

OLYMPIC DREAM

BY JEAN-FRANCOIS BRISSON

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EF The Games in 1980 if . . .

In an interview televised shortly before the Winter Games at Grenoble, one of the most deserving and most charming of our French skiers had to answer the following question:

"Would you rather be a World champion or an Olympic champion?"

"An Olympic champion," replied the young Pyrenean girl, without hesitation.

"For what reason?" enquired the interviewer.

"Well, I don't know, it's just that the Olympic Games are tremendous, there is nothing beyond ..."

That is, if I remember correctly, all this spirited girl could find to say, whose father was an excellent 400 metre hurdler and who, at that time, was herself getting ready for her diploma as a physical education teacher.

It seems to me that this story sums up very well the present situation of Olympism.

The Olympic label has a magic power; it helps the sale of the products which use it. This fact, incidentally, should incite the I.O.C. directors to try to protect legally and more efficiently the word *"Olympic"* against commercial cupidity.

The Olympic Games are, more than ever, considered as a universal event, as the most gigantic enterprise of sport

shown on television; but Olympism, the leading idea which started this enormous machine, the ideal which aroused Pierre de COUBERTIN and, centuries before, the Greek people, nobody can define it any longer. Let me try, then, to undertake this perilous ideological endeavour.

A group of university students and impartial sportsmen, formed in Paris over twenty years ago under the name of the Pierre de COUBERTIN Committee, proposed a definition which would modify Article 3 of the Olympic Charter in the following way:

Here is the proposed variation:

"The aim of the Olympic Movement is the exalting and safeguarding of the sporting spirit with a view to improving human nature. It considers sport as a means of development of both the taste for unselfish effort and the moral qualities it requires. In inviting all athletes of the world to a friendly quadrennial competition, it also contributes to the respect and preservation of peace between nations."

Olympism, therefore, is sport practised with a certain spirit, under certain conditions.

Olympism is an inheritance from Hellenism, by which term RENAN referred to the *"ideal of perfection realised by Greece in literature, art and philosophy."*

Olympism surpasses sport; it reaches a superior dimension where sport is no longer an aim but a means. The idea of sport can be defined as effort for effort's sake. Effort considered as a game, the stimulus of which is competition. Effort for effort's sake and effort to be the strongest is the very essence of sport when one has to fight against an opponent, against a record... or even simply against oneself, against the vis inertia which averts man, when he is not compelled to do so, from *"sweating it out"* as French peasants say.

Olympism confirms this sporting attitude but uses it to reach the higher purpose proposed by the Coubertin Committee -- faithful in this way to the man whose idea it defends -- that of improving the human being which not only aims for the best muscular efficiency, the test of well-tempered minds, but also, for each individual, for the search for an harmonious balance between all human aptitudes, physical intellectual or moral.

Ideal of perfection which, no doubt, was never better reached than on the privileged land of Greece in the age of PERICLES and this not only as RENAN says, in *"literature, art and philosophy,"* but also, it seems, in the *"cultural and athletic"* standard of its citizens.

The Olympic motto -- Citius, Altius, Fortius (strangely enough, in Latin) -- borrowed by COUBERTIN from Father DIDON, exalts, let us not forget it, the characteristics such as celerity, aspiration and courage, rather than the strictly athletic qualities of speed, springiness and strength.

Still, in a more concrete way, President BRUNDAGE has often stated: *"The main purpose of the Olympic Movement has always been, not only to beat records or to gain medals, but also to draw the attention of all nations to the advantage of a complete national programme of physical training and amateur sports competitions in order to improve the health of boys and girls and to make them better citizens."*

We have to admit that these simple ideas, even though they emanated from a succinct study, are ignored by the general public.

How can we spread, popularise these ideas, make them obvious?

Until now, we have probably been haunted by a rather fruitless quarrel: that of distinguishing between amateurs and professionals.

COUBERTIN used to say that amateurism was a state of mind and a state of mind is hard to define in a rule, however reasonable.

