

# Condition of Physical Education at the present time

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It is not an easy task to describe the present condition of physical education. The full significance of the actual conception of physical education leads to generalizations from which no valuable appreciation can be drawn. Moreover the problem presents itself under various aspects according to the different nations it affects. Amongst the primitive States which have just become conscious of their own existence, the importance of physical education must give way to problems of a much more compelling and vital character, such as food supply, housing scheme, the instruction, politicals, social as well as the economic organization of the nation. *Primum vivere.*

On the other hand, physical education counts as an important cultural factor amongst the more evolved and civilized nations. Generally speaking, it acts as a compensational element for the benefit of the individual himself as well as for the community at large. We shall concern ourselves with physical education in *these countries* only.

Physical education is readily defined and recognized by two characteristic features which were lacking from the physical education of former times: its outstanding *development*, its *definite Regulations* and its *organization*.

Its development assumes a double aspect. There is first of all, the diversity which characterizes physical education at the present time. In Switzerland alone, more than 50 different forms of sports are practised nowadays, while the Greeks hardly knew more than 10 different forms of physical culture (Athletism counted as one activity only). The number of physical exercises is still increasing although the output of new discoveries has grown less owing to the restraining influence and the selection of organized sports introduced notably by the Olympic Games in their clearly defined Program. The development of physical education manifests itself chiefly in the growing participation. Each Child is, as it were, affected by the pedagogic physical training which finds its consecration in school teaching. There is hardly a single human being, nowadays, who is not submitted, in a form or other, to a systematic type of physical education. But physical education has widely outrun the scope of school tuition, in order to reach the mass and has done so in a proportion much larger than could be foreseen if compared with the actual growth of the population.

Physical culture and sport, in general, have

become a public practice. In our modern times, especially, it is evident that their practice is no more the exclusive privilege of certain classes, the prerogative of a social elite, the practice of a selected caste or of a military aristocracy, they have become an integral part of the existence of several millions of individuals who are drawn from all the various classes of the population. The evolution that has taken place for the last fifty years has, in a certain measure, led us to a democratization of physical education.

Running parallel to this evolution, we find that the *Regulations* and *Organization* have also developed, which constitutes in itself another distinctive feature of modern physical education when compared with the one prevailing in former times. These Regulations and Organization affect at least one aspect of physical exercises: *sport*. Football is played in Hongkong under the same Rules as at Rio de Janeiro. The track on which a runner of California establishes a record, is of the same dimension as the one used in Siberia. The discus thrown by Consolini weighs exactly the same weight as the one thrown by Sam Jness. On the other hand, you may remember that Ulysses had to content himself with the discus at hand, it was bigger, thicker and heavier than the one he had been in the habit of using while practising.

The uniform system of Rules and their hypothesis, the supernationalizing of organization have given sport the universal aspect which is its distinctive feature today.

What inspires initial and timid tests in connection with other activities in other fields is already realized in the field of sport: thus we find identical Rules, directives for application affecting uniformly countries and far beyond their frontiers. Sport thus becomes the expression of a conception of life entirely conformed to our modern epoch with its jet aircraft, wireless and television.

From another point of view as well, physical education corresponds to the trend of the present times. Its practice affords a marvellous corrective element to protect nature against the ill-effects deriving from our own spirit of invention. « One may consider it as a way for sane humanity to protect herself against the prejudicial effects of our modern civilization », said Diem, and further « Physical exercises are a kind of personal hygiene of the modern man, a sort of trial test of preventive treatment against the depravity of modern life in our tentacular cities. »<sup>1</sup>

After this general outline dealing with physical education and its importance- which I have made purposely as brief as possible on account of the Conference which you heard yesterday on « The influence of Physical Education in Society and Education, »

<sup>1</sup> Olympische Flame, das Buch vom Sport, Bd. I, Deutscher Archiv-Verlag, 1942.

by B. W. Mulrenan, Cardiff University, England. We shall now endeavour to determine the starting point of Physical Education in our present time.

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This starting point, it seems to me, unifies itself with the significance and aims pursued by Physical Education as defined in Mr. Mulrenan's account of yesterday.

