

Prospects and aspirations of World Sport

by *Emile Birbaum*

Not very long ago, it happened last September, Mr. Avery Brundage was astounded to see the high level of splendour and outstanding majesty Rome contrived to impart to the Games because of its unique setting allied to the creative genius of the Roman people. He exclaimed: 'Rome fully deserves to become the capital of the world sport'. Rome is already looked upon as the spiritual centre of the world. A symbolical unification of the body and the spirit is thus realized. When uttering this comment, Mr. Brundage did not know how near the truth he was striking, indeed in man also the fusion of the body and the soul forms one entity. This promotion of the body which is raised to the level of the mind is one of the aims attained by the practice of sport. Let us observe the process: everything that passes through the body reacts on the mind. Inversely, everything that is felt and thought

reacts on the body. Einstein once said: 'Matter equals energy.' Teilhard de Chardin also said: 'An embryonic element of conscience was already present in the original matter.'

Thanks to sport, which is extending its powerful influence over the whole world, physical activities, so despised once upon a time, have acquired the value of a cultural phenomenon, the development and effects of which have not yet been fully understood. The facts are there to prove that physical activities affect the mind as well as the body and develop moral qualities. In spite of all what has been said the aim of the athlete is not only to develop the body and improve his physique but he practises sport as a means to reach perfection on a much higher level. This was very evident in Rome; for, in the Stadium, the athlete is always alone. He knows almost always beforehand the 'times'

of each of his rivals, he also knows who is going to be the weakest or the strongest amongst his opponents. The essential for the athlete is not so much to know if he is going to beat his rivals as to know if he can improve his time of performance, this is the asset that wins at the end; in other words, if he can break his own record, he realizes an improvement on all his former efforts. The material gain may represent only a tenth of a second or ten centimetres, but it constitutes only the outward sign of a moral victory translated by an expansion of spiritual values, it is a sign of better perception and increased consciousness of his true value allied to a deep feeling of inward exhilaration. There is even more to it: the athlete is not the only one to benefit by this spiritual gain, this exhilaration spreads to the spectators who are near or far, even to those who only read or hear about the results of such athletic achievements. Another thing which caused much admiration in Rome was the attitude of the enormous crowds which often witnessed performances by foreign athletes who came from faraway countries and who were utterly unknown to them, yet the crowds did not limit their encouragements to friends only, but to all the competitors on the latter own merit as athletes and sportsmen. If the athlete won, the crowds rejoiced with him, his triumph brought joy and happiness to hundred thousand souls. The spectator shared his joy because he identified himself with his cause, felt for him, he threw his whole weight in the race or contest ran before him. The public of the stadia has often been ridiculed by people who qualified it thus: 'Alright for the twenty-two actors! but what about the twenty-two thousand onlookers?' This kind of irony missed fire in Rome, on account of the fact that a stadium performance does not call for ridicule anymore than a concert hall, where two thousand auditors listen to a soloist, or when three hundred persons foregather in an Art exhibition in order to admire the works of one single artist. All are alike in the pleasure they derive of what they see or hear as they all benefit by it. This is why sport is considered to be a benefit to civilization, it is capable to impart and stimulate physical and mental balance in the individual in the

same way as Art and science, since Art is a means of expressing human sensitiveness whereas science is a way of salvation to people who seek truths. One day, sport will be able to absorb the excess of physical vitality in youth and lead the way thus directing the combative instincts inherent to men. For a very long time, there was no other outlet for men but wars and cruelty displayed towards men and animals. To satisfy his pride and sense of honour, a man had either to kill or to have the glory to be killed. Sport offers to man afflicted with this love for fighting a pacific and harmless issue, for, as long as man lives, he will fight and thirst for victory, he can do so with the practice of sport peacefully, without harming anyone, as it should be among civilized educated men who have evolved on the right line since the prehistoric days of the caverns. In our glorious days of spatial conquest, nothing is more humiliating as to see men continue to destroy each other like beasts in these periodical armed conflicts which kill millions!

One day, men will surely outgrow the notion that wars are useful or even necessary, nor will it be necessary to resort to blows if a man does not share your opinions. It is incumbent to sport to prove how wrong this way of thinking is, also to show that one can compete and measure ones physical power against one another without harbouring the desire to destroy one another. The game must, however, be played according to certain rules, certain facts must be complied with and one must submit oneself to the decision of umpires. When seen in this light, sport will succeed in transforming the present set of values, it will then prove to the world that wars are useless and wasteful, whereas sport proves its utility by fighting for peace. This fact was made evident to us by the great lesson we learnt in Rome when the Olympics there were the outstanding event of universal sport in 1960... There we observed the collapse of Chinese walls, iron curtains lifted and the proof that such international gathering in the name of sport can bring peace and unity to this planet, when the youths of all nations foregather to serve the same ideals of sport. May this great example be followed in other spheres...