A mood takes its shape through a dominant idea and that of Olympism is unselfishness. What is important is not to know whether the Olympic athlete has received aid and various advantages for his training, but if, in the end, he has given more than he received.

Every effort deserves a reward. The reward of Olympism is the enjoyment of striving, participating and improving.

Olympism is sport considered, from the point of view of those who practise it, for pleasure and health. Therefore, Olympism is everybody's sport since this pleasure is at everybody's hand.

In order to make people want to follow him, the Olympic champion must maintain an exemplary worth and never appear to be making a career of sport. He is neither an artist putting on a show, nor a propaganda agent intending to glorify his country, his government, or his race, nor an advertising agent for a trademark or a tourist resort. He practises sport for the enjoyment he derives from it, for the honour and not for money, not even for glory. This passionate

propensity for sport, which incites people to make sacrifices when they might otherwise agree to material satisfactions or those of vanity, is indeed the purity of which the Olympic flame would like to be the symbol.

On the day that parents, anxious for the future of their children and who renounce for them careers too often meteoric and boisterous, such as that of a music-hall singer, want to see on the Olympic podium those for whom they nourish ambition, we can say that Olympism will have triumphed.

Between the Olympic champion who goes to the top and the sportsman who never wins an event there is no difference in character, only in intensity and success.

If the five interlaced circles of the Olympic emblem symbolise with success the brotherhood between the sportsmen of the five continents, another geometric figure defines Olympism from the point of view of sports education: that of a pyramid set upon a wide base of adepts which by way of emulation, produce a representative elite.

Olympism, as we see and know it, has nothing anachronistic or esoteric. It even answers an imperative of our times which aspires to depart from too strict a criteria of rentability and financial success imposed by industrial society.

What can we do to make this quadrennial spectacular event contribute to the development of this state of mind in again becoming *"the great festival of human springtime"* desired by COUBERTIN and in escaping from the *"display of muscles"* denounced by Georges HEBERT, apostle of the *"natural method?"*

"The Games have become too large and too expensive, and as a penalty for their enormous success, they have been submitted more and more to political and commercial influence," recalled President BRUNDAGE at the last session of the I.O.C. in Amsterdam.

How can we bring the Games back into reasonable proportions, how can their programme be reduced, how can they be protected from political and commercial influences? These are the questions to which answers must be found without delay.

These answers justify the report I put before you, but mine and those of Pierre de COUBERTIN's Committee, which adopted them, are revolutionary which is why I have entitled the text: *"Olympic Dream."*

I offer them to you:

The Games must be divided into two successive phases: outburst in the first one, concentration in the second one.

Let me explain.

Most of the International Federations would like to see their sport entered in the Olympic programme, but this is already over-subscribed.

Therefore, why not open wide the Olympic gates and welcome all the sports wishing to participate in the festival? A series of Olympic tournaments (suggested by COUBERTIN) or, in the case of over-commercialised sports, "*pre-Olympic*" tournaments, could take place in a half a dozen towns in the same country as the city organising the Games. This would be the outburst.

Concentration would then assemble the Games in a confined space and, if possible, in the suburbs, in the countryside, the Games reduced to the sports closest to the Olympic norms. For example: athletics, swimming, gymnastics, weightlifting, wrestling, fencing, rowing, canoeing, yachting, equestrian, shooting, and modern pentathlon.

The rewards for the winners of the tournaments would be presented at the opening ceremony and delegations from all the countries would parade with the tournament participants.

This way the Olympic festival could be opened to everyone, but the Games as such would only welcome a limited selection.

The application of this idea would be made easier by the official institution of continental games the year before, to make a selection for the world games.

This would avoid the dangers of gigantism and exorbitant expenses for the organising cities.

Now, let us look at the nationalistic outbidding, commercial exploitation, and another abuse to which I was referring in citing Georges HEBERT: over-specialisation and excessive training with over-loaded coaching schedules and intake of various drugs such as the "*artificial stimulants*," male hormones which allow weightlifters and weight-throwers to put on perhaps as much as twenty kilos of extra muscle.

