

In defence of Sport

This is the title given by Pierre de Coubertin's Committee, which has its seat in Paris, in its *Review of Research and Information*. The Bulletin N° 4, which is in its first year of publication, is an excellent publication edited by some eminent sports leaders

in France. Although we may not always agree with ALL the opinions expressed in it, we find that it may be of interest all the same to quote some of its opinions:

MR. MICHEL DEBRÉ, Prime Minister and President of the High Commission of Sports

and Youth in France, ends his brief comment on the value of sport by sending his respects and congratulations to the Baroness Pierre de Coubertin on the celebration of her centenary in Lausanne which took place last December.

MR. JEAN BOROTRA, in 1961, had two interviews with President Brundage, one in Chicago and the other in Paris on the matter of amateurism, in the course of both these interviews they maintained respectively their own point of view on the problem. Among other things, Borotra said: 'Sport contributes throughout life to increase the possibilities of man, on the physical plane, it develops endurance and the capacity for work, it stimulates effort, whereas on the moral basis, it sharpens the qualities of will-power, courage and self-control. The logical result of such evolution must bring *Social promotion*. This fact applies to all the different levels of the people who go in for sport as well as to champions who must be helped to gain their goal. It does not mean, of course, to make life easy for them. On the contrary, one must avoid to facilitate things to such an extent that they are deprived of making the effort we are in measure to demand of them since they are capable of giving of their best. It is due to this second consideration that they are able to acquire the human qualities which are required to make champions. It is wrong too, to entice them to neglect secondary or higher studies for the sake of devoting themselves to train for a sport career. One should help those athletes who, by natural aptitudes and lack of inclination or gift for higher studies, aspire, by their own personal desire, to increase their potentialities in the field of first class competitive sport. At all events, this contingency will arise only in the case of a very small number of men who are specially gifted for this kind of physical activity and less interested in intellectual pursuits. Many people show no aptitude for culture and have no inclination for it. This fact does not deprive them of value, this value must be used rationally and there lies all the difficulty of the problem. We need to use these men, future champions some of them, intelligently, on the first instance for their own sake, in order to give them a chance to express themselves, also to save them from the pitfall of becoming fallen stars, but chiefly for the collectivity since the country requires all the will-power and talents available to realize these aims. Now, if these champions, who possess these qualities are worthwhile, they can and should be used for the service of humanity, they must also find their fulfilment in social promotion, leading them to assume higher responsibilities. The individual as well as the collectivity will benefit by it. Sport will thus contribute to the development of the value of the individual and by calling for an increase of his responsibilities thus

brings a social promotion and becomes a factor of human progress.

In today's organization, this promotion of the champion is difficult to realize and it is easy to explain why:

First of all, these days champions often lack proper background either on an intellectual or technical basis. They have not learnt a trade. Their education has been neglected. They spent too much time on sport, not enough on acquiring a true basic formation so essential in the discharge of any activity in life. (Bravo Mr. Borotra to have the courage to say it. *Ed.*) It is certainly justified to encourage the training of sport for those who show special taste and real aptitudes for it (it is even a duty to do so), but such an effort is in no way justified when it results in the abstention-o-f acquiring a formation, a trade, these 'social reserves' failing which there is no security. (...) This, at any rate, is a serious matter. Champion, too often, is intoxicated by success. *He takes everything for granted*. He does not exert himself personally; *he receives but forgets how to give*. This is often caused by the youth of the champions. Their lack of instruction and the influence not always beneficial of the press written or verbal, but it is also due to the fact that very often, benevolent leaders are chiefly concerned with the technical results (for their own prestige, *Ed.*) and being too busy with business of less importance fail to devote sufficient time to this really important side of their activity.'

