

Olympic Philosophy

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Last year a hard-boiled sports columnist from Chicago, on a European trip, visited Olympia. His story, written from the Olympic Mecca, was headed *Avery Brundage is Right*, and begins: 'Here in the Holy Land of Sports a feeling comes to you that Avery Brundage may be right.'

'For years and years many who are interested in sports have harbored a hunch that

our Avery is a lone wanderer in the dreamland of amateur athletics. Nevertheless, Brundage persistently insists that an athlete to be eligible for Olympic competition must be strictly and completely amateur.'

Unfortunately, far too many share the skepticism my cynical journalist friend harbored before his visit to Olympia and his conversion.

The Baron de Coubertin, who revived the Olympic Games, was not a sports promoter—he was a scholar and an educator, and he was the first in Modern Times to recognize that more than merely physical benefits can be gained from properly organized athletic sports and games. He perceived that there were also fine cultural and moral qualities to be acquired. He had studied Greek history and he knew the significant role in Greek civilization played by the Olympic Games for twelve centuries. He knew the Greek gods were not only wise and intelligent but also physically perfect, an inspiration to mankind to seek a like all-around physical, mental and moral development. He knew that, in those days, athletes met philosophers, dramatists, sculptors and poets on common ground. Plato, the great thinker, was also a great athlete.

He knew of the Golden Age of Pericles, of the men of Thermopylae and of Marathon, and he knew of the stalwart legions of Alexander the Great. He knew that the Ancient Olympic Games were a dignified religious, sport, and fine arts festival, amateur in essence, emphasizing grace and beauty of body, mind and spirit. He knew of the Olympic truce, during which all warfare stopped during the period of the Games. He knew of the overemphasis, the proselytizing and the professionalism that developed, the loss of Spartan virtues and the forgotten self discipline as the Greeks grew soft, morally and physically. He knew of the scorn of the Greek scholars and philosophers for the commercialization of the Games, and for over-developed professional athletes. He knew of the downfall of Greece that followed the corruption and the loss of ideals, of the conquest by Rome, and finally of the abolition of the Olympic Games. With great sagacity and with remarkable prescience he devised the rules and regulations, which, if followed, would prevent similar troubles in the future.

The first and most important of these rules, for good reasons, was that the Games must be amateur. They are not a commercial enterprise and no one, promoters, managers, coaches, participants, individuals, or nations, is permitted to use them for profit.

The amazing success of the Olympic Movement in the short period of seventy years, since the Games were revived by Baron de Coubertin, is almost entirely due to the soundness of the fundamental principles with which he equipped them. Unfortunately, many of the articles and reports on the Games that one reads today display a complete ignorance of this Olympic philosophy. It is sad that these basic principles of the Olympic Movement, which account for its universal appeal and its tremendous success, are understood by so few people.

To administer a project of this kind is not a simple task. As it was in the beginning there are always difficult problems. The

natural rivalry of Sport or of Nations, with some being stronger and perhaps more important than others, if not restrained, might well have wrecked the Games on many occasions. The solution was found in the International Olympic Committee, composed of individuals who do not represent any country or any sport but do represent impartially and impersonally, the Olympic Movement and only the Olympic Movement. This Committee is self-perpetuating and chooses its own members. It was first appointed by the Baron de Coubertin, who charged it to enforce Olympic regulations and to preserve the pure amateur spirit of the Games, free from commercial encroachment, which would soon lead to disapproval, or from political intrusion which would quite obviously be disastrous.

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One of the silliest proposals which has been made is that the Olympic Games should be thrown open to professional athletes. One reason advanced is that not all competitors have been amateurs. If this is the case it is certainly not the fault of the International Olympic Committee. By this time, everyone knows the Olympic rules. Every competitor in the Olympic Games must sign an entry blank, testifying that he is an amateur according to the regulations, and this must be certified by his national federation and by his national Olympic committee. If any non-amateur has participated in the Olympic Games, at least three people have lied.

Because there is cheating, crime and dishonesty in the world, shall we abolish all laws and return to the jungle?

Perhaps much of the difficulty arises from the fact that amateurism is not generally understood, in fact, it is widely misunderstood by those who classify an amateur as a tyro, "a neophyte, a beginner, or someone not good enough to be a professional. The thing that is not understood is that amateurism is a philosophy of life, a consecration and devotion to the actual task at hand rather than to the payment or to the reward. It is the same devotion that, in scholars and scientists, has led to the acquisition of knowledge and to the advancement of civilization. It is the same devotion that actuated the great artists and musicians who starved in garrets rather than commercialize their work. It is the same devotion that, in the great patriotic leaders in all countries, has produced all social progress. It is the same devotion that actuated the unknown sculptors and architects who created the great buildings and cathedrals of the world without even signing their work. It is the same devotion that guided Henry Ford and Thomas Edison to their achievements in the industrial world, which they would have accomplished even if they had never won a fortune. It is a philosophy of life badly needed in those materialist times, when

all that many workers think of his pay day and quitting time.

This, of course, is a strange conception in the materialistic world in which we live. where everything seems to be measured by dollars. but there are certain qualities in life. like charity, patriotism, love and friendship; that are not measured in dollars. Amateurism is one of these and the world would be a sorry place without them.

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The amateur has an entirely different philosophy than the professional athlete, who does nothing unless he is paid. With a professional, sport is a vocation and his main objective is to win, because the more he wins the better he is paid. The amateur also wants to win, but it is the manner in which victory is won that is most important to him. He wants always to improve and he wants always to do his best in the circumstances that prevail, but he does not wish to sacrifice his education or his vocation for a hollow victory.

