

IOC WANTS ALL ATHLETES WELCOMED BY U.S.; **WOMEN'S WRESTLING WINS APPROVAL**

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Body

SALT LAKE CITY -- With increased security plans already in place for the Winter Games, Olympic officials wanted assurances Wednesday that foreign athletes won't have a difficult time clearing U.S. immigration checkpoints in February.

The International Olympic Committee's executive board was concerned that athletes might find entry procedures less accommodating after last week's terrorist attacks, according to Mitt Romney, president of the Salt Lake Organizing Committee.

"We predicted there would be changes, particularly for certain countries," said Romney, who delivered a report by video link to an IOC meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. "Given what's happened, it's very possible that the processing time or procedures for certain countries might be impacted."

IOC director general Francois Carrard said the organization expects the United States to admit all accredited athletes, journalists and other personnel. The IOC issues Olympic identity cards, which are accepted in place of visas.

"We understand that after such a tragedy the authorities of the United States review all the security plans, including access," Carrard said. "We have recalled that the universality of the Games should be respected . . . and that those athletes who are bona fide athletes, who are qualified, should be granted access."

Romney briefed the IOC on security changes for the Feb. 8-24 Games that likely will include more fences at venues and tighter security at athletes' housing and the IOC's headquarters hotel.

Salt Lake safety commanders are fully reviewing plans after the Sept. 11 attacks in New York and Washington.

In Lausanne, the IOC expressed confidence in Salt Lake's "very robust" security plans and said no major changes or substantial amounts of money are needed. The group also gave its approval to add women's wrestling for the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

Romney said he did not want to spend time contemplating the scenario of an airliner loaded with fuel crashing into a stadium during Olympic ceremonies. That scenario, IOC officials revealed Tuesday, has long been a part of Olympic safety planning.

The IOC has ordered a report on whether it could be held financially or legally liable for any terrorism during the Olympics. It appears liability would fall on Olympic cities and organizing committees, which take full responsibility for staging the Games, Romney said.

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The Salt Lake Organizing Committee is "on the hook for any terrorism act that we have not prepared for," Romney said, but "we're not spending our time worrying about it."

Utah safety commanders plan to establish a no-fly zone over the Olympic venues, and Romney said the U.S. military had the capability to "intercept" any errant flights.

Romney was reluctant to contemplate the possibility that the Games might have to be called off if the United States and allies find themselves in a sustained war against terrorism or rogue states.

"It's our job to plan for the Games," Romney said. "I don't even want to think about the unthinkable."

Although the IOC approved adding women's wrestling for the 2004 Athens Games, the move is not a certainty because the addition is tied to a cut in men's wrestling events.

The action reflected a drive by new IOC President Jacques Rogge to control the size of the Olympics. Under the previous president, Juan Antonio Samaranch, the number of sports and athletes grew steadily without any significant cuts.

"This is the first time we don't increase the number of events on the program," IOC sports director Gilbert Felli said.

In the continuing effort to increase female participation in the Olympics, the IOC gave its approval to the addition of four women's events in wrestling. But, in return, two men's wrestling events would have to be cut.

Felli said the international wrestling federation may not agree to the reduction.

Of the 28 sports on the Olympic program, boxing and baseball would be the only ones left without women's events. However, women's softball has been played since 1996.

The most significant cut proposed was in boxing, with the elimination of one weight division, a total of 26 boxers.

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