

** Athlete and Officials

Diana Harris, 23, British swimming champion, is retiring from international competition, and has been talking to an editor from the Times, Neil Allen.

We reproduce below some of her comments which, unfortunately, often reflect young people's way of thinking towards their elders. We hope that Miss Harris and all those who share her views will take up the work of the officials "who don't understand them" to contribute in their turn to the development of sport. We also hope that sports leaders will benefit from the remarks expressed by the athletes, thus opening the road to a better understanding between them all.

... The indignation of "Di" Harris about the way international competitors are sometimes mishandled in swimming is an echo of what I have heard from other amateur sports in Britain for many years. Her complaints are similar to those made by athletes like David Hemery and Alan Pascoe last year—though so often time is on the side of the officials who can stay at the top for five times the length of a competitive career.

Miss Harris points out: "There are hundreds of officials who do a marvellous job for sport, especially at club level, and have little or nothing to gain in prestige. I'm not condemning people just because they're old. But there are those, quite often at the top, who regard young swimmers simply as machines who churn up and down the pool. They won't try to communicate with them or make contact sufficiently to understand the tensions which competitors have to endure."

... What depresses Miss Harris most about Britain's poor results in the Munich Olympic Swimming "was hearing so many swimmers saying at the end 'Thank God that's over, I'm getting out of sport and staying out'. They had had the heart taken out of them by the constant emphasis on times, rather than races, in the pre-

Olympic period, by homesickness on long courses and, most important, by lack of close contact with their own coaches. I even remember one British official laughing aloud because a coach couldn't get access to the pool. Every year in swimming I had thought it'll be different next season. But it never was."

It is no wonder, she feels, that so many former internationals never stay on in the sport.

... She also believes there should be more "relatively young officials who have availed themselves of all the knowledge of what it takes to be a top swimmer in 1973.

We must then get down to thinking about winning races not fiddling about with red tape. Training-camps should be encouraged but not made compulsory. Swimmers are young people, not robots, and we won't get anywhere until they are treated with more sympathy as individuals. Otherwise, the generation gap will continue to be the ruination of British Amateur Sport."

