

# The Spirit of sport and its winning form

by Dr. Paul MARTIN, of Lausanne

People have often asked me what thoughts pass through the minds of champions before a big competition. Do they foresee themselves as the winners or the losers of the contest which is about to take place? Do they possess that feeling of confidence to be found in men who are sure of themselves; or are they still uncertain of their capabilities?

If people asked me this question it was because they were aware that I had taken part myself in five Olympic Games, that I had won the European championships on one occasion, and had been the victor later of the American championships, a performance which occurs seldom.

It is therefore simple for me to answer such a question.

It is like the solution of an equation. If you know the formula and if you understand how to apply it, you are led inevitably to the solution of the problem set before you.

I admit that it took me quite a long time to acquire the knowledge of the mathematics of timing and its deep significance, and my mathematical training tables confirmed gradually during the years of my youth, when I was making progress in my attainments, that the performance of which I was capable was simply the precise result of a calculation based upon the progressive development of my possibilities.

As we were going into the changing rooms in

the Colombes stadium, where I had been invited to participate in a meeting of champions, one of my most important competitors asked me what time I expected to set up in the 800 metres that day. I replied: 1'53"2. I added that anybody who was capable of setting up a better time would be able to beat me that day over that distance. 1'53"2 was at that period the exact figure that my training tables showed me. I took the lead at the start and without a great struggle finished the 800 metres in the time I had forecast. Two metres behind me, the competitor who had questioned me, and who was none other than Sera Martin, the champion of France, set up a new French record with a time of 1'53"4.

Perhaps you may say that I could have set up a better time than the one which my training tables led me to expect? Until then I had relied upon the certainty of one's time, known to every trained athlete as the mathematical outcome of his form. There is also, I know, a value hard to calculate which could have urged me beyond my expected capacity. This is the spirit of competition stemming from contact with an opponent, from his quality, his class, and his provoking style, from the rhythm of the race, and from the atmosphere of the moment. These are so many unknown quantities, as a result of which certain athletes are capable of sur-

passing themselves one day to an extent beyond the point which they assumed to be their limit.

In China, philosophers have already defined the power of this spirit of extra attainment which they have christened « KI ».

« KI » denotes the passion of the contest and the feeling of triumph engendered by a will-power hitherto unknown. It is the impossible made possible. It is the spirit which suddenly takes control of matter and urges the body forward as if by a miracle.

But this spirit of triumph and this fighting spirit can only accomplish these prodigies of will-power in men hardened by the most gruelling training, who are capable of judging in themselves through the mechanism of their own physique the exact tempo of a race or the power of a single gesture. The Chinese express this knowledge of oneself by the word of knowledge « KOTSU ». Knowledge is the state of having united the elements of success. One must have understood the vital principles whose foundation is a spring-board which should allow the outburst of

« KI », or in athletic terms the outburst of performance.

Thus the superior form of the great athletes is controlled by an entirely psychic element founded on a purely biological adaptation to effort.

In my capacities as both doctor and athlete I have attempted to define the elements of « KOTSU » in as brief a manner as possible. They consist of a very simple formula which is the expression of perfect training.

Respiration, Suppleness, and Style, when exercised progressively and methodically through training, produce tirelessness based on a muscular and organic resistance and leading to a vital quality : Speed.

Speed, that neuro-muscular element, can be innate, but attains its full value when it is the outcome of qualities previously attained through training. It is from that moment that speed becomes the prerogative of training. There is little speed which bursts forth as a direct result of a mental command or as an immediate expression of the mind and of will-power. On the contrary this speed

loses its keenness if it is hampered by the noxious phenomena of fatigue and absence of a maximum development in the training of Respiration, Suppleness, and Style.

The training formula would not be complete if we omitted to take two other elements of intellectual origin into consideration, which constitute the value of great athletes. These are Tactics and Technique in competition. Technique controls the effort intelligently according to the mathematics of speed. Tactical sense makes use of a momentary advantage, whether it be caused by the tiring of an opponent, by his making a manoeuvre, or by an unforeseen event. Be that as it may, these two elements are indispensable in order that the spirit, « KI », may come into being and lead the athlete to victory.

In this way we have defined by means of a formula the physical qualities and the spirit which first of all must result in Speed and which, by using that speed, carry the athlete to the climax of his form and allow him to surpass himself, in order to attain the record.

The form and the fine quality of the champions and their performances can be defined by a combination of inter-dependant values, which intermingle to raise the limits of the human body, of the flesh and the spirit, to their climax.

Performance is thus the result of a simple equation :

*Respiration, Suppleness, Style + Speed + Technique, Tactics, Spirit of Triumph = Winning Form.*

With this formula you can understand more clearly that great athletes are men who are sure of themselves and capable of achieving victory.

Go to the stadium and see for yourself ; the contests will seem all the finer to you and the victories all the more human. de

D<sup>r</sup> Paul MARTIN.