

Letter from Great Britain

Athletes and their amateur status

BY THE MARQUESS OF EXETER

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This article is not an endeavour to start a *dog fight*, but to put objectively a point of view which although widely held, has not from its unspectacular nature received much publicity.

During the past years amateur athletics has made gigantic progress. There are 102 countries affiliated to the International Amateur Athletic Federation and several million young men and women find enormous enjoyment and good fellowship in the sport. Meanwhile professional athletics in this country has almost vanished from lack of public support.

Some attention has been diverted from this progress lately by a controversy over amateur status. The great majority take

part in our sport without demanding an alteration in the present rules and conditions, but among those who urge a radical change, many do not appear to appreciate what would happen to the sport if their views were to be incorporated in the *Rule Book*.

First, to clear a misconception, the idea that amateurism in athletics is a relic of the past, invented by a few wealthy people to keep others out, simply is not true. Although a few may have had some private source of income, the overwhelming majority have always been young men and women with slender wages or salaries, and they have *made* the sport.

GOOD SPORTSMEN

Amateurs and professionals are both usually good sportsmen and both get much enjoyment from their sport. Surely the fundamental difference is that one takes part purely for the pleasure he gets from it and the thrill of competition, whereas the latter basically is in the entertainment business and sport is his means of earning a livelihood through salary, appearance money, cash prizes, writing, broadcasting or advertising.

No amateur athlete enters the sport with the intention of making money. It is only when tempting offers are made to a handful at the top that they feel that they should be entitled to take it. In the absence of professional athletics, this small group cannot turn *pro* which is of course part of the trouble. Amateur athletes, incidentally, are entitled to receive all expenses up to 28 days in the year when running abroad, and also for certain competitions in this country.

It becomes, I think, obvious that amateurism is much more of an approach to life or a frame of mind than something for which you can draw up a tight legal definition. Indeed, the whole essence of it would be lost were people to devote their time to trying to find ways within the law to defeat the main spirit.

Countries affiliated to the International Amateur Athletic Federation make their rules in Congress, including general principles on amateurism and certain specific cases of their application. Amendment of the rules is a continuing process, but any changes in the amateur rule must not infringe its basic principle, *an amateur athlete must not make any material gain out of his sport*. If you leave this basis, where else can you draw another equitable line? It is from this principle, incidentally, that some opposition to broken time payments stems.

TIME OFF WITH PAY

Almost all employers allow their employees on salary or regular wages days off for competitions without loss of pay. Broken time

payments are proposed essentially for some piece work, commission, deal or action which an athlete considers he would otherwise have performed and for which he would have received payment. This, it is argued, is in effect giving money from sporting funds for an expense which he has not incurred. The other argument is of a more material nature. Such payments could only be diverted from the already quite inadequate funds of the sport, and could undoubtedly have serious repercussions in the attitude of some of the employers who, at present, continue to pay their employees while away competing.

Member countries are pledged to administer the rules within the spirit as well as the letter of the law, although naturally there is some latitude for the different problems which affect different countries. For example, it takes some six hours by train to cover the territory of the Amateur Athletic Association, compared to nine days from Vladivostok to Moscow.

'ATHLETIC' SCHOLARSHIPS

As regards 'athletic' scholarships, which are opposed by all the important universities in the U.S.A., each application must be judged on its merits. If an athlete is offered a scholarship for intellectual reasons, then a permit to run is given. If, however, it is just the thinly veiled hiring of a gladiator to raise the importance of the university in the athletic world, then it is not.

The organization of athletics here is based on some hundreds of clubs, whose democratically elected committees are composed of dedicated men, almost all ex-athletes, who willingly give up an enormous amount of their spare time to helping young athletes and to running their club. I wonder how many of them there would be if an important aim of their efforts was to enable the new generation of athletes to make money out of their sport?

The great majority of athletes appreciate the work of these officials, but when I see a handful criticizing, I wish that they would reflect on how much they owe to them. I cannot urge too strongly that those young men who have had a grand time out of athletics should, if they have not already decided to do so, when they hang up their shoes, devote themselves to putting back something into the sport.

We hear about the fortunes which a number of athletes are supposed to have amassed and the substantial cheating over expenses which is said to go on. I have a good many channels of information open to me as President of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, and I am sure that in almost all cases these allegations are not true. I know quite well that there have been, and

always will be, some who will cheat, but I believe that to the great majority of international athletes their sport is a matter essentially of enjoyment and not a means of making money. This, of course, goes, for the millions of ordinary athletes in the world.

HARD TRAINING

I have seen it written in another country that the only reason for taking part in athletics must be to win races. Everyone tries his best to win and enjoys doing so; but the idea that to stay in the game is dependent entirely on winnings shows a complete miscomprehension. I saw a magnificent example of this at a national cross-country championship, with 1,600 young men plodding nine miles across wet, sticky ploughs in rain and sleet, when half of them were bound to finish in even lower positions than 800th! This, too, was the culminating event of Saturday after Saturday of training under similar conditions. Here is your proof of the pleasure and satisfaction young men can get from hard training with their club mates, and from the knowledge that they are masters over their own bodies, and the exhilarating feeling of superb fitness which has been achieved by their own effort and determination.

I can but conclude by saying that I am convinced that there is a great future for amateur athletics. It is bringing much pleasure to vast numbers of young people and incidentally is developing those very characteristics which every country wishes to see in its citizens. Why should we change its basis towards professionalism, which has already withered in this sport?