

Amateurism and sports training camps

by KENNEDY L. DOHERTY

athletic Director, University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

During a leisure hour at the recent National Track Championships at Boulder a group of influential college track coaches discussed seriously the advantages of a training camp such as Finland has at Viermachi, Sweden has at Bosun and Volodalen, or as Percy Cerutti has at Portsea, Australia.

Somehow the writer's mind centered upon the ill-conceived attempt by a New York salesman to establish a two-month training camp in the Finger Lakes for the 1956 Olympic team, so his immediate reaction was entirely negative.

Upon returning home he chanced upon the autobiography of Jim Peters, great English marathoner. There, in complete sincerity and most readable style, is described the concentration of effort necessary for modern training but more than that, the endless distractions and interferences with training diet, and rest which are so often an unavoidable part of an amateur's life. Peters had a full-time job to maintain, a wife to keep happy who wanted to help her husband but who also wanted to enjoy normal living, a house to take care of, a family to raise.

How was it possible for such a marathoner whose traditional training called for tedious hours of slow running to ever get in shape? Get the book if you really want to find out, but in brief, he did it by means of short-time fast runs which have since revolutionized marathon training. Sometimes it was before breakfast but more often after work at night regardless of dark or rain or cold or wifely disapproval.

The first conclusion I reached was how wonderful and rewarding Peter's running experience has been but also how demanding and even sacrificial; the second, how unfair if his chief rival had the advantage of a training camp in which he could concentrate upon his training with none of the dilemmas or worries that constantly beset Peters.

* * *

My thoughts wandered over the reading and thinking done in recent years on the early history and significance of amateurism and focussed upon the fact that it was just such unfairness that amateurism was and still is intended to prevent.

Much as modern sportsmen are inclined to think and act so, amateurism is not

primarily concerned with material reward. Rather its basic concern has always been to achieve fair competition through equal and limited opportunity for preparation. At first preparation was limited by English nobility's disparagement of sweat and of those who earned their living by it whether in sport or job. More recently, preparation has been limited by the more primary requirements of normal living. Today, a true amateur, regardless of the specific words of written codes, is one who has major work to do, apart from his sport, which requires a major portion of his time, his energy, and his interest. An amateur therefore has only a lesser portion of these to devote to sport. Not only does this leave something less than three hours per day for practice, an amateur's so-called nervous energy is normally reduced by a thousand tiny worries and distractions of normal living.

* * *

This concept of amateurism is disturbing to many accredited amateurs who abide by all the rules as to material rewards, but who have been able, through personal affluence or the mis-guided leniency of industry, schools, or armed services, to devote themselves wholly and with little regard for limitations, to excellence in their sport. But this does not deny its truth. Delightful as they may be in their devotion to sport and their carefree approach to life, marvellous as may be their world record performance, these are not our true amateurs.

Contrast their opportunity for sports preparation with that of Jim Peters. His problem was not merely to discover a system, any system, which would provide maximum stamina and speed over the marathon distance. Rather he had the much more difficult task of following a system which would produce world-level performance within the hour or so of time available to him at night and the two days of each week-end, and despite the energy-sapping demands of full-time work and home.

There are many similar examples in our own United States of course, but few in print. Our amateurs need to do more writing. I recall Greg Rice's article in the October 1949 *The Amateur Athlete*.

Preparation, as I remember, even in midseason, was full of personal hardship.

After a day in the office, at the five-thirty bell, I would dash into the blackness of the winter's early darkness to the subway entrance to battle the homeward bound human stampede for a standing position to Columbia. Upon arrival, trek to my room, change into my track togs, don and extra heavy sweat suit, and an overcoat to keep out the chill of the night air between sections of my workout since the locker rooms were closed to all activities for the day. The library light reflected enough rays on the track so one could run without fear of stepping off the track...

'The day's training completed, bundle up and return to my room. A shower and if not too tired to eat, out on the streets for a belated dinner. When all was done it was time for sleep and another day.'

Perhaps the most publicized of all recent amateurs was Roger Bannister with his 'four or five weekly dashes to London's more unfrequented tracks at unpredictable times, when he could squeeze in an hour away from St. Mary's hospital'.

Then there is Cerutti's statement that 'much of Landy's training was done in the cold and wet of winter nights. Sometimes it was at midnight, because he did not want to interfere with his agricultural science studies at Melbourne University'.

* * *

Actually this idea of restrictions upon sports performance should not arouse surprise or angry protests. After all it is inherent in almost every rule in our code-books. Discus throwers could unquestionably throw farther if they had an unlimited area in which to turn. Instead they are required to turn within a tiny 8½ foot circle. To provide an equal and fair basis for competition, there are hundreds of similar precise limitations on mechanical aids: the taping of a vaulting pole or on a shot-putter's hands, the thickness of a high jumper's shoe sole. We accept such restrictions upon possible performance because they are fair for everyone. No one has a special advantage.

