



Voices of IFSC Leaders

Part 1: IFSC Board Members



Introduction

From May to August 2020, Anne Fuynel (TV & Marketing Director) and Marc Le Menestrel (Ethics Commission) have interviewed twelve leaders of IFSC about who they are, what their challenges are, and how they could perform better. The following document is the result of these conversations.

It expresses powerful and inspiring values of people deeply passionate and committed to the development of a sport that is more than a sport: climbing. It also highlights fundamental aspects of IFSC organizational culture, objectives and challenges.

Most of the material is directly quoted from the interviews and appear in quotation marks. We have also added material coming out of a questionnaire sent to IFSC Board Members, stakeholders and main officials in 2019. We thank all the people who agreed to play the interview game as well as David Chambre for his work on extracting the best quotes out of the interviews and on developing the document with us.

This interview work will be extended in order to allow each person wishing to express themselves on the values and the future of our sport.

Especially when the future is uncertain, organizations need to know who they are. Working on IFSC organizational identity is thus a complement to its strategic plan. Being together will help us to be more resilient towards unexpected events and better build our success.

We hope that you will enjoy and be inspired,

Anne Fuynel and Marc Le Menestrel



Table of contents

1. WHERE WE COME FROM: OUR HISTORY

- As an institution
- As IFSC leaders
- As a sport

2. WHY WE ARE HERE: OUR OBJECTIVES

- To develop the sport
- To unite the National Federations
- To represent the community in its ecosystem

3. WHAT WE BELIEVE IN: OUR VALUES

- We are passionate
- We are committed
- We are responsible

4. THE WAY WE LIKE TO WORK: OUR GOVERNANCE

- We stand together
- We create our own paths
- We aim as high as possible

5. HOW WE REACH OUT TO OTHERS: OUR COMMUNICATION

- Being an authentic advocate of the sport
- Inspiring future leaders
- Contributing to a better world

6. WHAT MAKES US STRIVE: OUR SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

- Can we make our diversity a strength?
- How much time and money?
- Beyond Olympism and competition?

Appendix 1: List of Interviewees Appendix 2: List of questions



1. Where we come from: Our story

As an institution:

When we left the UIAA in 2006, *“nobody could imagine that it was the start of a new era.”* From the beginning, led by Marco Sclaris, *“we wanted to become Olympics. So, the first IFSC vote was a yes to go to the Olympics. We voted it twice to be sure!”* Even if everybody thought it was crazy, we created the IFSC the next year *“with a lot of enthusiasm.”*

Nearly 15 years later, the legacy of this beginning is still here. *“IFSC is still young and grew very fast and since we are [now] an Olympic sport, things are just moving faster and faster, with a crazy numbers of opportunity for climbing to develop.”*



1. Where we come from: Our story

As IFSC leaders:

We the leaders of IFSC are coming from various origins and places. Some are climbers, *“I got in touch with climbing a long time ago and the sport has driven everything in my life”*, some are volunteers, introduced to competition climbing by their children: *“I quickly found that it was a great way for us to share, get involved and develop a sport.”* Most importantly *“we all end up being deeply influenced by the climbing culture and came to appreciate all the people around.”*

We share a common engagement: *“We felt like we were somewhere we had to be, at the right place at the right moment and thinking that we could bring something.”* We were really impressed: *“a small bunch of people in an office running the whole thing!”* So, we always took this as an example: *“if they can do it, we can do it!”*

From the beginning, we knew that going to the Olympics *“would be a big challenge and no mistakes would be allowed.”* But to be able to be part of a sport becoming Olympic *“is just a crazy experience.”* Nevertheless, *“we are making history - it's an amazing journey.”*



1. Where we come from: Our story

As a sport:

We are coming from a deep, long and beautiful history: *“when you see the history of climbing, you see the connection with nature, the sharing with other people.”* This sport *“originates from mountaineering, we have the same values, facing the difficulties, looking for the summit, united and helping together.”*

Our identity is shaped by climbing: *“climbing is an individual sport with a competition side with others but also with yourself.”* It is an activity *“that you can do throughout your entire life, from kid to whatever your age.”*

Competition and Olympism became the shape of the IFSC. *“Now we are in the Olympics and I think we did well. Reaching the summit was very rewarding but the process was more important.”* *“It is very beautiful to see all these athletes, top competitors, sharing together. And so much happiness even when they don’t win, to see other climbers going higher and succeeding where they failed.”* We also love to see athletes pushing to their best.

“It’s a magnificent vertical show, so inspiring!”



