

## Olympic Champion only Once?

Under this heading, "L'ÉQUIPE" de Paris, in one of its November editions has just published an article which sets forth a new idea designed to be of benefit to Olympism and the olympic ideal which the article holds to be in danger. It occurs to us that it would be a matter of interest to examine the problem in its general aspect, as it is a matter of the greatest importance. Here is what our distinguished colleague writes on the subject :

"The time has come when we must ask ourselves where Olympism is heading for. Is the olympic ideal not handicap by *an excess of nationalism* ? In face of the secret and intensive training practised in the Eastern countries, more especially in the U.S.S.R., the United States retaliated by fostering a movement of national public opinion. As is usually the case, this public opinion is likely to react only if it encounters a serious general defeat at the end of this year...

"Moreover, this defeat is coming on. It will not be felt in athletic, not as yet, but in great many other sports. The Russian weightlifters triumphed over the Americans and the best boxers of the U.S.A. have put up a rather poor performance in Europe recently... This is only one aspect of the problem, but it is a serious one. Are the Olympic Games going to be beyond the means of the smaller or medium sized nations?

This fear is entertained in certain olympic circles and a remedy for this situation is being sought. One suggestion is gaining in popularity... As the Olympic Games never are World Championships, it is assumed that distinct advantages could be obtained by deciding that an olympic champion can be so ONLY ONCE. The winner of an olympic gold medal would lose his qualification for future Games. The advantages to be gained by such a decision are obvious. Larger nations accumulating victories would be encouraged to train younger athletes and would no longer be tempted to bestow an excessive care on the star champions. The case has been quoted in this respect of Zatopek, the perfect amateur athlete, but nevertheless a type of "professional" in Olympism. Zatopek, marathon champion at Helsinki, will be the favourite marathon runner in Melbourne... And get, it is likely that he has competed in only two marathon races in his life... The above proposal will undoubtedly raise a storm of protest at the beginning. But, after careful examination of the consequences of such restriction, one asks oneself if this measure would not be instrumental in saving Olympism, since this Movement is threatened by its own expansion, inasmuch that within a certain limit, it would discourage the weaker elements and their own disaffection. This is an open question for debate."

## **The National Zeitung of Basel's Opinion**

This newspaper which is usually most objective in its appreciation of sport in general and olympic events in particular has called to attention this suggestion in its publication of November 28th 1955. The article's conclusion is short and to the point when it says :

"The proposal will not change matters much !..."

### **Is it advisable to decide that an Olympic Champion can be so only once ?**

Our distinguished colleague Mr. Gaston Meyer of "L'ÉQUIPE DE PARIS" reverts to this matter in a publication of January last when he writes the following :

"It was in Rome that we came across the suggestion which we published in these columns and which sets forth a new idea to be summed up as follows "Let us refuse access "to the Games to all former olympic champions "in either individual or team events". At first, we accepted this new conception with great caution and published it more by way of general informative interest.

"On first inspection, the proposed remedy did not appeal to us. Primarily because it was hard to see in which way it could check the tendency for expansion which is prevailing today ; secondly, because it shocked our elemental common sense which dictates that an olympic title should be won by the best man irrespective of all other considerations. We have, however, listened attentively to the arguments put before us, and we must admit that, by and by, certain plausible reasons have come out to light.

"Firstly, let us acknowledge the fact that the Olympic Games have at no time seek to assume the character of a world Championship. Their recurrence every four years, excludes all ambition in this respect, and it is on account of this periodicity that an olympic title is often more glorious than a world championship title.

"In fact, certain influential olympic circles would be most gratified if an olympic title were to be considered in the same way as, for example, the Nobel Prize, the recipient of which can be so only once, irrespective of the quality of subsequent work."

### **Debatable Interpretation**

"Has this rather revolutionary suggestion been misinterpreted ? It has met with

sharp criticisms from a certain portion of the political press. The latter has recognized it to be a more or less disguised instrument to prevent the U.S.S.R. and the Eastern Democracies from asserting their supremacy ! In this respect, it would be interesting to know the opinions of the Olympic Committees of these countries. They might be surprising."

There, Mr. Gaston Meyer proceeds to establish a balance of the number of gold medals won by the various nations participating in the Olympic Games. Allow us to refrain from quoting this elaborate calculation, save one consideration in which he proves that the proposal to refuse access to the Games to those who have won a gold medal, once in their lives, would disadvantage especially the United States. Let us put aside in this examination all nationalistic considerations and resume :

### **Advantages and Disadvantages put forward by Mr. G. Meyer**

"The disadvantages of the proposed limitation are obvious. The most serious one would be to deprive a small nation of a possible victory thanks to an exceptional champion (Ex: Barthel for Luxembourg in 1952). The advantages to be gained deserve to be taken into account: We sum them up in three sentences :

1. A larger number of athletes could hope to win the supreme award : the Olympic gold medal.
2. All the nations, especially those accumulating victories would exert themselves to find new likely winners instead of retaining and bestowing an excessive care on star champions already crowned.
3. In this way the disappearance would come of the class of man "who dares not disclose the fact that he is an olympic champion being protected, coddled, and trained as a prize horse."

"Will all this really prove sufficient to save the olympic ideal ? Evidently no, One fact remains, that all attempts made to save Olympism cannot leave us indifferent. At any rate, one can discuss the question impartially and objectively and find, perhaps, more satisfactory solutions before the time comes when the Games, like those of Olympia in ancient times, will be outrun by their success and disappear for centuries."