If we refer to his statement, we find that the first aim of physical culture consists in promoting health, developing strength and to give the feeling that we lead a more natural type of existence. This aim affects foremost but not entirely the physical development. Its importance does not run the risk of being carried too far in our over-mechanized world of today.

Moreover, physical activities offer strong possibilities of influencing the character as well as promote spiritual qualities. I do not think it is necessary to enumerate them.

They fulfil certain social functions as well by the way they group people together in clubs, societies, sportsmen's trains, youth hostels on the shores of our lakes and rivers, in excursions, on the skiing tracks even in the « After-Skiing Clubs »!

Physical activities also offer the possibility of grasping the whole personality of a man owing to his gregarious habit which is an inherent form of expression.

Looking at physical education under this light, we obtain two distinct impressions. One aspect dominates the whole of physical education as carried out at schools with the aims described in a syllabus as we know it. It has adopted a system of work similar to the one used in post-school physical activities notably sport, but, on the other hand, it keeps a prudent reserve towards it. It is a wellknown fact that a large number of gymnastics teachers refuse to practise sport as expressed under its present form. It is not therefore very surprising that other educational centres as well as a large number of intellectuals follow in their tracks.

Two trends of development derive from these post-school physical activities in which we find gymnastics, games, excursions and foremost sport. On one hand we find a development in width which aims to give to those who practise it health, a certain compensation of recreative nature in order to counter-balance professional work as well as to develop in them the taste for nature; on the other hand, we find the passionate desire to break a record performance which, in certain respects, is diametrically opposed to the development in width.

With the aid of statistics which are showing the total strength of the gymnastics and sport associations, it is easy to realize this evolution in width. Even more evident is the growing number of adepts who practise physical activities that are not « organized. » I have in mind more especially, the large

group of people who go in for « camping », the numerous swimmers who practise their favourite sport without being affiliated to a club or society I also refer to the multitude of holiday trippers who practise climbing. Skiing can also be quoted as an example. The Swiss Skiing Federation has 41.000 members while the number of independent skiers is 10 times greater.

Practised on a large scale by numbers of people, it certainly serves the same aims than those we have already mentioned even if they are carried out with less conscious understanding than is the case in the systematic physical education in use in schools.

Besides the development in width, we must now consider the development in height, that is to say record breaking though its relationship to the aims and meaning of physical education is more problematical. It relates by its nature to the actual sport. Let us examine this matter.

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The development in height: the seeking of records is not opposed in itself to the aim set by sport, on the contrary it finds its expression in the actual practice of sport. It is precisely on this account that its appreciation offers some difficulties.

In its essence sport is a game; a game for which one strives to realize certain performances. It differs in this from the act of walking for health's sake or performing gymnastic exercises which we practise to keep fit in the privacy of our bedroom. The principle of the performance which constitutes the main feature of sport leads naturally to comparative competitions and they in their turn create competition. Viewed as a whole, sport assumes the structure of a pyramid the base of which is embodied by the great mass of sportsmen and the sides of the pyramid constitute their performances, never static but always improving; the apex of the pyramid represents the top performance: the record. This apex expresses therefore, the performances in width as well as the performances in height of all sportsmen. The peak performance or record represents as it were, the supreme test showing the aptitude, the vitality and the sporting qualities of a nation. At least it is what one pretends.

If this were really so, we would be fully justified in praising and acclaiming the athletes who are breaking records when competing against the best opponents belonging to other countries; all the publicity made in connection with their performance would be justified in proclaiming to the whole world that, in our country, physical education is estimated at its true value, that gymnastics at schools is Perfect, that we live under ideal social and sanitary conditions, to cut it short, that we are healthy and strong people. In the reverse order, the defeats experienced in international matches should be severely censured

