

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY...

Mr. GASTON MEYER

Chief Editor of "L'EQUIPE", the most important sports paper in France, has kindly given us his views on Olympic matters in an article which we shall call :

REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS

(Editor's note: We do not share all the opinions expressed by the author of the following article, but we publish it all the same in respect for other people's opinions and because these ideas may lead to a constructive line of argument.)

The problem of amateurism is as old as sport itself; if no satisfactory solution has yet been found, it is because the stupendous social upheaval which has been taking place has never been taken into account.

One could fear — by this I mean that those who are conversant with the various aspects of sport may fear — that the International Olympic Committee is placed in a worse position than anyone to find a conclusive and decisive solution to this vexatious problem.

Now why is it so ? Because the members of the International Olympic Committee are

recruited from the upper classes and this very fact may keep it aloof from popular sympathy and public appreciation.

It is surely unnecessary to recall the history of the origin of amateurism, except on broad lines. We must not, however, overlook the fact that, at the beginning of the last century, sport, if it could be called so, was 100% professionnal. Moreover, in Great Britain, "gentlemen" organized for pleasure (but chiefly for being given the chance of *betting*) boxing matches, marathon races, weigh-lifting contests, etc., etc. When, on the initiative of Thomas Arnold and a few others, the great change in British education was brought in, it called for the necessity of a reform in physical education. It became obvious that in order to win public favour and especially that of the pedagogists, it was necessary to raise a barrier between the hirelings recruited from the lower classes and the

young public schoolmen and university students who were encouraged to take up sport. It was thus that *amateurism* was born a term for which one *invented* a sense which it never had before. An "amateur" is a man who shows an inclination for an art, a pastime or a hobby, etc. but does not allow this to become the chief interest of his existence. Amateurism is in no way connected with the idea of remuneration. It is obvious, that any musician, painter or writer is foremost an amateur or lover of music, painting or literature, and does not derive any material gain from indulging in these pastimes unless his talent is outstanding in the public estimation.

Amateurism, so defined, is therefore the consequence and result of a British necessity which happened to be *essential at the time*. If one considers the importance given to the law which strictly forbids the betting practice, one cannot but believe the truth of the above assertion. Indeed, it was necessary to draw a dividing line between these two worlds which stood so far apart: the mountebanks who were the objects of the bets and that of the young men who were encouraged to practise sport for high ideals based both on the moral and physical planes.

Though this law on betting may seem senseless nowadays, it is still in existence... Yet betting these days in the way of sport is prevalent in the form of organized "sweepstakes, or racing forecasts" which have become one of the mainstays of today sport organizations and this in a good half of the world! This constitutes a glaring contradiction.

Who could deny the fact that the rules of amateurism—though their fundamentals still prevail at the present time — are of an aristocratic nature and origin? Is it not a true fact that the Olympic Rowing Champion J. Kelly was once refused permission to compete in the Royal Regattas at Henley, and that his name was turned down, on the grounds that as he was engaged in manual labour, he came under the definition of "*professional*". There was then a close association of ideas—though disowned by the strict guardians of the law who thought it incompatible — between the discharge of *manual labour* and the character of an amateur!

Things have certainly progressed since then... But very gradually, step by step. The sports leaders, too much engrossed with upholding an ideal of which very few knew the origin, have never agreed to face the problem seriously nor to change the rules of amateurism from the foundations through and through.

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Here I shall make a diversion by describing my personal attitude on this matter. I am deeply attached to the principle of amateurism, or to be precise I am all in favour of disinterestedness and of abnegation. I managed a large club of athletic sports in France. A club which discovered trained and formed athletes of real international stand-

ing. Not a single athlete, member of the French Athletic Club, ever made an arbitrary request of a venal character or alluded to a material profit, I would have refused it in any case, for I reckoned that as I sacrificed a great deal of my time to the training and improving the style of my pupils, I thought it only fair and normal that my pupils responded in the same way by making sacrifices equal to mine. I have derived the greatest of satisfaction from the fact that I contributed to the social evolution of *all* the champions I had to deal with, all of them possess today a position in life that they could never have reached without the prestige sport gave them.

