

On the Record - Karate President Confident Ahead of IOC Presentation

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(ATR) "The time of karate has come," World Karate Federation President Antonio Espinos tells *Around the Rings*.

The black belt from Bilbao, Spain goes on the record with ATR's Matthew Grayson in this wide-ranging interview conducted Wednesday.

Around the Rings: How are preparations coming for next month's presentation to the IOC Executive Board?

Antonio Espinos: They are going well. I met the whole morning [Wednesday] with a team for the preparations and to go into the last details about the presentation that we will make in May before the Executive Board.

ATR: Have you tweaked karate's proposal at all based on feedback from the IOC Program Commission?

AE: I think that we did a good job in December, and we have good feedback and very positive feedback on the presentation. Moreover, I'm content with the presentation, which really showed that karate and the World Karate Federation have been progressing a lot in the last years.

ATR: How does it impact karate that wrestling got dropped in February? Does it help or hurt your chances to now be competing against another combat sport?



Ryutaro Araga of Japan and Kenji Grillon of France fight for -84kg gold at the 2012 World Karate Championships in Paris. (Getty Images)

AE: We fully respect the decisions of the IOC, and we don't have too much to say about this decision from February. We are confident in our possibilities, and we fully respect all the other candidates, but for us, it's really one thing more that comes into the decision process, and they will have their opportunity, and we will see. But as I'm telling you, we are confident in the values and the parameters for karate, and we don't worry too much about the other sports.

ATR: What sort of support are you seeing with "The K is on the Way" campaign, and how important will that be to your chances with the IOC?

AE: Well, "The K is on the Way" has been very important for us. It has been very important to connect all our supporters worldwide and see how popular karate is. I can tell you that in social media, we're getting millions and millions of supporters, and it's impressive the figures that we can show today and use in May in the presentation to the IOC Executive Board.

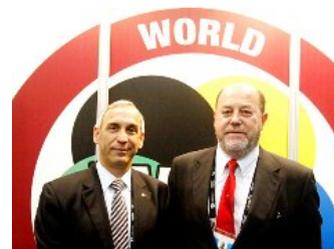
ATR: You've been mentioned as a possible candidate for the SportAccord presidency? Do you intend to run?

AE: No, I don't intend to run. For the time being, the only candidate is Marius Vizer (Bernard Lapasset joined the field Thursday), and I think that Marius Vizer is a good candidate that can bring some light on the shadows that SportAccord has been showing in the past years. I'm really happy about the opportunity of somebody like Marius Vizer as a candidate.

ATR: How confident are you in karate's chances about a month out from the St. Petersburg vote?

AE: We are confident that we can be in the shortlist of May. With full respect to the other candidates and the IOC Executive Board, believe me, we're working on this Olympic project for many years, and I think that karate finally deserves to have the opportunity. We were about to reach the goal in 2005 and also very close again in 2009. This is the third time in a row, and we have been progressing as never before in the last three or four years. I think the IOC will appreciate it, and we'll be able to show them what I'm saying.

ATR: Can you tell me anything yet about what you intend to focus upon in your presentation next month?



World Karate Federation General Secretary George Yerolimpos and President Antonio Espinos at SportAccord 2012. (ATR)



Antonio Espinos and his "K" are flanked by IOC inspectors Michael Fennell and Pierre Fratter-Bardy in Paris. (WKF)



Young karate practitioners take over the Demo Zone at SportAccord 12 in Quebec City, Canada. (SportAccord)

AE: Universality, of course. In general, the added value that a sport like karate can bring to the Olympic program. Since karate is a practice sport for the people, it's a very spectacular sport. It has a lot of social values, but at the same time it brings a lot of spectators and supporters to the Olympic competition. It's easy and cheap to implement. It's easy to understand. So it's a sport that brings great added value to the Olympics, the same as Olympics will bring a huge added value to karate, of course.

ATR: Is there anything else I should be asking, or is there anything else you wanted to share with me?

AE: Yes, that I was elected president of the World Karate Federation in 1998, already 15 years ago. We have been focusing on the progress of the federation, but always intended to show one day to the IOC that we would deserve to be given an opportunity to enter in the program. This has been our objective since then, and we feel today that the work done during all these years is really having a real opportunity now in May and finally in September in Buenos Aires, and with full respect, we feel that the time of karate has come.

Reported by [Matthew Grayson](#)

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