

# MITCH ABRAMS, PSY.D.

## LEARNED EXCELLENCE FOR ATHLETES

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Ms. Malia Arrington  
Director of Ethics and SafeSport  
United States Olympic Committee  
1385 S. Colorado Boulevard, Suite A-706  
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Ms. Shelli Pfohl  
Chief Executive Officer  
United States Center for SafeSport  
1 Olympic Plaza  
Colorado Springs, CO 80909

February 20, 2017

Dear Ms. Arrington, Ms. Pfohl and the SafeSport Board,

I have recently reviewed the draft, and re-draft, of the SAFESPORT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES generated by the United States Olympic Committee ("USOC"). I am greatly appreciative of the attention that is being paid to sexual assault and abuse. I am a sport psychologist and an expert in violence working in this domain for more than twenty years. In addition to working with athletes that have been perpetrators and victims of abuse, assault and other traumas, I have also overseen mental health services for several of the state prisons in New Jersey for the past seventeen (17) years; including an institution that is solely focused on the treatment of sex offenders. It is from my unique expertise and experience that I felt compelled to offer a couple of suggestions that I hope you will consider in this P&P that is being developed to protect and, I presume, prevent victims.

I would like to first state that the points raised in the February 6, 2017 letter written by Nancy Hogshead-Makar, Esq., of Champion Women and Marci A. Hamilton, Esq., of CHILD USA are poignant, relevant and on-target. I urge you to seriously consider integrating their recommendations into your final draft.

Further, I would like to add the following recommendations related to the handling of perpetrators and victims. To start, your document is silent on the issue of assessing an alleged perpetrator's risk of violence (sexual or otherwise). While this may be seen as a clinical endeavor, your document clearly is legally driven and discusses issues related to investigative and burden of proof issues; making it clearly a document that treads into the forensic world. In that world, when an individual is accused, and certainly when there is any conclusion of wrong-doing, it is very important to assess the individual's risk factors. This Risk Assessment is important because, unless the USOC plans on unilateral and permanent banishment from sport, that assessment would be able to tell you how likely the individual is to recidivate, as well as what sort of sex offender treatment they may

benefit from (if any). Without such an evaluation and subsequent treatment, it is exceedingly likely that there will be further victimization. It seems that this must be accounted for.

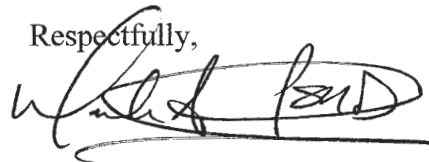
The other recommendation I would make is for there to be some consideration for assessing the treatment needs of the victim(s) and a mechanism to insure the delivery of those services. Athletes are not immune to psychological disorders and, in fact, may present differently than non-athletes when exposed to trauma. Further, victims can present with a myriad of conditions. These symptoms/conditions may include, but are not limited to:

- Acute Stress Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (both Simple or Complex)
- Eating Disorders
- Self-Injurious, Risk-Taking and/or Promiscuous Behaviors
- Personality Disorders
- Depression – with or without suicidality
- Anxiety Disorders
- Trauma-related symptoms that don't neatly fit into any DSM disorder.

To complicate matters further, symptoms may never appear, appear and then spontaneously remit, appear weeks or months later and/or may be very resistant to treatment. It is for this reason, I believe that sensitivity to treatment needs be included in your policies to make sure that the athlete does not only have “legal” or procedural remedy, but also resources for therapeutic remedy. My own preference would be to make the victims’ treatment be at the expense of the perpetrator, but that may be beyond SafeSport’s scope.

I will conclude by again thanking you for this important undertaking and I hope that my recommendations contribute meaningfully in your attempt to protect athletes from the unfortunate dark side of sports that we have seen in the past.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mitch Abrams", written over a horizontal line.

Mitch Abrams, Psy.D.