

Conflict between



Born in Barcelona (Spain), professional journalist of repute, whose articles appear in the world's largest sports pages, Andres Mercé VARELA began his career at the Bar.

He has followed the Olympic Games since 1948 in London, and has attended all the Sessions of the International Olympic Committee for the past eighteen years.

Polyglot, Andres Mercé VARELA is also a practising sportsman, trying numerous sporting disciplines and collecting national medals. He represents the Spanish federations in several international organisations and has held the position of Secretary General of the Union Mondiale de Ski Nautique since 1967.

We publish, opposite, an article which he has written on skiing, based on documentary evidence.

Skiing and Olympism

BY ANDRES MERCÉ VARELA

/s/

It is impossible to organize Winter Games in a non Olympic context

It is generally agreed that the world of today, the world of the consumer society, of the mass-production of all kinds of industrial products, a world finally that offers everybody the possibility of obtaining articles which formerly seemed to be reserved to a privileged few, is a world governed by publicity. Publicity in the political, commercial, touristic and even cultural fields. This, and there are many who agree, is the common denominator of modern society.

Another truth, if not exactly elevated to an axiom, at least widely accepted and easily verifiable, asserts that sport has been of invaluable assistance to publicity during the last few years. A number of governments use sport for publicizing their political, social and nationalistic theories. Sport is half the tourist attraction of a country. Whether it is a matter of skiing, the pleasures of the beach, golf, shooting, tennis, not to mention great sports meetings like the Olympic Games, the World Football Cup, world championships in ice-hockey, skiing or of any other sport rousing the enthusiasm of the crowds in support of some particular team or a particular athlete or encouraging the man in the street to practise his favourite sport, all this forms one of the most important means of promoting tourism today.

Sport and Publicity

With regard to commercial publicity, there is no doubt that sport represents an excellent means of launching certain articles. This involvement of the world of sport in publicity has resulted in incredible changes in the lives of our champions who, from being athletes subjected to a strict training regime followed by exacting periods of competition, have turned into businessmen with a keen sense of publicity.

There is a positive side to this phenomenon in so far as it reflects the value of sport as a form of social promotion. But if this promotion is not accompanied by a strict sense of honour in the athlete, he will end up infringing not only the rules of amateurism which he freely accepted on entering the world of competition but also those of his sport. Then, suddenly, he begins to weaken, falls victim to lies, begins to lack respect for other athletes and to break the rules which as a novice he had accepted at the start of his career as an amateur.

That the name, the person, the victories or the life story of the great figures of tennis, skiing, baseball or golf, for example, should be used for publicity purposes forms part and parcel of the advertising customs of the big countries when it comes to appealing to the mass of athletes or influencing the man in the street.

These methods pose no problem as far as professional athletes are concerned. Although forming a group quite apart from the great mass of athletes who accept sport as a means and not as an end, they are playing the game according to the rules. They pay their taxes, comply with the discipline of the manager, the trainer or the impresario. Although a certain boxer may show proof of bad taste in advertising, from the ring, the makes of different products conspicuously marked on various items of his clothing, and although certain cyclists seem to be playing the part of mobile sandwichmen, there are, on the other hand, a great many athletes who show better taste and use other, more effective means to attract a different type of clientele. At any rate publicity place tremendous sums at the disposal of the professional athletes who agree to cooperate. The American golfer Jack Nicklaus takes home 100.000 dollars for every match he wins. To this sum must be added what he is paid by the manufacturers of shirts, golf-clubs, golf-balls and golf-shoes. This is true too of tennis, ice-hockey, baseball, basketball players, etc... not to mention top-ranking cyclists like Eddy Merckx whose annual income is said to top the 30 million peseta mark (\$422,299.00)

A new problem: the skier who accepts money

All these champions have to continue to practise their sport with equal zest, in order to keep up their good name and continue to represent a worthwhile vehicle for publicity. Very few manage to live from publicity once they retire from the arena. From this point of view, the skier is a striking example, who has created one of the most serious problems in modern sport and more particularly for Olympism. The disagreement between the President of Olympism, Mr. Avery Brundage, who competed in the Stockholm Games in 1912, and the lawyer Marc Hodler, President of the International Ski Federation, makes it a burning question, with nuances and undercurrents that will grow more marked in the months to come.

