

In Conversation with...Brigitte Dero and Laurent Petrynka

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Interviews

The sports community is taking steps to improve its environmental impact. Brigitte Dero, General Manager of VinylPlus®, the European PVC industry's sustainability programme, and Laurent Petrynka, President of the International School Sport Federation (ISF), explain why making a long-term impact requires innovative partnerships.



Photo credit: VinylPlus® and ISF

Why did VinylPlus and the ISF decide to get involved with The European Week of Sport?

Laurent Petrynka: Since 2016, the ISF has been a proud partner on the topic of education during the Week, an extremely important platform for promoting participation in sport and physical activity. This partnership helps us emphasise the importance of physical education and sport for school students. We're hosting a conference in Brussels to present the results of the 'She Runs - Active Girls' Lead' event that we organised back in March. The European Commission's Erasmus+ Sport Programme and VinylPlus were our main sponsors. All ISF events are gender-balanced, however this was our biggest event promoting schoolgirls' health, emancipation and leadership through school

sport. The conference will include some of the participants and ambassadors, as well as the EU institutions and Brussels city authorities.

Brigitte Dero: The Week is a highly commendable initiative and one that we are proud to support. It's also a great way to connect with the public. VinylPlus has over 20 years of experience ensuring the sustainable use of PVC throughout its value chain. However, the public is a very different audience. Getting our message across requires a different approach. We have to make it more tangible. We realised that sport is an excellent way of bridging that divide. PVC is so widely used in sports, from equipment to the seats and roofs of stadiums, that presents a great opportunity to tell our story.

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It's not often you hear of industry partnering with an organisation such as the ISF, how did that come about?

Brigitte Dero: With 2,500 young women coming to Paris from all over the world, the 'She Runs – Active Girls' Lead' event represented a celebration of women's empowerment and an opportunity to help girls become community leaders – a cause I support wholeheartedly. It was also a new way to show a young audience how we can improve the environmental impact of sporting events by using materials such as PVC, which is entirely recyclable and is commonly recycled. A material fit for the circular economy. It was really encouraging to see how receptive the girls were about our message; the younger generation is so aware of the issue.

Laurent Petrynka: We were interested from the beginning when VinylPlus approached us to sponsor the event. We are all aware of the need to improve the environmental impact of sporting events and they came to us with innovative ways to do this. This partnership also helped us raise awareness of this important matter with young girls. We signed an 'Environmental Action', a commitment to sustainably use and dispose of PVC before, during and after our event and the results speak for themselves. You'll be able to read about them in our joint report which will be published on 27 September.

"The sporting world has recognised the serious need to consider organising events that are sustainable. As with any other sport organisations, we want to do more on this crucial matter" **Laurent Petrynka, ISF**

Would you consider partnering with each other again?

Brigitte Dero: As Laurent mentioned, the encouraging results from the 'Environmental Action' we signed are proof that such partnerships should be considered more often. We're launching the report on lessons learnt from the She Runs - Active Girls' Lead event during the Week. We're also looking into future opportunities for collaboration but you'll have to wait and see.

You both attended the she runs - Active Girls' Lead event, what was the atmosphere like? Any memories that stand out?

Laurent Petrynka: The atmosphere on the starting line was something else. Seeing 2,500 young women from 33 countries from all corners of the world lined up beside the Seine was a very special moment.

Brigitte Dero: Something else that really stood out for me was how engaged the girls were about sustainable development. You just need to watch the videos of the interviews to understand why I was so impressed. I never thought I would get to see the VinylPlus team discussing PVC's role in sports with such a young group, it really inspires hope for the future.

"The European Week of Sport is an highly commendable initiative and one that we are proud to support" **Brigitte Dero, VinylPlus®**

Does that mean sports need to do more in the sphere of sustainability?

Laurent Petrynka: The sporting world has recognised the serious need to consider organising events that are sustainable. As with any other sport organisations, we want to do more on this crucial matter and to continue raising awareness among our members and young participants. The She Runs project and our cooperation with VinylPlus on an "Environmental Action" was a great initiative, which we aim to continue developing within more of our events.

Brigitte Dero: Our partnership proves that a much more holistic approach can make a long-term and sustainable impact. Everyone has a role to play. Cross-sector collaboration is the key to success. There's a good reason that 'Partnerships for the Goals' is listed as a Sustainable Development Goal by the UN.

In what ways are you participating in the week's #BeActive challenge?

Brigitte Dero: I've been getting into yoga. It's a great way to exercise and get some peace of mind. Come along to the Schuman roundabout on 26 September, VinylPlus will be hosting one of the biggest open and free yoga sessions Brussels has ever seen.

Laurent Petrynka: As with my usual weekly routine, I will #BeActive that week, probably playing football and running, as well as celebrating the ISF Active Girls' Lead conference and the European School Sport Day on 27 September. This period also marks the beginning of the school year and so reminds us of our core values; the importance of sport and its place within education.

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