

CIRCULAR LETTER

*sent to International Olympic Committee members and to the Press
by Mr. A. Brundage in March 1961*

Dear Sirs,

In the sixty-five years that have elapsed since the Olympic Games were revived by the Baron de Coubertin, there have been many social, economical and political changes. As a result, and especially because of the revival of the Games themselves, there have also been vast changes in the world of sport. If we are to preserve the Olympic Games as originally intended, it is high time we review the situation, restate the objectives of the Olympic Movement, and in the light of modern conditions decide how best to accomplish these objectives.

Prior to the Twentieth Century there was little or no international sport competition of any kind. Furthermore, that branch of the entertainment business which bears the conflicting title of 'Professional Sport' (conflicting because sport is fun and not business) barely existed. The revival of the Games, coupled with the general and continuing improvement in economic conditions following the industrial revolution, has led to the development of the great structure of international competition in a score of different sports that exists today. Moreover, growing public interest has caused promoters to offer as entertainment, competition between paid performers and a lucrative business has come into being. This great public interest stimulated by the Press, Radio and Television, also presents opportunities to capitalize on athletic fame that did not exist in 1896.

The public interest in, and the success of the Olympic Games, has also aroused the attention of the politicians, and, forgetting that the Games are contests between individuals and not between nations, tremendous pressures for victory have developed, although the standing of a country is

not determined by the performances of a few trained athletes. If these pressures were always exerted along proper lines, this would be all to the good, but too often they are not.

Thus the Olympic Movement in these materialistic days in which we live, carries the seeds of its own destruction even more than it did 2400 years ago, when the Greek philosophers exclaimed against the subsidization, the proselyting, the excesses, the commercialization, and the other abuses that corrupted the ancient Games, and steps must be taken without further delay to preserve its purity.

Just what are the objectives of the Olympic Movement? One can be certain they are not merely to win medals and to break records. The Baron de Coubertin, when he revived the Olympic Games, had quite different things in mind. He was aware of the ancient Greek ideal of a sound mind in a strong and active body, and he wished to stimulate interest in physical fitness and to bring to the attention of all the world, the necessity of physical training for the full development of man's potentialities and for a well rounded existence. Observing the results in Great Britain and in the United States, he knew that a programme of competitive sports would build stronger and healthier boys and girls and make better citizens. He also believed in the self-discipline and the character building of amateur sport under proper direction, and he thought the moral quality of fair play essential, in sport, would carry over into other fields. He was convinced of the value of amateurism, the devotion to the task at hand without consideration of the reward, as a philosophy of life. These objectives were mentioned in his letter of January 15, 1894, when he said -

«Il importe avant tout de conserver à l'athlétisme le caractère noble et chevaleresque qui l'a distingué dans le passé afin qu'il puisse continuer de jouer efficacement dans l'éducation des peuples modernes le rôle admirable que lui attribuèrent les maîtres grecs. L'imperfection humaine tend toujours à transformer l'athlète d'Olympie en un gladiateur de cirque. Il faut choisir entre deux formules athlétiques qui ne sont pas compatibles. Pour se défendre contre l'esprit de lucre (profit) et de professionnalisme qui menace de les envahir, les amateurs, dans la plupart des pays, ont établi une législation compliquée pleine de compromis et de contradictions; trop souvent d'ailleurs, on en respecte la lettre plus que l'esprit.»

He also hoped to develop interest in the Fine Arts, so necessary to a complete and full life. Bringing the youth of the world together at quadrennial intervals under ideal conditions would, he believed, create international respect, good will and amity, and thus help create for all the world, a truce such as that which prevailed in ancient Greece during the Games.

One can be sure that he did not revive the Games as a commercial enterprise for profit, nor to entertain the public. He would have been horrified, after what he said about gladiators of the circus, to find the Games converted into a steppingstone to a career as a paid athletic performer. To have them used as a measure of the superiority of one political system over another was inconceivable. He would rather not have revived the Games than to see them perverted to such ends.

He was primarily a scholar and an educator. He believed in the old Greek adage, 'nothing in excess', and in the ideal of the Golden Age, a broad and comprehensive development for men, in which sport, emphasizing grace, beauty and its moral qualities, played a part, but only a part. Athletic Games and competition were not to be a career — they were incidental to a symmetrical and harmonious physical, mental and spiritual development, a supplement and not the goal. Thus the Olympic Games, which, in ancient Greece, were a dignified, semi-religious festival, were intended to be far more than merely a World Championship.

At the beginning, in 1896, there were few problems of eligibility and the rules were simple. Most of those participating understood the objectives, and all participants were on a reasonably equal footing. The regulations were confined to a statement of general principles, unelaborated. Baron de Coubertin, however, had no conception of the tremendous development to come, nor of the temptations to capitalize on athletic fame which exist today. He simply provided in the first of the fundamental principles that govern the Games that they were to 'assemble amateurs of all nations in fair and equal competition'. He thought this simple restriction would prevent the excesses which drew criticism from Greek scholars and eventually destroyed the ancient Games.

