

## THE OLYMPIC REFORM

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Theoretically, the Olympic Games remain the only big event in which sport is not considered solely from the point of view of records and a show. But it is obviously necessary to give fresh meaning to the notion of Olympism, which is voided of its substance today, to the point of being no more than a dressing of ceremonial added to championships.

In order to fulfil its mission of safeguarding and glorifying a sporting spirit placed in the service of humanism, Olympism must evolve and in this evolution the reminiscences of antiquity, or

even the details of the provisions imagined by Pierre de COUBERTIN, the modern reviver of the Games, matter less than present facts, the result of the excesses that have changed it.

Fettered by their success, the Games are suffering from gigantism and degeneration. The fraternal festival of the youth of the world, the wholesome sports meeting aimed at the improvement of man, has unfortunately developed into that "international muscle fair" that Georges HEBERT stigmatized forty years ago. Their contribution to a better understanding among the peoples of the world is undoubtedly not negligible at the level of the competitors. In the arena and in the organized Babel of the Olympic village, they come closer, mix and understand each other thanks to the common language offered by the universal rules and motions of sport. Among themselves they achieve the unity that cuts through prejudice, race and frontiers. But that is as far as it goes. The officials who select and train

these athletes, the governments who supervise and subsidize their preparation, the public that counts the medals, cheers on its favourites and thrills with pride when the flag of its country is hoisted up on high, lapse quickly back into the rut of chauvinism and blind partiality.

Have the limits to this dizzy expenditure, the mad desire to outshine been reached ? It is not sure, since the countries that are still growing are still ready to back the candidature of their towns. Other countries however consider that the moral, and possibly material, benefits are no longer proportionate to the financial efforts demanded by the gigantic organization involved, even if the expected results exceed the cost of the operation itself and the investments are aimed at the subsequent improvement of the city's amenities and tourism.

Whatever the case, the expenditure of billions, which almost makes one forget the misplaced emphasis on records, places the struggle on a prestige level and diverts the Games from their original significance.

What lies ahead, what can one hope for ?

The "expansionists" consider that the present trend is irreversible, that it is part of the price paid for progress and that the abandonment, as organizers, of the small and medium-size countries matters little, provided more and more athletes and an increasingly full programme can be gathered together and organized. They think too that the distinction between amateur and professional is out of date, that the dividing walls have to be broken down and the doors opened wide without taking these fallacious distinctions into account.

The "humanists", on the other hand, stop and think. They look back nostalgically to the 1952 Games in Helsinki which, by their simplicity and their completely sporting atmosphere, were models of the kind.

Where is the "human perfection" for the "full-time" specialist put through his paces in training like a thoroughbred and whose performance has become the sole purpose of his existence ?

Where is the example and what kind of a model does the champion become when it is proclaimed without shame that only the privileged freed from the worries of earning their living can hope to shine in the Olympic Jousts ?

Where is the fraternal and disinterested ideal when competitors become propagandists for a regime or advertising agents for a make of ski ?

Under such conditions, the remedies must be sought if not in a "return to the source", at least in "a clean sweep".

Why do multi-sport Games that have become a venue for world championships and whose regulations are to be based on those of an "open" form of tournament, cling so hard to the Olympic label ?

Such an idea moreover, even if it is likely to appeal to the advocates of *laisser-faire* and *laisser-aller*, would also offer considerable obstacles on the practical level.

Can one imagine professional boxers and cyclists willing to compete for a simple medal, with the extra risk of ruining their reputation by defeat, and consequently their market value ?

And if these professionals demanded to be paid, what an added financial burden for an organization that already shows a deficit . . .

Olympism, they conclude, must now dictate and no longer follow the movement. But how ? By a return to reasonable proportions and a ruthless pruning of the overabundant programme.

Through its commercial and advertising excesses, Grenoble will have served Olympism, if only by driving home the fact that certain winter sports (particularly Alpine skiing and ice-hockey) are out of place now among the Olympic events.

