



Official welcome for Basque athletes

# BAT: BASQUE COMMITMENT TO AMATEUR ELITE SPORTS

Herri txikia izan arren Euskal Herria beti izan da nazioarteko kirol lehiaketetan. Aurtengo Joko Olinpikoak ez dira salbuespen izan eta bertan izan dira euskaldunak ere, Beijing 2008an, Euskal Herriaren izena dagokion lekura eramaten. Eliteko kirol ez profesionala bultzatzeko EITB eta Eusko Jaurlaritzak Basque Team (BAT) egitasmoa martxan jarri dute. Helburua elite mailan diharduten euskal kirolariei laguntza ematea da.

2008 is an Olympic year and once again Euskadi has not been represented as such, although many Basque athletes have taken part in this great sporting occasion in both individual and team sports. Most participated with the Spanish or French teams, although in some cases Basque athletes competed in the Olympics for other countries under dual citizenship.

Despite being a small country, we have always made our presence felt in world sports to the point of being fundamental in some, creating our own place in history. This includes our cyclists' achievements in the Tour de France, the traditions upheld by Athletic Club de Bilbao, our mountaineers scaling the highest mountains in the world, and many more.

Nobody can imagine the most important cycling competition in the world, namely the Tour de France, without tens of thousands of Basques lining the route and turning the roadside orange with the team color; world mountaineering without Juanito Oiarzabal, Ederne Pasaban or Alberto Iñurrategi; or climbing without impressive ascents by the Pou brothers up the most emblematic walls of the "seven continents." What about one of the most important leagues in the world, the Spanish Liga, without Athletic, the only team in this globalized and merchandising-hungry world of soccer made up entirely of Basque players? Or European basketball without Baskonia from Vitoria-Gasteiz? They have reached the Final Four every year for the last four years, the only European club to ever manage this feat.

## Nearly 60 athletes have already received help from BAT

To date, 59 athletes and three sports organizations have received grants, but more are expected to be able to rely on financial support in the future. Among the beneficiaries are popular sportsmen and women, such as pole-vaulter Naroa Agirre, climbers Josune Bereziartu, Patxi Usabiaga and the Pou brothers, surfer Aritz Aranburu (very popular due to his participation in the latest world championships) and kayaker Oier Aizpurua, among others. Grants are awarded to sportsmen and women from a wide variety of disciplines: sailing, gymnastics, badminton, martial arts, rowing and snowboarding, among others.



The Minister for Culture and the Lehendakari with three Basque medal winners.

These are just a few examples without touching on what our people have contributed to sport in general. Many sports invented in this small country are played all over the world such as Basque pelota or the *herri kirolak* (rural sports).

**BEIJING 2008 – BASQUE PRESENCE GUARANTEED.** Coinciding with this sporting year, the Basque Government, along with EITB (Basque Public Television and Radio station), has presented BAT, the Basque Team project. This will be the brand representing Fundación Euskadi Kirol Fundazioa, aiming to promote the participation of Basque athletes in top-level competitions within amateur sport.

BAT was created to keep our name among the sporting greats. Within the aims of the Fundación Euskadi Kirola Fundazioa, it will support top level sportsmen and women and their trainers to optimize their training and, in the same respect, it will work with groups of sportsmen from different disciplines and the very highest levels of sporting entities.

This initiative was presented at an event on June 2nd, although the foundation has been working since last November. This presentation was held in the Ensanche building in Bilbao and was presided over by the Lehendakari, Juan José Ibarretxe. It was also attended by many people associated with sporting activities in the Basque Country: athletes, executive agents, technicians and trainers, specialized journalists, etc.

Despite the fact that there are two founding sponsors, the Basque Government, via the Department of Culture, and Basque TV station Euskal Irrati Telebista, this initiative is open to all types of private sponsorship. It is estimated that the impact of sport on the Basque economy represents 1.9%

of its GDP, putting it in front of traditional activities such as agriculture or fishing, or even sectors such as transport.

One of the athletes participating in this project is Maider Unda from Olaeta, Alava. Maider competed in the women's 72 kg wrestling category at the latest Olympic Games in Beijing, obtaining an Olympic diploma for her fourth place, just outside the medals. We can add to this a fifth place in the last World Championships, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, which earned her classification for the Olympics and a twelfth place in the Europe Championship held in Tampere, Finland.

For Maider, there are many differences within elite sport depending on the discipline. According to the Alava-born wrestler, "minority sports need to show results in order to receive any financial backing. I believe that our dedication and effort should be valued," she adds. She considers BAT's help as very positive, "as far as BAT is concerned, I believe that it is a well thought-out project which will help many sportsmen and women both financially and technically, from the CPT (Technical Perfection Centre)."

The Technical Perfection Centre (CPT) in Fadura (Getxo, Bizkaia) is a service provided by the Basque Department of Culture that Maider has been working with for many years. "Their team of technicians and doctors is the best you can find, giving you continuous support," assures the Basque Olympian.

As far as the Olympics are concerned, Maider Unda affirms that "they are the pinnacle of what an athlete can aspire to and just getting a place on the team makes you forget how many hard years you've worked and everything you've been through." There can be no doubt that getting fourth place has compensated for her effort and injuries over the last few years.