



*Jean-Claude MAGNAN*

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## OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS VOICE THEIR THOUGHTS

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THE FENCER JEAN-CLAUDE MAGNAN, OLYMPIC VICE-CHAMPION IN THE INDIVIDUAL FOIL EVENT AT TOKYO, AND FIRST IN THE TEAM EVENT AT MEXICO, attacks the exaggerated popular idea of a champion. Here is what France's greatest foil champion of the last five years has to say on the subject :

*"I am deeply affected by everything that is written on sport and champions. The press has an important part to play, since after all a champion is only known to the world through the portrait painted of him by the press. But I would criticize certain journalists for two reasons :*

- 1) *They are too fond of the personal angle and spicy items of news to the detriment of the truth as a whole. Rather as though a tenth of a picture were examined under a magnifying glass and the other nine-tenths through a telescope.*
- 2) *They build us up into demi-gods in the eyes of the youngsters.*

*Now a champion can serve the useful purpose of inspiring others to emulate him, but not if he is set up on a gilded and remote pedestal. Youngsters must realize that we are not "a class apart".*

*For example, I should like a youngster to know that MAGNAN the world champion is just an ordinary chap who was not terribly gifted at the start, far from it.*

*With the habit of presenting a champion as one of "the elect" you place us on the same level as pop singers. In this way children dream of becoming sporting stars just as you and I dream of winning the national lottery. They do not know enough to realize that to become a champion is not a matter of waiting until luck comes their way but on the contrary of rolling up their sleeves and throwing themselves into the fray.*

*It is important to know that there is nothing prefabricated about a champion (whereas in show business there may be), that he is simply a chap who has been willing to keep hard at it for years. One does not take up sport thinking: "I am going to be a champion", one takes up sport with the idea of*

*having a try, of seeing what one is made of. Now the way you present things, youngsters take up a sport saying : "I'm going to be famous". That is the surest way of making them very quickly disgusted with the reality.*

(INTERVIEW BY GUY LAGORCE, PUBLISHED IN HIS FEATURE "CHAMPIONS AT LARGE", L'EQUIPE, PARIS, 17TH FEBRUARY, 1969)

THE AMERICAN ATHLETE RAY BARBUTI, OLYMPIC 400 m CHAMPION IN 1928

This name probably means nothing to the young of today but in fact he was a real Olympian. His behaviour is striking proof that fierce determination always pays in the end.

Arthur DALEY, of the International Herald Tribune, writes of him as follows :

*"Back in 1928 Barbuti was known principally as a power-house line-crasher for the Syracuse football team. He had gone out for track mainly to improve his speed on the gridiron and was an invaluable relay runner because he never admitted he was licked. In that Olympic year he decided to take a fling at the individual quarter-mile.*

*In a driving rainstorm at Harvard Stadium he ploughed through the mud to win the intercollegiate championship. Few paid attention. Barbuti was the strongest runner in the field and had won on strength rather than ability. So they said. But in the final Olympic tryouts a worse storm, accompanied by lightning and thunder, bogged down everyone - except Barbuti. A flash of lightning lit up the finish line as he crossed it first. Another fluke, they said again.*

*At Amsterdam that summer the other 400-meter men scoffed at the hard-working Barbuti. It was obvious to every expert that Bud Spencer of Stanford, supposedly invincible, would be the champion. Or maybe Lannie Ross of Yale - yes, he became more famous as a singer - or someone else. Barbuti ? He didn't have a chance. The mistake they made one day was to laugh at him to his face.*

*"Listen, you bums," snarled Barbuti, salting his words with some choice adjectives, "laugh at me if you want but I'm gonna win the Olympic championships. If anyone wants to make anything of it, he can step right up."*

*His eyes were blazing and that grim jaw jutted. Silence descended on his scoffers. Barbuti was too formidable a man. He could have torn any one of them apart. As the Olympics progressed, though, it was Barbuti against the world. When the 400-meter final arrived, the United States had not won a single footrace, incredible though such misadventure now seems.*

*"I'm gonna send that old flag up the victory pole", Barbuti muttered on the starting line, if I have to pull it up myself."*

*In one last despairing burst at the finish line the powerhouse from Syracuse dived into the red cinders to beat out Jimmy Ball of Canada for the Olympic championship that was to gain America's lone gold medal of the individual foot-racing events.*

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