The story of one of the celebrated cases of professionalism in skiing with money earned through publicity will enlighten us as to the essential features of the problem. Without being one of the troupe of professional skiers and preferring to run a parallel course, in front of the colour TV cameras, attaching more importance to the show than to sport, Jean-Claude Killy now lives entirely apart from the world of skiing which made him famous. But his sporting achievements were such as to enable him, during his officially amateur career as a skier, to amass a fortune which at present, two years after his retirement, amounts to several million dollars.

Killy, a typical case

Thanks to his attractive looks and personal charm, his great skill and a born racer's spirit of decision, Jean-Claude Killy succeeded in arousing an interest which in the United-States exceeds all limits. He won the World Cup with the maximum number of points. He equalled Tony Sailer's record, by winning all three Olympic Gold Medals. Money flowed in from all sides. In the days that followed the French skier's victory, the firm that made Jean-Claude Killy's skis saw its sales increase ten-fold. Val d'Isère, the ski resort where he lived and learned to ski, saw its hotels filled at the mere mention of his name. His ski-boots, sticks, anoraks, pullovers and gloves, everything, absolutely everything was commercialized-to an unbelievable degree. Within the space of four years, the son of a modest farmer of Val d'Isère became a millionaire, clad all the while in the white robes of "amateurism".

One day Killy was approached by the big American businessman and "manager" Mac Cormack, of Scottish origin, who possessed an exceptional sense of publicity and was the owner of a veritable team of big golf and tennis champions. In a moment the exclusive publicity contract was signed. Killy's image was negotiated for astronomical sums. A big airline company, the United Airlines, which possesses one of the biggest fleets of planes in the world, finds Jean-Claude Killy one of its best advertisements. For 250.000 dollars Killy praises the qualities of the "Corvette", a General Motors model. For each pair of J.C.K. skis sold throughout the world by Head, the biggest manufacturer of metal skis, whose turnover is tremendous, Jean-Claude Killy receives four dollars. For some of its articles to appear under the name of Jean-Claude Killy, the American periodical "Skiing" gave the champion the mere bagatelle of 70.000 dollars.

This is a typical example of professionalism on the part of a skier. Ski manufacturers offer really big sums to the champions to be photographed with their skis held up facing the camera-just as tennis players do with their rackets-at the end of a race or when they climb on the podium to receive their medal and the applause of the crowds.



The binomial skier - manufacturer

In sports like football, ice-hockey, skating, baseball, boxing, etc..., where admission to the show is controlled at the ticket office, the financial link with the champion is comparatively simple. The public pays and the beneficiary of the takings (manager, organization, club or federation) has no difficulty in maintaining economic relations with the athlete. In skiing, on the other hand, where there is practically no ticket office, the problem of financing the athlete is quite different. Those who profit most from the growth of this sport are the manufacturers of skis and ski equipment. It is they who provide the victory bonuses for the winners, the sums agreed on at the beginning of the season and other sums for the appearance of skiers on TV or in the newspapers.

Dollars play a tremendous role today in the world of skiing and especially Alpine skiing. Everyone knows that not only Killy, but also the Austrian Karl Schranz, the world champion Jean-Noël Augert, the Americans Chaffee and Kavashi and many other skiing stars, from the modest mountaineers, farmers-or waiters that they were, have become the owners of 10.000-dollar cars and luxurious chalets. And all by doing nothing but ski during the eight months of the season - in winter in the northern hemisphere, in summer in Chili and New Zealand - and preparing themselves for the races during three months out of the remaining four.

At its famous congress in Barcelona in 1969, the F.I.S. thought it had discovered a good solution by allowing ski equipment manufacturers to advertise their goods by mentioning the titles and names of the champions who used them. On the other hand, it proposed itself to subsidize directly the national federations of skiers who allowed the manufacturers to advertise their skis, boots, gloves, etc... Each federation was to come to an arrangement with the skiers and in this way there was at least some check on the fabulous sums handed out. The French federation formed a pool of manufacturers and members of the French team used only the equipment supplied by this pool. In Italy too there is an agreement between the federation and the manufacturers, although it differs in many respects from that of the French. In the United States, the skiers deal directly with the manufacturers. As to the Austrian federation, it has left skiers quite free in their relations with the manufacturers.

