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I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sportaccord organizers for including Around the Rings as one of just five media partners for this year’s event. We value the association, and look forward to continuing for many years to come. Without a doubt, Sportaccord is the do-not-miss event of the year for international sports.

I would also like to thank the advertisers who made this magazine possible. Without them we could not produce the exclusive, insightful content ATR is known for. Please let them know you appreciate their support as well.

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If you’re not a subscriber, here’s a taste of what you’re missing: the best and most reliable coverage of the race for the 2016 Olympics ... preparations for 2010, 2012, and 2014 ... changes at national Olympic committees that could affect how teams perform ... sponsor news ... and, every week—Op Ed, the column by Ed Hula that is among our most popular and significant news items.

But don’t take my word for it. Ask our readers. They’ll tell you what you’re missing ... and what you really should read.

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Sheila Scott Hula
sheila@aroundtherings.com
Both Ebersol and Turner are highly quotable and their remarks this week should be widely reported.

No doubt the recession will be mentioned by the four cities campaigning for the 2016 Olympic Games when they appear in a joint forum Thursday afternoon. Chicago, Madrid, Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo each face challenges brought on by slumping economic conditions.

AND GIVEN THE STRESS OVER MONEY THESE DAYS, THE OPENING PANEL DISCUSSION FOR SPORTACCORD 2009 MAY PRODUCE SOME INTERESTING INSIGHTS. TENNIS GREATS ANDRE AGASSI AND ANDREA JAEGER WILL BE JOINED BY PARALYMPIAN CHRIS WADDELL ON “SPORT AND PHILANTHROPY: THE VALUE OF GIVING BACK.”

Money matters for the Olympic Movement could be making news this week, too. A new revenue-sharing agreement between the U.S. Olympic Committee and the IOC worth hundreds of millions of dollars is on the verge of being announced after four years of negotiations.

The new agreement has been sought by the Olympic federations and national Olympic committees that want more from the IOC revenue that they share with the USOC. In today’s tough times, the federations and NOCs want bigger slices of the pie and a smaller one for the U.S.

The marketing agreement is one of the items expected to arise in meetings of the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations and Association of International Olympic Winter Federations, set for Monday and Tuesday.

At the end of the week, the agreement could be reviewed by the IOC Executive Board, which now meets in conjunction with Sportaccord.

The EB meeting is the IOC’s first in the U.S. since 2002 and the Salt Lake City Olympics. It’s also the first time Sportaccord has been in the U.S., following meetings in Europe and Asia.

Denver, hoping to impress sports leaders as a host for future events, will lay on the hospitality. All 1500 delegates are invited to attend an NHL game Thursday night. Friday there are trips to the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs or Denver-area sports venues. Capitalizing on the proximity of the Rocky Mountains, delegates can also take a day trip on Saturday on the Ski Train, which departs from historic Union Station near the Sportaccord hotel. The train stops at the base of Winter Park ski resort, allowing for a run down the slopes before returning to Denver.

While a record number of 1500 delegates are expected in Denver, it remains to be seen whether the economy will keep the crowd from setting a Sportaccord record. If they come—Denver is ready.

For the first time since Sportaccord began in 2003, the main hotel—the Hyatt Denver Convention Center—is able to host everyone under one roof.
FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS, Hein Verbruggen has led the annual Sportaccord convention, which has grown into one of the most important gatherings for Olympic sports leaders. Verbruggen, president of the General Association of International Sports Federations, the group that founded Sportaccord earlier this decade, says that the convention provides a rare opportunity for federations, sponsors and organizing committees to meet under one roof.

What we intended with Sportaccord when we started some six years ago was for it to be a platform for networking... and more than that. We [GAISF] are addressing a number of problems together and will make major announcements at the congress. Sportaccord really has to initiate this feeling that IFs should address common problems [like betting and doping] together. My federation, the UCI, is spending a lot on anti-doping. But some federations don’t have the financial resources to address doping. We have to find solutions by working together.

What can international sports federations get out of Sportaccord and other GAISF initiatives this year?

