
EL OUAFI VICTIM OF PROFESSIONAL SPORT

Under the rubric "Let the Melbourne Games be a lesson", we published in our last Bulletin N° 52, page 56 and 57, English text, an article written by Mr. Gaston Meyer Chief Editor of l'Equipe. On page 57, the author mentioned the case of the French athlete El Ouafi who won the Olympic marathon in Amsterdam in 1928.

In connection with this matter, we received the following comments from Mr. Paul Mericamp of the French Athletic Federation. who need's no introduction among our readers as he has played and is still playing a very important part within athletics of his own country as well as International Athletics (Ed.).

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In your Bulletin No 58, I read the following comments written by my friend Gaston Meyer, Chief Editor of l'Equipe :

"The various countries will have to strive more and more in order to conciliate two things: the conditions essential to the preparation of the athletes as well as assure their social situation. For, having failed to do so, French Amateur sport has been responsible for El Ouafi, champion of the marathon won at Amsterdam Games, when he became poverty stricken and a waif and stray."

This assertion requires correction or at least deserves comment. El Ouafi was a factory worker and was able to devote adequate time for training for an important international contest only within the limited time he had at his disposal after fulfilling his exacting daily occupations. Beside, he never occupied the position of one of these vedettes who can be coddled by the public in anticipation of a sensational victory. I even frankly admit that if there had been need to reduce the size of the contingent sent by the French Athletics Federation in 1928, El Ouafi would never have been selected. This does not detract in anyway from the prestige of a magnificent and well deserved victory on the part of a very brave, conscientious and unassuming young man.

Unfortunately, (I refrain from naming the man who promoted the idea, who has since died), El Ouafi was persuaded to go to the United States in order to compete there in some long distance races run by professionals. When he returned to Paris, a few weeks later, bringing back not enough money to live on but too much for him to go back to his former profession and having thus lost his amateur status, he bought an hotel for North-Africans. His enterprise proved a failure, he fell sick and finally

reverted to an impecunious and very precarious form of existence.

El Ouafi was a victim of Professional Sport, but not of "the conditions required by his athletic training".

As far as I am concerned, I can see in his downfall, a decisive argument against professional sport every time it is not backed by measures assuring the social security of its adepts when the day comes when they have to abandon their *jobs*. To commit oneself further would be a great mistake. On the otherhand, I seem to be in complete agreement with the views expressed by Mr. Gaston Meyer, when he goes on to say "Nothing must be done under the pretext of athletic training which is likely to destroy the taste for work among champions."

Paris, April 30th 1957.

PAUL MERICAMP.