

Sunday

Los Angeles Times

\$2.00 DESIGNATED AREAS HIGHER 126 PAGES © 2013 EST †

SUNDAY, MAY 12, 2013

latimes.com

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Olympian Johann Koss awarded Kravis Prize

By Jefferson Yen
Contributing Writer

When Johann Koss speaks, he speaks with authority – the type of authority that comes from practice. And practice is something that the four-time Olympic gold medalist speed skater is very familiar with. As Koss starts speaking, you get the sense that he’s been here before. The stage is smaller but the signposts are familiar.

Koss recently visited Claremont McKenna College to accept the Kravis Prize in Nonprofit Leadership and \$250,000 on behalf of Right to Play, a charity focused on using sports to aid child development in developing nations.



CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

Right to Play was established in 2000 by Johann Koss, a four-time Olympic gold medalist and social entrepreneur. Through sports and games, the nonprofit helps children build essential life skills and better futures.

“We wanted to acknowledge and to reward and to applaud innovative leaders in the philanthropic world,” said Marie-Josée Kravis, chair of the Kravis Prize selection committee.

Right to Play

Koss, 44, founded Right to Play in 2000 but its roots started in 1993 when he joined Olympic Aid, a campaign to raise funds for disadvantaged children.

It wasn’t until 2000 that Right to Play became a formal organization and could do more than just raise funds. The organization now operates in more than 20 countries.

“The United Nations recognizes the right of every child to play,” said Koss. “But I don’t think they really knew when they wrote Article 31– the Declaration of Child Rights – that play is just not a luxury. It’s a tool for education, it’s a tool for health, and it can bring entire communities together.

“Every child has the right to hear that they can do whatever they can, as long as they work hard, put their mind to it and understand what it means to get there,” said Koss.