I am personally opposed to the formula of "complete freedom" involving the complete abolition of all measures of restraint. If these barriers were removed, if all the brakes were released, sport would soon fall into the hands of people who would exploit it essentially on a commercial basis, and sport would thus soon die in all probabilities.

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It is now quite unnecessary to assert that sport, nowadays, has reached all the different layers of the population. Indeed, it has become one of the driving powers of the great pacific confrontations of our modern times... It has become almost everywhere a State concern, where it is not yet so, it is developing on these lines...

In December 1939, I wrote in *Auto*, uncensored, that the fact of the war and its result were to be entered in the Gold Book of Olympism... What was the classification of the Berlin Games? Sport is a true expression of civilizations. In its ultimate form, the only one we are concerned with here, sport not only reflects the physical and moral health of a nation, but the victories of its champions reflect the potentiality and dynamic energy of a country, of its social organizations, and depict the nation's *social level*. Americans live in fear of losing their athletic supremacy (the fruit of several generations of trained sportsmen). Is it only on account of losing national prestige or simply because the Americans deemly realize that the day they will be outrun in the field of sport by the U. S. S. R., it will not be in sports only? It is therefore fairly logical that the new civilizations have turned sport into a State concern. In these countries, professional sport does not exist for the simple reason that professional sport is based on *individualism* and that the professional and the people who gravitate round him have only these objects in view; the lure of making money or to realize immediate profit. One cannot set a doctrine on such precarious and flimsy foundations.

This is the reason why sport in U. S. S. R. and other countries which are State run as was formerly the case with Germany and Italy remain strictly *amateur*. It has been proved that a Sovietic, Czech or Hungarian champion follows a trade corresponding to

his aptitudes. But there is no vestige of a doubt that if his talent outstrip the gifts of the ordinary level of sportsmen, and place him above them, he will receive assistance in all kinds of licit ways. He will be given facilities for doing his training, the time devoted to extra training outside his holidays will be counted as "broken time" and refunded to him. It will be arranged for him to receive assistance in the way of board and lodgings, clothes, free transport. (This last item has been refuted in Mr. Andrianow's letter published in the present issue of the Bulletin, *Ed.*) It is even probable that, later on, the very fact that he has been a champion representing his country, may help him on the social ladder although some others may equal him in quality and merit, he will still be chosen in preference to all others on account of his contribution in raising the prestige of his country. The same thing happens in Great Britain, when the "blue" of Oxford or Cambridge who has gone in for intensive training for eight weeks before the Boat Race, will be given a good degree from his College or University. and from the fact that he won his blues he may hope for a privileged position either in the Civil Service or in private business.

One cannot raise any objections to this as it does not create an offence against the moral code as conceived by men, but let us agree in conclusion that the social position and the *future of the champion is always secure.*

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The difference between the sport champion and the champion in the field of science, letters and fine-arts, is that the former's *champion is limited by age.* This has been the stumbling block encountered by all the reformators in the Occidental countries, they fought this obstacle but eventually failed.

In France, during the years of Government autonomy from 1940 to 1945 and the years following, did they not adopt a solution similar, by assigning certain champions to the National Sports Institute where they were employed as athletes demonstrators (for lack of pedagogic gifts or degrees)? The running champion, Alain Mimoun, and the pole lumping champion Victor Sillon are still carrying these functions there. The unfortunate part is that they do not know what the future holds for them as it is in no way guaranteed. They may be dismissed tomorrow in order to make room for the younger generation, champions twenty years younger... in the meantime they are growing old. Not very long ago, Mr. Paul Mericamp, one of the leading figure in international athletics, a fierce and most strict defender of the rules of amateurism, instructed the newspapers not to disclose the real profession of certain well-known French athletes demonstrators but to describe them by the non-committal term of "civil servant". One could not be more hypocritical, when one considers that the real functions of the athlete demonstra-

