

Protecting the Amateur Sportsman

from EMIL ANTONOV

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The celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Baron Pierre de Coubertin were a fitting reflection of the fact that the Olympic movement has gained world proportions and prestige. The amateur sportsmen of one hundred countries not only meet in a contest of physical fitness and will-power, but also in what is a great international rally for the promotion of good will, understanding and friendship among the youth of all five continents.

One of the underlying ideals of the Olympic movement is the striving after physical fitness, good sportsmanship and all-round perfection of the individual through sport. Sport, we mean amateur sport, has proved a most effective instrument in the promotion of these human virtues. For this reason all who stand for and respect the purity of the Olympic idea should fight phenomena that might undermine or mar the purity of the movement. We have in mind the commercialization of sports, from which even amateur sports have not been spared on many occasions.

In an article published in the American magazine *Sports Illustrated* the well-known Trinidad sprinter Mike Augustini lifts before public opinion the curtain on the business transactions which some people have made with amateur sportsmen. These speculators have taken heavy toll. Mike Augustini himself and many top athletes in the world

have sacrificed their amateur status. Scores, and even hundreds of talented sportsmen have left the amateur family to take a bow before King Dollar. What happens in the end is of no great concern to the businessmen who run the professional sport circuses. Their idea is that they can always rely to throw a bait into the great pool of amateur sports and fish out fresh talent on demand. This is an important aspect of the problem, to which all supporters of the Olympic movement should give careful thought.

The International Olympic Committee deserves high praise for its efforts to preserve the purity of amateurism — which forms the mainstay of the Olympic idea. In this respect it has received strong support from all who love sports in every country. But it is also the duty of sport journalists to be untiring heralds of the amateur code, as they keep a close eye on what goes on at the stadiums, courts and swimming pools. Their writings should reflect the true image of professionalism — where, in actual fact only handful of exceptionally talented or popular stars make their pile before retiring, but where the majority quickly fade away before they have really got anywhere and made something out of it.

As every craft and business activity, professional sports have their written and unwritten code. It is a full-time job. To stay

on top is the main purpose, an end in itself. Private and family life, cultural recreation and social life are left far in the background. There is just no time ! We do not mean that professionals necessarily lead the life of robots, but pretty nearly, for much of their time is devoted to training to meet the conditions and requirements of people who pay them to perform at a certain level. As a paid sportsman, the professional finds it necessary to give up many of the joys of modern life and cultural necessities.

Normally top-amateurs turn professional when at the peak of glory, usually between the age of 18 and 26. But this is the time when the growing individual normally shapes his future when he must learn a craft or profession, some branch of science, etc. The amateur sportsman, for whom sports are not an end in themselves, can do it. He will have enough time. Nobody is going to stop him ; in fact he will get every encouragement to study, learn a profession that will mean security through life. If he finds that a certain moment sports prevent him from studying or taking an examination, he can lay off for a certain while, knowing that he can go back whenever he has more leisure on his hands.

The professional cannot do it. He must keep up constant training, be in peak form and take regular part in competition, or else he won't be in demand. That would mean less pay, and after a while no pay at all.

One cannot take part in competitive sports all one's life ! Some professionals have a

longer active career than others, but no one has been eternal. The crowd likes to see new faces — a new boxer beating an old one, a new sprinter or jumper doing better than the star of last year. Usually the moment is not long when gloves, boots and spikes have to be hung up on the peg for good. That is always a bad moment. What next ?

Very few professionals, who have been well paid and have put something aside, are able to accommodate themselves to the new environment : running a restaurant, bar, or sport equipment store. But that is not often the case. Without capital, without a trade or profession, life in the new world can become very uncomfortable !

We all know cases in point. All lovers of sport are thrilled by outstanding achievements, no matter whether reached by an amateur or professional. In the present environment it may not be easy to really do something about commercialized sport, which has taken deep root in some countries. But it is the duty of every honest-thinking journalist who has the Olympic movement to heart, to try his best and keep amateurs from professional baits, which admittedly can at times sound very attractive at the moment. Sporting journalists can help much by pointing out the consequences of professionalism. Sports should never develop into an end in themselves. They should add beauty to life and create higher interests when work at the office or factory is over, rather than destroy the personality, spirit and social standing of the individual.