To wind up, Mr. Borotra refers to some methods tried in other countries. He mentions the United States, the U.S.S.R., Great Britain, the Army life in general and the new personal status of the athlete. The author of the article would welcome the disappearance of the shameful devices practised by the pseudo-amateurs (and you may be sure we do too, *Ed.*). But to achieve this, he adds, *the champion must be given material assistance*. There we ask ourselves, do athletes really become champions because of money? Mr. Borotra, who is an ex-champion, replies to this question with great common sense in the same article when he goes on to say: 'While following his sport career, an athlete must consider *building up his future in society*. The federations will help him to find a situation.' Then referring to the athlete, he goes on arguing on the same logical lines: 'Athletes must devote to sport only the time necessary to it and must take it to heart that they must always give of their best both to their profession and to their sporting career.'

The author goes on speaking of the human promotion, basis of a new form of Olympism, foresees the creating of a new class of 'non-amateur', athletes having a career (at 50 %?) and paid for participating in competitions! We fail to see the difference between this category and that of professionals. Both types will be *subsidized* for their participation

and from that moment, this is quite clear, there will be no amateurs any longer, for, who is going to compete without remuneration in Olympic Games when, according to the author, they are going to be open to all? There can be only two classes of athletes: amateurs and professionals. As for the pseudo-amateurs, who unfortunately do exist, they are employed by some unscrupulous sport leaders, often olympic, who work for their own prestige inspired by an excess of nationalistic pride. Mr. Jean Borotra's formula does not seem to us acceptable. It will open the door to all those leaders and athletes who want to *pay* or *receive* under the too easy term of *non-amateur athlete* who is allowed to compete in the Olympic Games. There are already too many of them! This new project will not improve the situation, on the contrary, it will make matters worse. In point of fact, the term *pseudo-amateur* will be replaced by that of *non-amateur*. It will sound better, that is all!

MR. JEAN-FRANÇOIS BRISSON, Editor of the *Figaro*, in the same Review, deals with the matter of offering scholarships for training in sport envisaged by the High Commission for Youth and Sports. To his way of thinking, it is a bad system since it is based on a lame argument! Its supporters maintain that sports training scholarships, far from depriving the champion of the extra-sportive career which will assure his future, will actually provide him with the means of acquiring a social promotion by giving him the time required nowadays for training purposes and this apply to any athlete who aspires to compete in top class competitive sport. Herewith Mr. Brisson replies to this line of argument: 'Who is going to believe that a young man worthwhile when faced with the possibility to pass a difficult examination or who is able to secure a good job rapidly by sheer hard work on the line of his choice, will be pleased to accept the compromise of working half-time, the other time being devoted to the practice of sport? He is fully aware that it is impossible to acquire good and rapid results by working half-time. The recipients of these "sport training scholarships" must therefore accept the following ineluctable corollary: this system works only in the case of the last non-specialized category (including of course those who have the required aptitudes and wish to go in for the sport they practise, also for the class of people who have no intellectual aptitudes and because they have no leaning in this direction, they realize that they have nothing to lose by giving temporarily equal time or even priority to sport which provides them with a kind of remunerations. This is a tacit acceptance to revert to a situation we flattered ourselves to have overcome with no end of trouble, and which can be condensed in these few plain words: "Sport is the affair of poorly gifted human beings whereas worthy boys and girls have something better to do."

'The only way to preserve the dignity and to keep the Olympic Games within reasonable limits is to maintain at all costs the high standard of competitive sport in the field of disinterested activities, recreation and leisure. Amateurism must also act as a brake and curb people's folly. To follow the bad examples of others is no excuse, nobody needs to do it and it is certainly more meritorious to show the good example, even if it consists in merely denouncing abuses with sincere conviction. Let us have the courage to do so!'