and all measures taken to put the matter right. This conception of the apex of the pyramid is unfortunately erroneous and this false conclusion tends to grow worse and worse. The initial logic of the pyramid of performances is actually false and has been altered absurdly by diverse elements alien to genuine sport. The sport of competitive performance is becoming more and more a « Phenomenon in itself » which is retaining only a faint resemblance with sport as practised by you and I, clerk Dupont or the workman Durand! This can be easily proved were we to put ourselves in the shoes of a man belonging to the middle of the 19th Century, who could suddenly reappear in the midst of our modern society. His reactions would certainly be astounding, he would be thrilled by certain things while he would scarcely understand others. It is so with sport, for what is presented to us nowadays under the rubric of « sport » by the press and the radio as well as the programs of television or reel-news are football matches between two teams of professionals, a boxing match of professionals, the Tour de France of cyclism, an exciting match of hockey on ice and occasionally a skiing man performing half flying, half sliding evolutions at top speed amongst the stones and the trees. This is sport as it would present itself to the eyes of our candid friend. I would be much surprised if he thought that this type of sport could really be practised by himself, you or I! I hardly think so! This is as inconceivable as if one attempted to sing at the Metropolitan Opera House when one is not entirely satisfied with the quality of one's voice when practising in one's bath!

« You will doubtless say that the example of the visitor belonging to the 19th Century is rather far fetched. Such men do not exist. » Undoubtedly, but you must admit that the youth of today finds itself in an identical situation. For youth too, sport must appear more and more as a thing to be witnessed, one becomes a spectator of shows for which one is capable of showing great enthusiasm, passionate interest and which give the greatest thrills, but Sport under its present form affords less and less possibilities for us to practise it ourselves.

That is the reason why competitive sport as it is actually played when practised either as professional sport or when kept more or less within the limits of the prescriptions ruling Amateurism, competitive sport deviates more and more from its natural source which is Physical Education.

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This contact, this relationship naturally disappears wherever sport deviates from its origin, its character and from its purpose which is to remain a game and an accessory, in order to become a « money matter ». Wherever sport is commercialized, the best performances of the better equipped *pro-*

*essionals* cease to offer an element of reciprocity against which the great masses can compete fairly. These performances are only able to show a proof of the quality of organization, the later is not concerned with nor is it interested with the educational side of sport, it only follows a commercial end and is exploiting the physical aptitudes, the professional zeal and the working capacity of individuals who earn their living by the means of sport. This way earning one's living is in itself as honourable as another but definitively loses the right to call itself « sport ».

Without a doubt, the most typical phenomenon resides in the fact that this professional sport absorbs more and more the interest of the general public. The « spectacular match » is presented as « sport » and a great many spectators, almost the majority, are under the delusion that this spectacular show is the real thing.

It is obvious that professional performances do not express the real degree of the capabilities of others. Here is an example sufficiently convincing for us: Englishmen at all times have been the great champions of football. At an early date, this sport became commercialized and very soon afterwards English professional footballers became the best players in the world. Up to this day no foreign visiting team has ever been capable of beating them (The National English team at home). This same England sent a team last year, in order to compete in the Olympic Games. She was one of the few nations whose representatives were, according to Regulations, a team composed of genuine amateurs. This team was knocked out in the first round by Luxemburg! Professional victories are no criterions of the amateur performances of the « people ». On the contrary, it has been proved that the ever growing tendency of commercializing sport causes a lowering of the standard of the performances. This is due to the fact that the whole interest is focussed on a few « gladiators » and that the practice of sport is giving way more and more to « spectacular Shows ».

A similar phenomenon takes place in the case of sport performance in general, whether it is commercialized or at least not officially

When an important skiing competition took place, last winter, which was the equivalent to a European Championship owing to the importance of the participation, I heard certain spectators complain that there were far too large a number of competitors amongst whom only 10 or 20 selected skiers belonging to the first groups at the starting point offered any form of interest. A specialist in the skiing world has imagined this very same skiing competition taking place in ten years' time: he foresees the « last on the list » having completely disappeared; one shall find them sitting amongst the rank and file of the spectators while on the skiing tracks, we shall see ten

to twenty « stars » competing and encouraged by numerous trainers, ski manufacturers etc... and surrounded by an imposing array of propaganda men for the benefit of the press, the radio and the television. The skiing races shall no sooner be over than the champions will pack up and move on to the next station which is likely to offer a similar contest, be it Saint-Moritz, Chamonix, Sestrières or Sun Valley.

