

Should the Olympic Games

become open Competitions for Amateurs and Professionals?

An important statement concerning this subject has been made, last March, to Brodie Snyder, reporter to the "Montreal Gazette", by Earl Alexander of Tunis, former Governor General of Canada and ex-British Minister of National Defence, in the course of an interview he gave to this newspaper:

"The Olympic Games should be and eventually will have to become, an open competition for the best athletes of all nations whether they are professionals or amateurs. Earl Alexander of Tunis, former Governor General of Canada, former British Defence Minister, and a sports fan, declared during an interview here-yesterday.

"After all, the world has changed considerably since the Olympic Games were revived in the 1890s (1894, please, Ed.) by Baron Pierre de Coubertin of France. For one thing, there were very few professional athletes of any description at that time," he said.

Situation has changed

"Amateurs then were people who played for love of the sport, but who played because they had the time for it, and the money for it. The early amateur athletes didn't have to work for a living. They were independently wealthy, and sport was the medium into which they channelled their activities."

The Allied wartime commander in North Africa and Italy said the situation has changed today.

"People have to work so hard to make a living" he declared. "that they are hard put to find the time and the energy for rigorous training. Expenses which they receive while they are participating in various events help them out."

He said the Olympic Games no longer are competed on the same standards by the countries involved.

"Canada's last Olympic hockey team, the Kitchener-Waterloo club, was called an amateur one, but I think there is serious doubt that this, indeed, is the case. Then, take the Russians. They aren't amateurs, and they aren't professionals. They are actually civil servants".

(Read the denial of Mr. Andrianov in the present edition. Ed.)

Not Fair Trial now

Lord Alexander doubted that the Olympics could be called a fair meeting ground for the athletes of the world, when those from some countries were pure amateurs, those

from other nations semi-professionals and those from still other lands subsidized performers.

"The Olympic Games were set up, I'm sure, as a means of testing the best athletes in the world. Now, the best athletes are not competing, because, in most sports, the best athletes are the professionals. The officials who run the Olympics are dedicated men, but they are also idealistic men.

"I think that the Olympics should become an open competition for the best professional and amateur athletes in the world. Let everybody compete. Then, there can be no arguments afterwards."

What to think of such a Suggestion ?

On the first instance, it would appear obvious that after reading this statement, Lord Alexander is not very familiar with the Olympic Movement nor does he have an understanding of the Philosophy of Amateurism in sport. His statements to the press come after the opinions expressed by Field-Marshal Montgomery, a few years ago, when the latter was in Switzerland for Winter sports. Both these eminent soldiers express similar opinions, and both seem to ignore the fact that to allow professionals to compete in the Olympic Games would undoubtedly bring about the irrevocable end of the Games. The professional athlete does not practise sport for his own pleasure, sport is his means of livelihood. If it concerns a star or a champion (God only knows how few stars there are!), his future is assured as long as he realizes it; but for the others... how many failures are wandering about the world chasing after the hypothetical myth!

Let us be objective and avoid to mistake those who love sport for its own sake and for what it stands for : recreation and nothing else, with those, respectable as they may be, who convert erroneously sport into spectacular performances. Sport in itself has nothing to gain by these shows. Furthermore, contrarily to the opinion expressed by Earl Alexander, do you really think that pros are superior to amateurs? We do not think so, at any rate not as far as athletic sports are concerned, because these offer the best example of the competitive spirit, and are the chief reasons of being of the Olympic Games.

History repeats itself

Let us recall certain facts about the history of sport in Ancient Greece and describe briefly its evolution and expansion. The first Olympiad dates back to 776 B.C.

For nearly a dozen centuries, the Olympiads were celebrated without a break, unaffected by the most serious events. Of course, certain disputes did occur, such as the case in the VIIIth Olympiad (748 B.C.) when the Pisates resumed their leadership over the Hellenes. About 354 B.C. the Sacred Truce was actually broken. The qualification of the competitor taking part in the Olympic Games was based upon the following order: ethnical, social, moral and technical. He had to be a pure blood Hellene, innocent of any crime, free of blasphemy, innocent of impious deed or sacrilege and who once "accepted" as a candidate, was subjected to a training course lasting ten months, when he had afterwards, to go through a probation lasting 30 days at Elis, during the time preceding the Games. This represents a succession of guarantees unknown to modern society.

Above all, the Greeks entertained a deep scorn for anyone who commercialized Art, and would never tolerate any material gain or advantages of a lucrative order to be brought into the Games. Even artists executing statues of the champions were not entitled to receive any payment. At the most, certain of them drew free meals at the towns's expense and were free of taxations.

