT'S EXPERTISE *SUPPORTING THE PANORAMA*

As a major contributor, Peace and Sport participated throughout the process, from the international steering committee to the final review.

In the first volume, the Organization notably contributed to a case study on the Naandi Foundation and its Nanhi Kali programme in India. This initiative demonstrates how football can strengthen the confidence, initiative and agency of girls from disadvantaged rural communities.

In the second volume, Peace and Sport contributed to the analysis of the conditions and risks associated with scaling up. Jean-Jérôme Perrin-Mortier, the Organization's CEO, notably highlights the evolving role of international federations. A growing number are establishing their own foundations to work directly with civil society and local communities.

This development can help mobilize new resources and bring sporting institutions closer to realities on the ground. It nevertheless requires balanced partnerships, clear governance and genuine recognition of local stakeholders' expertise.

Developed collaboratively with numerous stakeholders from the Sport for Development and Peace sector, the Panorama provides a shared foundation for improving understanding of the sector's practices, vulnerabilities and prospects. Above all, it reminds us that the future of social innovation through sport will not depend solely on creating more projects.

It will rest on stakeholders' ability to document their results, share their methods, invest in training and build lasting cooperation. To scale up without losing its impact, the sector must first learn to know one another—and then learn to build a community.

FROM THE PLAYING FIELD *TO THE* UNITED NATIONS

Putting sports diplomacy into practice

Considering the social legacy of a major event is a first step. It is equally important to determine who will fund it, who will implement it and how its effects will be evaluated over time. Just days before the start of the 2026 World Cup, the Sports Diplomacy Summit, held at United Nations Headquarters in New York, placed these issues at the heart of the debate. Peace and Sport championed a firm conviction: sports diplomacy only becomes credible when commitments made at the international level produce tangible, visible and lasting results within communities.

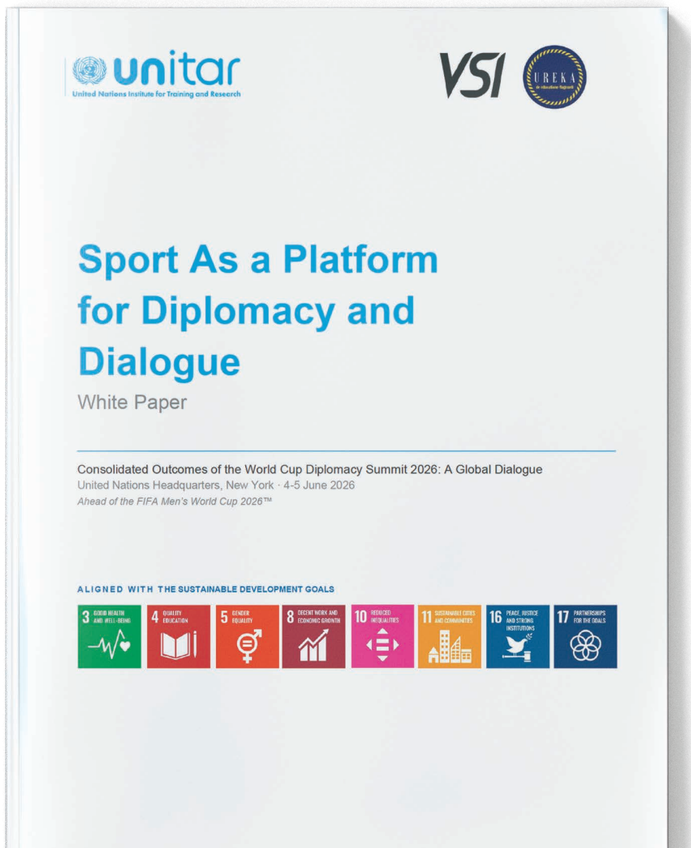
MOVING TO A NEW SCALE

On 4 and 5 June 2026 in New York, UNITAR brought together representatives from governments, sporting institutions, academia, the private sector and civil society, including Peace and Sport.

The discussions contributed to the development of a White Paper published by UNITAR in July, Sport as a Platform for Diplomacy and Dialogue. The document proposes a framework for action covering sports diplomacy, community legacy, training, governance and the responsible use of technology.

Its publication reflects a shift in perspective. Long associated with the image of nations or the international influence generated by major competitions, sports diplomacy is presented here as a practise that must be organised, funded, evaluated and sustained beyond the event itself.

The challenge is no longer merely to recognise sport's ability to bring people closer together, but to create the institutional conditions required to transform that potential into tangible results.



THE RESOURCE *PARADOX*

Major events attract considerable funding, media attention and political commitment. At the same time, the associations and educators who use sport every day to support vulnerable populations often struggle to secure the resources required to sustain their work.

During the Summit, Ernesto Lucena, Peace and Sport's representative in Latin America and Colombia's former Minister of Sport, called for investment to be rebalanced in favour of community programmes. Although social impact depends on relationships of trust built over several years, it is still frequently funded through a short-term, project-based approach. The resources accompany the event, then disappear with it.

The challenge is therefore no longer simply to recognise the value of community sport, but to incorporate it into the budgets, partnerships and accountability mechanisms of major competitions. Part of the value created at the highest level must deliver lasting benefits to those working at the grassroots.

This means funding programmes beyond the event calendar, strengthening local organisations and allocating the resources required to monitor the event's social legacy from the moment the competition is conceived.

SPORTS DIPLOMACY *ALSO BEGINS LOCALLY*

The "Beyond the Stadium" session, moderated by Ludovic Dau, Director of Impact and Sports Diplomacy at Peace and Sport, explored precisely this relationship between international ambition and local action. The experiences presented from Colombia, Cyprus, the African Great Lakes region and refugee communities demonstrate that sports diplomacy is not limited to relations between states.

It also takes shape when divided communities share the same playing field or when educators create an environment safe enough for people to meet. These spaces cannot replace political dialogue. They can, however, help build trust, challenge certain stereotypes and make that dialogue more achievable.

