

Swimming against the stream UNESCO has missed the bug

by Jean-François Brisson, Le Figaro, Paris.

If we are not mistaken, it was in this newspaper, in 1951, that the idea was first put forward that U.N.E.S.C.O. could not remain aloof from sport. This does not obviously mean sport considered merely as a social phenomenon of the 20th Century, whose performances are more spectacular than instructive, but in a more limited aspect of sport which could figure in school time-tables as a means of training, both moral and physical. This, at every age, encourages the fight against muscular atrophy which is aggravated by the progress in mechanical inventions.

It was supposed that U.N.E.S.C.O. would try to discriminate between the types of sport which come under its aegis and those where excess might constitute a social danger.

It might have ended as we had hoped in an appeal to those responsible for the direction of sport., in an attempt to free them from their obsession with *performances* and to remind them that their essential task was the formation of a strong and enthusiastic youth.

The start was slow but satisfactory, when, in 1956, an important enquiry co-ordinated the ideas of member states on the role of sport in education.

A 2d movement seemed to augur well when a council under the auspices of U.N.E.S.C.O. was formed with the encouragement of physical education and sports as its aim. With several chance remarks Mr. René

Maheu, Director General of U.N.E.S.C.O. upset the apple cart.

In his opinion, there was no possibility of shining in the stadium unless one was a state athlete, a university athlete or an athlete belonging to some organization — he might have said regimental athlete — it being well understood that occupations outside of sport are 'covers', as criminals say, and that eminent sportsmen are only civil servants, students, clerks or soldiers in a very secondary capacity.

What then was the conclusion ?

The necessity of taking action so as not to separate too widely the privileged champions from the crowd who are urged to follow their example, but who will give up if they feel that sport excludes them from following a profession in the usual way.

The exact opposite is the answer.

Amateurism is dead. Let us pay sportsmen openly. For a long time, we have hoped to see the International Olympic Committee tackle U.N.E.S.C.O. in order to keep an ideal of disinterestedness and equilibrium in sport.

Mr. Avery Brundage, President of the International Olympic Committee, has little confidence in the help which might be forthcoming from one of these important assemblies, which are somewhat far removed from everyday affairs.

He will certainly not change his opinion when he reads the declaration of Mr. René Maheu.