

MIND AND BODY

SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR OLYMPIC SPORT

by Reuben B. Frost

It becomes increasingly evident that if the human being, which changes slowly, is to adjust itself to the rapidly changing times and if we, through the medium of sports, are going to be able to assist the younger members of our generation to develop as rapidly and fully as possible, we must study the human organism in all its aspects and find out what causes it to behave as it does. For we are not interested in muscle contraction alone ; we cannot understand the human *organism* by studying only tissue and bone ; we are not able to develop speed or strength or explosive power by concentrating on nothing but the glycogen cycle, the Bainbridge Reflex or the "treppe" phenomenon. Scientists are increasingly recognizing the relationship of the "psyche" to the "soma". Every aspect of the human organism is affected by and in turn affects all other dimensions. Emotions produce or modify actions ; activity, in turn, may cause and influence feelings. All facets of the individual — mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, social and intellectual — have an effect on bodily condition, on endurance, on fitness and on performance.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I chose to discuss with you, not a new topic, but one which interests all of us, *Psychological Implications for Olympic Sport*.

Emotion and Motivation in Sport

Dr. John Lawther, the well-known basketball coach and psychologist, has stated that "man

acts as he feels, and not as he thinks". While we may not all accept this in its entirety, we have all seen or heard of individuals who, spurred on and stimulated by deep emotion, have performed feats which had hitherto been considered impossible. We have observed people run faster when afraid, strike out explosively when angry, hesitate when anxious, move smoothly and swiftly when confident, and quit when frustrated. There have been instances when teams or individuals have risen to great heights when encouraged by unexpected success and an equal number of situations in which impending defeat or failure have caused poor performances and uncoordinated acts. Joyous and buoyant spirits have in many instances been both the cause and effect of great victories while depression and anger have most often been associated with mediocrity and defeat.

Anxiety and stress appear to have variable effects on both the performer and his performance. Poor performance may result from both too much and too little anxiety. Complete lethargy leads to sluggish movements and lack of explosive power. As anxiety and stress increase, performances generally improve. It is interesting to note, however, that this relationship changes after a certain point is reached. When athletes are then subjected to greater stress and become more and more anxious their movements become less accurate, less coordinated and more ineffective.

The critical point, or the one which results in peak performances, is often difficult to achieve. Teams or individuals may be over-stimulated or under-stimulated and it is the wise and experienced coach who can achieve exactly the optimum amount of stress. There are also wide variations among individuals and additional study and effort are required if each athlete, whether participating in an individual event or a team sport, is to be assisted to do his very best.

Motivation is the secret of success, be it in sport, in business, in teaching or in medicine. While it is not difficult to accept this premise the problem still remains : "How are people motivated ?"

What made Bob Mathias break an Olympic record even after he had pulled a muscle ? Why did Emil Zatopek become such a phenomenal distance runner ? What did Vladimir Kuts and Bobby Morrow, the two stars of the Melbourne Olympics, have in common when they appeared to be so very different ? What made the four minute mile and the sixteen foot pole vault seem so unapproachable for many years and then suddenly become rather common marks for great performers? Why does the same basketball team, the same soccer team, the same hockey team perform so wonderfully in one instance and then,

only a few days later, play in a miserable fashion ? Or why do the tactics of a coach, which seem so effective with one team, fail completely with another ?

These, and many other questions, seem to defy definite answers. The answer is involved with nebulous, intangible things like spirit, feelings, ambitions, desires and inner resources.

Emotion has been defined as a state of physiological and psychological unbalance. It is something which causes the human organism to return to equilibrium. It is usually something which causes action and reaction, which moves the person, which stirs him to respond. Anger, fear, grief, sadness, anxiety, jealousy, hate and disgust have all been listed as emotions.

Motives are generally related to emotions but may in some cases be quite different. Motives arouse, control and direct actions. Motivation attempts to explain the reasons for behavior. This behavior is motivated by drives, needs, urges, incentives, original tendencies or whatever the particular psychologist wishes to call them. In any event they are the cause of the action or behavior. The need for survival, for companionship, for approbation, for self-esteem, and for self-fulfillment have been listed by some ; pain, joy, hunger, thirst, rewards, punishment have been pointed out by others ; the sex drive and the displacement theory have been emphasized by Freud and his followers.

