

# Speech by President Avery Brundage

at the Opening Ceremonies of the 61st Session  
of the International Olympic Committee,  
Innsbruck, January 26th, 1964.

Mr. President, Mr. Chairman of the Organization Committee, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Last year, because it was the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Baron Pierre de Coubertin, there was more than usual talk about the Olympic idea. Coubertin, who reawakened in us the ideal of the complete, if not the perfect, man, was presented to the world of today with differing degrees of felicity.

While in some places his memory was honored with a dignity which Coubertin himself would have approved, in other places a kind of eulogizing contest took place, from which a distorted picture of this great man emerged. Certain speakers, wishing to illustrate their own diverse points of view by quoting him, deformed his thought in attempting to make it their own. Coubertin, finally, was arousing the interest of those who had disregarded him during the vital years. Further, it was said that Coubertin's successors completely misunderstood his aims; and it was asserted that the whole future of the Olympic Games was in the balance. The Olympic principles, it was claimed, should be redrafted, their ideas revised and their practice modified...

Meanwhile, one hundred and ten National Olympic Committees all over the five continents were bearing witness to the growing success of the Olympic movement, and pursuing their task as defined in the Charter left to us by Coubertin and his colleagues. Meanwhile also, the word *Olympic* — a magic word in 'the world of sport' — was opening frontiers, awakening effort, fostering friendship.

As the critics of the Olympic Movement referred so frequently to Coubertin, let us also evoke him. We see him there in the early 90's at the beginning, often disappointed, never discouraged, trying repeatedly to penetrate the indifferent mind, which he well understood, in order patiently to implant his ideas, fighting constantly to overcome the apathy not to say active opposition, of his contemporaries. As he wrote in 1935, 'Half a century ago, when I undertook the raising of France's morale through sport... I had to join battle with three deep skated, die hard prejudices which put up an obstinant resistance. The first was that sport was only for the English, the second that sport kill's studies and that an intellectual could not be a good gymnast, and vice versa, the third that manual workers in all events

should be kept away from it. as they could derive no benefit — a triple nonsense against which I had to continue to fight for many years.'

He was still fighting when he wrote, in 1935: 'but does this universal passion bring to the nations all the happiness it has to offer? Not a bit of it! They should be thoroughly enlightened as to its possibilities instead of seeing in it only a *distraction* or *pastime*... Their sociological doctrine should constantly make allowance for sport. Their politics should seek in it a valuable outlet instead of trying to draw on it for electioneering support.'

But he never faltered and finally, in 1937, after nearly half a century of struggle he was ready to write: 'By means of the Olympic Games, re-established and modernized, sport has conquered the whole world. From now on, though the flame may flicker or even go out in some places, it will surely continue to shine elsewhere, until it is lit again where it shone before.'

This profession of faith, Ladies and Gentlemen, like the fundamental idea of Coubertin, applies to the past, to the present and to the future.

As Excellence President Drimmel has truly said, the Olympic Flame is once again about to give tangible evidence of its vitality, or the occasion of the 9th Olympic Winter Games. This prospect before us represents a renewed vote of confidence in the mission bequeathed to us by the man who revived them. And here our thanks are due to Excellence Dr. Drimmel, to Professor Friedl Wolfgang, to their colleagues on the Organizing Committee, and to all the Austrian people, for their indefatigable efforts and for their enthusiasm, which have enabled us to meet here today united by a common faith and the common symbol of the five linked and multicolored circles.

Notwithstanding this tremendous success, the difficulties which existed in 1935 are still with us. While, when the Olympic Movement began, governments showed no interest whatsoever in sport, and remained cold to Coubertin's ideas, which educators termed 'frivolous', today governments in many countries attempt to use sport in general, and the Olympic Movement in particular, for personal and partisan ends. Certain sport meetings are forbidden, or are confined to members of politically friendly countries: other so-called sport events are politically inspired, politically organized,

and politically conducted. (We know, of course, that these are purely political manifestations and not sport at all, just as so-called professional sport is a branch of entertainment business and not sport at all, but the uninformed may be misled.)

Although the legitimate business of the State is the education, the health, and the welfare of its citizens, and not the acquisition of medals in the Olympic Games, ministries of sport are organized in various countries and the State athlete appears. A victory in sport becomes synonymous with national prestige, or with the superiority of one political system over another. The international Olympic Committee and the international sport Federations have to devote an increasing proportion of their time to combatting the intrusion of politics into sport. One can understand the opportunism of politics and the desire to make grist of all that comes to the mill, but we must insist on our principles and we must also point out that those who use sport as a tool or as a weapon do damage to the true interests of their own fellow-countrymen, just as the infinitely graver errors of certain educators endanger the balance of personality of the young people they are supposed to be protecting.