The White Paper develops this idea through a Colombian case study presented by Peace and Sport. In communities affected by violence, sport-based educational programmes have helped create protective environments for young people, strengthen social ties and provide alternatives to exclusion.

The lesson is essential: sport for development is not a peripheral component of sports diplomacy. It is one of its foundations. Without tangible benefits for local populations, international discourse on unity, inclusion and peace risks remaining merely symbolic.

TURNING PRINCIPLES INTO RESPONSIBILITIES

The conditions required to build a social legacy are now clearly identified: begin with the needs of the host territory, involve local stakeholders, train educators and measure transformation over time.

The White Paper raises a more institutional question: how should responsibilities be allocated to ensure that these principles are applied in practise?

Its proposals include creating a sports diplomacy training programme, developing a roadmap for event organisers, establishing an international coordination mechanism and designing shared evaluation tools. The document also considers creating a network of host cities to sustain cooperation beyond individual competition cycles.

These recommendations reflect an important development. Sports diplomacy can no longer depend solely on the goodwill of a small number of institutions or individuals. It must be supported by clear governance, identified sources of funding and the ability to report on the results achieved.

Athletes occupy a special place within this approach. Their visibility enables them to bring people together, mobilise resources and open doors. Their influence, however, does not automatically become diplomatic action.

Peace and Sport therefore advocates supporting athletes through training, mentoring and structured partnerships. This framework should enable them to understand more fully the contexts in which they intervene, work with capable stakeholders and incorporate their commitment into a long-term strategy.

FROM INFLUENCE *TOWARDS* COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Sports diplomacy is not the responsibility of a single stakeholder. Governments can define political priorities and establish cooperation mechanisms. Event organisers can incorporate social impact into their budgets and governance. Businesses can fund sustainable programmes. Athletes can mobilise attention. Associations and educators, meanwhile, ensure continuity within communities.

The effectiveness of this framework depends on these stakeholders' ability to work together with clearly defined responsibilities.

This cooperation must also recognise the role of communities themselves. A project designed remotely, without an understanding of local needs or the participation of its beneficiaries, risks remaining disconnected from the realities it claims to transform.

Making sports diplomacy a genuine tool for action therefore requires a shift from influence towards collective responsibility.

THE REAL TEST *BEGINS NOW*

The White Paper provides a non-binding framework. Its publication therefore guarantees neither funding nor coordination, nor the continuity of the recommended programmes.

Progress will not be measured by the number of institutions that have adopted the language of sports diplomacy. It will be measured by the existence of dedicated budgets, clearly assigned responsibilities, communities involved in decision-making and indicators monitored for several years after competitions have ended.

The 2026 World Cup offered an exceptional opportunity to place these questions on the international agenda. Moving from the playing field to the United Nations represents important recognition. The movement in the opposite direction will now be decisive: bringing these commitments back to clubs, associations, educators and communities.

As Didier Drogba reminded participants during the Summit, ***"Peace means creating dialogue, respect, coexistence and human connections."***

Sports diplomacy will only truly take shape when these connections outlive the event that brought them to light.

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EQUIP SPORT

The sports access revolution is underway

Sport promotes social cohesion, a willingness to make an effort, perseverance and dialogue. But to produce these benefits, it must first be accessible. How can sport fulfil its potential when the cost of equipment or the difficulty of transporting it prevents people from taking part? Equip Sport addresses this challenge through an app that allows users to borrow sports equipment easily from connected lockers.



INFORMATION

The principle is simple: users download the app to their phone, locate a nearby station, reserve an item and return it after use. Several hundred connected lockers are available worldwide and Equip has enabled more than 1 million hours of sport.
Inside them are footballs, volleyballs, basketballs and American footballs; tennis, table tennis and padel rackets; as well as Mölkky sets, pétanque balls and even stand-up paddleboards. More than 50 activities are available in total.
Most of the equipment is made available to the public free of charge. Fees may apply only to certain higher-value items, such as paddleboards. "A user walks past a station, takes out a ball, plays for ten minutes and puts it back in the locker. It is as simple as that," explains Henry Nidecker, founder of Equip Sport.

AN INNOVATION **FROM THE NIDECKER GROUP**

Equip Sport is part of the Swiss Nidecker Group, founded in 1887. The company has repeatedly distinguished itself through its capacity for innovation, notably becoming one of the first European companies to manufacture skis in 1912, before moving into snowboard production in 1984.
Today, Equip Sport reflects the same determination to anticipate new ways of using sports equipment. "Equip represents our vision for the future of sport. When we imagined an ideal world, it did not make sense to us that people should have to buy equipment and keep it at home. It is expensive, takes up space and is not always practical," Henry Nidecker explains.
The idea emerged five years ago, when Nidecker and his teams were considering how the snowboard market might evolve. Why not install lockers containing snowboards directly at the foot of the slopes? As they expanded on this idea, they identified an obstacle common to many activities: sometimes, simply forgetting a ball or racket is enough to make someone give up the opportunity to exercise for a few minutes.

« In our vision of tomorrow's world, equipment should be available directly where the activity takes place. We should be able to play, return it to its place and then begin a new activity. »

FROM EUROPE TO **NORTH AMERICA**

London, Munich, Milan, Miami, Ottawa and Vancouver are among more than fifty cities that have already chosen to install Equip Sport stations.

« We generally install around thirty stations in each city. The response has been extremely positive. In Canada, the Minister of Sport attended the opening of one of them, and mayors regularly attend the launches, » Henry Nidecker notes.

