

## Correspondence

We received the following statement from Mr. Willy Meisl, journalist in London and foreign correspondent of *World Sports*. Mr. Willy Meisl was one of the five foreign journalists who was guest of honour at the Games at Helsinki. He has written several booklets concerning the Olympic Games and he was present at the Melbourne Games. He affirms that he has no intention to disparage the

*Olympic Games or the International Olympic Committee but wish to offer an objective collaboration with the building up of a constructive solution, even by using criticism to this end.*

*Nota Bene. — An answer by President Avery Brundage follows immediately after Dr. Meisl's article.*

## The regulation of amateurism is antisocial

by Dr Willy Meisl, London

The title of this article is the heading of one of the chapters of my book published in 1928 entitled : *Sport stands at the cross-roads*. Allow me to quote again from my work as these recognized formulæ may help to throw some light on this never-ending problem.

"Sport for sport sake is the only remedy to overcome the degeneracy of sport."

"22 players and 100.000 spectators constitute the chief ambition and ideal from the point of view of the cashier, 100.000 players and 22 spectators represent sports'ideal."

"The contemptuous attitude of amateurs towards professionals is a sign of class rivalry."

"The son of the wealthy man can devote the whole day to his training at tennis, golf or football, he can go in for running or swimming but he remains essentially an amateur, he

receives no remuneration for his activity. The impecunious athlete requires to be paid if he devotes only a half-day to sport."

"What is permissible to a rider also applies to the football player and to the athlete with the distinction that the former remains a *gentleman* therefore an amateur while the others are slightly lowered, they lose their amateur status and become professionals."

"The best safeguard of amateurism is to have a wealthy father."

All this brings us back to our subject, the antisocial character of the ruling of amateurism.

Some prejudices die out very slowly. What is life without illusions ? Thus we all indulge in wishful thinking and take our wishes for realities. Fifty years ago, most people aped the wealthy to the best of their abilities. Thus the regulating of amateurism became a kind of moral law

which, as a matter of fact, had very little connection with sport, at any rate with sport as we understand it today ; it was foremost a social measure. The legislation of amateurism raised a protective barrier behind which the privileged class of the well-to-do kept its games and sport to itself. This is neither a reproach nor is it a blame, it is in high-flown language an historical fact. Fifty years ago, these measures were in keeping with the exigencies of the times. I wish to stress this point because we must envisage clearly the true aspect of the problem of amateurism. These regulations concerning amateurism were not-laid down on abstract or idealistic grounds, they did not constitute a dogma based on sacrifice freely accepted. This ruling was conceived, on the first instance, with the view to keep the crowd of indesirables from the private pleasure ground of the privileged class.

John Kelly, senior, was debarred from taking part in the Diamond Sculls Regattas at Henley, in 1920, on the ground that he was a bricklayer and in his quality of labourer could not be considered an amateur. He made up for this by becoming an olympic champion, and furthermore, he became a millionaire (in dollars currency) and is the father-in-law of one of the last remaining crowned heads of Europe. Today, father Kelly would be given his innings at Henley, even if the ancient ruling of amateurism was still in force, for, he has long since ceased to be a labourer. Unfortunately, it is a very rare thing for anyone to become a millionaire by one's own effort at an age when one is still sufficiently young and fit to win a World Championship ! John Kelly, junior, won the Diamond Sculls on two occasions, in 1947 and in 1949. A millionaire's son has never been refused access to these regattas. On the other hand, the regulation applying to labourers-professionals has been repealed in connection with yachting as far back as 1926. At that time, a big scandal broke out at Henley, when the 8th Australian was not allowed to start off, on the ground that one of the members of the crew was a policeman, and thus, according to the rule in force, he could not compete as he was considered an artisan, therefore was a professional.

This was the last straw, even for regulations concerning yachting ! and the rubric was dropped. Since then, the structure of society has changed radically and we have realized some considerable progress. Let us lay stress once more on the fact that fifty years ago, this ruling was perhaps adequate and useful, and did not particularly interest the general public ; since then, the social aspect has evolved and along with it the laws have changed with one exception :

*The basic law of sport has remained the same.*

This fact constitutes an anachronism hard to justify, for, without realizing complete automisation, we have not yet reached the

stage, nor are we likely to ever attain the position in which the privileged class was fifty years ago. The members of this well-to-do class did not work and many of their young men could if they wished devote their entire time to their recreations, namely games and sports.

Meanwhile, two world wars revolutions, technical and economic development, taxation, the 8 hours working day as well as the English working week have changed the situation through and through. Is the law of amateurism to be the only ruling which does not need to adapt itself to present day circumstances ? If so it would be a very exceptional law !

Let me make my point quite clear. I am a fervent exponent of amateurism, just as much as Mr. Avery Brundage, I should think, but less orthodox. In my book which I mentioned above *Sport stands at the cross-roads* I said :

“Sport represents a gathering of forces which are spent freely in a spectacular performance, it is play for fun and nothing but for fun: professionalism delivers fun on request, it represents the pleasure given by producing wonderful wares.