HV: It’s the exchange of information. And every year the IF Forum [in November] is geared towards the needs of federations when we look to address certain problems together. I think the congress will be very interesting... strategic structure and organization of new projects [are among the tasks].

How important is the exhibition side of Sportaccord?

HV: It’s very important and always sold out, which shows that the people want to be there. I love to visit it because it’s very lively.

What are your ambitions for Sportaccord 2009?

HV: That it will be as good as previous years because I think Sportaccord has really taken off and now has a very important place in gathering international federations but also other members of the Olympic family. What we intended with Sportaccord when we started some six years ago was for it to be a platform for networking... and more than that. We [GAISF] are addressing a number of problems together and will make major announcements at the congress. Sportaccord really has to initiate this feeling that IFs should address common problems [like betting and doping] together. My federation, the UCI, is spending a lot on anti-doping. But some federations don’t have the financial resources to address doping. We have to find solutions by working together.

What are you expecting from Sportaccord 2009?

HV: I, respectively, have various federations the threat of breakaways, already in basketball and conflicts in football with the G14, cycling and sailing. We are seeing [North American] leagues expanding; they are setting up bases in other parts of the world which is in my opinion a threat for our system [of federations that take care of professional sport down to the grassroot]. You see contracts with the NBA and China. There is a risk you have a club competition which is going to be organized outside your federation. That is a threat and has to be addressed.

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Despite the economic downturn, has there been an increase in the level of sponsorship participation and investment?

HV: What we need are meetings. We have to get together for the general assemblies and council meetings and the IOC for its executive board. We’re not in a position to cut back as IFs and the major sponsors need to meet delegates. The only category where there are less people coming are journalists, although there are still a good number.

What is your schedule like at Sportaccord?

HV: I’ll be occupied from 7:30 a.m. every day until late at night. There are lots of meetings including GAISF council and general assembly, ASOIF meetings with the IOC. I will go to the convention and there are a lot of side meetings. 

If people like that are willing to share experiences with us that’s very interesting and I’m really looking forward to that.

What are you expecting from the summit session featuring the heads of North American professional leagues and their counterparts from the IFs?

HV: We have in various federations the threat of breakaways, already in basketball and conflicts in football with the G14, cycling and sailing. We are seeing [North American] leagues expanding; they are setting up bases in other parts of the world which is in my opinion a threat for our system [of federations that take care of professional sport down to the grassroot]. You see contracts with the NBA and China. There is a risk you have a club competition which is going to be organized outside your federation. That is a threat and has to be addressed.

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Explain the thinking behind this year’s conference program, which includes CNN founder Ted Turner, NBC Olympic boss Dick Ebersol, and Tennis great Andre Agassi?

HV: It’s normal to adapt [the program] to different markets; I think it’s very interesting and enriching. These are fascinating people who have done great things in their careers.
As a global sport, taekwondo gives hopes to 188 member nations around the world.

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AROUND THE RINGS

THE INUkSHUK

A stone landmark used as a milestone or directional marker by the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic; the symbol of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics.

EVEN IF OLYMPIC FEVER HASN’T BITTEN VANCOUVERITES, the city is beginning to look a lot more Olympic.

The inukshuk and five rings logo are popping up everywhere, while construction crews on projects big and small hurry toward fall completion. All competition venues are in use. An intense schedule of test events began last October with an ISU short-track speedskating world cup tour stop at the Pacific Coliseum. U.S. great Apolo Anton Ohno, who learned short-track in the Vancouver area, raved about the organization, saying it was the best test event he had competed in.

THE SENTIMENTS WERE DIFFERENT WHEN THE CALLAGHAN VALLEY’S WHISTLER OLYMPIC PARK PLAYED HOST TO A TWO-WEEKEND WHISTLER NORDIC FESTIVAL IN JANUARY. COURSE RECORDS FELL ON THE SKI JUMPS, BUT MEN’S AND WOMEN’S CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING WINNERS LATER CRITICIZED THE TRAILS AS BEING TOO EASY AND NOT OLYMPIC-WORTHY.

FIS and VANOC gave each other passing marks on the event, but did not indicate whether off-season work would take place. As it was, there was not a full field of world cup regulars, as several opted to remain in Europe to train instead.