Here, technology becomes a means of facilitating access to sport and accelerating its social impact. The stations record approximately three thousand sessions every day, the vast majority of which are entirely free. The actual number of participants is probably much higher: one basketball reservation may involve two, four or ten players.
Beyond the figures, Equip Sport enables residents to be active, meet one another and discover sports to which they might not otherwise have had access. Having the right equipment available in the right place at the right time can be enough to create an opportunity to play together.
Free access for users is made possible by a model bringing together private partners, sports federations and local authorities. Brands such as Decathlon and Adidas, organisations including the NFL, foundations like Jumpstart - Canadian Tire and host cities all contribute to funding and deploying the connected stations.

THE WORLD AS A **PLAYING FIELD**

After five years, Equip Sport appears to have explored only part of its potential. Henry Nidecker is clear about his ambition: to roll out the concept in new cities and, ultimately, around the world.
The app could also go beyond equipment loans by making it easier to organise tournaments, coach-led sessions and events for specific groups.

« We could imagine reserving certain evenings for groups of women or people over the age of sixty, for example. It gives groups a reason and an opportunity to come together and play. We have already tested this type of initiative, and the results are very encouraging. »

For now, the stations are mainly installed near parks and sports facilities. In the future, they could also be placed in care homes for older people, universities and company premises—all locations where immediate access to equipment could remove barriers to participation and encourage new connections.
The venture is already well underway. On Henry Nidecker's computer screen, each use appears in real time:

« A minute ago, someone was playing pétanque in Lausanne. At the same time, other people were playing football in Milan and Davos, or basketball in Newton, Canada. Every minute, we enable someone, somewhere in the world, to take part in sport. »

DAVID LAPPARTIENT
CYCLING MUST BE A TOOL FOR DIALOGUE *BETWEEN PEOPLES*

Beyond sporting achievement, cycling carries a broader ambition: to bring people together, build connections and promote universal values. In this interview, Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) President David Lappartient reflects on the unique role cycling has played in his own journey and the contribution it can make to our societies.



PEACE AND SPORT
What are your earliest memories of cycling?

DAVID LAPPARTIENT
My earliest memories of cycling are closely linked to my family life and the region where I grew up. I was introduced to cycling at a very young age, and it quickly became both a means of exploration and a genuine passion. Like many children in France, I also have fond memories of the major races, particularly the Tour de France, which was a highlight of every summer and a source of inspiration. Very early on, I realized that cycling wasn't just a sport, but also a way of life, a culture and a wonderful way to bring people together.

CYCLING AS A TOOL FOR PEACE AND DIALOGUE

PEACE AND SPORT
Is it personally important to you to make cycling a sport that brings cultures and peoples closer together?

DAVID LAPPARTIENT
Yes, it is an essential part of my vision for cycling. Cycling is one of the few truly universal sports, practised and understood all over the world, regardless of culture or social background. As such, it naturally fosters a sense of connection and sharing. For me, cycling should not only be a competitive sport, but also a means of fostering dialogue between peoples. Through competitions, development programs and youth training, we can forge lasting bonds and contribute, in our own way, to greater mutual understanding. It is this human and universal dimension that gives full meaning to the UCI's work.

PEACE AND SPORT
You recently presented a 'Jersey for Peace' to the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education. Does this gesture signify a desire to strengthen cycling's role as a tool for dialogue and mutual understanding?

DAVID LAPPARTIENT
Yes, this gesture is fully in line with that desire. We believe that cycling can be a vehicle for dialogue, rapprochement and mutual understanding. Beyond its symbolic value, it serves as a reminder of the universal values of our sport – respect, solidarity and inclusion – and its ability to bring together very diverse communities around a common language.

RIDE & LEARN: EDUCATION THROUGH SPORT

PEACE AND SPORT
How did the Ride & Learn project and the partnership with Peace and Sport come about?

DAVID LAPPARTIENT
The Ride & Learn project stemmed from our desire to promote cycling not only as a competitive sport, but also as a physical activity accessible to everyone, regardless of age, social background or ability. We firmly believe that cycling is a wonderful tool for promoting physical and mental health, whilst fostering social connections and instilling positive values. It was only natural that we turned to Peace and Sport; their expertise in using sport as a vehicle for peace is perfectly aligned with the values and mission of the UCI.

PEACE AND SPORT
What principles underpin the Ride & Learn methodology?

DAVID LAPPARTIENT
The Ride & Learn methodology is based on the principles of education through sport. It uses cycling as a genuine educational tool to convey essential values such as respect, active listening, solidarity and cooperation, thereby helping to shape responsible citizens who are open to others. Beyond teaching cycling skills, the aim is to support the personal development of participants and to demonstrate that sport can be a powerful vehicle for education and social impact.

PEACE AND SPORT
Why are these educational pillars particularly important for the UCI?

DAVID LAPPARTIENT
These educational pillars lie at the heart of the UCI's vision for the development of cycling. Our ambition is to foster the growth of our sport in a truly universal way, by offering young people from all over the world, regardless of their background or circumstances, opportunities to discover and take up cycling. Beyond training competent cyclists, we also aim to help foster responsible citizens by instilling values that will stay with them long after they have finished practising the sport. It is this dual ambition – both sporting and human – that gives our commitment its full meaning.

PEACE AND SPORT
Should education through sport become a priority area in organising committees' legacy strategies, to leave a lasting impact on the communities hosting major events?

DAVID LAPPARTIENT
Yes, we believe this is an area with a significant positive local impact. So far, we have observed that a significant number of organising committees are already running education programs through sport – particularly cycling – through our discussions with cities and regions holding the UCI Bike City or UCI Bike Region label, as well as our exchanges with the teams responsible for the legacy program within organising committees, including the 2027 UCI Cycling World Championships in Haute-Savoie Mont-Blanc. The example of ***Zeeland (Netherlands), where 36 primary and secondary schools were involved in a social engagement program involving around 2,000 pupils,*** provides a concrete illustration of the ability of such initiatives to sustainably embed sporting activity in the daily lives of younger generations.

PROMOTING CYCLING FOR ALL

PEACE AND SPORT
What are the main initiatives undertaken by the UCI to increase participation in cycling?

