

7 sport wonders

The Voice of Sports

Celebrities today command more influence than ever before. In particular, sport celebrities are making their presence felt beyond their chosen field. For about three decades, their opinions in political and social arenas have been increasingly listened to by the general public and decision makers alike.

Sport heroes have both a responsibility and a right to articulate the concerns we all share. Poverty, human rights, global peace and a healthy environment are important to everyone, but our voices are not equally strong in expressing hopes and fears. Stars in sports are among a select group who can cut through the red tape and rhetoric, whose message can transcend the barriers of nationality, culture and class. A growing number of athletes are using their celebrity status to raise awareness about issues that affect us all.

Isao Aoki

"The rough bunker stands out in contrast with the green up ahead. Sadly, the world is becoming all bunkers."

In addition to winning numerous domestic tournaments, Isao Aoki has achieved international fame for wins in golf's 1973 World Match Play, the 1993 Hawaiian Open and European Open, and the 1989 Coca-Cola Classic. Aoki is one of the greatest golfers in Japan's history, and he continues to play on the Senior Tour, for players aged over 50.



Monica Seles

"As an athlete that flies around the world, I hope for peace in every place that I land."

From her debut at 15, Monica Seles established herself as a champion. In 1993, Seles was becoming one of the strongest women's players of all time when she was attacked and stabbed by a spectator. Two years later she was back, and after winning her first tournament, was on her way to an eighth Grand Slam victory. There are four Grand Slam tournaments in a year, and winning one of them represents the highest level of achievement in tennis; to win eight is outstanding.



Yuichiro Miura

"Working step by step toward one's dreams is the foundation of youth, but how long will nature be able to continue sustaining its youth?"

Yuichiro Miura became famous for skiing down the highest peaks of seven continents including 8,000 metres down the southern slopes of Mt Everest. Some 33 years later, in May 2003, he became the oldest man to conquer Everest at the age of 70, on an expedition with his son Gita Miura.



Greg LeMond

"A bicycle isn't a machine of war. It is a machine for feeling the wind in your face and for challenging the spirit."

Greg LeMond is a three-time winner of the Tour de France. In 1986, he became the first American to win the event and, after a near-fatal accident a year later, came back two more times to win in 1989 and 1990. LeMond popularized what had been up until that point a minor sport in his home country. He is a tireless road racer and innovative cyclist and is a hero to the people of the United States.



Naoko Takahashi

"Clean air is vital to our bodies. We can do nothing without it, so we all need to act to protect it."

Naoko Takahashi has set several records including winning the gold medal at the Sydney Olympics in 2000. Because she was the first Japanese woman to win a gold in athletics, and the first Japanese athlete to win the marathon, she was awarded the National Medal of Honour. Takahashi was also the first woman to break the 2:20 hour marathon mark, a long-standing hurdle for the world's top women marathon runners.



Ilhan Mansiz

"Playing fields allowed soccer to become a part of my life. Sadly, they are gone from today's cities."

Ilhan Mansiz debuted for the Turkish national team in 2001 in the qualifying rounds for the FIFA World Cup. He scored three goals in the 2002 FIFA World Cup, leading his team to third place. He was the highest scorer in the Turkish league in the 2001-02 season, and was instrumental in making his club team, Besiktas, league champion in the 2002-03 season.

Photos from, and text adapted from, VITAL MESSAGES, published by Global Sports Alliance and UNEP.



Shaun White

"If global warming turns the mountains to summer, where am I supposed to snowboard?"

Shaun White is ranked the number one snowboarder in the world. He started snowboarding at the age of five and won the Arctic Challenge halfpipe in 2001, at the age of 14. He has won numerous tournaments and is fast becoming a legend in the world of extreme sports.