Today there are nearly one hundred countries in various stages of sport development, with differing social, political and commercial conditions,

interested in the Olympic Games. It has been impossible in the limited time to educate all of the hundreds of thousands of individuals in various parts of the world in the idealistic principles of the Olympic Movement. Today there are two classes of individuals interested in sport: First, those whose objective is fun, amusement, improvement and achievement, who are satisfied with the personal glory which comes with their accomplishments. And second, those who aim to make money. The Olympic Games belong to those of the first class only. There is, of course, nothing wrong with participation for financial gain, but it be thoroughly understood that such participation is business and not sport and that such participants are not eligible for the Olympic Games. Moreover, evasion of the rules is not cleverness, it is plain dishonesty. One cannot have one's cake and eat it too.

The first objective of the Olympic Movement, to bring to the attention of the world the benefits, and in fact, the necessity in modern times, of a programme of physical training and competitive sport, to counteract the medieval intellectual scorn of physical development fostered in educational institutions, which confine their activities to intellectual and spiritual fields, and to offset the physical degeneracy that accompanies the crowding into cities, and the lack of necessity of physical activities, which came with the advent of the machine, has already been accomplished in many countries, more and more of which have adopted Olympic ideas. The phenomenal success of the Olympic Games in the brief period of sixty years has, in fact, amazed the world.

The simple, unamplified rule that the Games 'assemble amateurs of all nations in fair and equal competition', however, is not sufficient today. Too many different, and sometimes inaccurate, definitions of the word 'amateur' have appeared. An amateur is not a tyro or a beginner, one not good enough to be a professional as the word is often misused, but literally one who loves and is devoted to the task at hand and not to the reward. Moreover, an amateur who loves sport, also knows that sport, by its very nature, is an avocation and not a vocation.

It follows that, to be eligible in the Olympic Games, a competitor must have a vocation, and if the competition is to be 'fair and equal', as provided in the fundamental principles, that vocation must not be one that gives the participant undue advantage of any kind.

The International Olympic Committee was placed in charge of the Olympic Movement, with the duty and the obligation to maintain its ideals, and to guard and defend its principles. It has the responsibility to set standards. It must lead and not follow. It must stop abuses or the Olympic Games will become a farce and a scandal, defeating the very objectives for which they were revived.

Once we agree on our objectives it should not be too difficult in the light of the knowledge that has come from the experiences of the last sixty years, to lay down detailed eligibility rules for the Olympic Games, in plan and simple language so

that everyone can understand them. Our brief amateur rule is no longer enough. We have already started to do this in the paragraphs that appear on pages 75, 95, 96 and 97 of the Olympic Rule Book. As specific questions of general interest arise they can be answered and embodied in the code, thus keeping it up to date. We know what is best for the Olympic Movement and we must specify clearly, so there can be no misunderstanding, those who can participate in the Olympic Games and those who cannot.

The first thing that must be understood is that no individual, no country, and no sport has an inherent right to participate in the Games; they must be confined to those who believe in and accept its objectives. One reason our rules have not always been followed is that they have not been clearly expressed in complete detail and therefore they have been interpreted differently in different places.

The code of eligibility must provide that –

- 1) all those who are not amateurs must be excluded,
- 2) since amateur sport is an avocation, all those without a vocation must be excluded. (Competition outside the participant's country should be limited to 28 days without special permission – this is the International Amateur Athletic Federation rule),
- 3) those whose vocation is connected with sport, thus giving them either physical or financial advantages, must be excluded.

Number three, above, will have to be amplified by specific restrictions written after consultation

with the different International Federations concerned. For example, we have talked with some ski leaders, whose fine sport is becoming more and more endangered by commercialization, and it is suggested that no skier paid or employed by –

- 1) a manufacturer or dealer in ski equipment, shoes or clothing of any kind,
- 2) a winter resort or hotel,
- 3) a manufacturer or dealer in medals or trophies,
- 4) anyone, when his employment is based on his athletic ability (sport journalist or commentator),

is eligible for Olympic competition.

The International Olympic Committee has no police force, and the responsibility for enforcing its rules has been divided. We assume that everyone is a sportsman, but our example has not yet been powerful enough to create such a Utopian condition. After the eligibility code (incorporating our present amateur rule) is made perfectly clear, so it can be understood in all languages, enforcement should be placed in the hands of the National Olympic Committees, which know the conditions in their respective countries (the Press and the public will be glad to assist), *and severe penalties for all violations must be provided and enforced.* Only so can the Olympic Games be kept pure and clean and honest, in accordance with the high ideals of the Olympic Movement.

Your comments will be appreciated by the Executive Board, which expects to make some recommendations to the session in Athens in June.