We have also other sports that like skiing are not yet very much commercialized but even they are well on the way of the direction already outlined.

Even the Olympic Games have developed on a line that they might lose more and more contact with the object aimed at by physical education. According to Rules, these Games are open to Amateurs only. One does not participate in these Games with the intention of winning any tangible reward, but for honour's sake. This honour is dearly paid, Olympic Victories have, become so much a matter of prestige, let us recall the disagreement, very far from showing the Olympic spirit and exploited by the Press, between the United-States and the Soviet Union, concerning the first place in the classifying per nation, *which is not even official*. Practically all means are good to justify the end even if by so doing, one breaks the fundamental Rule of Amateurism. These attacks on Amateurism assume various disguises from the « amateur » who is selected, trained, kept, paid, promoted and decorated by the State, to the « University man » who is benefitting from a bursary, the « Nationally appointed coach », and the « travelling trainer » who receives a substantial gift of honour twice of three times a week, there are numerous versions of pseudo-Amateurs.—It is hardly possible to find a young man who goes in for sport outside his profession and his formation and who can still exceptionally, in certain individual sports, aspire to the Olympic Palm.

Thus manifestations such as the Olympic Games, the World Championship, etc., run the risk to lose touch with sport inasmuch as the later is looked upon as a factor bringing health to the people, a source of energy and « joie de vivre ». They are brilliant entertainments, unforgettable to those who have seen them. They give a striking proof of human energy, will-power and physical perfection. But taken on the whole, the results of these manifestations only tend to show the effort realized by a nation, a political system and a sport's organization they are only aiming at seeing their own flag hoisted to the mast of victory. The Games illustrate less and less the qualities of sportsmanship and fairplay of the people, nor do they give the true meaning of victory. That is why they are no more a criterion of appreciation of the development of Physical Education in any given country.

In this competition, for instance Finland, cannot retain her place. Her famous athletes

did not win a single gold Medal at the Olympic Games of Helsinki in 1952. Does this mean that the Finnish nation is less sporting, has less endurance and is not as fit as in former days? It has been victim of the war but there remain only a few war wounds which are not yet healed. The Authorities controlling sport in Finland have so far simply failed to take the necessary steps in order to relieve their best athletes of all material worries also to secure their training as potential champions. Is this a calamity for Finland? From the prestige point of view perhaps! The Finnish nation has certainly shown more than any other nation, its keenness to win Medals in the traditional performances of its disciplines. Such medals have however a doubtful value as far as their influence on the health of the nation. It is in fact unimportant. What matters then? It is of vital importance that the children should be allowed to grow in a healthy and happy atmosphere, that playing grounds as well as open-air parks should be provided at the seaside as well as in cities where the children can be real children. Another important point is to give children a rational basic system of gymnastic tuition, put under the control of fully conversant teachers who are imbued with the importance of imparting a proper moulding of character to the child. Another equally important point is that apprentices, secondary school children and young country lads, in fact the whole youth of the country should practise physical culture and go in for any kind of sport activity with enthusiasm during the critical years of adolescence. Every opportunity should be given them in order that they may consecrate to sport the short time of freedom put at their disposal. Another important point is to see that in every nation, on the sports grounds, on excursions, in youth hostels, on the lake side or on the snowy slopes of our mountains, youth should be happy, full of zeal and show a spirit of enterprise; it is also vital that it should compete in games and competitions which are best adapted to it. Last of all, it is important, that man and woman should, when advancing in years, retain their impulse for « effort ». To father and mother falls the duty to take the children out in the country and teach them to appreciate nature and its beauty. All the important points enumerated in this talk lead to the conclusion that there are aims much more vital than winning medals or gaining trophies in glorious encounters; these victories are so highly placed nowadays that it is impossible to reach them without being assisted by « artificial ladders ».

In conclusion, what really matters is for us to be sportsmen, to act as true sportsmen.