2. Why we are here: Our objectives

To develop the sport:

We have the responsibility and the capacity to contribute to the development of sport climbing and to shape its future. Olympism is the natural way to build this path. It is *“a great project for this sport and everybody at the Board has a link with climbing.”*

We know how to take advantage of what makes climbing different. We are not a mainstream sport but *“we are ‘extreme’ and slightly different. Many governments are quite interested with this approach.”* If climbing *“becomes too simplified, we’ll lose the essence of climbing.”*

We also connect more with the global sport community. *“We need help from people who are experts in the world of sport in order to get more visibility.”* As example, the Combined Olympic Format is *“a good example how to balance our ideas and the ones of others.”*

Our athletes are at the centre of the game, they are *“really important. When you watch a climbing event, the most powerful thing you can see is how people can support each other and communicate, even during competitions.”* There is *“a total respect for athletes and climbers.”*



2. Why we are here: Our objectives

To unite the National Federations:

We take advantage of our IOC recognition which gave us bigger and stronger legitimacy. *“IOC also needs sport climbing as a new exciting activity and see further.”* We would *“like that IFSC and IOC use this Tokyo opportunity to create a real family.”*

We are more and more part of the sport family and *“are going in the direction taken by the other sport federations.”*

We must take care of our inclusiveness, as *“we need to open our mind to what happens elsewhere and use this opportunity to be more inclusive.”* As a critical point, *“we need to make sure that all the countries have the possibility to host, organize and attend events.”*

Of course, there are challenges such as *“the position between the national federations and the IFSC.”* We have to admit that *“we need new people and sometimes bureaucrats to get good advices.”* IFSC is *“not perfect but the world would be worse without us.”*

Respect remains our cornerstone: we need to create trust, listen to each other and be open minded, such as following the rules: *“as in any sports, you must believe in the rules, in what you are doing and always remain independent of your nationality.”*



2. Why we are here: Our objectives

To represent the community in its ecosystem:

We recognise ourselves in the climbing values: *“sport climbing is now recognized by IOC but the most important is to keep alive our core values, our very unique characteristics such a strong attractiveness for young people”, “our community aspect” and “our true basic nature.”*

We are here *“to represent the climbing community”* and the Charter of Climbing Ethics *“is very important to introduce us.”*

Of course, *“climbing belongs to climbers, but climbers should educate themselves first about what is the IFSC, his role, the challenges, how it works.”* Here comes our educational role. The responsibility of the IFSC and the small climbing world *“is to educate the newcomers and give them the possibility to go outdoors, to teach them safety and how to preserve and respect nature, because there is a need of safety and we need to educate how to manage risks.”* Balance between challenge and safety *“is a strong value of our sport.”*

Sharing is part of our identity: *“climbing is an individual sport but it is a community of people.”* We would like to think that this sharing is *“an enduring quality of climbing, without losing our identity.”* We need to *“preserve the culture of the community when sharing it with more and more people in the world.”*



3. What we believe in: Our values

We are passionate:

We are all inspired by climbing and sports in general, *“the inspiration we all get from climbing for a number of years is huge, and we all saw the benefits to be a climber, its positive influence, as sport has driven everything in our lives.”* Working in climbing organizations is *“a lot of time and commitment without being really payed, so it is a passion and everybody is amazed by the passion of the IFSC community.”*

We also have this global vision, as *“climbing has the power to empower yourself. You discover all lot of yourself with climbing, to find solutions and overcome problems.”* That inspires us to have *“this global vision and impact.”*



3. What we believe in: Our values

We are committed:

*“As the organisation grows, we want to maintain part of the volunteering spirit we began our organisation with.”
“So we need to keep a balance between the true value of the Federation and the volunteering”.*

We are fully engaged as *“engagement and work allow us to be part of the development of this new sport and we could learn how worked the IFSC as an organization, which is not obvious from the outside.”* Then, naturally, the simple challenge of building something *“forced everybody to evolve.”* We aim for partnership and trust, as *“trusting others and considering they are all trying to do their best is extremely important: you have to work in partnership, to trust somebody else, having a real opportunity to make a difference, especially together at the IFSC.”*



3. What we believe in: Our values

We are responsible:

We have the chance *“to be a young Olympic sport, just starting, but keeping our core values that we do not want to lose.”* Because, as many noticed, *“we do not believe climbing is a better sport than others with better values but keeping our core values while becoming bigger will be challenging.”* It is true that *“we already have a lot of power and in a very short time, we made a lot of progress with the IFSC.”*

When you are an IFSC official, whatever your position, *“the biggest challenge is your integrity.”* The framework you put is very important: *“no cheating, no manipulation, true to yourself and your colleagues, the values of extreme action sport.”* Then, it is obvious that *“we must strongly prevent and punish doping and cheating.”*

Speaking of responsibility, 2020 was of course a very special year. *“Today, with the virus, our new challenge is to create an environment in the gyms and in competitions that people can trust from a public health point of view.”* Respect and tolerance are important too as consciousness of nature and acting with sustainability. *“We can have fun and respect the others, even those who are not climbers while respecting the environment.”* Because this is another challenging part: *“to manage a development with respect for the activity.”*