The only other hiccup was the cancellation of the third day of a late February world cup snowboarding tour stop at Cypress Mountain. The parallel giant slalom race was scratched because of unsafe snow conditions. Course designers ran out of time to make it ready, embarrassing VANOC at a venue that has a history of trouble.

The West Vancouver ski and snowboard area is the first Olympic winter mountain venue with a view of the Pacific Ocean. That may be more of a curse than a blessing if fog or rain clouds roll in and cause delays or cancellations next February. That is exactly what happened during the 2008 freestyle skiing world cup.

 Moguls and aerials skiers, along with skicrossers, enjoyed chilly temperatures and cloudless nights for their 2009 test event.

Ski cross, a cousin of snowboard cross, is the only event that will debut at Vancouver 2010. A B.C. Supreme Court Judge, however, could add another event: women’s ski jumping.

Five members of the Canadian team, who were relying on federal government support to lobby the IOC, grew impatient and announced March 6 that they wanted their names added to a lawsuit backed by Women’s Ski Jumping USA. The trial begins April 20 and could last five days.

The last test event remaining is the Aug. 31 to Sept. 6 Hockey Canada women’s cup at General Motors Place (to be called Canada Hockey Place at Games-time) and UBC Thunderbird Arena.

VANOC’s transportation plan is 80 percent done as of March 11: Just 11 months and one day until the opening ceremony. It was originally to be released at the end of 2007. Attendees of the recent chefs de mission conference indicated they may not get to see a complete version that addresses athlete movement needs until May.

Financing problems besetting the Vancouver Olympic Village have dominated headlines. The City of Vancouver bought out project lender Fortress Credit Corporation and opted to go it alone with a line of credit from city bank BMO. The entire $850 million cost could be borne by taxpayers if the real estate market downturn persists.

While Vancouver accommodation is expected to be scarce and expensive at Games-time, Whistler worries that its high-price, luxury perception will scare away visitors. Already, the German NOC will use a Vancouver hotel instead of spreading its guests around several hotels in Whistler Village. The cost-cutting decision to scale back the Whistler medals plaza also contributed to the move.

Sponsor activation under the current economic climate is shaping up to be modest compared to recent Games. Many NOC sponsors are suffering and reviewing their budgets. Various planners indicate May is a key month for plans and budgets to be finalized. Without an economic turnaround, VANOC may find it has more tickets to sell to the public and fewer hotel rooms on hold for the Olympic family. If that happens, athletes’ families could stand to gain.

BY BOB MACKIN
I don’t want to downplay the challenge to get it done, because we are looking at it very carefully, and obviously it has to be done to deliver the Games. But we think the risk is a manageable one to have the construction complete in time for the Games.

Q: ARE THERE ANY LESSONS TO BE TAKEN AWAY FROM THE OLYMPIC VILLAGE EXPERIENCE AND YOUR OVERALL APPROACH FOR PREPARATION?

DC: When you look at the projects an organizing committee is responsible for, two things that we did that put us in the position we’re in now.

One is that the financing was secured before the bid was even submitted and two was that we had very early completion dates and we stuck to them.

When we’ve talked to Sochi and others, it’s ‘Get your time, build lots of room into your schedule and be built early.’ And the target, I believe for all competition venues for Olympic Games, should be at least one to two years complete before the Games. That allows a cushion for contingency if you need it. But just as importantly, it gives you that time to operate them.

Q: WHAT ABOUT KEEPING PROJECTS WITHIN THE SCOPE YOU PLANNED, AVOIDING COST OVERRUNS?

DC: We didn’t allow that, and in fact we shrunk what we were doing. We took out a sledge hockey venue in Whistler in large part because we thought it would be a white elephant up there and we could do it down in the University of British Columbia.

We ended up not converting General Motors Place from a North American size hockey rink, instead using a standard international size. We would have spent $10 million, and it never would have been used again.

Q: WHAT ABOUT YOUR FINAL STAGES OF FUNDRAISING FROM SPONSORS, TICKET SALES?

