

# Sport versus Amateurism

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In sport, amateurism can be subjected to two distinct interpretations.

- a) Amateurism constitutes a state of mind (nota state of fact), according to which the individual practises a sport without any other aim than pleasure and for the physical and spiritual benefits he derives from it, without material gain.
- b) Amateurism is the term improperly used by sport leaders to describe opportunism, self-interest or ignorance (and against all probabilities) is the term used to qualify the sporting ability of athletes more or less professionals, who certainly derive direct or indirect material benefit from the practice of their sport.

Athletes who comply to the first of these definitions do not offer any special problem, they form the chief majority of amateur sportsmen, they are anonymous and want to remain so... On the other hand, all the controversies led by the press or by other means, discussions and *business* concerning the matter of amateurism spring from situations created by the second definition and from facts it leads to.

One cannot sufficiently stress the fact that the words *amateurism* and *amateurs* are in the mouths of far too many people, especially in the mouth of sport leaders. These words are devoid of meaning since they only serve the purpose of covering hypocritically and even stupidly, facts and deeds which pertained to professionalism or,

at any rate, to semi-professionalism. But there are too many people who think that one can save one's face by camouflaging *faked goods* with an eye-wash definition.

Let us be clear: to be a professional or semi-professional in sport means to practice as honourable a vocation as another. We are no more, thank God! living in the days when an actor was almost ostracised and had not even the right to a Christian burial like any other common mortals. Nowadays, professional sport or spectacular sport is just as an asset to society as the theatre, the cinema, etc., etc. Those people, who therefore confer a wrong meaning or a disparaging quality to the condition of a professional sportsman, are either stupid or unkind as they are certainly not fair-minded.

The reader will ask himself why so much fuss is made over cases when an athlete considered an amateur infringes the rules and acts as a professional? Would it not be much simpler to give him the statute of non-amateur as soon as a case like that occurs? The equivocal situation would be cleared at the same time. Unfortunately, it is not just so simple, as a matter of fact, nothing pertaining to this sort of sports problems is ever simple.

'To understand anything, one has to trace back everything to its source', said Gonzague de Reynold. Let us therefore, consider sport from the beginning. At the outset, what are the motives evoked in the majority of countries with regard to modern sport? A desire for national defence and military training, these two factors where evidently more important in the minds of the sport leaders whose task was to organize sport in

their country, than to bother over the improving of public health. Past days photos showed us that even at the Olympic Games, even more so there than elsewhere, there is a display of uniforms, swords and riding boots; these can be seen at all sport manifestations of any importance. On the other hand, we know that politics and the army sometimes launched certain sport movements. The German *Turnvater* Jahn dreamt of unity and Germanic preponderance, Swiss gymnasts practised their drill in turn with military training. Even the venerable Baron de Coubertin did not managed to avoid this type of 'deviation' as we gather from his reply to a French Minister who questioned him on the efficacy of competitive sports as vitalizing factor at the Olympic Games. De Coubertin was of the opinion that sport would 'revitalize France'. After her period of Romanticism and the military disasters she encountered in 1870-1871, France needed badly this impetus of energy.

In face of this martial if not bellicose tendency, professionalism in sport was unthinkable. Only lofty ideals of altruism and fair-play in sport were to the fore and to crown it all: patriotism... As sport manifestations were such poor paying concerns, no business men ever looked upon them as sources of profit making.

With the one exception: the British who were precursors of sport, they probably paid their footballers as well as their pugilists. This peculiarity was confined to the inhabitants of the British Isles and did not cross the Channel!

At the beginning, sport required financial assistance and subsidies, as it was an entirely new movement. This was done under some protest and was closely watched by the public bodies sponsoring it, among whom was the army. Sport is marked almost everywhere by the influence it was submitted to at the beginning. Almost everywhere, elderly leaders can be found who were brought up as real amateurs since there was nothing else but amateur sport in those days. These leaders often make rules and take decisions, they also vituperate and condemn in a spirit which was valid long ago but is now outgrown. It is out of date because sport, in the lapse of half a century has evolved on gigantic proportions and has grown so big that leaders imbued with the notions of past days have not been able to keep pace with the progress realized by modern sport. This disparity is at the root of the trouble which affect certain sports, these have to suffer on one hand the leaders who, because they were submitted to these rules in their youth, still maintain the character and the principles they impose on today sport and this against all new ideas, and on the other hand, we have spectacular sport organizations which are run on a profit making basis and have to face all the charges and requirements this implies. Sport has thus entered

a phase where it is in open dispute against amateurism; vanities and abuses helping, amateurism is ridiculed more and more by those who draw material gain from it and still pretend to have a right to the wrong appellation of amateur, encouraged as they are by the leaders themselves who are anxious to save appearance before the public bodies which distribute the official manna in the same way as they did before!

Right at the top of this strange edifice, there is the Olympic flag hoisted there well in evidence, because it is the ideal symbol on which sport is built. IT IS, HOWEVER AN ENORMOUS ERROR TO THINK THAT AMATEURISM IS NECESSARILY OLYMPISM. In reality, Olympism represents a far higher ideal than this restricted notion. It is a much deeper philosophy and imparts a much deeper and positive value to sport. This is most fortunate since, had Olympism not done so, it would have been destroyed forty years ago by disguised professionalism. Pierre de Coubertin was not deceived when at the outset of the Olympic Games he had just revived, he clearly declared that he was not interested in the debate over amateurism. It is certainly no fault of his if so many sport leaders, dealing with Olympism or other sport movements, have led sport afterwards to an impasse.

In view of the increasing number of sham-amateurism incidents, certain persons would like now to free Olympism of the burden of lies and hypocrisy besmirching it. As a matter of fact, it is not Olympism which must be cleared since it stands on a much loftier plane, but it concerns the Olympic Games.

When thinking it over, one perceives that all discussions concerning amateurism including those of the Olympic Committees are ambiguous simply because it ought to be explained that their aim is to save the Games. Yet the Games are after all a spectacular performance like any others, this is observed more and more since the Olympics have reached such gigantic proportions and amplitude. The moment everybody agrees on this point so very essential, it will follow that Olympism on the one hand, and amateurism on the other will not set anymore problems. The first represents a philosophy which symbolizes sport, the other is a state of mind which can neither be invented nor imposed.

On the other hand, what is the means conducive to a less ambiguous situation? The statute of the athlete participating in this gigantic omnisport: international championships which are the Games ought to be changed. One cannot go on giving athletes performing at the Games the ridiculous title of amateur sportsmen, a statute which so many of them have ceased to deserve for a very long time!