DAVID LAPPARTIENT
The UCI's mission is to develop cycling at all levels, from elite competitions to cycling as a leisure activity and a means of transport. With this in mind, we have organised several complementary initiatives aimed at encouraging cycling and maximising its social, environmental and public health benefits.
The Cycling for All program provides the overall framework for this approach, promoting the everyday use of cycling and active mobility amongst the public, national federations and the wider cycling community. The UCI Bike City Label, supports and recognises towns and regions which, in addition to hosting major UCI cycling events, invest in the development of cycling within their communities and in the infrastructure and programs associated with it. The Cycling for All & Sustainability Awards recognise outstanding initiatives implemented by members of the cycling community that have a positive social and environmental impact, promote active mobility and encourage everyday cycling. These initiatives are complemented by the UCI Bike City Pathway, a reference tool designed for public decision-makers and urban planners to support the development of cycling-friendly environments worldwide. Finally, the UCI Bike City and Mobility Forum is a major annual event bringing together experts, institutions and stakeholders in the cycling sector to discuss the challenges of active mobility and its future developments.



PEACE AND SPORT
Does developing the sport also mean making it more gender-balanced? How does the UCI work – in general – to promote gender equality?

DAVID LAPPARTIENT
Developing cycling involves making it more accessible to everyone. Gender balance is a central pillar of this strategy and is set out as a priority in the UCI's second sustainability report.

At the top of the pyramid, the UCI is continuing its efforts to professionalise women's cycling, with the introduction in 2025 of the new UCI Women's ProTeams category, which sits between the UCI Women's WorldTeams and the UCI Women's Continental Teams. However, the UCI's work is not limited to professional sport; at the base of the pyramid, the UCI has also embarked on a far-reaching reform of its junior circuit, with a complete overhaul of the Regulations for the UCI Junior Nations Cup Road.

With this reform, men and women are treated equally; the same rules apply, enabling the youth categories to be structured without distinction. This commitment is also reflected in concrete progress towards sporting equity. UCI events offer equivalent prize money for women and men, and the Paris 2024 Olympic Games marked a historic milestone with full gender parity in cycling, featuring 257 women and 257 men. The 2025 UCI Road World Championships introduced, for the first time, a separate race for women under-23s.

Beyond competition, the UCI encourages women's access to all roles within the cycling industry through training programs run by the UCI World Cycling Centre. The number of female race officials is therefore steadily increasing. If a National Federation puts forward several candidates, at least one must be a woman. In the UCI World Cycling Centre's Satellite programs, a large majority of women (154 out of 222 athletes) took part in training sessions in 2024, illustrating a global trend towards greater female participation. Finally, this commitment is underpinned by strong institutional frameworks, including equality charters and rules on representation within the UCI's governing bodies.

MONACO
CAPITAL OF PEACE
THROUGH SPORT

La Vuelta 2026 much more than a grand départ

From August 20th to 23rd 2026, the Principality hosted the Grand Départ of the 81st edition of La Vuelta. Broadcast in more than 190 countries, the event gave Monaco an exceptional international sporting showcase. Beyond the performances and spectacular images of the route, however, it also enabled the Principality to promote a message of peace, solidarity and responsibility.



On May 16th, 2024, the announcement became official: Monaco would host the start of La Vuelta 2026. Two years of preparation followed, transforming the Principality's streets into an elite cycling course and preparing Monaco to welcome one of the three Grand Tours on the international calendar.

Accustomed to organising major sporting events, Monaco wanted this Grand Départ to represent more than a logistical success. By combining sporting excellence, public enthusiasm and a universal message of peace, the Principality once again affirmed its commitment to using sport as a tool for dialogue and international outreach.

A HISTORIC GRAND DÉPART

For four days, Monaco lived to the rhythm of world cycling. Beneath the Mediterranean sun, 184 riders were presented to the public on a stage installed in the heart of Casino Square.

Cycling enthusiasts, residents and visitors watched the team presentation from the terraces of the Carré d'Or and specially designated viewing areas. Among the riders were Monaco's Victor Langellotti, starting his third Vuelta, and Tadej Pogacar. The five-time Tour de France winner and two-time world champion was returning to a race he had not contested since 2019.

A Monaco resident, the Slovenian had a special motivation to start the race in front of his family and home crowd.

"***Racing in front of your home crowd, your family and your neighbours gives you extra motivation. The atmosphere in Monaco during this opening week is simply magical,***" he said during the team presentation.

For La Vuelta, starting in Monaco provided a prestigious setting, first-class facilities and exceptional international exposure. For the Principality, the event offered another opportunity to demonstrate its expertise in organising major sporting occasions.

"***Hosting La Vuelta in Monaco is not only a source of sporting pride. It is also an opportunity to send the world a powerful message of solidarity, peace and environmental responsibility. Sport has this unique ability to unite nations and transcend borders,***" emphasised H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco.

A SPORTING *AND* LOGISTICAL SUCCESS

The opening stage took the form of a demanding and technical nine-kilometre individual time trial. Starting from Casino Square, the route passed through Larvotto, Port Hercule and Fontvieille, continued around the Louis II Stadium and finished on Boulevard Albert-Ier.

Accessible free of charge along most of the route, the opening stage attracted large crowds. The sporting suspense lasted until the final rider, Tadej Pogačar, crossed the line. Winning by just nine hundredths of a second, the Slovenian secured his twentieth victory of the season and claimed the first red leader's jersey.

Beyond the result, the day was also a remarkable organisational achievement. The challenge was to transform the streets of a particularly dense urban territory into an elite cycling circuit while preserving mobility within the Principality as far as possible.

Integrating the route into Monaco's cityscape produced spectacular images and demonstrated the territory's ability to host an international competition in the very heart of the city.