As in climbing, *“you have to make our own decisions.”* The rock *“is our mirror, we cannot cheat with ourselves and with others.”*



4. The way we like to work: Our governance

We stand together:

We are a united community as *“we all have the same sense of community, learning from each other like a family and enjoying the team.”*

We must beware of the dangers of *“taking personal interests or those of our national federations before the IFSC ones, not sharing the vision of the IFSC”*. *“This is especially important when being active in private and commercial interests related to sport climbing.”* As in every community, *“relationships can sometimes be challenging but also extremely important because we realized over these past years the power of a team.”*

But *“you are never alone, always in the action, to create events and new things.”* IFSC aims for the highest level of professionalism and *“their leaders brought sport climbing to a very new level, to the Olympics and careful about the athletes and the youngsters.”* We are confident to be *“on the right way and that we took the right decisions.”*

“This evolution of all of us in terms of competencies, behaviour and of technical ability to achieve things, in order to go to the Olympics, is extremely powerful. It’s a fantastic story.”



4. The way we like to work: Our governance

We create our own paths:

We love changes and *“coming with new ideas and be able to realize them.”* Of course, *“we need to bring ourselves the changes and it must be carefully done.”* As an example, *“the development of the bouldering activity in the last 5 years was incredible.”* Sometimes, trying to enhance the show *“creates new things.”*

With the experience, *“we stopped thinking to always have a simple solution to problems.”* We learned *“not the hard way but the complex way”*. We don't want to take no for an answer, *“as there are always different ways to do things.”*

The Charter of Climbing Ethics is pioneering these new paths in the IFSC, *“helping to maintain our integrity, to keep IFSC anchored to key and core values and being a point of reference concerning issues when Board members or IFSC officials are put in a conflict of interest.”* It is *“a perfect tool of promotion and education and coaching on these questions, simply explaining what ethics is.”*

“IFSC is an adventure.”



4. The way we like to work: Our governance

We aim as high as possible:

We are able to do things which seem impossible: *“we are used with cruxes and to find solutions for them, keeping the mentality of the climbers”*.

We are inspired by the climbing community, as *“you develop a natural ability to find solutions.”* Climbers are *“very serious to achieve the challenges and we can learn from the climbers when they start a project such as a route, how was the process, the strategy and what is the difference between success and failure.”*

Climbing also teaches us how to fail, *“sometimes, you just discover that you will not be able to achieve the challenge you set.”* In climbing, *“you learn falling and you learn from your fall, you never give up until falling or reaching your goal.”*

We are looking for performance as *“to achieve something good gives a lot of satisfaction”*, acting for improvements and *“aware that we still have a lot of potential and that we could do more.”*

“If you think that something is possible, you can reach it.”



5. How we reach out to others: Our communication

Being an authentic advocate of the sport:

We have the responsibility to promote sport climbing all over the world. Our sport is unique, *“it is passion and fun, whatever you try to beat nature or the route setter.”* Working at the IFSC is really working for the development of sport climbing. *“It is the place to be. We are making history and it is a privilege to live that, to be part of it, to participate in the decisions being taken. This is an amazing journey.”*

It is very important how the sport and the climbing community are presented to the world. We need *“to emphasise climbing when broadcasting with inspiring commentaries. Climbers should use their social media to tell how climbing is not just about difficulty but also a lot of fun and passion.”* Our social media *“should be enjoyable, a celebration of all of us, of the good and not the bad things.”*

In this way, joining the Olympics *“is a unique opportunity to be an example for the Olympic community.”* If we are in the Olympics, *“it is because we interest young people. It is important for the IOC to get more attention from the youngest generations.”* But the more we grow, *“the more we have to convince people that we are doing the right thing.”* So, *“we need to stay solid to our values”* and in the meantime seeing the IFSC as the door to the Olympic world for climbing. In return, *“sport climbing can bring freshness to the Olympics and bring new values.”*



5. How we reach out to others: Our communication

Inspiring future leaders:

We care about our legacy and *“to do something for the next generation.”* It is a strong motivation, *“giving something for the ones to come, in respect for our predecessors and bringing new leaders, to make sure they will have the passion to carry on.”*

Climbers need to support their entire sport and community, *“helping us proactively, coming to us with propositions and be involved.”* We need to adjust our communication all around the world, country by country. There is *“a need to adapt, to take people on the way, and to understand the structures”*. We need to create video contents from the athletes: *“why they climb, what inspires them, what keeps them climbing.”*

We want to share our passion with others, *“enjoying what we are doing, be part of it and respecting each other practices: outdoor, indoor, it doesn’t matter.”*



5. How we reach out to others: Our communication

Contributing to a better world:

“Climbing is a good way to meet other people around the world and to better understand them and share.” Climbing is “such a basic instinct, almost like running, it resonates with everybody.” It is a sport for sure but also more than that, “an activity which transforms people.”