DC: We were very fortunate to have our sponsorship program 98 percent done when the economy downturn hit. But we’re not done yet.

We did go in and cut about $35 million out of our budget. And those are dollars that could go back in later on, if we find we’re in good shape. But at this stage now, we’re going to have to be very disciplined and very careful managing this budget to get through on a balanced operations budget.

Q: THERE WERE EXPECTATIONS OF 10 OR 11 TOP SPONSORS FOR VANCOUVER, BUT SO FAR THE IOC HAS ONLY LINED UP NINE. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR YOU? WILL YOU EXPECT SOME HELP FROM THE IOC TO COVER THE GAP?

DC: It’s a major concern of ours. We need to work through with the IOC to see what that means from a financial standpoint and what the ramifications on our program could be.

But that’s just one of those things that you have to deal with. And I would expect that if the economic downturn hadn’t hit, they probably would have signed those sponsors.

The IOC has been a very good partner of ours. I think one of the reasons we’re as well prepared now as we are is because of the guidance we received from the IOC.

Q: THE SPONSORS ARE FINDING IT MORE DIFFICULT TO ACTIVATE WITH THEIR MARKETING BUDGETS BEING CUT. HOW DOES THIS AFFECT THE IMAGE, THE WAY THE GAMES ARE PROMOTED?

DC: We haven’t seen that yet. In fact, if you put on your TV today in your hotel room, you won’t be able to watch a show without seeing at least a couple of our sponsors running advertising campaigns. They’re out in a very big way right now.

We may see it, but at this stage, we’re being told that the marketing budgets for the Olympic Games have been protected.

Q: ARE WE EXPECTING TO SEE FEWER PEOPLE AT THESE WINTER OLYMPICS IN THE FORM OF THE CORPORATE GUESTS?

DC: I don’t think so. In fact, I think it’ll be significantly more than any previous Winter Games.

... We had $350 million in (domestic ticket) orders in five weeks, after the economic downturn started, so there’s no question Canadians want to come. National Olympic committees around the world (have been) flying out here pleading with us to increase their allocations even though they get what they got in Salt Lake.

Q: AS OF FEBRUARY 2009, THE TRANSPORTATION HAS STILL NOT BEEN PUBLISHED, AND WHEN I TALK TO PEOPLE AROUND VANCOUVER, THEIR CHICKEN LITTLE RESPONSE IS “WHAT ABOUT THE TRANSPORTATION?”

DC: I think most people in Vancouver recognize that there are going to be disruptions to the regular functions of the city. But they also know that they’ve had seven years of advance warning. So seven years to prepare for two weeks of some level of inconvenience, I think, is something a huge majority of people in Vancouver are prepared to put up with.

Q: ARE YOU ALSO PLANNING FOR THE PARALYMPICS, HOW DO YOU MAKE SURE THAT GOES ALONG WITH THE WORK THAT YOU’RE DOING WITH THE OLYMPICS?

DC: Our structure doesn’t allow us to not plan for that, because every one of our functions have the same responsibilities for the Paralympics Games. So we haven’t created a separate department or a company to run the Paralympics.

It would be very easy to think ‘okay, let’s just focus on the Olympics, and we’ll deal with the Paralympics later.’ But the transition period between the Games is so short. You really can’t do that.
Chicago’s bid features a comprehensive plan to develop Olympic and Paralympic sport. If Chicago wins the right to host the 2016 Games, expect to hear more about the Five Rings of Sport in the years ahead. Chicago 2016’s plans for the Games unfold in five concentric circles—five rings—that reach from the heart of the city, to the shores of the nation, to members of the Olympic Family around the world.

RING 1 Engages youth in the heart of the city in Olympic and Paralympic sport through a unique program called the Urban Youth Sport Initiative, which teaches the values of friendship, excellence and respect as it promotes sport.

RING 2 Takes that initiative to cities across the country with the support of the United States Conference of Mayors, an organization of hundreds of city mayors who have endorsed the plan.

RING 3 Integrates the resources of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and the United States National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sport into this developmental program.

RING 4 Delivers direct benefits to the International Olympic Family by opening the USOC’s training sites and Chicago-area university facilities and seminars to international Olympic teams and family.

