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## CONSIDERATIONS ON A MAXIM

*The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, for the essential thing in life is not to have conquered, but to have fought well.*

Baron P. de Coubertin.

However lucid the expression of a thought may seem to be at first sight, it is always liable to be interpreted differently. The above quotation does not escape this rule, and more has been read into it (or less, depending upon the point of view adopted) than the author himself must, no doubt, have wished to express.

In fact, we do not believe that De Coubertin wished to urge absolutely any kind of athlete to compete in the Olympic Games, even without being of international calibre, simply in order that he should *take part*.

It seems to us that the second part of the sentence clearly explains the first. for De Coubertin did say that the essential thing is *to fight well*. Now there is no fight or struggle if there exists a distinct difference of class between the two opponents. The author might have altered this formula and said, 'When two athletes fight to obtain a title. it is the fight itself which is interesting, not its outcome'.

The *struggle for life* is the law of nature, and the contest in the stadium is a pleasant aspect of this law. It is the harmony resulting from a well-balanced struggle which lends it its full charm ; it is a human achievement which makes the performance worthwhile.

The matching of a weak athlete against a strong opponent is a painful thing to witness. It is not a contest, it is a walkover. Obviously this is not what was intended by the brilliant man who revived the Games, and whose mind was so fine and generous.

Let us say therefore, the important thing is not to win but to approach the Games in a trained condition which is sure to offer a well-balanced and spectacular contest. In the stadia there have been vanquished athletes who have made a much deeper impression than those who bested them, and sometimes a defeat can win more applause than a victory. In everyday life this is also the case...

Is this not the sense of what Baron de Coubertin wished to convey, rather than suggesting a ridiculous participation without glory ?

We are well aware that the strict application of the principle which we are defending, would have the effect of noticeably reducing the number of the competitors, but the quality of the performance would thus be enhanced. It would afford a twofold advantage, since at the present moment the Olympic Games are likely to incur the risk of having to reduce the number of events in their programme on account of the

overcrowding among the participants in each event.

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(Note from the Editor: It is generally unknown that the first part of that maxim is not from Coubertin. It was pronounced by The Archbishop of Pennsylvania in St. Paul's cathedral in London on the occasion of the religious ceremony which preceded the Opening of the 1908 Games. That maxim was then taken up by the Renovator in a speech he gave at an official dinner. While approving the maxim given by The Archbishop, he added the second part, which is from him.)