



BackSoftball

BackSoftball Athlete Ambassadors campaign in full swing New program will further involve athletes in reinstatement campaign

Plant City, Florida, USA; 13th January 2009: The BackSoftball Athlete Ambassadors lobbying campaign is now in full swing following the conclusion of a two-day workshop at the International Softball Federation (ISF) world headquarters in Florida.

During the workshop, the Athlete Ambassadors were educated on the BackSoftball campaign including the huge increase in people playing softball around the world, especially among young people, which is helping the fight against obesity; the initiatives of the ISF to help women around the world participate in team sport for the first time, especially in Muslim countries where female sporting opportunities are infrequent; and the continued exemplary record in the fight against doping.

There were also workshops focusing on the rules of conduct during the campaign and the Athlete Ambassadors will now represent the BackSoftball campaign at international events and in the media to communicate the importance of supporting softball's bid to return to the Olympic family.

Ten female softball internationals attended, seven of whom have competed in the Summer Olympic Games, with representation from all five regions: Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania.

Although the ISF already has an Athletes Commission that meets every other year at its Congress, this initiative is the most aggressive in putting softball players at the forefront of the steps being taken to get the International Olympic Committee, at their Session in October 2009 in Denmark, to vote to reinstate the sport to the Summer Games for 2016.

ISF President Don Porter commented: "The Olympic Games are all about the athletes, and being able to discuss our vision with internationals who will communicate the message in their homelands is at the heart of our campaign. Softball is an increasingly global sport and the international nature of our Ambassadors underlines the global popularity of the sport. Most attendees have participated in the Olympics and know first-hand how important it is for the sport to regain its Olympic status.

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Michele Smith, two-time Olympic gold medalist and chair of the Athlete Ambassadors committee added: "This year is so important for the future of softball and is a challenging year for our BackSoftball campaign. Softball has worked hard to earn the right to be back on the Olympic Programme. It is growing in popularity at a tremendous pace and softball players all over the world will now be working in support of this Olympic goal."

Australian Danielle Stewart, a bronze medalist last August in Beijing, said: "In only two days I have learned so much about how I can actively and directly contribute to the BackSoftball campaign. I want to fight for this wonderful sport and ensure millions of people across the world are touched by softball during the greatest sporting show on earth."

South African softball athlete Lynn Alexander stated: "This seminar has shown me how passionate people are about this beautiful game of softball and how determined we are to move mountains, not only in Africa but around the world."

Notes for editors:

Two-time Olympian Michele Smith (USA Softball, 1996 & 2000) served as chairperson for the group, which consisted of the following Ambassadors:

<u>NAME</u> (Position)	<u>COUNTRY</u>	<u>HIGHLIGHT</u>
Lynn Alexander (OF)	South Africa	Played in 2007 Africa/Europe Olympic qualifier
Alison Bradley (OF)	Canada	Two-time Olympian (2004 & 2008)
Luciola Figueroa (C)	Puerto Rico	Played in 2007 Americas Olympic qualifier
Gergana Handjiyska (IF)	Bulgaria	Played in 2007 Africa/Europe Olympic qualifier
Saskia Kosterink (OF)	Netherlands	2008 Olympian
Jessica Mendoza (OF)	USA	Two-time Olympian ('04 – gold medal, '08 – silver)
Rubilena Rojas (OF)	Venezuela	2008 Olympian
Danielle Stewart (IF)	Australia	2008 Olympian (bronze medalist)
Zhou Yi (OF)	China	Two-time Olympian (2004 & 2008)

The BackSoftball Task Force Co-Chairs, both of whom were in attendance, are Donna de Varona (two-time Olympic gold medalist in swimming) and Dale McMann of Canada (the ISF VP/North America).

Visit the official campaign website at www.BackSoftball.com.

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