
FAREWELL ZATÓPEK

Emil Zátopek, thrice Olympic champion and the most prodigious runner of his generation is also a wise man. He has given up all training... to remain true to his reputation, as he declared recently to Raymond Meyer, special correspondent of *L'Equipe* in Prague: Zátopek fears that, if he keeps on training, he may rapidly regain his earlier form, especially in cross-country, the standard of which is very low in Czecho-Slovakia. He could easily become the best runner in his country, in which case he would be obliged to appear on the starting-line in the big international events, a thing that he wishes to avoid at all costs. He refuses to return to international competition in spite of the efforts of the sports committee in his own country, who asked him to take part in the European-Games at Stockholm last year. His refusal to do so caused a certain disagreement between that committee and the army, in which Zátopek at present holds the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Fortunately the army backed him up and shared his views.

Nowadays Zátopek's greatest wish is to devote himself exclusively to the task of becoming a technical adviser, to educate and foster the love of sport. Undoubtedly he would still enjoy running, and participating in small regional games, simply for the pleasure of appearing on the track once more.

But the time of international competition is over for him. Last summer he devoted his time to undertaking a tour of lectures, including Brussels and thereafter Baku, Moscow, and Peking, where he spoke on behalf of sport with the geniality, humour and sincerity which are the characteristics of his happy nature.

The great erstwhile champion goes on training now with his wife Dana, and practises exercises on the gymnastic bars which he has installed in his home. And what about Dana? Zátopek replied: 'After winning the title of European Champion at Stockholm last summer, she is giving up her appearances in big sports manifestations. Dana is very old (*sic*). She is now thirty-six.' These are daring words, yet they are wise ones. The great runner of the post-war years is overtaken by age and outrun by the rising generation. He wishes to remain true and loyal to his reputation. The ageing triple Olympic champion is only the shadow of the prodigious runner of former times. The ex-god of the stadium, now an ageing athlete, but still worthy of our admiration, is entirely right in resisting the pressure of all those who still want to offer him as a sacrifice to the hard and critical public of the stadium, while feeding him with the crumbs of his past glory.