Such noble institution as the Olympic Games could not last indefinitely: first came the conquest of Greece by the Macedonians, then by the Romans, then the disappearance of the competitive spirit which had prevailed between the cities followed by the infiltration of the *spirit of mercantilism*, all this contributed to deal the death blow to the true sporting spirit. This has been described by Philostrate in the following terms: Now, everything has changed, instead of fighting men, we have athletes who have never been soldiers, in place of energetic men we have lazy and indolent people, sleek, sinewed men have been replaced by the spineless. Greed prevails everywhere, athletes have lost all incentive and especially since bribery and flattery prevail throughout the land. Medicine which up to now been an art serving a useful purpose, has become misused; it compels athletes to inactivity and order them to rest during the time preceding training, it teaches them laziness and turn them into sorry slobs and spineless people. It provides them with cooks and valets who wait on them hand and foot. They wallow in luxury and this living on the fat of the land arise in them appetites for illicit cupidity of all kinds and lead the athletes to trade their victories. Some of them turn their fame into money, I presume, in order to satisfy an ever-increasing desire for expenditure. Others pay to obtain an easy victory. I do not exclude from blame the promoters of this corruption: it is to satisfy their cupidity that they have become instructors." Translated by M. Berget

and F. Moussat, from an Anthology of Sports, extract from texts of Antiquity.

The author goes on to say: "With the exception of the Hellenic Olive branch which is immune on account of its traditional glory, all competitions of today have become corrupt", the Olympic institution which was no longer supported by the fervour of the Hellenic people nor by the esteem gained by the practice of its rigorous discipline was also shaken to its foundations.

The Roman Emperor, Theodosius, pursuing his fight against paganism, gave the Olympic Games their death blow, when, about 395 A.D., he decreed that these Games which symbolized the beauty and strength of the body, were to be abolished as they were dedicated to its gods.

The Romans, conquerors of Greece, did not understand that these Games which they borrowed from the vanquished, had their meaning and value in the way in which they were practised. The physical training which they entail was valued only for the added power and physical strength it gave to the legions. *The disinterested effort was no longer valued.*

The gladiators who attracted the crowds to the circus performances were in point of fact *professionals*.

Let us avoid, fifteen centuries later, to commit the same error in spite of the leit-motive for ever present: "Times have changed". This slogan does not help to solve the problem, it is not objective. Let us at least, retain the Olympic spirit and keen in the Olympic Games, the amateurism which is nothing else but a turn of mind. We can achieve this end by avoiding to introduce in the Games the spirit of mercantilism as well as the performances of gladiators or show spectacles which certain people would like to have in order to draw a profitable advantage.

Lesson on a Grecian Urn

"Sport Illustrated" 's Opinion
U. S. A., April 2, 1956.

Earl Alexander of Tunis tossed off an idea about Olympic competition the other day, and it was enough to make the turf tremble on the playing fields of Harrow: Why bother about the distinction between amateurs and professionals anyhow? "Let everybody compete," cried Earl Alexander. "Then there can be no arguments afterward. After all, the world has changed considerably since the Olympic Games were revived in the 1894 by Baron Pierre de Coubertin of France. For one thing, there were few professional athletes of any description at that time."

Lord Alexander hurled his Olympian thunderbolt in Montreal, while revisiting the country he once served (1946-1952) as King George VI's Governor General. He was the same Alexander who led the Allied

forces to victory in the Mediterranean in World War II. who won his field-marshal's baton in the 'liberation of Rome — and who set records for the mile and two miles at Sandhurst. As a lithe lieutenant of the Irish Guards, Alexander won the Irish Amateur Mile in 1914 with a commendable time of 4:33. He grew up in the full bloom of gentlemanly amateurism in British sport, today heads the crusty Marylebone Cricket Club. Yet. in Montreal...

"People 'now have to work so hard to make a living", said his lordship, "that they are hard put to find the time and the energy for rigorous training. Expenses which they receive... help them out. Take the Russians. They aren't amateurs and they aren't professionals. They are actually civil servants."

Old Harrovian Alexander should have known that creeping civil servantism was a big reason for the decline and fall of the original Olympic Games. In the sixth century B.C. Solon started handing out drachmas to any Athenian who came home from Olympia a winner. Soon leading athletes were drawing free meals and free front-row seats at public spectacles. The Sacred Games became profane, bribery became commonplace, and the cities of Greece bid competitively for the services of the Olympic heroes. By the fifth century,

the top musclemen of the day were worshipped as demigods.

For a long time the athletes lived it up handsomely in Hellas. Gradually they became an indolent class unto themselves, stylishly pensioned, supported and bribed by the State, and organized into synods, or unions, to protect their privileges. Most Athenians were, of necessity, vegetarians ; the athletes gorged on steak.

Inevitably, Greece's kept athletes began to look like Strasbourg geese, bred and fattened for the public to venerate. Had he consulted his history books, Marshal Alexander would have discovered that great generals, like Epaminondas and an earlier Alexander, scorned the professional Olympians as being too useless for military service. Had he looked at the marbles and painted artifacts in the British Museum, he might have discovered why : the graven likenesses of Greek athletes by 300 B.C. show a race of muscle-bound pinheads. Compared to the statues and the murals of their sleek-sinewed ancestors — amateurs all — the State-supported athletes were sorry slobs indeed.

The Greeks had a word or two for them. "Of all the countless evils throughout Hellas" — Euripides wrote it down — "none is worse than the race of athletes... Slaves of their belly."