



Ambassador's Activities

2012

Distributor: French Embassy in the UK
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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the Olympic Games and Business evening

London, 14 June 2012

Cher Denis Masseglia, President of the French National Olympic and Sports Committee,
Cher Arnaud Vaissié, President of the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain,
Chère Malia Metella,
Dear friends,

I welcome you this evening, and I'm happy to have such a tremendous champion as you, Malia, here at the French Residence; you've held our flag high by being, among other things, European swimming champion, the world number two and an Olympic silver medallist.

With 43 days to go, we really are in the final straight towards the London Olympic and Paralympic Games, and when the French Olympic Committee and the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain suggested I host an evening on the subject of the Olympic movement and business, I didn't hesitate. It really is an excellent opportunity to encourage closer ties between two worlds which share so many values.

Sport is a unique source of high emotions, and the London Games will enable us to experience them once again. It's no accident that sport brings in the highest TV ratings every year and that businesses jostle to be visible during these great events. However, it would be simplistic to see it only from this angle. Sport contributes to France's international influence and to both public health and education. For many people it's a place for cohesion and sharing, regardless of differences. At a time when people are sometimes tempted to retreat into separate communities, sport breaks down social and cultural barriers. In short, it's an opportunity to live together, as was so brilliantly demonstrated by the French football team that won the 1998 World Cup.

Sport also embodies values. Values of excellence, of reaching new personal heights, of perseverance, of equal opportunities and of solidarity. It shares all these values with businesses that succeed, but the bridges between the two worlds are still all too rare.

We in London, however, are something of an exception. *Cher* Denis Masseglia, you've made closer ties between sport and business a priority of the French Olympic Committee, and I congratulate you on it. I'm also very happy to announce that this evening you'll be signing a cooperation agreement with the Chamber of Commerce. You dreamed up *Club Ambition Sport* to bring together all the businesses that share the values of sport and want to support our

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champions. This initiative will enable our businesses to experience the sporting adventure from the inside and forge even closer ties to that world we find so thrilling. *Cher Denis*, in a moment you'll have an opportunity to tell us more about *Club Ambition Sport*.

We'll also take advantage of your presence here to find out everything we want to know about the French delegation, Club France and this unique event, the London Games. Denis had the excellent idea of bringing with him a great champion, Malia Metella, who will be sharing her Olympic experience with us.

Unfortunately the Olympic pool at the Residence isn't finished yet, so it's through words that Malia will convey to us the dream of every athlete: to participate in the Games and come back as an Olympic medallist.

To celebrate the launch of *Club Ambition Sport* in Britain, Denis Masseglia also wanted to give its members the chance to win tickets for the Games in a raffle. We'll proceed with that raffle – calmly, please! – at the end of the evening, and anyone who wants to become a member then can also have that opportunity.

Some people in the British media are focusing more on the transport problems we'll be facing – genuine though they may be – than on the magic of the Games. But I'm still convinced we're incredibly lucky to be experiencing the Games in this city. After the very successful and high-profile Jubilee ceremonies, it seems to me our British friends are ready to welcome the whole world to London. Beyond any constraints some of us might be under, this event remains an opportunity to be seized. We have great champions, an exceptional venue in Club France, and ours is one of the few countries to still have tickets to sell. So everything is in place for these Games to be a great festival for French people – and a logistical nightmare for this Embassy!

I'd also like to say that the link between sport and business can only get stronger, and you can all be involved in this adventure. I'd like to make a contribution, in addition to this evening, by proposing to Denis Masseglia that, in the autumn, we invite companies who have joined *Club Ambition Sport* to a meeting with several French Olympic medallists – and there will be many of them to choose from! This would give *Club Ambition Sport* members a special opportunity to talk to some of the greatest French champions about their London experience.

Club Ambition Sport is going to be developed with you, and because of you, and this evening I know that Denis Masseglia and the French Chamber of Commerce will be listening to what you have to say about taking this relationship between sport and business further. I for one would like to suggest something to the French Olympic Committee: why not put on a major national sporting challenge for companies which are *Club Ambition Sport* members? Quite apart from the image it conveys and the values it promotes, sport remains above all a tremendous tool for companies to promote employee bonding and team cohesion.

So any ideas as to what this sporting challenge could be are welcome – except, quite obviously, those which involve rowing, swimming or kite surfing across the Channel's shipping lanes and end up mobilizing our navy!

I wish you a very enjoyable Olympic evening, and before handing over to my friend Arnaud Vaissié, President of the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain, I want to thank his team, who have contributed a great deal to making this evening a success./.