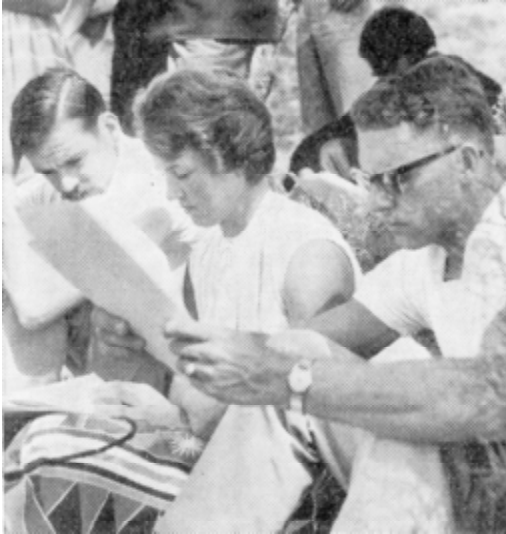
Much intense emotion results from man's need for the respect and approbation of others. People of all ages are constantly striving for those things which will increase their sense of worth, their feeling of security, their sense of self-confidence. Feelings of inferiority and a desire to compensate have been pointed out by many as a powerful motivating force.

There is ample evidence that there are hidden resources and latent powers which may be called forth when stimulated intensely. In sport, the problem is how to release this extra energy, how to call out these reserves.

The Development of Character Through Sport

As a starting point we need an analysis of how character can best be developed through sport and what steps might be recommended to accomplish this end. Much has been written for many years regarding this subject and much discussion has ensued. Let us, then, turn our attention now to some of the more recent thoughts and findings with regard to this subject. While there are claims for the role of sport as a wonderful medium for the development of desirable character traits, the evidence is not conclusive. There is insufficient evidence and too

little proof that desirable traits accrue from sports *per se* and that they carry over into other phases of life. There is, however, a great deal of testimony on the part of those who have competed indicating the lessons learned and the values of such participation.



Leadership is the key.

In athletic competition, in sports and games, we find situations which very often closely resemble those occurring in later life, in business, in the home, in the office. The same type of behavior is often called for under both sets of circumstances. Control of temper, acceptance of authority, obedience to rules, self-discipline, subjugation of self for the good of the organization, and cooperation are examples. If individuals can and will apply the principles learned in competitive sports much can be accomplished.

If character education is to be a real part of sports education and is to accrue from competitive experiences there must be transfer from the athletic situation to later life. Transfer is not automatic but can occur and appears to be most probable under certain circumstances. A few principles will serve to illustrate.

1. The nearer equivalent the two situations are, the greater the likelihood of transfer. Identical or similar elements found in the sports and the non-sports situations increase the probability.
2. The common elements in the two situations must be recognized by the individual. If an athlete sees no similarity between the game and the life situation there will be no transfer.

3. The more intellectualization and generalization that takes place the greater will be the education for life. When the athlete begins to realize that the incidents occurring in contests are examples of what may happen later, a great deal has been accomplished toward his development.

4. The more intelligent the individual, and the greater effort he makes, the greater the likelihood of transfer.

From the testimony of great athletes it can be concluded that the emulation of coaches and other leaders also plays an important role in their character development.

It has been said that "Character is caught rather than taught". "Character by contagion" is another expression of the same thing. Coaches spend a great deal of time with many of their athletes. Sometimes they are together two or three hours each day for several years. They take trips together. They share adventure. They suffer through defeats and rejoice after triumphs with each other. It is not strange, then, that leaders and coaches are important in this phase of an athlete's education.

A psychiatrist emphasized the importance of "rapport" between leader and athlete or between the person doing the influencing and the object of such influence.

It appears to me, therefore, that a fairly good case can be built for the role that sports and games can play in character development. My concern now is that coaches and teachers of sport at all levels take seriously their responsibilities in this regard and recognize their opportunities. For certainly it is true that if character education is to take place "leadership is the key".

Implications for the Olympics

We have talked about emotion, about motivation, about character development. A man must be educated to dream, to work, to play. He must be able to think, to move, to inspire. He must be able to love beauty and at the same time win battles. He must be able to work for his country and yet understand and love people in other countries.

These then are the goals of Olympic Sports — to assist contestants in their overall development so that they may, as nearly as possible, reach their potential ; to help all of those who play a role in the Olympiads or in any other level of sport to understand other people, regardless of race, creed, or nationality ; and to contribute to a

better society and a better world. For as Elihu Root, Former Secretary of State for the United States, said, "No nation can live alone and continue to live — there is not one that will not gain by the prosperity, the peace, the happiness of all."

If we are to achieve these goals we need to study human nature, human behavior, human emotions and human attitudes and remember that man is also a thing of mind, a thing of spirit.