

By special permission of the French newspaper 'L'Equipe' we are publishing an article by its special American correspondent Edouard Seidler which should be of interest to our readers.

In the United States, Television has brought Sport under the Dictatorship of the Dollar

The America of today is a forest, a metal forest of television aerials ; with 160 million inhabitants and 45 million sets, there remains scarcely one home into which television has not found its way.

Television has invaded American life. And it has turned it upside-down. It has brought into the home itself everything that previously one used to go out to find. The present-day American, bourgeois and be-slipped, glued to his television set, drinks X's beer because it brings him his base ball daily ; shaves with Y's razor blades - the blades that shave fast and shave the champions ; and cleans his teeth with Z's toothpaste, the toothpaste of the boxing world.

Television has turned America into a nation of 'fans' and supporters. It has turned sport into a 'big show', having first made 'big shows' 'big business'. And in so doing, has forced the amateur out of the stadium.

American Champions have become salesmen of soap tablets

There is no longer any common ground between sport as it is practised and organized on this side of the Atlantic, and the European notion of sport : physical activity and healthy relaxation: One is forced to admit that never in the history of the United States have there been so many fishermen, hunters, golfers, yacht and sports car owners. It is the result of an extraordinary prosperity.

On the other hand there have never been in this country so few competitive sportsmen, so few boxers worthy of the name, so few victorious tennis players, so few swimmers of racing class. Never have the

sports commissions, the federations and the independent organizing bodies had so little power.

American sport is in the hands of a few hundred professional organizers, who are, in their turn, slaves to the men of Madison Avenue, the publicity agents.

Professional Sport is a spectacle, no more, - it is one of the mainstays of advertising.

American sportsmen nowadays have become salesmen of soap tablets. How should it be otherwise ? The financial means, which television, that is to say the commercial promoters have at their disposal, are so great as to be irresistible.

Nowadays, most of the catch matches, which are televised, take place in the studio in the presence of a few dozen spectators. When these spectators cease to appear, they will doubtless be replaced by other participants.

I.B.C. recently staged a boxing match between Gavilan and Tiger Jones in the hall of the Carillon Hotel, Miami.

At Saint Nick's Arena in New York, the few spectators, who do attend Monday matches, are placed deliberately on one side of the ring - the side facing the television cameras.

As Mike Jacobs once said to Joe Louis : 'One day you will find yourself boxing in empty studios watched by millions of televisioners.'

We are not so far from that day now.

In a matter of ten years television has dealt a mortal blow to the small clubs and the provincial organizers, *as well as to amateur sport*. It has pampered and irretrievably spoilt its public by offering it the most for the least : the most stupendous events for

the least possible effort and the lowest possible cost. From the depths of his living-room armchair the American Mr. Average has been for the past ten years the passive spectator of everything that is worth seeing and this without costing him a cent.

A recent statistical survey shows that the number of spectators attending Second division baseball matches has fallen by 57 per cent in ten years. Total numbers of football spectators fall by 2 or 3 per cent annually. Boxing matches can now boast no more than a skeleton attendance, and an event as important as the Championship between Robinson and Basilio is held in the presence of less than 20,000 spectators, even though the fight cannot be seen on television in the region where it is being held. Nevertheless, 400,000 spectators assembled in 174 cinemas scattered throughout 38 American States and four Canadian provinces witnessed the 'fight of the year' simultaneously on 'closed circuit'.

When Jim Norris made his accounts in the offices of the I.B.C., in Chicago, that evening, he could not muster a total of 300,000. But the receipts recorded by the Teleprompter Corporation of New York from the box offices of its 174 cinemas topped the one and a half million dollar mark.

None of this, however, causes any anxiety among the promoters of professional sport. 'Direct' receipts – markedly inferior to television rights are no longer important for them. They no longer have ears for the S.O.S. calls from the organizers of university sport, and of sport in the provinces. *They scarcely pause to consider that with the disappearance of amateur sport the springs which supply recruits for professional sport will dry up for ever.*

So long as the public is kept happy, so long as it stays mesmerised before its television screens, and so long as it watches the advertisements extolling X's razor blades, T's beer, and Z's toothpaste, in short, as long as the commercial promoter continues to foot the bill, the organizer has nothing to worry about.

He just organizes.

In any case, even if he wished to do otherwise it would be too late for him to turn to other methods.

Jim Norris 'owes' 52 fights a Tear

Sport is bound to the wheel of the commercial promoters by long term contracts. Teddy Brenner, the promoter of Saint Nick's Arena, is under contract to the Du Mont Television Network to stage events every Monday evening in his New York hall. Jim Norris (or his successor) 'owes' 52 fights per year, one every Friday night, to the

Gillette organization and the C.B.S. network. The Philadelphia baseball team, like all the others, has sold 77 of its matches to a well known brand of beer, assuring itself of a revenue of around 550,000 dollars. Gillette – once again – is believed to pay 3 and a half million dollars for the telecasting rights of the 'World Series' base ball matches, a series of seven matches corresponding to a national Cup, Final decided on a basis of the best of seven matches. Furthermore, Gillette must add the broadcasting expenses of the television stations to this already fabulous sum. The commercial promoters, the television network, and the baseball league are bound by the present contract until 1961.

On the other hand, world boxing championships of medium importance (in other words, contests which are not retransmitted on closed circuit for relaying in cinemas) draw crowds to the value of only 50,000 to 200,000 dollars !

The Dictatorship of the Dollar

By imposing the dictatorship of the dollar upon sport, which has accepted it happily enough, American advertising and television have bound it hand and foot. 'You can't win against those people' said Walter Brown, President of the Boston Professional Baseball Team, 'they own you body and soul'.

Nevertheless, a few organizers have sent television with its pomp and circumstance to the devil. I know three of them. In all probability there are not many more.

Lou Perini, president of the 'Milwaukee Braves', banished television from his stadium. As a result his Club is the only one to be packed out !

Jack Hurley, boxing promoter of Seattle, (Washington), refused all television contracts for the Patterson-Rademacher fight, which he was promoting.

George Parnassus, boxing promoter of Los Angeles, can be considered as the saviour of boxing in California, or at least as the man who would not tolerate its total disappearance.

He refused to televise the recent world championship between Basse and Moreno. Last November, when he staged the Bantam weight championship between Halimi and Macias, he prevented the screening of the match in Southern California. By curbing the ravages of television – and by resisting the temptation of immediate profit through television rights – he has made his area a region of crowded boxing halls and stadia. Basse and Moreno, Halimi and Macias boxed at Los Angeles before more than 20,000 spectators. In New York they would not have drawn 5,000 !