Editor's note: *We hold the High Commission of Youth and Sports in too high an esteem to allow ourselves to interfere in French sport, but we cannot refrain from being in full sympathy and agreement with the views expressed by Mr. Jean Brisson of the Figaro.*

*

MISS MARIE-THERÈSE EYQUEM, is chief superintendent of the 'High Commission of Youth and Sports' in France. We take this opportunity to congratulate Miss Marie Thérèse Eyquem, who has just won the second Great Prize of Dramatic Art in Enghien Casino with her play: *The Finest Match in France*. She has also been appointed president of the 'International Physical Education and Sports Association in Washington for girls and women'. On the strength of this, we can fully understand all the interest she shows for feminine participation in the Olympic Games. She dealt with this subject in her article which also appeared in the Review *In Defence of Sport*. We do not intend to go back to the article on the same subject, which we published in our Bulletin No 76, but we would like nevertheless to quote a few extracts of Miss Eyquem's article, which our readers, according to their sympathy for feminine sport as we personally have, without committing the International Olympic Committee, are sure to appreciate.

The author, on the first instance, points out that, at the 2nd Olympics held in Paris, in 1900, out of 1066 athletes there were only 6 women competing in the Games, whereas in Rome in 1960, there were 651 women out of 5,902 athletes. One can draw the following conclusion, says the author, 'All the countries where civilization raised the status of women encourage their participation in the Olympic Games. This is therefore a social fact. We are fully aware that the physical potentiality of men performances is not to be compared with that of women on the biological plane. The women athletes performances set on an equal footing both in technic and in training will never reach the same level as that of men performances.' Quoting the staunch opponent of women in sport, Pery Cerruti who pretended that if a woman athlete wants to participate in the Olympics, she must do so against men! Women should be excluded from the Olympic Games the same as Greeks never allowed their women to take part in competitions'.

Very wittily Mlle Eyquem retorts in the following manner: 'It also happened that Greeks sent to prison sophists who were guilty of false reasoning!'

'Furthermore', she says, 'the information of Mr. Cerruti is inexact. To give him the lie we can show him the picture of the marvellous *Laconian Woman* at the Vatican Museum in Rome. It depicts an athlete competing in the athletic events in the Heraean Games which were held in Olympia every fifth year. On the one side, the women athletes competed among themselves, on the other, the track of the race they had to run was not of the same size as that of the men. It was curtailed by 1/6th. Nowadays, the distances are the same, thus women run longer than men. To solve the problem would it not be possible to adopt the identical system as the one used in the International Gymnastics Federation with regard to women gymnasts? Formerly, the latter were directed by men technicians whereas now it is in the hands of women belonging to a Commission. They are responsible for the spectacular evolution which has taken place in women gymnastics within the last ten years and which has caused its true realization as we see it today. Who could have foreseen that, after witnessing the painful gesticulations of women competitors at the parallel bars and at the swinging rings in the London Games of 1948, one day would come, as it did in Rome, when people would pay fancy astronomical prices for seats in a gymnasium in order to witness women gymnasts! Not knowing what would be the greatest draw: 'their light-footed grace, suppleness and virtuosity

or the strength of these gymnasts as opposed to the grace of these ballet dancers! The gymnasts have proved the truth of the axiom: Women have nothing to be gained by imitating men for they run the risk to do badly what men do well; but when they remain in their own spheres, they do well what men do badly. Speaking of the activities of this International Association of which she became president recently, Miss Eyquem states:

'I am of the opinion that women should be allowed to have their place in the International Federations, in the National Olympic Committees and in the *International Olympic Committee*. (A woman presides the International Archery Federation and the post of Gen. Secretary on the South African Olympic Committee is held by a woman, *Ed.*) Do not women participate in World Championships as well as compete in the Olympic Games?

'Did we not prove to men who reproach us that women sports are too virile that they would see women sports becoming less virile if they did not interfere with them. The duty, incumbent to our Association, is to fight in every field, from primary school to university, from the small association to the powerful club, in order that the humblest girl or woman athlete to the greatest champion finds in sport: Poise, joy, self-knowledge self-control and realizes the full expansion of spiritual qualities of her womanhood.'

In conclusion it comes to this: let women administer their own sport and everything will go better ...for them.