RING 5 Ensures organizational excellence in the competitions at the Games through a committed seven-year partnership between Chicago 2016 and the International Federations that govern sport around the world.

RING 6: More than 1,000 children aged 7-14 participated in the Chicago Kids Triathlon in 2008.
As construction for the London 2012 Olympics moves into high gear, organizers will be keen to deflect attention away from any further cost increases in the coming months.

The projected bill for the 80,000-seat Olympic Stadium increased $63 million in 2008 to $800 million due to the cost of an external wrap and changes to the roof. The complexities of the aquatics center now put its price tag at $367 million, a $54 million rise since November 2007. And there are emerging cost pressures on a number of other venue projects on the 500-acre Olympic Park.

But last month, Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell and the Olympic Delivery Authority gave assurances that the government’s $13.6 billion budget for venues and infrastructure will not be exceeded, despite the economic downturn.

Jowell’s new quarterly financial reporting—which begins in April—will be an indication of any additional hikes in construction costs.

It’s a big year for the ‘big build’. Work is accelerating on the main stadium with the installation of permanent seats and steel trusses to support the roof. A key moment in the aquatics center build is the lifting of its steel roof structure in the next month.

Construction starts on the velodrome, the International Broadcast Centre and the Main Press Centre, and, in north London, Broxbourne White Water Canoe Centre later this spring. Building of the last street blocks for the Olympic Village gets under way in early summer, as discussions over the finance package for the largest Olympic construction continue. Bridges and roads on the Olympic Park are also being built, while transport links to the site are said to be progressing on schedule with the ODA’s targets.

The workforce on the Olympic Park and the Olympic Village is expected to increase from the current 3,300 to 9,000 by the end of the year. It will peak at 11,000 in 2010.

Of the more immediate challenges is the IOC’s March 31 deadline for LOCOG to lock down its venue plan. LOCOG must finalize the site for shooting events and several temporary venues. In keeping with staging a compact Games, the Royal Artillery Barracks in Woolwich is likely to be favored over the National Shooting Centre in Bisley.

The security budget for the Games will also stoke much debate following the attacks by gunmen on a bus carrying Sri Lankan cricketers in the Pakistani city of Lahore this month. There are mounting concerns that the $900 million allocated will not be enough to deliver a safe and secure Games.

With only weeks until the IOC coordination commission visit to London (April 21 to 23), 2012 organizers will want to be in a position to give a clearer picture of security plans. This will depend on progress made by the multi-agency Olympic Security Directorate (OSD), led by the Home Office and hosted by the Metropolitan Police Service, which is tasked with planning Games security.

The IOC inspectors led by Switzerland’s Denis Oswald also will visit the British capital again in November.

Less of a concern to them is LOCOG’s fundraising drive, which is considered to be ahead of previous Olympic cities at the same stage of preparations. So far it has raised close to $700 million. A London 2012 spokesman tells Around the Rings that several tier three sponsors will be unveiled in the next few months.

Meanwhile, there will be more announcements about the Cultural Olympiad program. Another Open Weekend featuring hundreds of sports and cultural events across the U.K. takes place in July.

And the Legacy Masterplan for the Olympic Park and Olympic boroughs will be further developed following public consultation. Last month, London Mayor Boris Johnson unveiled proposals to create six new ‘character areas’ with 10,000 new homes and more than 1.2 million sq ft of commercial space. A national sports academy is part of plans for the main stadium.

By Mark Bisson

CONSTRUCTION ACCELERATES FOR LONDON OLYMPICS

...the government’s $13.6 billion budget for venues and infrastructure will not be exceeded...
Be inspired.  
Get involved.  
Try something different.  
Go somewhere new.  
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accessible  
inclusive  
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Summer and winter Olympic sports federations plan to make their voices count at the 13th Olympic Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark, in October.

Both the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) and the Association of International Olympic Winter Sports Federations (AIOWF) view the congress as a major opportunity to help shape the direction of the Olympic Movement.

