

Mr. Avery Brundage's Reply

to Dr Willy Meisl's Article :

The Regulation of the Amateurism is antisocial.

Dr. Willy Meisl's article appearing elsewhere in this issue of the International Olympic Committee Bulletin, expresses very well certain widely held views. I agree with a great deal of Dr. Meisl's article, but in my opinion some of the conclusions therein are incorrect. Where I differ is as follows :

I cannot agree that amateurs have a contemptuous attitude toward professionals. An amateur is a sport lover, and as such he admires a skilled performance, no matter by whom.

The idea that the son of a wealthy man has an advantage today is a common misconception. If it were true, why are nearly all athletic champions, if not poor certainly not rich boys ? In fifty years I cannot remember even one champion from a wealthy family. Most sons of wealthy parents have too many other opportunities for amusement. They will not make the sacrifices necessary to become a champion. Anyone devoting the whole day to training, moreover, would soon go stale. Today the 8-hour day is almost universal and the 5-day week is rapidly becoming so. There is plenty of time for an athlete, whether in an educational institution or working, to train in his spare hours without interfering with his education or with his vocation. Roger Bannister and many others have illustrated this point very well.

Dr. Meisl is quite correct when he states that in the 19th Century amateurism was a social measure, but that day has long since passed. It was the interpretation that was erroneous, not today's regulations. An amateur may be a dub or a champion — he may be rich or poor — he may be unlettered or an L.L.B. ; an amateur is simply one who practises sport for the love of it and not for any material reward.

I do not disagree with Dr. Meisl when he says a professional athlete may be an excellent sportsman. Sportsmanship and amateurism are two separate things that should not be confused, although all good amateurs

are supposed to be sportsmen as well. Organized professional sport today is very well controlled and violations of the laws of sportsmanship are penalized just as they are in amateur sport.

It is the term 'amateur sport' that is redundant and a pleonasm, since if it is sport it must be amateur. There is no such thing as so-called 'professional sport', which is a business and not a sport at all.

The controversial addition of four words 'and intends to remain' (an amateur) to the Olympic rule, did not mean that the athlete swore never to become a professional ; as Dr. Meisl says, it merely expressed his intention at that moment. It introduced no new feature, since an athlete who intends to become a professional has always immediately lost his amateur status. Because there was so much misunderstanding, the four words were eliminated from the pledge.

Now to the Olympic amateur rule, which Dr. Meisl qualifies as 'senseless, hypocritical and against morality' Dr. Meisl says that no one, and specifically includes me, thinks that participants in the Olympic Games are practising sport 'solely for recreation'. Moreover, he uses me to prove his point. What he says may be partly true, but his conclusions are specious in my opinion.

Most of my generation of athletes did practise sport solely for recreation. I will admit that there is a different attitude today, particularly in the United States, where most outstanding young athletes are offered inducements to go to college because of their athletic ability. This is wrong, but it is our social and education system that should be condemned rather than the Olympic code. If these boys were educated properly to the advantages of amateurism they would prefer to remain amateur and would resist the temptation to make a few easy dollars. (It is unfortunate that more sport journalists do not write of the advantages of amateurism.)

As for the personal illustration, if Dr. Meisl thinks that anyone can obtain a

contract to build a three or four million dollar skyscraper because he knows how to throw the discus, he is seriously mistaken. It is true that an *amateur champion* displays certain qualities of character which advertise him to the world, but it is those qualities of character which lead to rewards rather than athletic ability. If I 'won favour' in business it was because I was an amateur. Moreover, none of these benefits alleged to have come to me, accrued until long years after I had ceased athletic competition.

If there are competitors participating in the Olympic Games who do not comply with the "Olympic rules, it is because those rules are not enforced and not because they cannot be enforced. To use an example, college football in the United States was just as interesting, and a lot more fun, before they had athletic scholarships than it is today.

Dr. Meisl says that the legislating of amateurism has reached the stage where morals are undermined and the observance of the law has disappeared. I fear he has the cart before the horse. It is moral standards that have lowered, alas, and we are trying to raise them. I am not sure that Dr. Meisl is wrong, however, insofar as team sports are concerned, because it may well be impossible under modern conditions to prevent team sports from becoming commercialized. It is for this reason that many wish to drop team sports from the Olympic program. They were introduced over the strenuous opposition of the Baron de Coubertin and have been opposed by every International Olympic Committee President since.

As I said before, most athletes are relatively poor rather than wealthy, but I have never known an athlete who was prevented from going to the Olympic Games by poverty. In the first place, members of Olympic teams have their travel and maintenance expenses paid. In the few cases where a wife or child might suffer, the family, the employer, personal friends, the Church, or the community, feeling that it is a great honour to have an Olympic athlete, have rushed to assist. This is good, old-fashioned charity that should be encouraged. Organized payment for broken time, however, is another thing and the minute it becomes necessary the sport can no longer be amateur because it is interfering with the athlete's vocation.

It was at the instigation of the International Olympic Committee that the situation in equestrian sport to which Dr. Meisl refers was corrected.

The Olympic Games are and must remain amateur or they cannot exist. Dr. Meisl himself says "Sport for sport's sake is the only remedy to overcome the degeneracy of sport." We don't abolish the Ten Commandments because they are occasionally broken. Let us explain the benefits of amateurism, which are no less important because they are not always tangible. Instead of Dr. Meisl's conclusion that the Olympic amateur rule has no 'raison d'être', would it not be better to hail it as a beacon that lights the route to be followed by young people who wish to escape from modern materialism and 'dollar chasing' into a more pure and enjoyable atmosphere ?