* * *

The question of sports training camps creeps in again. Can everyone be given the same opportunity for all-out training in a care-free environment?

Before going further it should be emphasized that the inherent limitations of amateurism in time, energy, and interest do not require nor even imply a dilettante attitude or practice. When the Olympic code defines an amateur in part as one 'to whom participation in sport is nothing more than a recreation without gain of any kind, direct or indirect', it does not consider recreation as

mere play which one begins and ends as idle pleasure might decide... No one who has watched the training of a Dellinger, a Delaney, or a Courtney could describe it as childish recreation.

The Olympic code-writers know as well as any one that their 'recreation' realistically defined means work, to quote Cerutti, 'exhausting, soul-killing work' but with Cerutti they would agree that even such work 'seems only fun, exhilarating, satisfying fun' when motivation is high and self-initiated, when distractions are absent or shunted aside, and especially as at Cerutti's Camp Portsea the environment is soul-refreshing.

Similarly 'limitation in interest' does not at all mean disinterestedness. On the contrary during the limited hours a serious-minded amateur has for practice, no activity in the world is so interesting, more than that, so soul-absorbing as his sport. During these few hours, all else (home-life, vocation, studies) is mere distraction to be eliminated completely from mind and conversation. Nothing but all-out concentration can bring the efficiency and intensity of practice that modern excellence in sports requires.

* * *

In summary then, limitation should refer primarily to time. Major time is for more primary affairs in life. Major energy and interest is for one's vocational, student or home life. When fatigue from sports practice continues beyond an hour or two after practice, the athlete has attempted too much that day. Or he has failed to follow a proper 'warmingdown' period at the end of practice which helps to remove feelings of fatigue.

The energy output and enthusiasm of an amateur can be just as intense as that of any professional, but only during the limited time left over from his major concerns.

Does this mean a limitation upon ultimate performance? It may be that Lawrence Morehouse is right when he states in his widely used physiology of exercise, 'in general, improvement in endurance is determined by the length of the workout period', but we still have very recent examples in Courtney, Delany, Bannister, Landy and a host of others that world level performances can still be achieved through progressively more intense, year-round training within an average of less than two hours per day.

* * *

It would be a serious error to conclude from all this that amateurism is primarily a matter of restriction and limitation. On the contrary amateurism is a positive, affirmative idea, a way of life; well rounded and proportioned, with first things first and other things in their proper place. In an amateur's life, sport

can be only one of the other things, all-important within its proper time, but a lesser value in terms of the whole of life.

But to return to the original theme of this paper, *Amateurism and Sports Training Camps*, how does this discussion relate to the suggestion that the United States should start a series of training camps in which special attention could be given to women's track and field and to the events in which we are weak internationally? Are such camps legal according to Olympic codes and can they be justified in amateur sports?

First of all it should be recognized that the 1958 Olympic Rules and Regulations state that 'the practice of interrupting the occupation of an athlete (studies or employment) to put him in a camp for athletes for over two weeks for special training is not in accord with the ideals of the Olympic Games'.

Immediately then we have the precise limitations of 'two weeks' per year within which a given athlete can attend camp. Secondly, it cannot be 'a camp for athletes... for special training'. Here the meaning is less precise and more open to interpretation.

In most of the countries of the world there are examples of out-of-doors retreats, away from city and home hindrances, which permit, more than that, which impel abnormal concentration upon training. The most flagrant of these are undoubtedly the armed service camps of most countries where for patriotic reasons, and others, men are encouraged to do their best for service branch and country. The Olympic code specifically outlaws such camps and labels those who benefit by them for extended periods, 'pseudo amateurs'.

Then, in contrast to these, and accepted by Olympic standards, are the dozen or so Sports Institutes which Finland has found so beneficial to her sports program.

The writer remembers with great pleasure and nostalgia two wonderful weeks at Vierumachi. Added to heart-warming Finnish hospitality and efficient organization, there existed almost perfect conditions for sports training.

No problem of eliminating or disciplining distractions here. With endless pine-needled paths through woods and around beautiful lakes, with an excellent cuisine and spotlessly clean rooms and beds, with pleasant good music piped out to all the areas of the camp, with an invigorating Finnish sauna bath within twenty feet of the cold lake, the amazing thing is that we left the place at all. Only personal experience can teach how much the Finnish sauna produces cleanliness and well-being of spirit as much as of body.