Then again it would be useless to hope to make an example of them by penalising those who break the most solemnly proclaimed rules.

What must be attempted is to create a new position of understanding, to set an example and to reward those who have kept to it best.

What are the concrete means of achieving this?

Competition for medals has become the Olympic test for governments, anxious to see their prestige defended by their athletes in the stadium.

The only solution is the official adoption of a moderate international classification, that is to say which does not only consider the number of medals brought home by the participants of one country or another, but which also takes into consideration other elements such as: the sporting standard of the whole population of the country represented and also, to a lesser extent, the degree of sports education of those selected and their academic or professional aptitudes outside the stadium.

In effect, this would be materialised by the institution of an Olympic Day or an Olympic Week during the year preceding the Games in all countries wishing to adopt the moderate international classification (for it goes without saying that the Olympic Games, an essentially individual confrontation, would remain open to everyone).

During that day or week all the sporting population, besides the specialists already controlled by their Federation, would be invited to come to the stadium, the gymnasium, the swimming pool, to take part in elementary events such as the 100 m. flat race, high jump, shot-put, rope climbing, weightlifting, and the 50 m. swimming. The minimum standard required for a sportsman to take part is very modest, set at 13 seconds for the 100 m. flat race.

This contingent of sportsmen, added to those whose Federations have already recorded performances, would take their places in the moderate international classification in the sense that it would represent a higher or lower percentage of the total population (for example the 20th, the 15th, the 10th).

This assessment could also be used in fixing the upper limit of selected sportsmen that each country would be authorised to send to the Games.

International classification kept up to date by computers would designate the leading countries at the end of each day of the Games. It is these countries whose colours would be flown on masts decreasing in height which would help to eliminate nationalistic manifestations, such as the national anthem played at the presentation of the medal to the winner as well as the raising of the relevant national colours.

Such a classification would therefore achieve the aim of President BRUNDAGE: *"to draw the attention of all nations to the benefit of a complete national programme of physical training."*

But, as I told you, it could also have other effects through the intervention of different moderating factors.

The re-establishment of art competitions (music, painting, sculpture, architecture) would be one, and those interested would welcome it if it were only open to the young (under 35 for example). UNESCO would probably agree to collaborate in the appointment of the juries.

Another possibility, and this is the idea of Mr. Geoffroy de NAVACELLE, Pierre de COUBERTIN's nephew, is that these same art competitions could have a special classification for the sportsmen participating in the athletic events of the Games.

The correcting of a well balanced international classification must also fight (as we have said) against the excesses of specialisation and therefore reward the all-round sportsmen; rewarding, too, the sportsmen who have been able to reconcile success in the stadium with the handling of their studies or professional life. Finally, it must help in creating an atmosphere without anguish and restraints, which have no place in a demonstration which, let us not forget, presents itself in the form of Games.

This is why it would be possible and advisable to add some other events to the lighter programme containing a limited number of entries, which would brighten the closing ceremony, always overshadowed by a certain melancholy caused by the prospect of the impending separation.

The first of these events could be in a triathlon (10 X 100 m. race, 10 X 50 m. swimming relay, a clean and jerk test) in which the ten best participants (in all the specialities of the Olympic programme) of the ten leading countries in the moderate international classification could take part.

Riders, fencers, rowers, wrestlers and others would then be able to perform outside their field, which would permit all-round sportsmen to assert themselves and would restrain the excessive quest for records and encourage versatility.

With regard to the corrective for the moral and social aspect, the interested parties would also be asked to produce a concise record of the best ten representatives, specifying their trade or profession, the duration of the training

period granted to them, as well as the various advantages received to help their sporting success. This would afford additional points in the moderate international classification to those champions whose activity had not been concentrated solely on sport.

This would be a reward for respecting the Olympic spirit. None of these correctives would, of course, radically modify the classification established according to the results obtained in the official Olympic programme.

Ultimate element of moderation, itself very symbolic, destined essentially to bring cheerfulness before parting: a series of improvised events. These events and their heats, the finals of which would precede the closing parade, would fill the spare time in the Olympic Village where many competitors do nothing when their events are over.