The amateur sportsman knows that sports is recreation, play, fun, and an avocation, and has his eyes on a higher goal, the main business of his life, his education or his vocation. He does not want to waste his valuable time as a professional entertainer. He does not want to be part of a troupe of trained seals for the amusement of the public — he plays for his own entertainment. He always does the best he can in the circumstances and he acquires a lot of valuable experiences and qualities. The man, who climbs the Matterhorn or who runs a four minute mile. does not expect to find a pot of gold when he arrives. He has not conquered Nature he has conquered himself and he has the great, never-to-be-forgotten self-satisfaction and pleasure that follows.

Someone once defined science as 'anything you cannot understand'. Cynics have said the same of amateurism. But just as the scientists know what science is, amateurs know what amateurism is. The great difficulty is that amateurism as a thing of the spirit is not easy to define. As a result there are many definitions. Each Sport has its own and each country has its own.

The Olympic definition is quite clear :

An amateur is one who participates and always has participated in sport as an avocation without material gain of any kind. He does not qualify :

- a) If he has not a basic occupation designed to insure his present and future livelihood ?
- b) If he receives or has received remuneration for participation in sport ?
- c) If he does not comply with the Rules of the International Federation concerned, and the official interpretations of this Rule No. 26.

Official interpretations of this rule are made from time to time and these have now been published for all to see.

Amateurs sport is recreation. an avocation and not a vocation, play and not work. To exist unflourished it must be free, without either political or commercial dictation. Professional sport, so called, is not sport at all but a branch of the entertainment, business, like the circus ? It is for the spectators whereas amateurs sport is for the players. A competitor who is paid is a workman and not a player. The professional takes from sport, while the amateur gives to sport. These are fundamental truths that must always be remembered.

We must never forget that 'the most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well'.

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The Olympic Games are a wonderful athletic spectacle, full of excitement, suspense and drama, but dont ever think that is the only reason for their astounding success. The principal reason for this success is that they are a demonstration of idealism in action and as such they appeal to all people of every country. Good sportsmanship, which is the basis of the Olympic code. is nothing more or less than an application of the Golden Rule — the essence of all religions. They are an enterprise, conducted by the devotes, by dedicated individuals who seek to demonstrate the best and the finest without thought of personal gain. Based on the high principles of the amateur code, they illustrate a system where everyone has an equal opportunity and where the reward is measured by the ability and the application of the participant — a system that is honest, fair, and just and so a system which meets the aspirations of all people. Sportsmen are admired and respected because they exemplify high moral qualities as well as physical ability.

Since 1896, when the Games of the first Olympiade of the present era where celebrated here in Greece, the practice of amateur sport has spread to all quarters of the Globe and today National Olympic Committees are recognized by the International Olympic Committee, in more than one hundred countries. Amateur sport has become an important part of modern life with millions of followers. Realizing this importance, some misguided persons seem to think that Olympic sport can be made a political tool. This is as erroneous as anything can be. The minute political activities are permitted in Olympic affairs, the Games are finished. Never has the world been so peaceful that countries or political systems were not somewhere at odds.

If not a hot, there has always been a cold war of one sort or another -- sometimes religious, sometimes racial, sometimes political, and the minute distinctions of this kind are permitted, it is quite obvious that the Games will soon come to an end.

As it is, the Olympic Movement furnishes a conspicuous example that welfare play and good sportsmanship prevail, men can agree regardless of race, religion or political convictions.

In February 1963, the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee met with the representatives of the International Federation and adopted the following resolutions, deploring political interference and agreeing to attempt in every way to discourage it.

'Sport in the Olympic sense, which is strictly amateur and, for that matter, all other truly international amateur sport, is free from financial or chauvinistic objections.

'A score of amateur sport federations govern International sports in a democratic manner and their members federations in the different countries have joined together to form National Olympic Committees, which is more than a hundred countries follow the Olympic code of good sportsmanship. The participants in this great structure of international sports involving millions of individuals work together in a programme which develops international friendship and good will sought by the youth of the world.

'International sport, one of the few fields where all participate on an equal footing, cannot survive if it is used either as a tool or as a weapon for any political purposes. We hope therefore that all Governments will recognize our free and independent position, a benefit to all, a threat to none, and respect our neutrality in all fields.'

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The Olympic Games were not revived by the Baron de Coubertin merely to give contestance a chance to win medals and to brake records, nor to entertain the public, nor to provide for the participants a stepping stone to a career in professional sport and certainly not to demonstrate the superiority of one political system over another.

His idea was that they would -

1. Bring to the attention of the world the fact that a National programme of Physical training and competitive sport will not only develop stronger and healthier boys and girls but also and perhaps more important, will make better citizens through the character building that follows participation in properly administered amateur sport ?
2. Demonstrate the principals of fair play and good sportmanship which could be adopted with great advantage in many other spheres of activity ?

3. Stimulate interest in the fine arts through exhibitions and demonstrations, and thus contribute to a broader and more well rounded life ?
4. Teach that sport is play for fun and enjoyment and not to make money, and that, with devotion to the task at hand, the reward will take care of itself ? The philosophy of amateurism as contrasted to that of materialism ?
5. Create international amity and good will, thus leading to a happier and more peaceful world.

Not everyone can visit Olympia. You who have had the good fortune to spend some days in the serene ambiance of this beautiful valley, among the sacred stones of the Ancient Temples, must have absorbed some of the true principle of the Olympic Movement.

As disciples of this philosophy, which stands for what is right and stand against what is wrong, you can carry the message with you when you return to your homes and thus help to create that happier and more peaceful world invisioned by the Baron de Coubertin.

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