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Do you think the following opinion paradoxical? Is it really possible to cure sport by sport and to bring a remedy to its present

defects by instilling, developing and encouraging the real thing? Would it be preferable for us to join the ranks formed by those who are in the habit of deprecating sport?

I do not think so. I share the opinion expressed by Carl Diem when he said that bad sport can only be vanquished by putting in its place a better form of sport. I believe that this fight to regenerate sport works on a line similar to the one adopted in the case of pernicious literature. Merely censuring it proves insufficient.

We must counteract the effect created by pernicious literature by opposing it with something better and endeavour to promote the desire for better literature.

This is essential: *We must offer something better and create the desire for it.*

This duty is incumbent to us all. It rests not with parents and educationalists only to assume this task but it falls on all those responsible for directing sport's activities in the various societies, clubs and institutions. In my opinion, this matter also concerns the Authorities but is chiefly incumbent to the intellectual « milieu ». For a long time, the strength of the world of sport was raised chiefly from the ranks of the intellectuals who were the life and soul of the sport's movement, they also contributed to a large extent to secure the place of eminence sport occupies nowadays. Disgusted with the loud display of these demonstrations as well as the diffusing of aims alien to sport and the venal aspect it is now taking, the intellectuals have been gradually losing their interest in sport. For many, sport in these days, claims too much time and effort. It seems to them, that it is out of keeping with what sport can give them in the way of a happy formation resulting from an activity full of responsibility.

This accounts to a large extent for the diminution of the sport's contact with the intellectuals nowadays as opposed to what took place in pioneers' days. Managers have come forward in their place, whose aims differ radically from the pioneers' ideals. One can hardly expect the managers to bring out « the best » nor to awake the conception of mind likely to wish for the best.

However this problem is urgent. The keen and experienced observer, who has been watching sport activity over a lapse of time, does not fail to notice with alarm the speed with which « this processus of scission », as I wish to call it, is evolving. A new direction is evolving from the evergrowing organism of sport. What should be the realization of the supreme achievement of independent and carefree sport and the logical results obtained from its width, actually is expressed in the performance and the record breaking, these are in the way of losing touch with their basic origin and are becoming a separate phenomenon. This form of sport has no connection with initial Physical Education. It has changed its character and it belongs to the range of « spectacular shows ».

Judging from the small number of sportsmen it affects, the harm does not seem very serious and the verdict on these « spectacular Manifestations » has not yet been pronounced. What is more serious however, is that we see the offshoot draining the sap of the trunk as represented by physical education in an alarming manner. The salient feature of this new type of sport as found in « spectacular sport » appeals more and more to the crowds. It represents the sport of people who do not take any active part in it beyond the fact that they pay their entrance fees.

The main danger lies in the fact that it affects the Physical and chiefly the general health of the people. When the number of the spectators shall outrun the number of the performers, sport shall have missed its fundamental aim which consists in promoting health and therefore it will lose its *raison d'être*.

The educative possibilities that emanate from sport and the spirit of fairplay also the need to respect Rules of the Games tend also to disappear. If instead of remaining a game, practised seriously, sport is practised to excess, and looked upon as an end in itself, the qualities to be derived from sport become atrophied. To the Roman gladiator the principle of « fairplay » or the respecting of Rules, did not exist, because the contest meant life or death to him. His law was the jungle law of « You or I », very primitive, brutal and amoral law ruling humanity. Therefore wherever sport is no further practised as a game or whenever it is used as a means of existence, it loses its educational value and we fall back to the level of the Roman gladiator.

I think, by these few remarks that I have described the peculiar disease sport is suffering from. While obeying its inherent principle, the performance threatens to destroy or to say the least to alienate sport from physical education and its original aims as outlined by me at the beginning of this lecture.

It would be sheer defeatism if we were to accept this evolution without protest and if we were turning away from sport because we no longer approve of its orientation. On the contrary, I think it preferable to realize that our duty is to fight down this tendency with the energy of despair if you like to put it this way, to go on pursuing this fight in the big as well as in the trivial circumstances of our practical work as in our recreative activities.