*If sport becomes a profession it ceases to be sport.*

The professional may actually be an excellent sportsman, a better one than many amateurs ; this may appear as a paradox but only on the surface...”

But I do protest when one tries to deceive us.

Sport as practised fifty years ago and sport of today are two fundamentally different conceptions, that we recognize or refute to accept this does not very much matter.

The fact remains that nowadays, there are at least three different classes of sports, that we agree or not :

1. Sport and games for physical recreation, pleasure and as a keep-fit device.
2. Sport organized by various clubs and associations ; dealing always essentially with the problem of organizing leisure time, week-ends, etc.
3. Sport as an outstanding performance : championships, International matches, record breaking, Olympic Games, in short, all that is understood by the term of record-sport, term which is so to speak a pleonasm.

The controversy over amateurism which started 100 years ago, reached its crucial point owing to the misinterpretation of the new rule due to a faulty translation, at the time of the Games of the XVIth Olympiad. It was suddenly known that the International Olympic Committee demanded a new declaration and undertaking from the athlete, namely that every competitor in the Olympic

Games declared on his honour (declaration to be countersigned by the National Federation and the National Olympic Committee) that he would never become a professional.

All this uproar was unnecessary for the simple reason that it is perfectly obvious that such an undertaking is purely delusive. Who in case of infringement could decree sanctions ? and what would these be ?

Avery Brundage desired to keep out of competing in the-Olympic Games sportsmen who intended to turn professionals in the near future.

It is a known fact that by canon law, the pope, if he wishes it, may suddenly nominate a person cardinal whose name he had *in petto* ; it represents a fact not yet openly recognized of an intention not yet realized. If one may be allowed to draw comparison between such an elated institution and that of our sport organizations, the inference is that the athlete who has in mind the intention not yet realized to become a professional must not compete in the Olympic Games. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, this evidence has always been understood. If, for example, the British Amateur Boxing Association hears that a player intends to become a professional in the near future, the later loses instantly his amateur status. Mr. Avery Brundage's notion may appear as an exaggeration ; but it was not senseless by any means. On the contrary, it was morally justified.

But I shall not disagree with those who qualify the form of the-universally accepted olympic oath as *senseless, hypocritical and against morality*. With a view to consolidating an impossible position, Brundage and the International Olympic Committee have gone too far. During several Olympiads, the members of the International Olympic Committee forced sportsmen all over the world, including their national federations and national olympic committees to make declarations openly against their conscience, which all right thinking persons do know *to be false*.

Let us proceed as 'man and jurist' to a full analysis of the wording of the statement of amateur which each participant has to sign and which has to be countersigned by the national federation and the national olympic committee :

"I declare on my honour that I have participated in sport solely for my pleasure or for the physical, mental or social benefits derived therefrom ; and that sport is nothing more than recreation. from which I have drawn no material gain of any kind, directly or indirectly"... This is my own translation, I have kept as near as possible to the meaning of the official English text.

First of all, nobody from Brundage to Romanov can entertain any doubt concerning the fact that few participators in the Olympic Games practised and are practising sport solely for recreation ; but I would like to lay stress and point out the non-sensical aspect of the last sentence of the declaration.

Without a doubt. Mr. Brundage has been an amateur throughout his life. I am convinced of the fact. As he happened to have also an excellent athletic record, through the means of sport, he has undoubtedly been brought in contact with influential personalities who he would not have met otherwise.(It is true that this could be called "social benefit".) He is an engineer. Let us suppose that one of his well-to-do sports friends with whom the young and farseeing Brundage had won favour on personal as well as sports grounds commissioned him to build him a house, a factory or a bridge... As far as I am concerned, Brundage, beyond all doubts, remained an amateur, but can he declare on his honour that he has never drawn any material gain direct or *indirect* from the practice of sport ?

He can do so, as 5000 to 6000 sportsmen prove it every four years ; *only this cannot be true*. Even if someone went as far as to refuse all material gain of any kind given him by his sport's activity, he could still not avoid drawing an *indirect* gain from it.

"Big Bill Tilden expressed it in his own way 30 years ago when he said :

"That I work on the Stock Exchange, in business or that I write books... it is always the name I made while playing tennis which carries me along in business'..."

The little word *indirect* evidently introduced in the declaration by a lay person not conversant with jurisdiction, causes all its signatories to subscribe to a lie. This is surely not the intention and purpose of an olympic committee.

I leave it to the discretion of my readers to pass an opinion on the practical execution of this other olympic precept :

"Athletes who receive subsidies from their governments, from sport and physical training centres or from business firms which employ them on account of their athletic records, are not considered to be amateurs..."

Some athletes obtain contracts when they are not expected to produce much work, this is done in order to allow them the necessary time for training or taking part in competitions.