"***Monaco offers a prestigious setting that is unique in the world, together with exceptional logistical expertise in elite competition. Starting La Vuelta here guarantees maximum international exposure and an unforgettable experience for both the teams and the spectators,***" Yann Le Moënner, Chief Executive Officer of Amaury Sport Organisation, told Radio Monaco in October 2025.

"MONACO OFFERS A PRESTIGIOUS SETTING THAT IS UNIQUE IN THE WORLD"

The following day, the ceremonial start of the second stage took place in Palace Square. The peloton descended from the Rock, crossed Monaco and reached the official start near the Exotic Garden before heading towards Manosque.

With this edition, Monaco became the first city-state to host the start of all three Grand Tours: the Giro d'Italia in 1966, the Tour de France in 2009 and La Vuelta in 2026. It marked another milestone in the Principality's sporting history.

SPORT *AS A TOOL FOR* DIPLOMACY

The Grand Départ of La Vuelta continued Monaco's long-standing tradition of hosting international events. From the Formula 1 Grand Prix to the Rolex Monte-Carlo Masters, the Principality has developed recognised expertise in staging major competitions.

The broadcast of La Vuelta in more than 190 countries naturally strengthened Monaco's appeal and visibility. Yet the event's significance extended beyond this media exposure.

"***A major sporting event must convey a universal message of inclusion, unity and peace among peoples,***" H.S.H. Prince Albert II reiterated.

By hosting the Spanish race, Monaco also strengthened its ties with Spain and

demonstrated its ability to bring public institutions, sporting organisations, athletes and international stakeholders together around a shared event. This convening power lies at the heart of sports diplomacy: using the universal language of sport to build relationships, open dialogue and promote shared values.

For Joël Bouzou, President and Founder of Peace and Sport, "***bringing a major international cycling tour together with the Principality makes it possible to use the extraordinary visibility of professional sport as a global platform for peace. Monaco is demonstrating that it is not only a welcoming home for champions, but also a capital committed to sports diplomacy and the transmission of educational values and a culture of peace.***"

This ambition took tangible form through "Ride for Peace", an initiative included in the Grand Départ programme.

RIDE FOR PEACE *A PELOTON UNITED FOR PEACE*

Jointly organised by Peace and Sport and Unipublic, the organiser of La Vuelta, Ride for Peace brought together a peloton of 50 participants: institutional representatives, sporting figures, Champions for Peace and former professional cyclists.

H.S.H. Prince Albert II launched the parade from Palace Square. Participants then followed part of the time trial's urban route, encouraged by several thousand spectators.

"***By launching Ride for Peace, we are reminding everyone that cycling—and sport more broadly—are powerful tools for bringing people together. Hosting La Vuelta in Monaco enables us to show that, beyond elite competition, sport can become a messenger of peace and solidarity among peoples,***" the Sovereign Prince declared.

The initiative aimed to harness La Vuelta's global exposure to promote a message of fraternity and cohesion. Families, local cycling clubs and young riders watched a parade that directly connected the sporting spectacle with a collective cause.

"***Ride for Peace perfectly illustrates our mission: using the global reach of a Grand Tour to convey powerful values. Combined with La Vuelta's expertise and the Principality's vision, sport demonstrates its ability to transcend borders and inspire communities far beyond the finish line,***" Joël Bouzou explained.

By incorporating this initiative into the official programme, the organisers emphasised that a major event can leave an intangible legacy: a story, a series of encounters and a message capable of enduring long after the competition.





A **LEGACY** *BEYOND* **THE FINISH LINE**

The Principality also wanted to place this Grand Départ within a long-term perspective. Promoting sustainable mobility, developing cycling infrastructure and encouraging young people in Monaco to take up the sport are among the event's potential lasting benefits.

The legacy of a major competition cannot be measured solely by attendance, audience figures or economic returns. It also depends on its ability to change habits, engage new audiences and strengthen the stakeholders who will continue their work after the temporary facilities have been dismantled.

The Grand Départ of La Vuelta 2026 therefore achieved several objectives: successfully delivering a complex event within a dense urban territory, giving Monaco exceptional international visibility and placing that exposure at the service of a message of peace.

By combining public enthusiasm, organisational excellence and diplomatic engagement, Monaco demonstrated that a Grand Départ can represent far more than the beginning of a race. It can also become the starting point for dialogue.



ISABELLE BERRO-AMADEÏ

A European Presidency for Safer and Healthier Sport for Children

As Monaco holds the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for the first time, the Principality intends to use sport as a lever for dialogue, cooperation and protection.
Isabelle Berro-Amadeï, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, sets out the ambitions behind this sports diplomacy and the priorities Monaco is pursuing in favour of safer, more inclusive sport, particularly for young people.

Monaco was named World Capital of Sport in 2025 and regularly hosts major international sporting events. How does the Principality intend to turn this sporting identity into a genuine instrument of influence and diplomatic action?

Sport and the hosting of major sporting events has been an integral part of the Principality's identity for over a century, giving it the image of a dynamic country at the heart of world-class excellence, where the greatest champions come seeking, beyond the records themselves, the unique thrill of winning on a legendary track, court or circuit.

It is therefore only natural that Monaco has already placed sports diplomacy at the centre of its priorities. This is evidenced by the fact that Monaco's Ambassador to the United Nations in New York has co-chaired the Group of Friends of Sport for Development and Peace for more than fifteen years. Through intensive intergovernmental negotiations and by organising events every year, Monaco is recognised within the world's foremost diplomatic forum as a leading player in promoting sport for sustainable development.
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In an international context marked by tension and the fragmentation of multilateral dialogue, what part can sport play in Monegasque diplomacy and in building cooperation between states?

Sport is a universal language. It has the unique power to forge a connection with a stranger, whatever their language, origin or beliefs. International sporting events illustrate people's innate capacity to come together, even in sporting rivalry, around a shared set of rules. And at national level, history has given us many examples of sport reconciling two communities after a conflict.