Artistic competitions reserved for sportsmen and these improvised events would therefore contribute to the enlivening of the Olympic Village, and the public would see with interest athletes, gymnasts weightlifters, and runners compete in both high and long jumping, wall-scaling, tug-of-war, speed rope climbing, javeling throwing, and many other contests (outside the official programme) requiring qualities of strength, skill and speed.

These novelties which, from a practical point of view, would not pose any problems, but the use of a computer and the formation of some additional jurys would help to modify the contestants' state of mind and, above all, (for it is rarely among participants that you encounter the lack of a sporting spirit) would change the point of view of the governments or administrative bodies in charge of the Olympic preparation.

The countries brought together would be judged as much on their intensity of effort as on the way they have handled the training of a few specialists.

Medals of Olympic merit could even be awarded, in the same year as the Games, to sportsmen of extra-Olympic disciplines, to federations, and to clubs which, through their behaviour, would have contributed to the spreading of the spirit of improvement which is the spirit of Olympism.

I have just very briefly summed up what, in my opinion, can and must reinforce the humanist's ideal according to the Hellenistic tradition, whether it is a question of Olympic education of the public or of a modification of rules and programmes.

However, since I am a journalist and since I did warn you that I was indulging in a kind of day-dreaming, I would

like to end with an anticipatory report: a report on the 1980 Olympic Games, if the reforms outlined above were adopted, if the proper place were chosen, and if all the good intentions were brought together.

That is to say that we are closer to the dream than to the reality -- but is it not sometimes from a dream that reality springs, takes shape and improves itself?

So, it is now July 1, 1980, at Olympia before the bowl where the Olympic flame is permanently nurtured. That flame never dies except at the time of the Games when a torch-bearer comes to collect it in order to take it to the place where the quadrennial confrontation is being held, and always by means of torch-bearers, this flame returns to Olympia after the closing ceremony of the Games.

If Olympism does not give up its aspiration for purity and unselfishness, it is right that the Olympic flame sustains, not the publicity for some brand of fuel, but the humanistic and sporting devotion of the populations watching it go by...

Here we are, at this solemn moment when the flame, taken from the torch, will stop burning in the bowl of Olympia and go from hand to hand as far as the stadium, where it will blaze for the duration of the Games.

The young Greek has gone, the torch in his fist, and every five minutes, from one kilometre to another, other sportsmen will take up the relay to the border. Yugoslavia and Northern Italy are crossed, as far the French border where my dream has chosen to materialise, for it did not seem unlikely to me that Pierre de COUBERTIN's country, from where the bases of a renewal of modern Olympism would also have emanated would have obtained the organisation of the 1980 Games, according to the best adapted standards.

It is on the outskirts of Fréjust that the torch-bearers are waiting with the flame which will radiate towards Marseilles, Lyons, Paris, Strasbourg, Lille, Rennes and Bordeaux, where Olympic tournaments are planned.

A spark of Olympic flame will burst all over the land where the Games are taking place, and the best young sportsmen can participate in the relay in the regions crossed.

This omnipresence of Olympic attributes, this decentralised increase of preliminary displays contribute to securing the opinion of the country, to giving the Games the dimension of a major happening, imposing a truce--not as we think of in an improbable war, but simply to the dissensions and worries of the time.

In addition to the conveyance of the flame separated and multiplied into as many sections as there are towns organising tournaments and the re-assembling in the Olympic stadium for the solemn opening ceremony, other initiatives are destined to arouse interest in all regions.

An Olympic rally, comprising various muscular and motorised forms of travelling (walking, alpinism, cycling, rowing, swimming, yachting, driving, flying, even parachuting) is open to all-round sportsmen.

It begins in the main French towns and ends in the Olympic stadium. Added to this event are: Olympic walks, cycling rambles, horse-rides, downstream canoeing, all of which, placed under the Olympic sign, contribute to the convergence towards the stadium, in a sportive way, of the spectators most faithful to the spirit of the Games, that is to say the participants.

