

# Victory: for who, for what?

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by Victor Banciulescu

In an article published in the July, 1908 edition of the "Olympic Review", Pierre de COUBERTIN wrote: "Internationalism, as we understand it, means mutual respect (2) and fair competition, which courses through the athlete, when he sees the colours of his country rising on the flag-pole of victory, as a result of his hard work (3)".

Besides the fine style of writing, there are several phrases in this quotation, which are worth remembering. By alluding to internationalism in 1908, COUBERTIN was meaning Sport's contribution to the great human adventure, which was breaking down regional or zonal barriers, and to the meeting of the world's athletes in the Olympic arena as friends. Similarly, mutual respect for other nations and for the colours of his country represents a fair tribute to the people, who saw champions born and brought them up. If the words underlined above are put side by side, we see the basis of the idea, i.e. the rivalry in the field of competition sport distinguishes but does not lead to isolation. The modern Olympic Games have become a means of communication with far reaching effects and bring together very different peoples.

We, therefore, have here proof that sports rivalries can only persist if the competitors meet together and if they know each other and are complementary to one another.

COUBERTIN does not cease to surprise us, then, by a third term (hard work), by which phrase he anticipated (already!) the training, the athletes' preparation, the long and hard work, indispensable for reaching maximum performances.

The harmony existing between these quoted phrases can lead us to some very interesting conclusions, with regard to one of the most controversial Olympic ideas: Victory, for who, for what?

When we see the athlete, whose heart is coursing, as COUBERTIN says, climbing the Olympic podium, we wonder, in spite of ourselves: what is making his face shine or why those tears of joy in his eyes? What are the controlling impulses which have led him from hard work to victory? For everybody knows that the life of a top athlete is not only one of bearing the preparations but also the overwhelming joy of passing the threshold of victory, as if passing over the boundaries of paradise. In the dedicated grove of Olympia, the name Olympionique was associated in the first place with that of the athlete's father and to the name of the city, where he was born. It goes without saying that the joy felt in gaining victory

*The joy of the winner: the Austrian Christl HAAS, gold medalist of the downhill at the Innsbruck Winter Games, is congratulated by her compatriot, Edith ZIMMERMANN, silver medalist in the same event*



was increased by a feeling of social prestige which was conferred on the athlete: he, therefore, became a hero of the masses.

But to what feeling can we attach the success of today's champion? To his personal happiness, to the honour of his family, to the prestige of the community, in which he lives, or in fact to all these? I will try to outline the characteristics of these mentalities.

Success is born and lives in a physically gifted individual. But the value (figuratively speaking) of his training ceases to belong solely to the athlete, but also belongs to a determined community which participates (directly or indirectly) in the moulding of a performer. In a competition, the athlete does not only justify his own value but at the same time he puts the final touches to a real act of creation before and with the help of a representative public (for him). This also applies to the journey towards victory, for having won, the sportsman not only thinks of himself but also of those close to him. It is natural - and I am not talking about rare cases of egotism - that the happiness of the winner is mixed with gratitude towards his trainer and all those people whose efforts (general, complex and resolute, efforts of creation which can nearly be classed as artistic) helped him to gain victory (his

physical education teacher, his doctor, his training partners, his club, his supporters). But the performances of the champion (or record-holder) are not only of value for the world of sport but also for humanity in general. The athlete is not an individual, no matter what but a representative of a social group and his public activity becomes an expression of the respective community, which specifically relates itself to other societies.

In the Olympic arena, the Rumanian athlete feels himself pledged - according to the Olympic sermon - to fight "*for the glory of sport and the honour of his team*". He is not ashamed of the tears of joy rolling down his cheeks or of the coursing of his heart (COUBERTIN); rather he is proud of them.

To all those who continue to argue these points of view, because they think of extremes and perversions, I would propose a subject for meditation. What do we prefer: the champion-patriot, who dedicates his successes to his country or the athlete who only thinks of himself and more often of material gain and by doing this - with the help of a commercial minded society - making his victory a stepping stone to professional sport?

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*(1), (2) and (3) - underlined by the author*