The proper role of these educators is to ensure for the young the harmonious development of their moral, intellectual and physical capabilities, to teach them the love of effort which will enable them to improve their performance. While their vocation should be to raise the level of all, for the betterment of humanity, we see the establishment of grants for fictitious courses, allotted solely on the basis of the individual's physical prowess ; we learn that athletes are permitted to neglect their studies for sport training, we find that educators yield to the pressure for gate receipts. Thus the creation of those hypertrophied creatures, the state athlete, the university athlete, and the company athlete is not only tolerated but encouraged. On the pretext of social progress, of educating the masses by means of an elite of champions, they betray their mission and mislead the young.

The apprenticeship of sport is served not only in the stadium : it begins on the road to the stadium, a road paved with the temptations of modern life—easy pleasure, mediocre pastimes, quick profits. The athlete's first triumph is to reach the stadium under his own steam and by his own willpower. He has thus exhibited discernment and has taken the first step toward the complete man.

But what is the example which, it is claimed, is given to the young by displaying those spoiled darlings of sport who receive special rewards because they have muscles ? Is it so admirable that they are able to run and to jump, and to win ? Surely, they are merely doing what they have been selected and pampered and paid to do ! They are practising their trade, and will probably find

themselves, in a few years' time, in some paltry job, remembered briefly because they achieved an illusory fame simply and solely by being young and strong. Is this what is meant by an elite ? Is this the elite which is to educate the masses ? As far back as 1927, Coubertin was already advocating the opposite when he wrote : 'The elite must no longer be expected to influence the masses, but rather the masses the elite.'

And what of the social progress to which, we are told, that kind of sport contributes ? To whom are offered the wonderful jobs, the costly gifts, and their name on the front page ? To the winners, and only to the winners. The public likes winners : it forgets the losers. In any competition, there is only one winner. So this artificially created elite can only increase the obsession with performance, the hypertrophy of the individual, the imbalance between body and mind.

Coubertin, who was far more concerned with the complete man than with the breaking of records, admirably summed up this danger already in 1918, in the course of a prophetic lecture. 'Sport', he said, 'implants in a human being the seeds of psycho-physiological qualities such as coolness, self-confidence, resolution. These qualities may remain localized around the action which inspires them : in fact, this is frequently the case. Many an intrepid cyclist dismounts from his machine to become a waverer at the crossroads of life ; many a bold swimmer is daunted by the surges of human tides ; many a fencer has no idea how to apply to the skirmishes of life the judgement and purpose which he displays on the mat !' And he continued with this definition of the task of those whom he called *responsible men*, a definition to which we should draw their attention today : 'The task of the educators is to make these seeds bear fruit in every area of the personality, transferring them from one particular circumstance to a whole set of circumstances, from one special type of activity to the whole field of human action.'

I ask you, Ladies and Gentlemen, shall we permit this ideal of the complete man to be endangered by the very persons who should be promoting it ?

Are we to see the establishment of a new class of citizen, a *sport militia* ? Can those who advocate its creation assure us that state athletes will not perforce have to share the views of their governments, that university athletes will not be given degrees merely because of their sport successes, that commercial athletes will never be exploited for purposes of publicity ? Can they, in all honesty, talk about fair play and straightforward competition, when only the most highly developed countries have the means to finance such athletes ? Will there be no tinge of remorse in the triumph of the privileged athlete over the athlete from a less developed country without the benefit of

these unfair advantages ? Did they consider these things, all those who, last year, were claiming to *rethink* Coubertin and to *reshape* the Olympic Movement ?

Let us end the dispute and reaffirm the principles of this Movement, which it is the task of the International Olympic Committee to promote and to guide. Coubertin did not create these principles, they have existed from time immemorial and will exist forever since it is in man's nature to better himself, but he had the perspicacity to recognize them as an eternal verity and the tenacity to place them in execution in a universal movement.

The Olympic Movement does not consist solely of sport. It is to sport what humanism is to intellectual activities. Let us continue to strive to safeguard the individual in an age of industrialization, of over-specialization, and of all-consuming automation. Let us, with the aid of public opinion, strive to convince Governments that sport, like the fine arts, transcends politics. Let us strive to convince the educators that sport is part of education, that education is not merely the accumulation of information but

must also include the development of character, that knowledge without character is dangerous, that character can be developed better on the playing field than in the class room, and that amateurism is the secret of true success in life.

Let us fight as did Coubertin for the purity and simplicity of these principles, rejecting all compromise, not from rigid conservatism, because. in contra-distinction to the spectacular phenomena, which may result from the misuse of sport, the Olympic Movement offers the fundamental values that enable a man to achieve his full stature and his proper balance.

This philosophy which reconciles action and thought, more than any other. is for our time ; and it is this philosophy which we commend to the attention of all sportsmen and to all educators at the beginning of the XVIII Olympiad.

May the pure spark, which shines within each of us, be kindled to fire by contact with these essential and undying truths, and so keep alive that symbol of peace and brotherhood, the Olympic Flame.