

OLYMPISM AND NATIONALISM

by FERNAND LOMAZZI

The growing tendency of the Olympic Games is to assume more and more the aspect of an international competition. Pierre de Coubertin, wanted, above all, that the Games should be the means of recognizing and selecting a glorious Champion, who, by his brilliant personality in individual contest, will prove to be the best performer in the Stadium.

It is certainly true, that the Olympic Rules stipulate that the victories, in this respect, are to be individual. *The Rules, are opposed to all classification « per nation » as there is no scoring between countries.* In reality this is nothing more than a formal clause. The Olympic champion is not only acclaimed by the National Anthem of his own country, but one issues three medals (silver-gilt, silver and bronze) which officially commemorate three victories instead of one. Lastly, there does not exist a single sporting review which, after the celebrations of the Games, refrain from publishing an account of classification of events between nations, and this is undoubtedly written with the intent of serving the national if not the nationalist ends.

We do not criticize, we merely state facts. We even go as far as to admit that the ever growing popularity of the Games is probably due to the actual intrusion of the nationalist factor in the concept of the Games. Nevertheless, we are asking ourselves if this new formula does not carry the seeds of serious troubles for the future of the Olympic Movement. As a matter of fact, contests in sports demand primarily equality of means for every competitor. However, as national pride is at stake, it is easy to see that the countries involved will gradually make an ever increasing financial effort in order, to obtain supremacy, which will flatter and enhance the national prestige. Consequently, it is obvious, that athletes belonging to countries which find themselves in an unfavourable financial situation, will start from the onset with a definite handicap. The various stages of preliminary pre-olympic training, the qualified instructors, often the material, all these assets are lacking or have been dispensed in a most scanty manner, consequently, the equilibrium in the contest is upset and this right from the beginning before the competition has even started. It derives from these facts that numerous

athletes coming from such countries where State's assistance is practically non-existent, would, in an open contest, have equalled if not actually succeeded in outclassing their victorious opponents who are belonging to countries where State' Solicitude and help concerning sports are always forthcoming. Evidently, it is the penalty to pay for a state of things that cannot be altered by anybody. One is bound to admit that, this handicap is unfair and weighs too heavily when one considers that it is really the result of the initial confusion of the actual basis on which sporting contests are laid.

For the first time since the renovation of the Games in 1896, one has come to realize this fact: In Great Britain and in Belgium there is a certain section of the public who is asking to abolish or at any rate to lessen the duration of the pre-olympic training camps. Unfortunately, one tackles the effects rather than grapple with the actual cause of the problem. Some believe that the practice of holding training camps is actually affecting the status of amateurism. This is an error of diagnosis: it is the « Nationalization of the Games » which is at fault as I have said it before. Nevertheless, it is a favourable sign that one perceives that there is something amiss.

Perhaps the problem will be investigated. Empirical solution will be sought but the actual solution will be hard to find. There are worthy and poor nations. As long as this state of things last nothing can be altered and one has to accept the inevitable.