Vierumachi is called a sports institute or out-of-doors school, restricted to those interested in vigorous physical activity if not actually competitive sports. Certainly it is not a typical American tourist camp with ease and relaxation as the major concern. When we were there a group of boy and girl

swimmers were training twice daily under their home-town coach. Our own purpose was to conduct a track clinic for the younger coaches of Finland. A well-conditioned track was nearby and a fine auditorium for about 100 persons with sound movie equipment was available. Naturally most of our work was out-of-doors.

Next, in thinking about camps of the world, Percy Cerutti's Portsea came to mind. No precise information is at hand as to the basis on which athletes attend Portsea or for how long a period. Length of time is a primary concern as stated in the Olympic rules.

But what red-blooded athlete could fail to be stirred by Cerutti's enchantments? Located at the edge of the sea, with cool invigorating breezes for pleasant running, sand hills for exhausting endurance running, long beaches and soft earth for long or fast running, Portsea is an ideal training set-up, but more than that, it is an instrument for developing and expounding the 'Master's' life philosophy. To quote Cerutti's pamphlet, *Running*,

Here in this environment, over this terrain, the spirit of beauty, of high endeavour enters our souls... Seek out your Portseas, train and run as the impulse comes on you. An hour, two hours of hard running slips away as so many minutes. We become tired, exhaustingly tired, but never unhappy. It is work, but it seems only fun, exhilarating, satisfying fun. When we want to, we have three hard sessions a day.

As the French booklet, *Athletisme*, 1959, puts it, though his pupils may follow Percy wholly and blindly with their feet, one wonders if their ears are quite as open to his philosophical digressions.

* * *

Finally and perhaps most ideal of all there is Sweden's Volodalen. Located above the arctic circle in Lapland, a country of poignant beauty with endless lakes and forests and with air of the utmost purity, Volodalen is not a mere sports training camp. Actually it is a resort to which the Swedish people come with their families as we might do at Yosemite or our State Parks. Its official title is 'The Volodalen Resort for Tourists of Sweden'. Primarily it is an institution for preserving and teaching ancient Swedish folklore and out-of-doors living. It is a way of life, a means of achieving simplicity and soundness of mind and body, a short period of freedom for better living, not merely freedom from city life and its complexities.

The training emphasis is the work of one man, Gosta Olander, whose obstinate passion for running and early success with Gunder Haegg overcame all obstacles. Olander is

certain that perfection in any specific physical activity can be achieved only when there is a foundation at a very high level of all-round basic physical and mental conditioning. City life will not permit this; it is only by living out-of-doors (climbing, skiing, swimming, chopping wood, strength and flexibility exercises, fatiguing runs and walks, a 24 hour a day programme that optimum condition can be reached.

Obviously Gunder Haegg or Alain Mimoun went to Volodalen to train for running, perhaps they trained as much as three times a day, as did Elliott at Portsea, yet their actual training was a much broader and worthwhile thing than is implied in the term, 'training camp'. The latter smacks of pre-season professional baseball camps; Volodalen is closer to higher education which provides opportunity for sports as an essential part of whole living.

* * *

One need not look far for analogies in other areas of life. For example, Arnold Toynbee's great *A Study of History* states that one of the fundamentals of all progress lies in the practice of 'Withdrawal-and-Return'. Creative leaders have discovered unsuspected and great powers within themselves by withdrawing for a time from all social toils and trammels... St. Paul's voluntary withdrawal for three years into the desert, and Gandhi's forced withdrawal through imprisonment are two wellknown among 10,000 possible examples.

But this truth has equal validity for sports. Only a man with Roger Bannister's powers of concentration could carry a full medical school programme and still write

'I sometimes think that running has given me a glimpse of the greatest freedom a man can ever know... the simultaneous liberation of both body and mind. The mental approach is all important, because the strength and power of the mind are without limit. All this energy can be harnessed by the correct attitude of mind.'

The ordinary mortal would fare better if he could withdraw from his troubles for a time, build new levels of physical and mental fitness, and then return to his regular routine of living. Could Elliott have achieved so much without the self-discovery that occurred at Portsea under Cerutti's dynamic and urgent demands? Time and again he has said otherwise.

* * *

In summary then, though the idea of sports training camps contains virulent seeds of professionalism, they can be made to serve

a real need in amateur sports IF, and it is a serious reservation, (1) if the primary purposes of the Camp leadership are related to a simpler, more concentrated, and more abundant out-of-doors life rather than to the narrower goals of sports training only, (2) if the stay of any one athlete is limited to brief vacation periods, and (3) if they are not exclusive, but open to a great many athletes. The more such camps there are, the more they are consistent with amateurism and its equality of opportunity. The first of these reservations would suggest that the Camp director should not be a sports coach and that non-athletes would form a high proportion of campers.

Within these restrictions, such camps could lead not only toward greater sports performances but more importantly toward the better individuals and the better world which amateurism, the Olympic Games, and their founder, Baron de Coubertin have always sought to achieve.