

# In Defence of the Olympic Emblem

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Emblems are a reflection of a certain thought, principle or whole movement, presented in its crystallized essence. That is how it should be. But it is not often that one sees an emblem doing justice to what it stands for. And, in fact, it is not at all easy to represent in line and colour, the complexity of an idea, so that it can have the desired effect, to find the simplest possible form, which, entirely purified, becomes a symbol.

Neither is it so easy to find the proper wording of a device — the direct words that are strong and compact, without lapsing into elaborate description.

The Olympic Movement, so rich in content, has an emblem and a device clearly symbolizing its noble principles. There are many principles which have helped uphold the Olympic Movement, but it is not accidental that one among them has risen above all others as a personification of its main essence — friendship among the sportsmen of all five continents. The lofty ideals of peace and mutual respect among the peoples of every nation can never fail to fill the heart of every honest-thinking person with joy and hope.

The five Olympic circles, so harmoniously interwoven and coloured to represent all five continents, is so expressive in its simplicity, that its direct impact always leaves lasting impressions.

No less expressive is the Olympic device — *Citius, Altius, Fortius* — hammering into three simple words the great striving towards perfection and constant progress.

The Olympic emblem and device are so intimately linked with the essence of the Olympic Movement, so strictly personal,

that their protection from any encroachments should be a prime task both of the International Olympic Committee and of the National Olympic Committees. This is not a matter of conceit or overrating the importance of the Olympic Movement and its distinctive symbols. The most ardent adherent of the movement will realize that the world does not necessarily turn around the Olympic Movement, but every amateur lover of sport is unfailingly conscious of the fact that the movement carries a message that is pure and bright, and that it helps bring the youth of the world close together by way of sporting competitions.

The concern for the protection of the Olympic emblem has been growing more and more acute with every passing year. No wonder. In addition to its symbolic significance, the Olympic emblem is attractive in appearance. Much as beauty deserves praise, it can have its drawbacks, in the sense that it can be used for ends that are both good and evil. The Olympic Games, as a grand festival of youth and sport, enjoy immense popularity. This inevitably has an element of showmanship, which some people have tried to use to their own personal advantage, waving aside all sense of decency and responsibility.

The five interlaced circles can be made in any dimension, to ornament objects big and small. Naturally, hardly a trace is left of the lofty ideal behind the emblem when it is used to focus attention on some label advertising a box of macaroni, toothpicks, or when printed on neckties or to lend colour to handkerchiefs. What happens to the principle underlying '*Citius, Altius, Fortius!*' when used to name a pub? Profiteers never have a keen sense of measure and responsibility. Nothing strange, indeed, if one day

certain people decide to stage dog-race or cock-fight 'Olympics'!<sup>1</sup>

The problem is somewhat different as regards the Olympic hymn, composed with the intent of reflecting the youthful joy of life, given such wide scope of action at the Olympic Games. The hymn which won the prize does not seem able to serve its purpose. It does not go straight to the heart; no one remembers the refrain; no one joins in the singing. Songs are something which should bring people together, inspire and draw them onward. The Olympic hymn failed as a debutant at the 16th Olympic Games in Melbourne. No one took it up, and as it did not catch on, even the advertising sharks left it alone. But if the Olympic Movement should one day have a hymn with true contagious youthful inspiration, the danger will immediately arise of attempts at its commercialisation.

How can we protect what we think so pure from vulgar abuse? The International Olympic Committee has, on several occasions, tried to promote an International Convention for the protection of the Olympic emblem, on the lines of the International Red Cross. In spite of insistent efforts, the idea has not yet been realized. Perhaps this initiative failed because not all national olympic committees were sufficiently active in their representations before their respective legislative bodies. Acting in the spirit of international co-operation, the Bulgarian Olympic Committee was one of the few national committees to give its support to this initiative in 1959, in spite of the fact that, in our country, the Olympic emblems and devices cannot be endangered. The reason for this is the fact that trade in Bulgaria is no longer in private hands and there can be no abuse for the purposes of commercial advertising. Furthermore, the Bulgarian Olympic Committee enjoys the necessary prestige and authority not to allow any inadvertent use of the olympic markings.

The case is not the same in the western countries, where the national olympic committees have no legal right to intervene in private commercial initiative. There they can only clarify the design and content of the emblems and appeal to the consciousness of the people, but no legal right to give them their overall protection.

The International Olympic Committee has recommended that all national olympic committees help in the elaboration of legal dispositions, providing for the protection of the Olympic emblems and devices, as in certain countries this measure has become an absolute necessity.

If we look upon the Olympic emblems as our own, as an outward manifestation of

what we feel to be so pure and exalted in the Olympic Movement, we ought to be able — in conformity with the particular conditions in the different countries — to give them adequate protection against the speculations of commercialism.

<sup>1</sup> (We have already seen 'frogs olympics'! *Ed.*)