

THE GREAT SOCCER SHAM

In August 1956, an article entitled *The great Soccer Sham* was published in the British Magazine 'World Sports' (the official organ of the British Olympic Committee). This article was signed by Dr. Willy Meisl ; as it deals with a problem of intense topical interest, we quote below the principal items, or at least those passages which refer to football at the Olympic Games.

The Olympic soccer tournament is a relic : it ought to have ceased after 1930, when the first World Championship (World Cup) took place in Montevideo. Of course, the Olympic tournament would still be worth while if it really constituted a sort of world championship for amateur sides ; but what sense can it make when, under the sacred Olympic flag and the most intricate amateur security measures, a few almost-amateur teams have to compete against 'shamateurs' of various hues and several super-professional sides, usually known as 'stamateurs' (i.e. state-amateurs)? No sense at all, of course.

The F.I.F.A. World Championship is much fairer. It does not incite players, associations and national Olympic committees to make false pretences and give palpably false words of honour in writing. In the World Cup no questions are asked. Every country wanting to compete fields her strongest side of stars, no matter whether they are well paid, underpaid or not paid at all.

The serious and severe gentlemen of the International Olympic Committee would have had soccer removed from the Games programme a quarter of a century ago — but for the 'gates'. Whatever one may say about amateurism, the organizers of the big Games need the cash as much as anybody, and soccer is usually the biggest Olympic moneyspinner. This has had the sad consequence that the otherwise so-strict International Olympic Committee permitted the International Amateur Football Federation to use its own amateur laws.

Much could be added to Dr. Meisl's article, which on the whole, is a fairly true picture of the situation. Nevertheless, one fact must be mentioned in favour of the International Olympic Committee which is responsible, after all, for everything and which in the last instance, receives the blame for

everything. Nevertheless, we repeat once and for all : the responsibility for every athlete who is engaged for the Olympic Games falls in the main on the respective National Federations who are required to countersign the engagement form signed by the athlete. Then the duty of controlling the veracity of these statements is assumed by the National Olympic Committees which will ultimately forward the entries to the Organizing Committee of the Games. In this way, the Governing Bodies of each country assume their own responsibilities towards the organizers of the Games as well as towards the International Olympic Committee. The later cannot possibly examine the personal status of approximately 6,000 athletes who participate in the Games. A moment's consideration shows this to be a sheer material impossibility. Therefore the International Olympic Committee places its trust in the Governing Bodies of each nation and if 'non-amateurs' are entered as contestants in the Olympic Games, the blame should be cast on the National Olympic Committees and not on the International Olympic Committee. Hence, it is obvious and we cannot deny that Dr. Meisl is right in his assertions that certain countries pay not the least heed to the amateur status ; for example, as far as football is concerned, and that the constantly reoccurring infringements of amateurism makes this Olympic tournament ridiculous. Do not wonder, therefore, if one day, the International Olympic Committee were to launch an attack at the basis of this evil and should simply decide to eliminate this sport from the programme. This would certainly raise a storm of protests from the very ones who asked for it. It is perfectly true that football has played a leading part in the receipts of the Olympic Games. Thus, at Helsinki, the profit made by the Football Tournament was exceeded only by that received from Athletics. At Melbourne, where the Football tournament turned out to be a fiasco, as far as attendance and quality of play were concerned, it came 3rd in order of attraction after Athletics and Swimming. This, certainly, does not mean that the Olympic Games could not be organized without the financial contribution realized by the Football Tournament. Anybody who thought this, would be mistaken, as we know of numerous cities in North America who would be delighted to organize the Games and to assume their financial responsibilities while excluding football from the Programme.

Do not forget that Europe is no longer the only continent in the world !