

ENSURING THE FUTURE OF SPORTING SUCCESS IN QATAR AT EVERY LEVEL

Qatar is a nation passionate about sports, and those at the helm of the national movement believe in its power as a tool for development.

BY INGA STEVENS

Qatar had their best-ever results in the 2016 Rio Olympic Games with Mutaz Barshim becoming Qatar's first-ever Olympic silver medalist in the Athletics Games. Abdelrahman Abdelqader and Sara Masoud won Qatar's first-ever Paralympic medals, and the country achieved more top 10 finishes than ever before. Qatar also had their largest delegation in history and, perhaps most importantly, 50% of their team was under the age of 25, showing huge potential for the future. The man at the helm of the nation's Olympic body, Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) and Chairman of the Qatar Athletics Federation (QAF), H.E. Dr. Thani Al-Kuwari, credits the government for this success, and for securing the role of sport as a fundamental part of the National Vision for 2030.

Al-Kuwari's work in the sporting arena began when he was appointed Director General of the Organizing Committee of the Qatar 2015 Men's Handball World Championships. Being able to combine his love of sport with his business experience and knowledge was a proud moment for the Qatari, who saw Team Qatar take home the silver medal in the Championships. "It was fantastic to be able to showcase the sport to our country and region, creating new fans, connecting with new markets and inspiring new athletes," he says. "It has been amazing to see how the sport has taken off in Qatar since then."

Qatar Olympic Committee is the overall supervising body for all sporting activities and events in Qatar and it is responsible for



H.E. Dr. Thani Al-Kuwari
Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic
Committee (QOC) and Chairman of the
Qatar Athletics Federation (QAF)

IMAGE COURTESY FOR QOC



encouraging sport participation at every level, bringing world-class sporting events to Qatar, ensuring sporting success and promoting Olympism. The QOC works with all sporting federations and stakeholders to develop programs, initiatives and events that will deliver these objectives. Examples include the Schools Olympic Program (SOP), National Sport Day (NSD), the unique Athlete Development Pathway and the Qatar Olympic Academy, which all aim to increase sport participation from a grassroots level, identify and nurture sporting talent, spread the Olympic values and educate through sport. As H.E. Al-Kuwari explains, “Qatar is a nation passionate about sport and we believe in its power as a tool for development. This is why sport is a fundamental part of our National Vision for 2030—we understand its importance in developing our nation at every level, and building a healthy, prosperous and sustainable society.”

Qatar has played host to major international events for over a decade with the 2006 Asian Games providing the catalyst for its development into the global sports hub. Other notable events have included the 2014 FINA World Swimming Championships, 2015 World Championships in Men’s Handball, Boxing World Championship, 2015 IPC Athletics, and 2016 UCI Road World Championships, with more World Championship events to be hosted in the years ahead.

For this small Arabian Gulf nation, the investment it makes is about more than simply hosting sporting events; it is about developing sport at every level. “We have continually developed our sporting

infrastructure with these events, alongside the sporting ambition of our young nation,” says Al-Kuwari, who explains that whilst the new infrastructure and facilities provide something that the whole community can enjoy, it goes far beyond this. “International sporting events help to capture the attention of new audiences, inspire new athletes and connect our young people with strong role models. These events also help to develop new skills and provide employment, business and tourism opportunities. Each event that we host provides a lasting legacy for our nation and we hope that this will continue long into the future.”

Like any nation, the funding for Qatar’s sporting activities comes from a mix of government and sponsorship support. All events have local and international sponsors and the infrastructure is supported as part of the nation’s 2030 Vision, with sport and sports development a core pillar of their economic future. “Investments are being made now to support our country with sustainable, economic and social returns to be gained in the future,” Al-Kuwari notes.

Developing world-class athletes in a young and small country such as Qatar does not happen overnight. Over the last decade, significant focus has been placed on developing the sector and these efforts are now starting to bear fruit. As Al-Kuwari explains, it is not just at an elite level where they are seeing results, but also in community participation through the success of their programs, such as the Schools Olympic Program and National Sport Day, and in the number of successful global sporting events hosted in Qatar.

The most significant project is the Schools Olympic Program, which is currently enjoying its tenth edition. The SOP was established as a legacy from the Doha 2006 Asian Games and has now grown to almost 30,000 students participating throughout the school year, across a broad range of Olympic and Paralympic sports.

“SOP aims to introduce children to sport at a grassroots level, from an early age, and spread the Olympic values of friendship, respect, excellence and identify talented young athletes,” he says. “Qatar aims to be a trailblazer for the development of sport across the region and several other MENA countries have developed their own SOP models as a result of the success of our programme.”

Described as the third dimension of the Olympic movement, the environment also plays an important role in sport. The QOC is strongly committed to supporting the International Olympic Committee (IOC) with the implementation of the 2014 Agenda 2020 reforms to include sustainability in the Olympic Movement’s daily operations. This is illustrated by the fact that the new stadiums developed for the 2015 Men’s Handball World Championships, which have subsequently been used for the World Boxing Championships, received the highest four-star Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS) rating, making them the first sporting arenas in the region to achieve such a rating.

Sara Masoud is Qatar’s first female athlete to win a silver in Rio’s Paralympic games



“We have continually developed our sporting infrastructure with these events, alongside the sporting ambition of our young nation,” says Al-Kuwari

“It is our ambition to set a new benchmark for sustainable venue development at every level of the national agenda,” says Al-Kuwari.

Over the next few years, the QOC will be working closely with Qatar’s National Federations to organize some of world sport’s biggest events, including the 2018 FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Championships, 2019 IAAF World Championships in Athletics and 2023 FINA World Championships. “Our focus will be on delivering these events to the highest possible levels, and ensuring that they have a powerful impact on the development of sport, both within Qatar and globally,” notes Al-Kuwari. 