

FOLLOWING THE DEAD OF THE POPE, LOVER OF SPORT

The members of the International Olympic Committee still recall the audience granted them by His Holiness Pope Pius XIIth in the Vatican in 1949. We are publishing in this present issue of the Bulletin a photograph which was taken on that occasion.

Pius XIIth was a great admirer of sport. He was keen on mountaineering, particularly in Switzerland, and alpine climbing became his favourite pastime. But we prefer to let him speak for himself and are quoting below some of the statements he made concerning

sport. These statements are not the utterances of a modern statesman, nor the leader of an advanced socialist party, nor yet the victor of Annapurna. No, these subtle definitions of sport come from His Holiness Pope Pius XIIth, who has just passed away.

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‘At the beginning of this century, sport assumed such proportions – as a result of the teams of amateurs, the crowds which pack the stadia, and thanks to the importance given to it by the press – that it constitutes a phenomenon typical of the society of today’.

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‘In the field of organization and technique it is necessary to increase the diffusion of healthy sport among the youth of less well off circles. If you are convinced that sport improves and strengthens the body, trains the mind and urges it towards the attainment of the greatest victories, you cannot possibly tolerate the fact that a great number of young people should be deprived of these riches on the grounds of their poverty.’

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‘Listen to the lessons taught by mountaineering. Your ambition is to climb ever

higher, aided by the strength of your muscles. Yet after all, this thirst for reaching the summit is an aspiration of your heart and soul.’

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‘We must not only watch over the spiritual preparation of the leaders of sport, but also over their technical preparation, for the technical and scientific organization is incontestably recognized nowadays as a necessary requirement. Let us learn to distinguish between straightforward physical training and athletics, and between athletics and competitive sport. Physical training ensures the normal development and preservation of sound physical strength ; athletics tends to go beyond the normal, but without confrontation with others and without tending towards acrobatic feats, for acrobacy is a somewhat cold sport ; competitive sport, in its turn, tends by means of rivalry to concentrate reaching the extreme limits that can be attained through wise and skilful use of physical strength.’

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It was Pius XIIth who once said to a visitor at the Vatican,

‘When I was a seminarist, long ago, I took up boxing.’

His Holiness added in a lower tone,

‘And it wasn’t just shadow-boxing, either.’