That said, while sport is a formidable catalyst for dialogue, states still have to want it to play that role. Monaco firmly believes that dialogue, multilateralism and respect for the rules are the only ways to build a peaceful and just world for our citizens and future generations.



The Principality holds the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for the first time. What priorities does Monaco wish to focus on during this Presidency, and what place do youth, protection and social cohesion occupy within it?

Young people are the future of our societies. They are both vulnerable and a source of solutions. They must therefore be involved in and listened to on matters that concern them. This is something the Monegasque Presidency has sought to do across several areas, including, for example, the fight against disinformation, through a conference and interactive workshops due to be held on 9 and 10 November.

The Monegasque Presidency of the Committee of Ministers is built around the following vision: "Protecting everyone through an effective Organisation to address current challenges."

The main priorities are the protection of women, children and young people, support for the European system for the protection of human rights, the fight against organised crime, and support for international peace and justice.

Among these priorities, sport occupies a special place, particularly through child protection. Why did the Principality want to place this issue at the heart of its Presidency, and what role must states and sporting organisations now play?

Sport makes an essential contribution in the fields of education, physical and mental health, gender equality and social inclusion, and it fosters healthy lifestyles, team spirit and tolerance. However, sport can only reach its full potential within a framework that is inclusive, participatory and safe. Children must be protected against all forms of violence and discrimination, including within the sporting sector.

This ambition will culminate in the 19th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport, held in Monaco on 3 and 4 November around the theme "Safer and healthier sport for all children." Beyond statements of principle, what concrete progress would you like to see come out of this meeting, and what legacy does Monaco wish to leave on these issues?

Up to 300 participants and representatives from sports ministries and sporting organisations are expected on 3 and 4 November to discuss the prevention, detection and handling of the violence and abuse suffered by children, as well as the need to place children's development and wellbeing at the heart of sporting practice.

This flagship event of the Monegasque Presidency of the Committee of Ministers will allow for concrete exchanges on good practice to strengthen public policy, for example in the training and recruitment of coaches and sporting professionals. Children's mental health, along with the fight against harassment and doping, will also be addressed.

EXTRA TIME

SPORTEL AWARDS 2026
when sport becomes a story

On October 19th, 2026, the SPORTEL Awards will bring together the finest sports-related audiovisual productions in Monaco. Open to the public, the evening will celebrate the intersection of imagery, emotion and commitment.

Sports imagery does more than record an achievement. It reveals its tension, beauty and human significance. A slow-motion sequence can suspend time. A documentary can uncover what lies behind a performance. A report can give a voice to individual journeys and social realities that sporting results sometimes leave in the shadows.

Created in 1990 and held under the Honorary Presidency of H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco, the SPORTEL Awards celebrate those who tell the story of sport through images. The selected works compete in categories including Best Documentary, Best Report, Best Slow-Motion Sequence and Best Advertising Film. The Renaud de Laborderie Book Prize recognises an illustrated publication capable of capturing the full intensity of a sporting moment.

Among these distinctions, the Peace and Sport Documentary Prize rewards a work highlighting the positive role of sport in promoting peace. It reminds us that sporting narratives can extend far beyond the celebration of performance alone. By presenting stories of resilience, struggles against discrimination and initiatives that bring communities closer together, they can also help change perceptions.

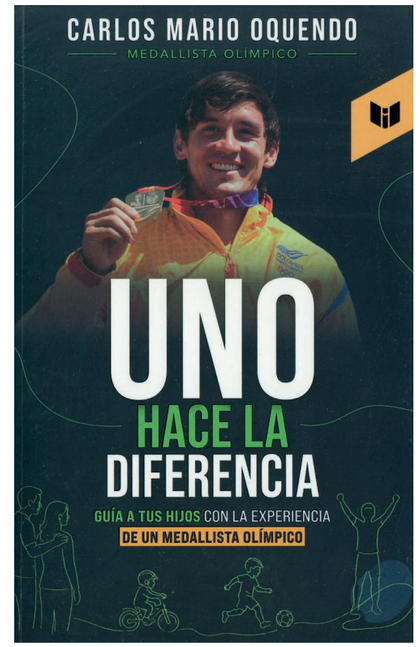
The ceremony will give the public an opportunity to discover the nominated works and share a special evening in the presence of champions and leading figures from international sport. It is an invitation to see sport differently: as a universal language capable not only of conveying emotion, but also of telling the story of our world.

Practical Information
Monday, October 19th 2026
From 7:00 PM to 9:30 PM
Salle Prince Pierre, Grimaldi Forum Monaco
Free admission with advance booking



UNO HACE LA DIFERENCIA

CARLOS MARIO OQUENDO | BOOK

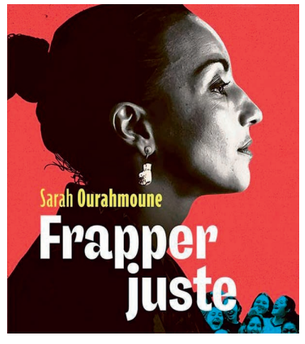


An Olympic BMX medallist at London 2012, Carlos Mario Oquendo shares a method designed for young athletes and their families. Drawing on his own journey and the many questions parents have asked him, the book offers practical advice on supporting children's physical and mental development without losing sight of their well-being and enjoyment. Working alongside Peace and Sport and the UCI on the Ride & Learn programme, the Colombian champion promotes a simple conviction: sport can shape the person as much as the athlete.
Editorial Intermedio, 357 pages, available in Spanish.

STRIKE TRUE: A SHORT MANIFESTO OF WOMEN'S RESISTANCE

SARAH OURAHMOUNE | ESSAY

The first French female boxer to win an Olympic medal and a Champion for Peace, Sarah Ourahmoune transforms her experience in the ring into a call for empowerment. She recounts the prejudice, social pressures and obstacles she had to overcome to establish herself in a discipline long reserved for men. This personal and impassioned text invites every woman to break free from convention, reject imposed roles and find her own way to "strike true."
Éditions des Équateurs, 144 pages.