While it is obvious that the present definition of an amateur is too strict and can only be respected if relaxed, one should not conceal from oneself that the real discrimination takes place not on the categories of performers but on the categories of sports. The best guarantees of disinterestedness are modesty and simplicity. To be tempted, there has to be a tempter, to be bought there has to be a buyer . . .

One can easily count ten or so sports whose meetings only seldom bring in handsome receipts, and whose stars do

not claim a share in the manna they do not bring down from heaven. Another observation: many sports do not give rise, like cycling and skiing, to the exploitation for advertising purposes of feats destined to promote a particular brand of equipment.

In this way the everlasting quarrel of amateurs and professionals could be settled once and for all.

Which then would be the sports chosen ? First of all athletics, swimming, gymnastics, weight lifting, wrestling, fencing, rowing, canoeing and kayak, sailing, riding, shooting and the modern pentathlon. Others too, provided the behaviour of their exponents complies with Olympic standards.

This programme, reduced from the start, would make it easier to respect the unity of place and especially the unity of spirit desirable for a gathering of youth practising sport as a game and not as a duty or as a profession. The oath so constantly broken would express nothing more than a state of mind: that of disinterestedness. The restrictions it would imply would be more limited: to draw no salary or "fee" from a competition, to possess a means of livelihood outside competition. In this way the fundamental principle expressed by Pierre de COUBERTIN according to which "the Games are competitions between individuals and not between nations" (1) would once again be respected. That would be unity of spirit.

The demon of narrow-minded nationalism would be exorcised at last. Fewer national anthems, fewer flags raised to celebrate each victory. On the other hand, an official classification between nations would have a salutary effect, provided it was very carefully worked out beforehand; it would not be only the order of competitors that would be taken into account but also their number, which should be dependent not only on the accomplishment of a qualifying performance but on the total of the performance achieved, at all levels, by all the sportsmen of the country represented.

The year before the Games, the sporting population of the countries competing would be invited, at "pre-olympic weeks" to show in the stadium their ability which, even though modest, could help increase the number of those selected. These thousands of participants, who run a hundred

(1) *Article 7 of the Olympic Regulations.*

metres in twelve seconds and over, could have pride in having contributed to the selection of their champions, who, from the point of view of sporting value, would also become truly representative of the whole population.

As to unity of place, the Olympic arena, removed far away from the cities would be able to return to its original rusticity: a stadium of earth in the heart of nature, competitors and spectators being gathered in neighbouring camps. The swimming pool, in this same stadium, would be dug out of the greensward, alongside the running track. Indoor sports would once again come out into the open to breathe the fresh air, sheltered perhaps by an awning from the risks of bad weather. A river and a sea close by would allow nautical sports to be held in a limited area.

This temporary set-up, arranged for the occasion, would not leave only useless remains behind. Part of a plan for improving the territory, once the festival was over, it would be put to another use, benefiting from the laying on of water, electricity and telecommunications. But in memory of the event, it would keep the name of Olympia.

Here, briefly, is how the Games could evolve.

Whether the crowds in the years to come would still be interested in sport as a show, Olympism, confirmed in this conception and reduced to this dimension, would remain an example and a stimulus for anyone aware of the need to look after his body and strengthen his will, in a century when mechanization will make every muscular effort superfluous. It will avoid the break between mass sport which is part of leisure and health, and sport for the elite, reserved for specialists who perform before an audience. It would remind us that, reduced to its essence, sport is above all effort for effort's sake. It would put an end to the confusion between two different species: the sportsman who sometimes alone and at grips with an element - sea or mountain - finds his pleasure and his reward in the struggle and, on the other hand, the virtuoso or the artist who, deprived of an audience or spectators, loses his *raison d'être*.

"Te ipsum vincere": master yourself, the motto that Thierry MAULNIER suggested as accompaniment for the five interlaced rings, would better describe the goal aimed at than the present "*Citius, altius, fortius*", more evocative of records than human perfection.

Thus simplified and reintegrated in a humanism representing balance and progress, Olympism would once again have some meaning. Its flame, its oath, its rings, its release of pigeons, and its cannon shots would become symbols again over and above the ritual and the ceremonial.

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