ASOIF formed a working group to gather contributions from the 26 sports on the Summer Olympic program, with members drawn from inside and outside the association. They included ASOIF President Denis Oswald and Vice President Hein Verbruggen, IAAF President Lamine Diack, Richard Blun, former controller of sport at the European Broadcasting Union, and London 2012 director of sport Debbie Jevans.

ASOIF made 20 submissions to the virtual Olympic Congress; up to 20 contributions were sent in separately by its member federations.

“We are treating it as very important,” Andrew Ryan of ASOIF tells Around the Rings. “The idea we had was to put the position of ASOIF forward on each of the five themes.”

Congress themes include: Olympic Games; athletes; governance of the Olympic Movement; young people; and the digital revolution.

He said one submission focused on changing the attitude of sport and the Olympic Movement to computer gaming and suggested how sport might embrace the possibilities presented by new technologies to widen the appeal of the Olympics. A couple of submissions suggested the structure of the Olympic Movement should be reviewed, questioning whether the mix of different groups on the IOC membership—particularly the prevalence of national Olympic committees—was still relevant.

ASOIF executives believe every serving president of a summer IF should be an IOC member; currently fewer than a dozen of the 26 federations are represented.

“We believe their experience should be there at the table,” said Ryan.

AIOWF’s seven member federations will discuss what they hope to get from the Olympic Congress at their general assembly at Sportaccord.

Sarah Lewis, secretary general of the International Ski Federation and a member of the Sportaccord steering committee representing AIOWF, says the congress will “set the agenda for the next decade.”

“The landscape has changed very dramatically over the last five years,” says Lewis, noting the threats facing sport from the economic downturn and also security.

“These are completely different situations to the time of the last Olympic Congress so they need to be taken into consideration in reflecting on where the sports movement is going, to help us deal with these obstacles and the effect they have on us.”

Summer and Winter Federations
Look to Exert Influence in Denmark

By Mark Besson
The Seven Sports Competing for a Place on the 2016 Olympic Program Range from the Genteel to the Rough-and-Tumble. They Originated in Countries Around the World and Grew Globally.

**Baseball:** An exhibition or demonstration sport seven times before achieving medal status (1900, 1912, 1920, 1924, 1936, 1948, 1952, 1960, 1964). Baseball became an official Olympic sport in 1992. It was forced out by the IOC vote in 2005 that also dropped softball from the program. Baseball played its last tournament in 2005, which conforms to Olympic requirements.

**Golf:** Played in the 1900 and 1904 Games, golf then disappeared from the Olympic program. The International Golf Federation is proposing 72-hole (18 holes a day for four days) individual stroke play for 60 men and 60 women, with a three-hole playoff in case of a tie. Tiger Woods would give an Olympic tournament star power to the sport, which is not as attractive as other major league players. The latter options would allow the best major league players to compete. The format for the Olympics would be the same as for World Championships, with gender equality for men and women. The World Karate Federation has two disciplines: sparring (kumite) and forms (kata).

**Karate:** Karate claims to be the most popular martial art in the world, but would join the other martial arts—judo and taekwondo—which are already in the Olympics. The format of the Olympics would be the same as for World Championships, with gender equality for men and women. The World Karate Federation has two disciplines: sparring (kumite) and forms (kata).

**Roller Sports:** Quad hockey was a demonstration sport in the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, but roller sports is now focusing on its Olympic hopes on in-line speedskating, which especially appeals to young athletes. It also does not require as many participants as hockey. Figure skating was ruled out because it is a judged sport, which is not as attractive to the IO.

**Squash:** After lobbying for years to be included in the Olympics, squash made its debut at the 1996 Atlanta Games. Nine years later, it was voted out by the IOC membership. Softball is played in an eight-team tournament. It promotes itself as providing more female participation in the Games, although it has included the option of a men’s discipline.

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**Squash:** The format would be a 32-player tournament for both men and women. The sport can be played anywhere, with portable glass courts that open the sport to spectators and to TV coverage. Although squash has a strong professional circuit, an Olympic tournament would become the pinnacle of the sport and the top players have promised to play in the Games. The World Squash Federation also touts its rigorous drug testing system, which is compatible with WADA. The sport is strong in small countries, especially in Asia, that have not produced a lot of Olympic medalists.

