

**February 28, 2017 House Hearing**

**Conducted by the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight  
and Investigations**

**Testimony of Michael Phelps**

**Retired Swimmer and Olympian**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, good morning. My name is Michael Phelps. I am a retired professional swimmer and an Olympian. I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is a privilege to be here to share my thoughts and perspective on the issue of clean sport, which is so important to all athletes, and to sport in general.

I competed internationally for over 15 years and had the tremendous honor to represent the United States in five Olympic Games and six World Championships. Without question, many of the proudest moments of my life have been representing my country in international competition. There is no greater feeling than standing up on the podium and watching the Stars and Stripes rise as our national anthem plays.

The Rio Olympics were special for me because it gave me the opportunity to end my career on my terms, and to do it with my wife Nicole and son Boomer watching. Rio was also unique because of increased doping concerns. In the year leading up to the Games, there was uncertainty and suspicion; I, along with a number of other athletes, signed a petition requesting that all athletes be tested in the months prior to the Games. Unfortunately, the uncertainty remained, even through the Games, and I watched how this affected my teammates and fellow competitors. We all felt the frustration, which undermines so much of the belief and confidence we work so hard to build up to prepare for the Olympics. Looking back over my career, and knowing how difficult it is to get to the highest levels of the sport, and to try to stay there, I can't help but wonder how the current and next generation of younger athletes of today will be able to do it, if this uncertainty persists.

As a child, I found school difficult. I had ADHD, which probably contributed to my restlessness. I'll never forget being told by one of my teachers that I'd never amount to anything. It was swimming that enabled me to see past those challenges, and not be defined by them. My mom put my sisters and me in the pool so we'd be water safe. At first, like many children, I was afraid to put my head under the water, but by overcoming that fear I got my first taste of self-confidence. As it turned out, I was pretty good in the water, and I quickly realized that the harder I worked, the quicker I improved. I found a focus and purpose I had never felt before. I would set goals for myself, and work like crazy until I accomplished them. Dreams would just pop into my head whenever I got into the water. I'd dream about becoming a gold medalist, a world record holder. I wanted to be the best. I talked with my coach so we could come up with a plan, not just for what I could do in the pool, but also what I could do away from the pool to make myself better. I made up my mind to do everything I could to make my dream a reality.

In school, I had friends, but I wasn't all that social. I was focused on swimming. At times, I was made fun of for what I was doing, because it was

“different,” but I was in love with challenging myself to be the best athlete I could be. I felt that every single day was an opportunity for me to do something special when I went to the pool or to workout. I always felt it was the kids who worked harder that got the best results, so I pushed myself in every way I could.

Over a 5-year period, I trained every single day without a day off. My competitors were also training hard, but I figured some of them might not train on holidays, so I’d get an edge if I did. I made sure I was sleeping and eating right, and getting the rest I needed between workouts. As my hard work and sacrifice began to pay off, my confidence grew and I began to feel that if I could dream it, and gave everything I had, anything was possible. The strength of that belief drove me to set goals that others might have thought unrealistic.

That’s one of the amazing things about competitive sport: it demands that you believe in yourself. This isn’t always easy. There were so many times I could have quit and walked away. Sticking with it required me to dig deep, especially knowing that even after all the work and sacrifice, success may be determined by just a hundredth of a second. In those critical moments that really test your commitment, and that can ultimately define your career, you need to believe that if you push on, you’ll get the opportunity to measure yourself (your preparation, your desire, your talent) against others who have had to prepare themselves in the same way.

Throughout my career, I have suspected that some athletes were cheating, and in some cases those suspicions were confirmed. Given all the testing I, and so many others, have been through I have a hard time understanding this. In addition to all the tests during competitions, I had to notify USADA as to where I would be every day, so they would be able to conduct random tests outside of competition. This whole process takes a toll, but it’s absolutely worth it to keep sport clean and fair. I can’t adequately describe how frustrating it is to see another athlete break through performance barriers in unrealistic timeframes, knowing what I had to go through to do it. I watched how this affected my teammates too. Even the suspicion of doping is disillusioning for clean athletes. To believe in yourself through sport, you need to be able to believe in the system that safeguards clean sport and fair play. All athletes must be held to the same standards, which need to be implemented and enforced with consistency and independence.

For years now, I have worked closely with kids. I’ve regularly visited Boys & Girls Clubs all over the U.S., often just to sit down and speak with the kids. After the Beijing Games, I launched my Foundation, which provides water safety and learn-to-swim programming in the clubs. Most of these kids aren’t swimmers, but they’re eager to sit down and talk with me, and they’re full of questions. It’s when I talk about being a kid like them, and how it all started with a dream, that I see their eyes light up. We talk about how I did it, and I tell them they can do it too. To look into a child’s eyes and tell them that if they dare to dream, and do the work, they can

succeed, requires conviction that can't be faked. The power to believe in yourself and inspire others through sport depends upon fair play.

Now that I'm retired, I'm frequently asked if I think anyone will win more medals than me in my lifetime. My answer to that question is I hope so. I'd like to think that there's some boy or girl somewhere now, with an even bigger dream, and even stronger drive to work even harder than I did to do something that's never been done before. But for that to happen, he must believe he or she will get a fair opportunity to compete. If we allow our confidence in fair play to erode, we will undermine the power of sport, and the goals and dreams of future generations. The time to act is now. We must do what is necessary to ensure the system is fair and reliable, so we can all believe in it.