

AMATEURISM

What was true twenty years ago is still true today. To realize this, one only needs to read over again an extract of the address the great reviver of the Olympic Games delivered at the opening of the Congress at Prague on May 29th 1925, on the very day of his resignation from the Presidency of the I. O. C.:

No doubt you would all be much surprised if I did not allude to the controversial question of amateurism. This problem was not as insoluble as one is apt to believe. Before the 1914-1918 war a little give-and-take from all concerned would have settled this question once and for all. Today the whole situation has been changed by the rising cost of living which has complicated matters; as well as this, public opinion is not prepared to allow sport to become the pastime of the leisured class only.

I am not of the opinion that one ought to expect this Congress to find the complete definition of the status of the amateur applicable to all sports. What we should endeavour to achieve at all costs is that in each Federation the existing Rules and Regulations should be honestly carried out and strictly enforced. We are compelled to admit that this is not the case, as it cannot be denied that there is a certain amount of cheating and swindling. This is the direct outcome of the lowering of the standards of morality which is spreading to the field of sport. The growth and development of sport has been taking place in a society which threatens to become rotten to the core because of its passion for money. Now is time for all sports Associations to set a good example by leading the way back to the high ideals of Honour and Truth, thus uprooting deceit and hypocrisy from within. Before worrying their heads over finding the perfect definition of the amateur, let them begin by respecting and enforcing implicitly the observance of the existing Rules which people have been in the habit of breaking shamelessly and disobeying.

The Governing Bodies should disqualify ruthlessly these pseudo-amateurs who draw substantial benefits directly or indirectly when participating in public competitions. These people are usually far less sporting and undoubtedly less respectable than most professionals. To impose the essential condition of the Athlete's Oath on all competitors is the best way to reinstate all sporting events under the control of true sportmanship. I have been advocating this course of action for the last nineteen years. I am now gratified to find that public opinion has at last adopted it.

Olympism and I. O. C.

The Olympic spirit thus reborn will be a way to carry out successfully this purging process, but on condition that the Olympic Games cease to be regarded as a World Championship. It is because they are steeped in this false conception that some experts seek perpetually to destroy the Olympic Constitution, in order to seize the power which they imagine themselves fit to exercise exclusively. I insist once more, and wish to put my colleagues of the I. O. C. on their guard against relinquishing any of their rights or making any concession on this point. Modern Olympism has prospered on account of having entrusted its full control and organization to an International Committee, entirely independent, self-supporting, never subsidized by anybody. The very fact that this Committee is self-recruited makes it immune to all political interference, and it is not swayed by intense nationalism nor influenced by corporative interests. If the Supreme Executive Council were composed solely of delegates of the National Committees and of the International Federations, the spirit of Olympism would die in a few years. Even today, were one to give up this vital point of permanency the future of Olympism would be seriously compromised.

The I. O. C. in accordance with its constitutional rights has to decide where the celebration of each Olympiad is to take place, also to make the Games worthy of their glorious tradition and high ideals which are the root of these celebrations. Thanks to its unique mode of self-recruiting the I. O. C. alone can achieve this aim and realize success. On the National Committee is incumbent the task of organizing all arrangements of participation of every country in the Quadrennial Olympiads. As to the International Federations, they have the right to exercise their power to control entirely the technical management of all the contests. Let harmony prevail amongst these three Governing Bodies! the I. O. C., the National Olympic Committees and the International Federations; if it is so, it will then secure the best means of maintaining the high level one desires for the Olympic Games.

There is no need to remind anyone that the Olympic Games are not the prerogative of any one country, nor any particular race, nor can they be monopolized by any given group. They belong to the whole world. All nations are eligible for the Olympiad without question: moreover, all types of sport are placed on the same footing of equa-

lity without being influenced by the whims of Public opinion. The coveted title of athlete can be applied to the gymnast, the prize fighter, the horseman, the oarsman, the fencer, the sprinter, or to the thrower of the javelin. All partaking in the above mentioned forms of exercise as well as other recognized sports have equal value from the standpoint of the true sportsman, even if the public favours one more than the other at a certain time. On the other hand, it would be useless to increase the number of collective contests. The fundamental purpose of the Olympic Games has always been to honour the individual champion, whose performance is necessary to maintain the keenness in true sportsmanship and promote the competitive spirit generally. Past experience has shown that conditions do not lend themselves to too many team-contests taking part, for it has been found advisable to shorten the duration of the Games to minimize the expenses there involved.» (We are faced with the same difficulty nowadays.

Ed.) « However, I do not believe that these two facts are altogether related. Great savings of money could be realized at the Celebration of the Olympiad if the latter is organized sufficiently in advance, with the greatest of care and discipline, inspired by a spirit of unselfishness and impartiality. Unfortunately, in this respect, as well as elsewhere, one has to deplore the squandering habits conceived and growing from the wrong idea that spending lavishly necessarily brings comfort and prosperity to all. Luxury is a questionable matter, its vulgarity makes it unfruitful and it tends to crush the middle-classes thus aggravating social contrasts. Simpler methods should be adopted by the organizing Bodies. Cheaper and quieter dwellings to accommodate the competitors, less festivities, but above all, more daily and friendly intercourse between the athletes and the organizers without interference of politicians or social climbers likely to cause discord and confusion amongst them. Such is the picture which I hope future Olympiads will give to the world. »