

Making a Difference

The Power of Sport

An Interview with Ned Wills,
Global Director, Laureus Sport for Good Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE Ned Wills began his career in sailing, and proceeded to work for UBS Warburg in London, managing its emerging sailing sponsorship portfolio with its sponsorship of the Volvo Ocean Race's Nautor Challenge. After six years with UBS, finishing in Hong Kong as Head of Group Sponsorship in the Asia Pacific Region, Wills moved to the oil and gas exploration firm BG Group, based in the U.K. He was appointed to his current position in May 2007.



Ned Wills

COMPANY BRIEF Headquartered in London, with national offices around the world, the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation (www.laureus.com/foundation) was set up to promote the use of sport as a tool for social change. It was established by the Laureus World Sports Academy and founding partners Daimler Chrysler and Richemont, and addresses social challenges through a worldwide program of sports-related community development initiatives. Since its inception in 2005, some 150,000 underprivileged young people have been helped through more than 50 projects around the world, focused on overcoming poverty, homelessness, war, violence, drug abuse, discrimination, and AIDS.

Laureus is comprised of the Laureus World Sports Awards, the Laureus World Sports Academy, and the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation. What role does each of these elements play within the organization?

Laureus is a universal movement that celebrates the power of sport to bring people together as a force for good. The central pillar of the movement is the Laureus World Sports Academy, a collection of some of the finest sports men and women from around the world to have competed at the highest level in their chosen sports. The Laureus World Sports Academy has two objectives: to use the power of sport as a tool for positive social change and to celebrate today's sporting achievements.

"Sport has the power to change the world," the famous words of Nelson Mandela, originally set the mission of the Sport for Good Foundation. The foundation was established to deliver the Sport for Good objective of the World Sports Academy. It now supports over 50 projects around the world, touching the lives

of more than 150,000 young people. The projects use sport as a tool to educate, to inspire, and to develop young people, identifying an alternative life path out of a broad range of social issues that range from AIDS to gender exclusion, from child soldiers to gang and gun violence.

The Laureus World Sports Awards are the premier global sports awards, honoring the achievements of the greatest sportsmen and women across all sports each year. The winners are selected by the ultimate sports jury –

the 43 members of the Laureus World Sports Academy, the living legends of sport honoring the great athletes of today.

What is the membership of the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, and how do you engage your members to actively participate in the efforts of the foundation?

The Laureus Sport for Good Foundation does not have members, but it does have supporters, which include its founding patrons, IWC and Mercedes-Benz, global partners such as Vodafone, as well as a number of corporate and individual donors who are committed to the work of the foundation. These partners not only make donations, but are actively engaged in fundraising and communicating the mission of the organization. Laureus is fortunate to have Former President Nelson Mandela as its patron, and he has provided inspiration for much of Laureus's work over the years.

The Laureus Sport for Good Foundation itself does not operate projects on the ground; rather, it works to support local organizations that are already in place, that know their territory and, most importantly, are part of the community they serve.

As you mentioned, the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation has had the benefit of working with key corporate partners, including Mercedes-Benz and IWC. How important have these partnerships been to the success of the foundation?

Corporate partnerships are an essential part of the movement. Our partners are examples of companies that are taking their responsibilities toward society at large extremely seriously. They are leading examples of the principles that recognize that social ills are the responsibility of the whole community, and are not confined just to developing countries. Indeed, Laureus and

its partners often look to address very similar issues in the slums of Kenya as they do in the back streets of New York.

What are some examples of the work done by the foundation, and the impact this work has had on the communities where you are engaged?

Among the projects we support is one in Crotona, one of the most racially diverse districts in the South Bronx, New York, where the population comprises African Americans, Dominicans, West Africans, Puerto Ricans, Hondurans, and Mexicans. There, over 90 percent of schoolchildren receive free lunches, only 27 percent of students can read at grade level, and just 26 percent can demonstrate proficiency in math. In a district with more than 20,000 young people, the Mary Mitchell Center represents the community's collective efforts to confront these problems. Its Fight Back! project teaches the young people of Crotona to avoid the negative influences of gangs and drugs through the mastering of jujitsu. Every day, participants from 4 to 18 years of age go to the Mary Mitchell Center after school to get help with their homework and then train with the guidance of skilled adults. Each week, the young people also get a chance to go to local shelters to teach their skills to women who have been victims of domestic violence.

The very first Laureus-supported project, dating back to 2000, is the Mathare Youth Sports Association [MYSA], based in one of the largest and poorest slums in Nairobi, Kenya – a slum with a population well into the hundreds of thousands. The project pioneered the use of football as a tool to encourage cooperation and raise self-esteem in the young people of the community. More than 14,000 youngsters play in some 90 football leagues, where success is measured not just by the goals scored in matches, but by the work the young people do in cleaning up the slums. Young people who have been involved in MYSA since the beginning have become role models and youth leaders in their community. Turmoil has recently beset Kenya and the MYSA project stands as a pillar of the slum community, providing safety and sanctity in the chaos and much-needed support to the international aid agencies working to distribute supplies to those affected by the violence. ●

Michael Johnson, one of the most successful track and field athletes of all time, works with Laureus to motivate children through sports.