We really need to find the best way to share what we do, why and how we do it. There is *“definitively a work to be done inside our climbing community to set how we speak, how we behave in front of the rest of the world.”*

Our sport can be *“practiced anywhere and it can be very helpful especially for the youths to get off the street, to understand new values.”* Climbing is an opportunity for kids to be involved in a community and *“helps you to recognize yourself more clearly.”* In that respect, *“we can make the world a better place with sport having a more important role to play.”*



6. What makes us strive: Our successes and challenges

Can we make our diversity a strength?

We recognise that *“IFSC has this international aspect with completely different people and cultures in the background working together.”* We have a common goal and we need to find solutions coming from different perspectives and to look differently. IFSC is made of very different people with various backgrounds and *“we need to accept that things can be done differently from the way we thought they could be done.”* While travelling, we can discover *“other federations, different ways to do thing with different challenges.”* So, when we have to take decisions, *“everyone has to consider with respect towards developed and developing countries interests and be open minded.”*

Speaking about governance, *“it is true that IFSC and the climbing governance needs more women.”*
Also, *“former athletes are necessary in the organization but it is also good to have non athletes and this mix is essential.”*

We further need to identify what real ethical issues could be for us. This dialogue is very important.



6. What makes us strive: Our successes and challenges

How much time and money?

We need to consider that *“with more money in the sport and bigger IFSC budget, the pressure is increasing.”*

There is a challenge here because *“if Olympics equal more money, it implies corruption risks, potential unethical behaviours, more commercial and marketing efforts and inputs.”* Of course, financial independence is also important, *“we need to raise funds and give them back to the community.”* Being Olympic and with more money in sport climbing, *“we would like to see more budget to educate and to help the new countries.”*

Nations new to climbing try to develop their competition system and promote their athletes giving their time on a voluntary basis, but often without money and support from their National Olympic Committee.

So, *“we have to consider the financial obstacles in those poorer countries and how to help them.”* Even if *“we are really expanding with solidarity projects to help those new countries in terms of training and finances and joining the IFSC, the costs can for instance be prohibitive to travel to a World Cup and there is a need of financial resources to have the job done, as for example, with flight tickets.”*



6. What makes us strive: Our successes and challenges

Beyond Olympism and competition?

We are aware *“that the challenge is to manage our growth because we are growing so fast but as we grow, we try to widen our perspective.”* Still, *“we must not lose our DNA, change too much and corrupt ourselves because of the pressure of the external world.”* We *“are not invincible and when people say that climbing is a better sport than others, we don’t think so, we need to be realistic.”*

IFSC history seems unique: *“we started from the rocks, then we moved indoors.”* There may be new participants in our sport *“who started indoors and then later found enjoyment in outdoor climbing.”* Now, we have this really strong community aspect, this lifestyle sport, going to the gym, sharing with friends. Is it to remain the same *“if climbing becomes more mediatised, monetised on its competition side?”* Sometimes, *“people feel that some decisions are not taken in the interest of the community and it is painful.”* What do we need to do so that *“climbers who identify themselves as outdoor recreational participants stop saying that Olympics are not good for climbing, or that indoor is not the real climbing?”*



6. What makes us strive: Our successes and challenges

Climbing is *“the most outdoor of the indoor sports.”* Indoor and competition climbing can be a gate to enter the outdoor universe. Many people *“start climbing in a gym but they also start to appreciate what is climbing about and its values.”* But we are creating more climbers going outside which *“induces stress on the outdoor environment and our limited natural resources.”*

We need to promote all the benefits of climbing, *“everything that makes people love climbing and not just competing.”* What we are trying to do is *“to provide a way to people to climb, not only in competition, but also in their life.”*

Climbers are doing their best in competitions but *“they keep their modesty and humility, their core values.”* Their integrity serves *“as an example for younger and new climbers all over the world.”*

“Our youth is the key for the future”.



Appendix 1: List of Interviewees

In the order of interviews

Marco Sclaris	President	Maria Izquierdo	President Panamerican Council
Kobina Toru	Vice-President Sport/Event	Antony Seah	President Asian Council
Debbie Gawrych	General Secretary	Wolfgang Wabel	President European Council
Pierre-Henri Paillasson	Vice President Treasurer & Finances	Shauna Coxsey	Athlete Representative
Li Zhixin	Vice-President Communication	Romain Thevenot	Oceania Council



Appendix 2: List of questions

1. How did you start working for the IFSC?
2. What inspires you the most in working for the IFSC?
3. What are the benefits for you?
4. What are the values that are important to you?
5. What are the values that are the most challenging?
6. What power would you dream to have to do things even better?
7. How can a sport like climbing make the world a better place?
8. How could climbers help you to do your work even better?