

Can Motor Racing figure as a Sport ?

First of all let us state that, as a general rule, the Press places commentaries on motor-racing results on the sports page. Thus our query may seem paradoxical. What is the actual definition of sport ? Gaston Meyer of *l'Equipe* admits that it is far from easy to give a true rendering of this definition. Recently, he raised the question in the paper of which he is the Chief Editor, but without reaching a conclusion. Is it hygiene, or the love of outdoor games, he asks, or the sport itself, or the team spirit, or the incentive of competition ? Sport seems impossible to define.

We are now confronted with another dilemma which points to the pertinence of the title of this article as far as motor-racing is concerned. Does it fall within the

bounds of sport as we generally understand it ? In a statement concerning the terrible accident in the Mille Miglia car race in Italy, which caused the deaths of the Spanish driver, the Marquess of Portago, his co-driver and some ten innocent although highly imprudent spectators. The Vatican Broadcasting Station stated : "Sport is important but its value is not absolute. Kept within bounds, sport can instil human and christian noble-mindedness ; but when it is carried beyond these limits. it becomes a form of pagan idolatry. Risks must be kept within bounds, for, when taken beyond these limits, risks become a serious fault."

Mr. Marcel Berger, president of the Association of Sporting Writers defines sport in the following terms : "A game which

calls upon the muscles for the attainment of an immediate or ultimate goal of physical and moral betterment." He goes on to add, "What is a game ? It is one of the highest goals of life, whereas work is only a practical necessity."

Mr. Avery Brundage, President of the International Olympic Committee, in his reply to an article which appeared in the last issue of our Bulletin, refers to sport in the following terms : "The term amateur-sport is both superfluous and redundant, because if it is sport then it must of necessity be amateur. There is no such a thing as so-called 'Professional sport' which is a profession and therefore cannot be defined as a sport, since the latter is a pastime."

But to return to our discussion of motor racing, a second problem is now added to our main question namely : is a racing driver an amateur or a professional ? The reply depends precisely on the manner in which one defines motor racing. As far as our own opinion is concerned, we fail to see how the term 'sport' can be applied when we are concerned with this type of contest. As a matter of fact, the racing car driver, during the actual run, makes only a feeble physical effort in comparison with athletes who, for instance, participate in the Olympic Games ; since for the racing driver, all effort is psychological. He does not undergo any physical training to keep himself fit and to maintain his form, in short, he is not an athlete in the strict sense of the word. His success in competition does not depend in anyway on his physical or muscular qualities but it depends entirely on his intelligence, on the quickness of his reactions, on his perspicacity... and on the quality of his engine. He looks foremost to a *technical* achievement of a non-sporting character.

The racing car driver, provided one agrees with the point of view expressed above, is comparable to any other driver. He runs for a motor firm and represents a special make, he takes part in these racing contests on behalf of his own firm with a mechanically propelled machine. He receives a fee like any motor agents representatives of a special make of cars. His actual racing is for him both a profession and his *raison d'être*. He is a propaganda agent acting on behalf of a motor manufacturer, advertising and publicising his wares by the skill and mastery of his driving. He is not an athlete, therefore he remains an amateur.

We hasten to add that this point of view is not likely to be shared by everyone and that even within the International Olympic Committee (this is no secret) opinion seems to be divided on this point. If so, why is it that the late Marquess of Portago to whose memory we pay a tribute was entered in the Winter Olympics at Cortina d'Ampezzo in 1956 by the Spanish Olympic Committee ? As a matter of fact, he was placed fourth in the two-man bobsleigh competition. He signed the undertaking himself by which

he declared on his honour (and he was above all a man of honour) that he was an amateur. This declaration was countersigned by his National Federation. This was done for the very reason, we presume, that the Spanish Olympic Committee as well as the racing driver in question, did not look upon motor racing as being a sport.

As a matter of fact, the Marquess of Portago did not require motor racing as means of earning his livelihood and he stated himself, shortly before his fatal accident that speed and his love of dicing with danger were his main reasons for competing in motor racing trials. We come to the conclusion that the query, is motor racing a sport or not, remains unsolved.

"Racing is a vice..." wrote de Portago just before his fatal accident

We add a postscript to the above article drawn from an issue of *Sports Illustrated* of May 13th, published in Chicago in the form of an interesting article bearing the signature of the racing driver Alfonso de Portago, whom we have already mentioned. The unlucky driver sets out here his own thoughts, but he will never see them in print as his fatal crash occurred on the day following their publication.

Although expressed in a different form from our own views, his ideas approach our own to such a marked degree that we take the opportunity of reproducing several brief extracts which add weight to our own point of view. The following passages were written by the ill fated driver on the eve of his violent death :

"What type of man becomes a professional racing driver ? At heart he must be an adventurer. Adventure is a religion. Religions require faith, and the adventurer must above all other things have faith in himself. It is the uncertainty of the future that attracts the adventure most. Few *professions* have less security and more uncertainty about the future than racing."

"As one can well imagine, racing is an extremely competitive *business*."

"Speed is the keynote of our age. But the sportsman who has neither the physical ability to run a four — or even a five-minute mile nor the mental ability to work on things like guided missiles, has to settle for automobile racing or for such sports as bobsleigh. Both of those occupations also have the advantage that one remains, at least most of the time, in a *comfortable, seated position*. There is none of this nonsense of running around the park at some ungodly hour to keep in proper trim. As we race every Sunday from March to October, after the initial month's racing we automatically (and much to our surprise) find ourselves in excellent shape. We then are able *with little or no effort* to maintain this condition to the season's end."

(Editor : We underlined.)