
Should Football be retained in the Programme of the Olympic Games?

The problem of the inclusion of football in the Olympic Games is the subject from time to time of discussions, if not of open controversies. It is a question that is discussed even within the I. O. C. where opinions are at variance on this subject. On the one side, we find the supporters of the reducing of the programme of the Olympic Games who would like to see team events excluded from this programme. Football would therefore be among those sports which would be excluded. But what grounds have we for claiming that the Games should be limited to individual sports? On the contrary, it seems to us that the position occupied by team sports in the world justifies their inclusion in the vast universal Exhibition of Sport which are the Olympic Games. (At the Session of the I. O. C. held in Mexico in April 1953 it was decided that on principle

team sports would not be excluded from the Games. A final decision will be made at the Athens Session in May 1954. Ed.).

Despite all the esteem with which we view the altruism of the leaders of Olympism we do not believe that they are quite impartial to financial questions. Now there is no doubt that in this respect the Olympic Tournament makes a contribution that is far from being negligible. We also expect that football will be retained on the programme of the Melbourne Games in 1956, even though Australia is a country which is not very experienced in matters pertaining to football.

But this is not the crux of the problem. In reviewing the history of football at the Games, we have laid sufficient stress upon the anomaly of qualifications of amateurism and upon the confusion that is caused by the

contest for a title which, whether one likes it or not, is imbued with a false significance. For these very reasons the only problem to be solved so far as Olympic football is concerned is the question of amateurism. As we wait with impatience and curiosity to see what solution will be found, we cannot help being somewhat sceptical.

Two years ago a great stir was caused by the opinions voiced by Field Marshall Lord Montgomery, the essence of which was that sport had evolved so much throughout the world that there were no longer any grounds for the exclusion of professionals from the Olympic Games. The Field Marshall's arbitrary offensive was not countenanced in Olympic circles, and it is quite obvious that such a proposition is unlikely to be taken into consideration. Taking football only into account, we do not think that the admission of professional teams to the Olympic Tournament is either desirable or advisable. In the first place, what would become of the World Football Championship (we shall discuss this shortly) which is organized by the International Football Federation every four years, between the Olympiads? Open to

professionals, this tournament would become nothing less than another World Championship. The event organized by the I. A. F. F. would lose all its importance and significance. In addition, the organization of a world contest involves preparation and arrangements that would prove difficult to repeat every other year. Moreover the selection of the nation, chosen through the I.A.F.F. to organize the World Championship, is made by its Congress. The choice is subject to a number of conditions relevant to football. The Olympic Games are controlled by other concepts. The directive powers of Olympism choose a town, not a country. These principles would certainly come into conflict. It is very likely that the inclusion of professional teams in the Olympic Games would require the making of new regulations, by which the financial department would make allowances for the sharing of receipts, an arrangement which is contrary to all the traditions of Olympism. It would be hardly logical to assume that the football federations would abandon all interests of this nature for the sake of Olympism.

Therefore let us not insist upon such a

remote and revolutionary event. The fact remains that the true value of the Olympic Tournament is declining, because of the impossibility with which we are faced in trying to limit the interpretations of the definition of amateurism that are being made everywhere. Yet many football federations are in favour of the maintenance of the Tournament and would like to see it reserved for national amateur teams. The English and Scottish federations have been indignant at the liberties that have been taken in this matter; the Italian federation would like to see a broadening of the formula of amateur status. The International Olympic Committee has given each national federation the liberty to define the character of its own amateurs under the control, more theoretical than real, of the National Olympic Committees.

Hence it is the responsibility of the I.A.F.F. to establish a definition of amateurism suitable for all its official federations. up to the time of the Congress at Helsinki the federation did not feel that there was any object in doing so. since in its opinion, there were neither professionals nor amateurs, but only footballers. It adhered to the strict meaning of sport and left the responsibility to the national federations of establishing all the interpretations that they felt to be useful or expedient. But the Congress of Helsinki, doubtless influenced by the blatant deviations from the doctrine of amateurism that characterized the Olympic Tournament, passed a resolution that called upon the executive committee to present a definition of amateur status, that would be respected throughout the world. A commission was formed at once with this aim in view.

We trust that through perseverance this commission will achieve a brilliant success in the task with which they have been charged. The Congress of 1954 will enlighten us on this matter. But we do not see how the commission can succeed in satisfying everybody. It seems that in the countries where professionalism is officially recognized, such as Great Britain, France, Italy, Spain, and the countries of South America, the question would be easily solved. One might say that every player who is attached to his club by

a contract containing a financial clause is by virtue of this fact a professional. But would Italy agree to so simple a definition, which would prevent her from including professionals under the pretext that they are also students? And what definition could be conceived which would allow for such federations as Switzerland, Portugal, Belgium, and even Sweden, whose players receive remuneration in some form or another, without being regarded as professionals under contract? Furthermore, how could these players be brought together in a competition reserved for amateurs?

But the hardest problem to solve is that of the countries who defend with vehemence their adoption of professionalism. Their players are State footballers, or, being attached to industrial or commercial organizations, receive employment as such, but are absolutely free in actual practice to carry out their training and preparation. This is the method by which the U. S. S. R. and Hungary, to mention the most typical countries, maintain the strict amateur status of their footballers. There is no doubt that the commission nominated by the I.A.F.F. to establish the definition of amateur status will have the greatest difficulty in satisfying such varying points of view. Let us not expect too much of the future, but let us forecast that the situation will be the same at the Melbourne Games as it was at the Games in London and Helsinki. Hence it seems that there is no fair solution to the problem of Olympic amateurism, and for this reason we feel that a tournament based upon differing doctrines has no longer any justification for its existence. The nations who refrained from participating in the Helsinki Tournament acted with both logic and loyalty in refusing to lend their support to the celebration of a travesty.

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