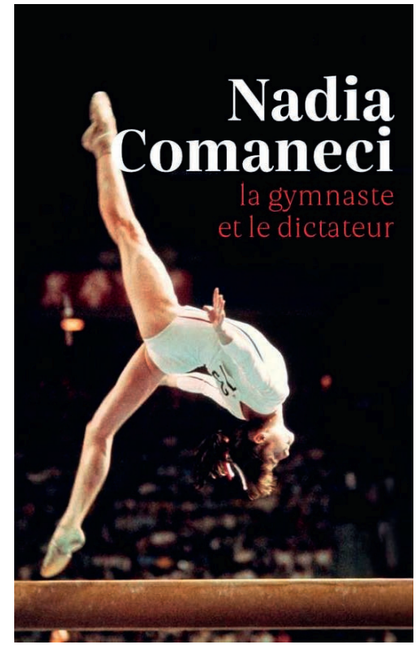




PAULA RADCLIFFE: CHASING STARS

A FILM BY PAT ODOM | DOCUMENTARY

A former marathon world-record holder and Champion for Peace, Paula Radcliffe embarks on one final challenge: completing all six World Marathon Majors. The documentary follows her journey, particularly in Tokyo and Boston, capturing her preparation, doubts and undiminished appetite for effort. More than a story of performance, Chasing Stars explores how an exceptional champion continues to run after the end of her professional career—with the same high standards, but a new definition of success.
An Abbott World Marathon Majors documentary, available online.



NADIA COMĂNECI, THE GYMNAST AND THE DICTATOR

A FILM BY POLA RAPAPORT | DOCUMENTARY

Montreal, 1976. At just fourteen years old, Nadia Comaneci earns the first "perfect 10" in Olympic history and becomes a global icon. Behind this achievement, however, the documentary reveals a young athlete who was closely monitored and exploited by Nicolae Ceaucescu's regime until her escape from Romania in 1989. Fifty years after she made history, this account reminds us that the values of sport cannot exist without freedom, dignity and the protection of athletes.
56-minute documentary, available on Public Sénat's YouTube channel and to stream on arte.tv.

THE FOOTBALL *WAR*

when sport deepens divisions

In June 1969, Honduras and El Salvador faced each other in three FIFA World Cup qualifiers. A few weeks later, the two countries went to war. The connection proved irresistible and gave the conflict its name. Football, however, did not cause this war. It gave already deep-rooted tensions a stage, a set of symbols and an emotional power capable of accelerating their escalation.



AI-generated image

THREE MATCHES *IN AN EXPLOSIVE CLIMATE*

By the end of the 1960s, El Salvador had approximately one million more inhabitants than Honduras within a territory five times smaller. In a country marked by an extreme concentration of land ownership, hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans had crossed the border to work and cultivate land in Honduras.

In Honduras, an agrarian reform now threatened these families with eviction. Competition over land and employment fuelled xenophobic rhetoric. These tensions were compounded by a border dispute, imbalances within the Central American Common Market and two military regimes that used nationalism to divert attention from their own weaknesses.

It was against this backdrop that the two national teams met. On 8 June, Honduras won 1–0 in Tegucigalpa. One week later, El Salvador secured a 3–0 victory in San Salvador. On 27 June, a deciding match was held in Mexico City. El Salvador won 3–2 after extra time and continued its path towards the 1970 World Cup.

Intimidation and violence intensified around these matches. But they did not emerge in a political vacuum. The expulsion of Salvadorans had already begun, and tensions between the two states were long-standing. The matches did not create the hatred: they gave it a stage and amplified its expression.

WHEN FOOTBALL BECOMES A POLITICAL WEAPON

In both countries, sections of the media portrayed the incidents as national humiliations. Rumours became entangled with facts; violence was amplified and each side presented itself as the victim. The sporting result gradually became a matter of national honour.

Football then provided political leaders with a particularly powerful tool. It brought crowds together, produced immediately understandable images and drew a clear boundary between "us" and "them". Social hardship, disputes over land and political decisions disappeared behind flags, national anthems and results.

One episode, however, reveals the full ambiguity of this history. At the end of the deciding match in Mexico City, Honduran and Salvadoran players embraced and shook hands. At that very moment, diplomatic relations between their countries had just been severed. The opponents on the football pitch were not the ones deciding to go to war.

On 14 July 1969, the Salvadoran military launched air strikes and a ground offensive against Honduras. In approximately one hundred hours, between 2,000 and 3,000 people were killed, most of them civilians. Under pressure from the Organization of American States, a ceasefire came into effect on 18 July. Football neither sent the aircraft nor issued the order to invade. Its language, symbols and mobilising power were nevertheless exploited to transform a political and social crisis into a confrontation between nations.

PEACE CANNOT BE DECLARED *AT THE FINAL WHISTLE*

A peace treaty between Honduras and El Salvador was not signed until 1980. The border dispute continued until a ruling by the International Court of Justice in 1992, while the demarcation of the border was only completed in 2004. Ending the fighting was therefore not enough to create peaceful relations overnight.

This history highlights an essential reality for everyone working to promote peace through sport: organising a competition or bringing two communities together on a playing field does not automatically produce peace.

To become an instrument for bringing people closer together, sport must be supported by the right framework. It requires educational work, safe and inclusive spaces, dialogue between communities, responsible media and institutions capable of resisting its political exploitation.

When these conditions are met, the emotions generated by sport can help people recognise the other as an opponent who follows the same rules, rather than an enemy who must be eliminated. Without such support, those same emotions can instead reinforce exclusive identities, divisions and nationalist narratives.