**Soccer:** Although soccer has a strong professional circuit, an Olympic tournament would become the pinnacle of the sport and the top players have promised to play in the Games. The World Squash Federation also touts its rigorous drug testing system, which is compatible with WADA. The sport is strong in small countries, especially in Asia, that have not produced a lot of Olympic medalists. Squash, along with karate, failed to win enough votes from the IOC Session in 2003 to make the program for the 2012 Olympics, 63-39, short of the two-thirds mark then required. The rules have been changed to allow a sport to enter the Games with a simple majority.

**Tennis:** Tennis is one of the most popular sports in the world, and its Olympic presence has been confirmed by the International Olympic Committee. The sport is played within venues of several different sports instead of requiring a dedicated stadium. One of the knockouts against softball had been the dominance of the U.S., which won gold medals in 1996, 2000 and 2004. Japan ended that streak with the 2008 gold medal.
The four cities in the race for the 2016 Olympics have six months to go before the Oct. 2 vote by the IOC at the session in Copenhagen. On Thursday afternoon at SportAccord, Chicago, Madrid, Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo will each make a presentation on their plans for the Games.

Here are some highlights of the four Summer Olympic bids. (Source: 2016 bid books)

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AS HE APPROACHES HIS 89TH BIRTHDAY, ex-IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch tells Around the Rings he is shedding nearly all of his past responsibilities.

“My active life is over,” he said during an interview in his Barcelona office late last month.

Samaranch, who holds the title of Honorary President, retired in 2001 after 21 years in office and 35 years as an IOC member. “I am still involved with the Olympic Museum, with President Rogge, but meetings are only every two months,” he says about his slower pace of life.

Samaranch still serves on the board of the museum, which was conceived and built during his tenure. He says travel between Barcelona and Lausanne, his home is only a few minutes away.

The high and wide office walls allow space for books and scores of mementos. There’s little in the way of overt Olympic decoration, except an Olympic torch from Barcelona. Instead, a breathtaking collection of paintings by noted Catalan artists hang on the walls, all from the bank’s collection.

Without prompting, Samaranch brings up Beijing, calling the Games “a huge success.” An advocate of bringing the Olympics to China, Beijing bid twice in the Samaranch era, winning in 2001. It was the last host city vote over which he presided.

“They are very lucky that this crisis came after the Games,” he says. “All the world is suffering,” he says, referring to the global economic slump.

Samaranch says he does not know what impact the weather the trouble, thanks to excellent TV contracts and the reserve fund of more than $300 million that has been amassed under the Rogge presidency.

Despite concerns over how much work needs to be done in Sochi to prepare for the Winter Olympics, Samaranch says he believes the will and means exist to carry off the Games.

“This is a dream of Putin’s,” he says with a smile.

“We don’t know if he is coming,” he says, but adds that heads of state are now a must for IOC Sessions when cities are bidding for the Games.

Samaranch praises the work of Jean-Claude Killy, the Olympic great and IOC member who leads the IOC Coordination Commission overseeing Sochi 2014.

“His home is only a few minutes away. He’s worked out of this office, the custom-ary well-sharpened pencil in his hand. He’s worked out of this spot for about a year, moving from a high-rise office over looking venues from the 1992 Olympics to this location on the slope of Tibidabo in north Bar-

The torch has been passed to a new generation.

“My son, he is working very hard for Madrid,” says Samaranch. “My active life is over,” he said nearly all his past responsibilities.

Samaranch sits at a table in his outsized office, the custom-ary well-sharpened pencil in his hand. He’s worked out of this spot for about a year, moving from a high-rise office overlooking venues from the 1992 Olympics to this location on the slope of Tibidabo in north Barcelona. His home is only a few minutes away.

Samaranch says he does not know what impact an appearance at the Copenhagen IOC Session by U.S. President Barack Obama might have on the Chicago bid for 2016.

And while he is enthusiastic for the Madrid bid, he is less involved with this campaign than he was for 2012. The torch has been passed to a new generation.

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