

# Reply to Mr. Arnold Kaech

*Director of the Swiss Federal School for gymnastics and sport.*

Sir,

I have read with considerable interest, I may even say with real pleasure your Conference on the "Condition of Physical Education at the present time", published in the 42nd issue of the Bulletin of the I. O. C. In any case it is likely that I should have let you know that I recognize in it the majority of the notions which I am defending daily, expressed almost in identical terms! In the course of a long career devoted to the organization and supervision of sport, I have reached the same conclusions as yours and it is always gratifying to feel oneself of one mind with an eminent personality.

In any case I would have felt tempted to write you in order to discuss a point on which I do not quite hold the same views as yours.

If I understand you rightly, you seem to put on almost the same level and label with the same terms professional and commercialized sport and important exhibition performances where only "stars" can perform. It is on this point that I do not quite follow your line of thought.

In agreement with you, I do not consider it right to make an aim of the "system of exhibition shows where stars performers top the bill"; like you, I fully realize the danger it creates but on the other hand I do not consider it as harmful as commercialized sport. I agree with you that the *big spectacular manifestations* tend to become only accessible to super star performers. The comment you heard in connection with the skiing competition has become really true in the sphere of other sports which have remained strictly amateur (Equestrian competitions which have become "Jumping" contests for instance). But I do not consider this to represent the same danger as the commercialized sport performance.

I approve of the "star" and striving to find such performers, I even think the stars necessary but on one condition only (on this point we agree again) that the use of the star should not be an end but *a means* to justify the end.

I also admit that certain performances offering distinctive and rare features, can *only* be realized by star performers, this cannot present any danger since there still remain the majority of other competitions opened to all. That it should be so in the case of the Olympic Games and the world Championships will not detract anything from the interest displayed in connection with other sport demonstrations held throughout the year in the world.

But where the real danger lies is in professional Footballers only, attracting large

crowds of people Sunday after Sunday in every part of the country. The professionals kill sport in the same way as spurious money kills good money, while outstanding brilliant star performers incite people towards sport.

The responsible sport leaders should avoid to concentrate all their efforts on seeking or creating artificially these stars, nor should it be possible that in order to obtain the brilliant results performed by this "galaxy" of stars, one sacrifices to this type of performances all the sportsmen of lower standard. Stars ought to be used as a factor of propaganda, set out as magnets attracting and encouraging the irresolute mass; but afterwards, or running parallel with the former, one should concentrate ones effort on the training and development of the latter and on developing sport in depth. It is the athlete-official who is blameworthy not the dazzling phenomenon athlete if I may say so.

It is most likely that our opinions do not differ very much even on this point. The divergence between us lies in the fact that you are an educationalist while I am not!

You think that your teachers' influence will be sufficiently powerful to incite the young to practice sport for the love of sport, with the desire for improving ones' physique, for the sake of hygiene, just in the same way as one contracts the habit of washing ones teeth or not to smoke! I am personally less optimistic. I have little faith in the ideals of modern youth, I do not believe that it is disinterested, enthusiastic or disciplined. I do not share the opinion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau that man is born good. On the contrary, I am of the opinion that young people of today are breaking free more and more from the influence of pedagogues and that they act only in a passionate and selfish way. They will go in for sport only with the idea to shine like the star performer who thrilled them and not with the intention of finding a means of improving. The Olympic Victory of a Raiff has lured to the cause of Belgian athleticism more young adepts than thousand advices given by veterans!

The spectacular performance is not, according to me, blameworthy in itself nor does it constitute an actual danger, but this is so only as long as it is a means and not an end, as I told you before.

It is up to us who are supervising sport to grasp the difference and to endeavour... to give sport the right direction!

*André-G. Poplimont,*

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