

# At the Olympic Games of Rome, Amateurism has been flouted worse than ever before

by Gaston Meyer, chief editor of *L'Équipe*, Paris

Just before the beginning of the Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee discussed at length various items at a meeting it held then. It took no important decisions, save that of examining again the aggravating question of amateurism: 'A solution, says the International Olympic Committee must be found to put an end to abuses and hypocrisy.' This is the main point.

There is, however, no really perfect solution to this problem; although, as a matter of fact, there are two: open the Games to everybody or close them to all.

One must admit that there has never been so many flagrant violations of the rules of amateurism than those seen in Rome. State athletes are increasing in number, others are assisted in all conceivable ways (included the French team). The only real amateurs left are the Anglo-Saxons, and yet, the Australians were severely criticized because they had gone through several weeks of special training in swimming, when all their expenses had been paid, of course.

The most flagrant case was provided by Italy who, for the last three years, kept back her young boxers, cyclists or football players from becoming professionals with the result that the most striking proof of infringement of rules was duly rewarded by winning a good dozen Olympic medals!

I fully realize that Italy, being the organizing country of the Games, had the duty to shine in them, and I do not blame her for having devoted important resources in helping her athletes. But everybody ought to have the right to do the same openly and publicly.

The days of integral amateurism are over, and we will never return to the amateurism of our forefathers. Our sport leaders should be the first to recognize this fact.

This being so, the only thing that matters is: how far can we go? The *pros* having access to the Games is not in itself immoral. A pro fighting to win a medal will stand to lose more than gain by it.

The factor of propaganda and advertising interferences would tend to pervert certain competitions. Therefore, it is better to abandon this solution.

## *Definition of the « Pro »*

On the other hand, it is possible to give a precise definition of the professional: 'A person

who lives of his sport and makes a lucrative career of it is barred from competing in sporting events controlled by the amateur sport federations recognized by the International Olympic Committee.'

This solution would bring the disappearance of boxing, cyclism and football from the olympic programme. It would not be advisable to create, however, professionals groups apart from those of amateurs.

This suppression would, besides, really be justified from the point of view of sport, since the purpose of the Olympic Games is to be the meeting ground of the elite of the world. This is not the case with boxing, cycling or football.

It is surprising that so simple a solution does not have the suffrage of the greatest majority of sportsmen, for it would be an easy thing to adopt an honest attitude by seeing things as they are, and retain the essential.

I shall resume:

1. DEFINE THE PROFESSIONAL AND EXCLUDE FROM THE GAMES THE PROFESSIONAL UNDER CONTRACT.
2. ABOLISH FROM THE OLYMPIC PROGRAMME THE SPORTS, THE PHYSICAL ELITE OF WHICH ARE PROFESSIONAL: BOXING, CYCLISM AND FOOTBALL.

## *The Olympic Programme*

This problem has also been a source of long discussions within the International Olympic Committee, for it underwent a drastic change this time, as it did not begin with the athletic events as usual. The experience seemed however conclusive. Formerly, the Games put on a spurt at the start and flopped in the course of the second week. Gorged with a surfeit of record breaking, the exhausted athletes did not have sufficient energy left to capture our interest on trifles. The Games always flopped and fizzled out at the end.

Nothing like that happened this time.

Athletic events kept the interest alive till the very end of this magnificent manifestation. The events contested at the beginning of the Games apart from swimming, namely cyclism, canoëing-kayak, even wrestling also attracted crowds of spectators as never before. On the whole, it was a success. However, around, everything was not perfect.

This was the fault of the International Federations in control of the technical side of the Games, for, they failed to take the necessary measures to keep the Games within bounds and prevent the ill effects of rampant gigantism assailing them.

The athletic programme had to be prolonged over a period of ten days owing to the very large number of entries.

After the 1952 Games at Helsinki, we headed one of our commentaries by the following rubric: *Lack of respect of the sport leaders towards the competitors.*

Indeed, nothing is done with respect to show consideration to the athlete and give him the best possible conditions materially. Some events last for hours at end. Consider the position of the competitors in the weight-lifting and fencing events, when they are mobilized during ten hours consecutively?

Yet, there is no difficulty about finding a solution, even by the most simple brains. Alas, the force of habit, my dear friend, yes,

the force of habit is so deep-rooted, that, the real fact is that the development of sport thanks to Olympism has been so great, that it seemed to have completely overpowered the responsible leaders of sport.

In 1955, the International Olympic Committee proposed certain measures in order to reduce the Programme of the Games. The International Federations dodged the difficulty. For example, the International Olympic Committee decided to abolish *artificial classifying*, that is to say the classifying of teams per points, starting with classifying in individual contests (cycling and equestrian sports). As a result of this, the U. C. I. (International Cyclist Union) and the International Equestrian Sports Federation promptly requested the addition on the Programme of a cycling team event (road) and the International Equestrian Federation demanded an additional team event: jumping! These were in direct opposition to the aim intended.