The label "Football War" remains appealing because it offers a simple and dramatic explanation. Yet it obscures the injustices, political decisions and responsibilities that led to the conflict.

Football alone is neither guilty nor a peacemaker. It is a social force whose effects depend on the context and the way in which it is used. In 1969, that force was placed at the service of nationalism. The challenge of peace through sport is precisely to create the conditions in which it can instead promote encounters, dialogue and coexistence.

CHAMPIONS FOR PEACE

making a difference on every field

Their careers evolve, but their commitment endures. On the playing field, alongside young people and through their public advocacy, six Champions for Peace continued to use sport as a vehicle for inclusion, learning and change in 2026.

ALPHA DIALLO

From the Roca Team to the NBA, without forgetting Conakry

After five seasons with AS Monaco Basket, Alpha Diallo has taken another major step forward. Named the EuroLeague's Best Defender for the 2025–2026 season, the Guinean international signed with the Denver Nuggets, securing his first NBA contract at the age of 29.

Several weeks earlier, he had launched his foundation in Conakry with an inaugural basketball camp bringing together almost 100 young Guineans. Two achievements reflecting the same journey: reaching the highest level without ever losing touch with his roots.



ALPHA DIALLO


DIANA GANDEGA

DIANA GANDEGA

From the court to the Aigles Dames coaching staff

Sixteen years after competing in the first World Cup in Mali's history, Diana Gandega has returned to international competition in a new role. The former international player joined the Aigles Dames coaching staff as assistant to head coach Oumarou Sidiya for the 2026 World Cup in Berlin.

Having moved from player to coach, she now places her elite-level experience at the service of a new generation. It is another way of continuing her commitment to passing on knowledge and developing women's basketball.

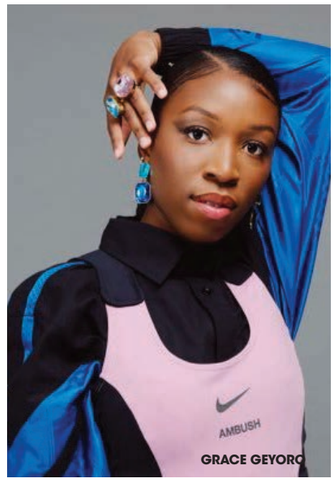
JULIAN AGLIARDI

Dakar 2026 in his sights

When Julian Agliardi joined the Junior Champions for Peace in 2022, he was only twelve years old. Four years later, the French American skateboarder has established himself as one of the most promising young athletes in his discipline.

A multiple X Games medallist, he now represents the United States in international competitions and has begun the journey he hopes will take him to the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games. Before then, the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games, which will include skateboarding, represent another major objective. It will provide a new stage for the young athlete, who has represented Peace and Sport at the United Nations to inspire younger generations.


JULIAN AGLIARDI



GRACE GEYORO

GRACE GEYORO

Towards a historic World Cup in Brazil

Following her transfer to London City Lionesses, Grace Geyoro continued competing at the highest level in 2026 with a new objective: the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup in Brazil.

Named Champion for Peace of the Year in 2025, she has also given greater structure to her commitment by creating Pow-Her, Be Gr8. Supported by Peace and Sport and JJPC – Je Joue Pour le Congo, her organisation uses sport, culture and education to promote the inclusion and empowerment of young people, particularly girls.

From London to Brazil via the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Grace Geyoro is now pursuing the same ambition wherever she goes: combining performance, education and responsibility.

ANTOINE ZEGHDAR

From Olympic Gold in Paris to victory in Bordeaux

Two years after winning the Olympic title in Paris, Antoine Zeghdar rediscovered the taste of victory with the French rugby sevens team. In June 2026, France won the Bordeaux SVNS after defeating New Zealand in the final.

Now fully committed to rugby sevens and focused on Los Angeles 2028, the French athlete is establishing himself as one of the senior figures in a rebuilding team. At the same time, he is strengthening his commitment as a Champion for Peace, notably through the #WhiteCard campaign, to pass on to young people the values that have guided his journey: hard work, respect and perseverance.



ANTOINE ZEGHDAR


TEGLA LOROUPE

TEGLA LOROUPE

840 Kilometres to move peace forward

From August 17th to 23rd 2026, Tegla Loroupe covered 840 kilometres in seven days, travelling from the Kakuma refugee camp and Kalobeyei settlement to Uhuru Park in Nairobi.

Accompanied by 28 refugee runners, the Champion for Peace crossed 9 Kenyan counties, meeting young people, athletes and local communities along the way. This nationwide initiative sought to promote a message of peace, education and hope, while drawing attention to the challenges faced by displaced people and the need to strengthen coexistence with host communities.

A week of endurance to remind us that running can also move a cause forward.

THE NUMBER THAT INSPIRES HOPE

12,000 KILOMETRES

TWO FINALS, ONE SHARED PASSION

On July 19th, 2026, the FIFA World Cup final was played in New York before billions of viewers. More than 12,000 kilometres away, another final was taking place in Prayagraj, in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

On the Toofaan Cup pitch, girls from rural communities were also playing the final match of their own "World Cup". Organised by the Naandi Foundation, the competition replicated the different knockout stages of the global tournament across seven Indian states.

Its purpose, however, extended far beyond the sporting result. Implemented in 17 districts, the initiative uses football to strengthen participants' confidence, independence and ability to take their place within their communities. The teams are supported by female educators from those same regions, known as Women Game Changers.

Since 2020, Peace and Sport has supported the Naandi Foundation through the Peacemakers Project, helping to measure the programme's impact and share the lessons learned.

On one pitch, a team lifted the World Cup trophy. On the other, girls gained confidence and discovered new possibilities. 12,000 kilometres apart, the same sport gave victory two different meanings.

17 DISTRICTS
12,000 KILOMETRES
7 INDIAN STATES

ONE SHARED CONVICTION:
SPORT CAN CHANGE
A LIFE.

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