It does not matter much to those directly connected with physical education if the general trend of things cannot be altered. Nobody could have this illusion! What is really important is to form a solid and indestructible basis for the benefit of all those who are likely to be affected by its influence. One must be able to grasp two facts. People must learn to distinguish spurious sport, degenerating from its source, and real sport

which etymology can be traced to an old French word « se desporter » (meaning to relax or recover). All those adepts must steep themselves body and soul in this sport. Their teacher's influence must be stamped on them in such an indestructible way that they shall be able to resist firmly the lure of cheap propaganda as well as the tempting offers made by spurious sport. If this object is realized, we do not need to worry over the fact that our youth is filling up the seats of the stadia. Our young people will go there in the same way that they attend any other type of entertainments, the cinema, for instance, because it fits in with the general trend of the life of today. There will be no fear of them joining the ranks formed by the passive crowd of onlookers, the camp of those who do not find self-expression in actual sport but who are seeking a compensation in others' experience.

It is now becoming clear to educationalists that the utmost importance must be put on the ultimate value of physical education as it affects both mind and body. This can only happen if the teacher himself is convinced of the physical as well as the moral value which can be derived from sport, he will then be imbued with this faith and carried by the force of his enthusiasm he shall then be capable of counteracting effectively the tacit acceptance of the noisy performances of spectacular sport.

A definite duty befalls the Authorities. They determine and influence more or less the direction of sport and the orientation it must take. Generally speaking, the Authorities, more especially their political leaders, give their attention more readily to the demonstrations of spectacular sport rather than to the display of physical exercises which usually take place away from the centres of publicity. Echoes of the famous « *Panem et circenses* » can be heard in the smallest villages. It does not matter much if the spectacular sport manifestations are interested in the Authorities collaboration only as far as a decorative aim is pursued, but the question becomes more intricate when exhibition sport pretends to claim a part of the funds allotted to physical education. Once for all, let us admit frankly that *subsidies allocated to finance spectacular sport performances are a sheer waste of money*, even if they are of importance to their respective locality. A municipality which offers prizes to picked professional cyclists or is awarding an honorary gift to a winning championship football team is to blame. The duty of awarding prizes is incumbent to the « Ministry of Propaganda » not to the « Ministry of Sport » as it concerns only the former. We shall never insist enough on the fact that the part played by the Authorities is not limited to making brilliant spectacular shows possible but in creating favourable conditions for the practice of physical activities in all their various aspects.

The Authorities' duty is not limited to

dealing with Games and Sport only their responsibility also embraces the field of physical education and its influence on public health in its various forms, be it school gymnastics, equipment of gymnasium and stadia, as well as creating public playing grounds for children, public hygiene or sport medical services. The Authorities are especially called upon to give assistance to gymnastic or sports organizations which cannot for some reason or another be self-supporting.

To all those who are not directly connected with sport such as an educationalist, a coach or directing sports activities, but are only superficially related to sport, it is important to be able to distinguish clearly real sport from spurious sport. They must also acknowledge, the fact that a physical trainer's work, or a coach or a swimming instructor or a football referee of the lowest rank is in a sense as vital as a world championship or the individual victory of a professional. They must realize one thing above all that the most essential thing is to take part in sport and not to be a mere spectator.

This truth must be told more and more. If the press and the radio were to become the mouthpiece and broadcast freely this conception of sport, they would only repay part of the debt imputable to them as regards the present state of affairs.

If I were to conclude my talk with giving the synthesis of my conception I should say this: In the field of Physical Education, sport has attained an eminent situation. Various of its concepts can be accepted in complete confidence. Sport in itself has not deteriorated nor has it renounced the original and mutual aim as expressed by Physical Education. Sport has merely given birth to a bye-product which is often mistaken for the genuine thing and which is threatening to take its place if we do not watch carefully.

It is up to us, therefore, to maintain sport in its original purpose to cultivate and develop its expansion and to put it to the service of physical education's lofty ideals. This task rests chiefly with all those who have the privilege to study at a University.

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