tor, besides a few parade duties, consist of *organizing sports competitions.*

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It is in Great Britain, where amateurism came from, that the most severe blows are dealt to it. Following Marshal Montgomery's views, a short time ago, Sir Alexander created a sensation when he asked to abolish the distinction between amateurs and professionals, and that the latter should be allowed to compete in the Olympic Games... (We refer to this matter in the present issue of the Bulletin when we express our opinions freely on the subject, *Ed.*) These views are natural though they may seem fantastic to us. Anglo-Saxon nations, protected by the laws of amateurism, have technically been ruling over the world of sport. But these very laws, more or less adapted elsewhere, now turn back on the very peoples who still apply them most strictly and thus *they are handicapped* by them. This is sufficient to stir up the realists into demanding their abolition. I have aired my views in *L'Equipe*, when I said that if the Olympic Games were to be open to all athletes indiscriminately, on the condition that only a simple medal be their reward, professionalism would be dealt a severe blow by the application of this decision... One can hardly imagine a Coppi or a Robinson jeopardizing their career and taking the risk of being beaten by some unknown athlete. They would lose everything by this as they would have no other alternative but to take this risk or *shirking* it and this would be worse than a possible defeat.

It is highly improbable that the International Olympic Committee would adopt straightway a solution as drastically revolutionary. But, in this case, it is up to it to abolish the cause of the problem. Among the Olympic Federations, three of them control at the same time the so called amateur sport and the professional sport, these being: the cycling, football, and in some countries the boxing federations. They should be requested to forego without delay the control of professional sport which is not the concern of benevolent leaders, but, on the contrary should come under the supervision of the labour control in every country of the world.

If these federations were to refuse to forego what is not part of their duty, they would not exist anymore in their capacity of Olympic Federations and would, no doubt be replaced very rapidly...

By the way I noticed that *in the countries where amateurism is most strictly observed, professionalism is most prevalent and flourishing* (In the United States and Great Britain, for instance). *Isn't this simple acknowledgment a fact worthy of notice?*

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How are the rules controlling amateurism to be altered? Must the actual term "amateurism" which does not correspond to rea-

lity be abolished, or is it better to retain it for habit or convenience sake?

In my ways of thinking I would adopt the simplest formula running on the following lines:

"The Olympic Games are open to all athletes coming from every country provided they have been duly entered with the consent of the responsible National Olympic Committee recognized by the International Olympic Committee. To be eligible for the Olympic Games, the athlete must not:

- 1).- Make a living now or in the past by the practice of a sport listed as professional sport (follows the list of these sports. For it remains yet to be settled if a golf or tennis instructor or even a fencing master are to be considered professionals more so than a skiing, a swimming coach or even a physical culture instructor).
- 2).- He must not compete in official international matches (outside the Olympic Games, the Regional Games, the World and European Championships or the matches between nations) for prizes other than a commemorative souvenir.
- 3).- He must not compete in International or private national events sanctioned by the International and National Federations for a prize (object) which exceeds the value of 50 dollars.

On the otherhand, the athlete is entitled to:

- 1).- In all cases, all travelling and board and lodgings expenses are to be paid him

during his participation in a competition-
2).- In his capacity of official representative of his country, he must be paid for his "broken time" according to an arbitrary scale established by each Olympic Committee and approved by the International Olympic Committee.

Broken time: (notification) : As it is an impossibility to set a rate for broken time equivalent to the actual salary of the athlete, every National Olympic Committee is authorized to set a national scale of charges showing a maximum and a minimum limit."

This ruling is simple, straightforward, fair and founded on the well-known principle *Sever forbid what cannot be prevented*. This ruling offers the advantage of dividing the world of sport in three categories:

- 1).- *THE AMATEUR*: who defrays his own expenses and pays for the practice of sport which is nothing more for him than pleasure and a pastime.
- 2).- *THE CHAMPION*: who is the representative of his country.
- 3).- *THE PROFESSIONAL*: who makes his living by sport and for whom, as a rule the Olympic Federations show no interest.

I doubt if the gap which separates the present conception of amateurism and that of the above proposition can be bridged so readily. But it is bound to come sooner or later! do not forget it!