
PRO SPORTS FAIL TO SCORE WITH SYD

by Sydney J. Harris ('Chicago Daily News')

Professional sports don't interest me, because I think the phrase is a contradiction in terms. An activity ceases to be a 'sport' the moment it becomes 'professional'.

I was in Detroit this fall when big black headlines announced the trading of quarterback Bobby Layne from the Detroit Lions to the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Detroit fans were shocked, but the Lions' coach, George Wilson, said simply : 'It's a cruel, hard business. But I have a job to do and I can't let sentiment enter into it. If I do, I'm licked.'

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It's a cruel, hard business. So is every professional sport – baseball and basketball and hockey and golf and tennis. It's mean and mercenary and basically inhuman – when the whole idea of 'sport' should be its humanity.

Recreation was devised so that men could find release from the grim business of making a living ; so that they could glory in winning a contest *for its own sake*. The Olympic heroes of ancient Greece were crowned with laurel because they showed what men could do with no incentive but victory.

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Take sentiment out of sports and you take away its original reason for existence. Remove sentiment and you have cut the

loyalty that clings to a losing team ; and little is left but to raise the money that can buy a winning team.

It is good and necessary that men should work for a living. It is a monstrous perversion that men should play for a living. The whole purpose of play is to escape to a realm beyond necessity, to a glorious never-never land, where the skillful and the fleet and the courageous can find a happy ending that is too often denied them in the cold market place.

In true sports, the contestants are ranged against each other. In professional sports, they are ranged against the public. Their ultimate object is to attract as many customers as possible. They are merchandisers and promoters and box-office accountants.

There is nothing at all wrong in being any of these things – but let us not pretend that what we have is 'sport'. What we have is business, transferred from the counter to the stadium. A cruel, hard business, where the Bobby Laynes are as disposable as so many boxes of stale merchandise.

Who is competent of preventing the participation of 'pseudo-amateurs' in the Olympic Games ?

When a pseudo-amateur takes part in the Olympic Games, according to public opinion and (that of certain misinformed newspapers), the responsibility of this happening falls on the International Olympic Committee. Were this the case, the press would not fail to criticize the Committee for its weakness, and would be quite right to do so, but things happen in a different way. Let us stress the point once more, it is not the International Olympic Committee who engages the athletes competing in the Games, nor is it possible for this Committee to control the amateur status of about 5,000 athletes belonging to 89 different countries of the world.

Among other things, Art. 34 of the Olympic Rules and Regulations stipulates quite clearly that 'only National Olympic Committees, officially recognized by the International Olympic Committee, are competent to enter competitions in the Olympic Games'. Further on, in connection with the declaration of amateur signed by the competitor, the article says that 'the *National Federation* of that particular sport must countersign this declaration, while confirming that, to the best of its 'knowledge, and as far as it can testify, this statement is true'.

We are of opinion that these texts are sufficiently clear and precise to convince all

those who are interested in this problem, that the International Olympic Committee cannot be held responsible for the participation in the Games of certain pseudo-amateurs. This responsibility falls entirely within the competence of the *National federations* and of the *National Olympic Committees*, the latter are the representative Bodies of the International Olympic Committee in their respective country. It must be understood, however, that the International Olympic Committee has the right to intervene, as we mentioned it in the last issue of the Bulletin, when a doubt arises as to the amateur status of a competitor, or in case the International Olympic Committee were to have irrefutable proofs of non-eligibility of a competitor.

Indeed, according to the Art. 39 of the Olympic Rules, the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee is authorized to intervene directly on all controversial matters of a non technical nature. (All controversial matters of a technical order fall within the competence of the International Federations.)

A fact greatly to be deplored is that excessive national pride and the overwhelming desire to win Olympic medals, often get the better of the integrity that one expects

to find in the National Federations and in the National Olympic Committees, certain of which close their eyes over cases which are known to them, in the hope that the winning of some medals at the Games will enhance their own national prestige. — A practice which has been incessantly condemned and fought down by the International Olympic Committee. — It seems to us therefore opportune to remind the leaders of these

institutions to which we have just alluded, to reread paragraph 6 on page 96 of the Olympic Rules and they will then be fully conversant with the obligations and responsibilities assigned to them. They are the only organisms which are responsible for tolerating, on occasion, certain deviations to the code of amateurism, an evil which the International Olympic Committee never ceases to condemn.