Sometimes, governments on the ground of national prestige, have recourse to similar methods when they give official appointments to sportsmen in the Army, Police forces or in the Civil Service. The States finance and run training centres for a certain time... the athletes who benefit by such advantages resulting from their athletic performances, are not amateurs... I wish to nut the following question to the International Olympic Committee and its president :

*In these gentlemen's opinion, what is the number of competitors participating in the Olympic Games who comply grosso modo with the conditions enumerated above ?*

In your opinion what is the number of Olympic champions who fulfil these conditions ?

I estimate that it would be overrating the number to put it down to 1000 in 6000 competitors. The percentage of the champions (the first six) represents perhaps half this figure. In expressing my views in this manner I do not question the quality of amateurs of the 5000 remaining athletes. I mainly condemn the wording of the paragraph on amateurism which is completed out of date and does not take into consideration the present conditions as they really are.

I now revert to the onset of my argument.

I do not want to be reproached with criticizing without submitting objective proposals as well.

I am well aware that making the said ruling milder would not prevent its infringement. But from past experience, one knows that unduly harsh and severe regulations do not reduce the number of crimes but tend to increase them. When a law has fallen into abeyance to the extent that it is broken oftener than it is observed, it is necessary to amend it and this must take place *before morals are undermined and that the observance of the laws disappear.*

*The legislation of amateurism has reached this stage long ago.*

Practically everywhere, champions are paid for broken time, and the training of athletes is made possible by facilities being provided by means of subsidies. Governments assist those who bring prestige to their country and they accord them all sort of facilities ; it is however true that they control the athletes too and sometimes even order them. However, a few rare sportsmen endeavour to obey and observe rules which are impossible to follow or are outgrown by present conditions.

Emil Zatopek, one of the most successful and one of the cleverest athlete did not hesitate to say so : "Is there anybody who still believes that an athlete can do 30 km training every day and yet carry out his work at the same time ?"

The International Olympic Committee is underestimating its contemporaries !

Wes Santee and Ferenc Puskas have also disclosed their opinions on this subject. In the newspaper of his country, Puskas revealed that the National Hungarian team (Champions at the 1952 Games) is so badly underpaid that it became necessary. for its members to go in for smuggling in order to afford the style of living in keeping with their sport achievements, or, if you like, that they need in order to achieve such sports results.

Since then, we heard that Hungarian football players of the first team earn five times as much as an Hungarian worker (it is true that the later hardly earns a living wage). The Hungarian National team composed of amateurs — won the Olympic Games in 1952. I have no wish to prick these three or four personalities or

to lessen their merit. I quote them among hundreds and thousands of people who stand as examples of the non-existence of olympic amateurism.

I do not criticize their athletic achievements, which in the case of Zatopek as well as in the case of Puskas were faultless and unquestionably correct performances.

In the United States, the situation is much about the same nowadays, in many other countries, from China to Albania, the situation is actually worse.

I suggest therefore the easing of some of the paragraphs instead of making them more strict than ever.

In my opinion, I think that it is grossly unfair that thousands of athletes receiving public grants may compete in the Olympic Games while others must stay at home because they cannot afford to forgo their pay as workers. Others, also can undertake the journey to attend the Olympic Games only on the condition that their wives work to keep up the family.

In our present times, the participation to the Olympiads should not be determined by the amount of private means or profession, but it should be settled by strict regulations concerning the subsidies for broken time. In this way, even the impecunious athlete, the man who draws a weekly salary or is paid by the hour may, if he is up to standard, take part in this world sport manifestation as well as in other international competitions without feeling the unbearable outlays of financial commitments.

If the orthodox definition of the rule of amateurism had only lessened the evil of the degeneracy of amateurism, I would have felt more tolerant, but, so far, it has had the reverse effect. The same gentlemen who have passed the senseless formula of the amateur declaration on his honour, closed their eyes for years, not wanting to see that the said rule is broken everywhere.

Is it not scandalous that as recently as in 1949, a victorious team of horsemen could be disqualified on the ground that, besides the two officers competing, there was a sergeant-major who was given the temporary rank of officer also in the team ? Only the two officers were considered amateurs (meaning gentlemen).

After this disgraceful incident, this wording of the ruling in question was slightly modified. Now, sergeant-majors are considered amateurs (= gentlemen), but the lower ranks are still not eligible including the non-commissioned officers and the privates who are still considered non-amateurs as they were in the past. There is no doubt that in my opinion, a corporal or a simple dragoon with a good record is infinitely more of the pure amateur than most of the cavalry officers. unless he comes from a very wealthy family.

In several cases, the officers are instructors in large cavalry military schools, they do

nothing else but ride during the whole day, which means that they are always training, as well as this they have at their disposal a whole team of brother-officers and non-commissioned officers to assist them. Let us mention that, eventually, they also break in horses or cause the non-commissioned officers to break in the horses for them with the view to sell them at a good profit !

I cite these few examples among a quantity of others in order to hear out my theory and prove that the present regulation of amateurism has its foundations not in contemporary sport but in a society which has ceased to exist today.

In its present form, the rule of amateurism in force at the Olympic Games has no more its *raison d'être*.