Respecting the regulations

The International Olympic Committees stands firm on its famous Rule 26 which given a definition of the non-amateur athlete. Any athlete who comes under this definition may be disqualified by the I.O.C. In fact, the International Olympic

Committee considers that as long as this rule is not modified, amateurism will remain the sine qua non for eligibility for the Olympic Games. It demands therefore purely and simply a respect for the written rule until such time as it is modified. It is not up to the I.O.C. to investigate infringements of the rule of amateurism (Rule 26), for it possesses neither a body of inspectors nor a body of officials empowered to enforce obedience. But if it should come to hear of an infraction that has been proved, it can then forbid the sham amateur from taking part in the Olympic Games.

This is what President Avery Brundage did when he announced (and it was not exactly well received in the press) that ten skiers, whose names he gave, would not be allowed to take part in the Sapporo Olympics next year. Certain federations have already announced that they will disqualify the skiers that have infringed the regulations. Such is the case of the American federation, which has backed up Mr. Brundage by disqualifying Chaffee and Kavashi. On the other hand, others reacted differently and suggested that the International Ski Federation should break away from the I.O.C. They consider that the Winter Games would be more sumptuous and more spectacular if they were not controlled by the I.O.C. But is this possible?

We do not think so. First of all because there is no majority within the F.I.S. to enable voting to be carried through in favour of a split between the F.I.S. and the IOC. In May 1971, the F.I.S. will hold its Congress in Yugoslavia and if the problem is raised then, it can only end in the failure of the anti-Olympians. Only France, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, Finland and Norway would come out in favour of a split. The smaller countries, which form the majority in the F.I.S., will never accept such a separation, which would deprive them of the financial aid that each of the National Olympic Committees grants to sports recognised by the International Olympic Committee. In addition, as far as the medium-size countries are concerned the fact of taking part in the Winter Olympics constitutes the biggest reward for all their amateur skiers who in fact represent the great majority. The exclusion of skiing from the other Olympic events will never be agreed on within the F.I.S.

It would be a good idea too to consider whether it would be possible to hold non-Olympic Winter Games. Quite probably, in such an eventuality, the big skiing countries - France, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Norway, etc... - would find simpler means of proving their superiority, in Nordic as well as Alpine skiing. In the other sports, the problem is quite different. Ice-hockey and figure skating, the events at the Winter Olympics where the box-office receipts are the biggest, will never agree to the idea of holding Winter Games outside Olympism, in spite of

the heated discussions that often occur between the International federations of these two sports and the I.O.C. Never would it be possible for a world ice-hockey or ice-skating championship to be held in the same winter resort as a world skiing championship that did not form part of a Winter Olympics. Ice-hockey and ice-skating will always select New York, Montreal, Chicago, Stockholm, Moscow, Berlin, Toronto, Tokyo or other big towns that can offer them a Sports Palace big enough to hold 12.000 to 15.000 spectators and capable of allowing them to take in millions of dollars in receipts. But never will such championships be held in small winter resorts.

These sports agree to organize an Olympic tournament every four years in different ski resorts. However, during the last few years, the Winter Olympics have shown their preference for towns like Innsbruck, Grenoble and Denver rather than for true ski resorts, and without departing from Olympic tradition. On the other hand, these same sports reject the patronage of Olympism, the ethics of Olympic philosophy, the value of the fraternity of the five rings as well as the spirit of solidarity and brotherhood peculiar to the Olympic Games. Skating and ice-hockey will then launch out on their own and go in search not only of more popularity, a wider audience and the applause of the crowds, but also of much larger box-office receipts. But all this is quite outside the natural setting required by skiing.

We do not believe in the banning of skiing from the Olympic Games nor do we see the possibility of organizing Winter Games without the patronage of the I.O.C. It is necessary to respect the written laws, which in sport are known as regulations. Whoever does not comply with a regulation deserves to be punished for his lack of sporting discipline and lack of respect for his opponent and the regulations.

Or then the rules of the game must be changed, but this is much more difficult.

* * * * *