But where is the exceptional stadium, how is it equipped?

In a natural setting near fresh water and near to the sea; where all ground and nautical installations necessary to the reduced programme of the Games can be concentrated in several acres; where the Olympic Villages for male and female competitors, officials, journalists and also encampments for spectators are grouped; in an area where the use of cars is unnecessary.

This place, after the Games are closed, would retain the name of Olympia. I imagine it in Aquitaine, three quarters of an hour away from Bordeaux, the organising town. The large stadium could nestle in the dunes, in the pine forests, between the Atlantic and the lake of Carcans, where the rowers and canoeists would compete. The yachting regattas taking place in the Bassin d'Arcachon.

This humanisation, out-of-town planning and, if I dare to say it, naturalisation of the Games--is it a figment of the imagination? By 1980 when progress of telecommunications will have made giant strides, when the respect for nature, the hopes of city-dwellers (80% of the population) to flee from built-up areas will have increased, when television will be better able to transform into a spectacular world display any event happening in any point on the globe, what difficulty could we encounter in assembling some 70,000 sporting spectators (room must be left in the stands for contestants, officials and journalists) wishing to camp or stay close to a place where they could enjoy 10 days of sporting holiday?

Sporting holidays are precisely the objective aimed for by the authorities of Aquitaine to enhance the worth of

an area much neglected up until now, despite tourist attractions such as the beauty of its landscapes, with the sea, the lake and the pine forests.

Thus, it is on a "*previously prepared ground*" that the I.O.C. could think of moving the newly styled Games, if the town of Bordeaux and the French Olympic Committee wish to experiment.

Other countries may also wish to follow this formula, if the conditions for organising were more favorable there; it goes without saying that I wish, in the true sporting tradition, that the best one wins.

What I have attempted is, above all, to shape for you an idea and to show the actual possibilities it has of materialising.

An Olympic concentration, in the countryside, a rustic stadium set in the dunes, in the pine forest, a well informed sporting public, an atmosphere of holidays and freedom--that would help the revival of humanistic sport.

Eliminating from the formalities any reminder of the winner's origin, the moderate international classification would exorcise the demon of chauvinistic nationalism and, on the last day of the Games, would rekindle the Olympic spirit in bringing the ultimate symbolic correctives. These correctives would contribute to making the best all-round athletes stand out and to favouring those who have been sustained by their sporting faith more than by their governments or by any trade-mark. They would hardly complicate the task of the organisers since they would be limited to the triathlon of the best ten, to the study of their files and to the improvised games performed light-heartedly as games should be.

I visualise, at the end of the last entertainment, the illuminated scoreboard showing the name of the victorious nation and of the runners-up with the number of points won by each.

At a final colour ceremony, such as that held at the end of each day, flags would be raised on masts of decreasing height around the stadium, the highest mast (the one above the the bowl where the flame is burning) bearing this time the colours of the most sporting country in the world. Its national anthem would be played, the only one during the Games, the individual winners, in mounting the rostrum to receive their medals, only being saluted with a few bars of the Olympic Hymn.

During the closing parade, no more division of countries. Leading alone, the decathlon winner, then that of the modern pentathlon. Glory to versatility!

Then, men and women gold medallists, silver medallists, and bronze medallists. Next, neither stiff nor marching, the mass of participants grouped according to their different sports--athletes, swimmers, gymnasts, etc., without discrimination of race or country.

The only solemn moment, after the regrouping of all competitors on the grounds: the first torch bearer would come to collect the flame from the bowl where it would stop burning, then run along the top of the stand on the designed path which slopes down to the ground and the return road. The man carrying the torch would disappear into the falling night and then the other competitors, then the local sportsmen would take the relay from the newly named Olympia to the original Olympia.

In this way, before the eyes of the watching world, spellbound by pictures, where the beauty of movement and the ardour of fighting would be in harmony with the spectacular surroundings, the largest and, indeed, the greatest spectacle would once again become the very festival of human springtime.



J-F.B.