

## With regard to Rule 26... Some journalists' reactions

*The new eligibility rule for athletes in the Olympic Games, or rule 26, was adopted by the 75th Session of the IOC in Vienna. Widely circulated, it has met with and aroused much interest, comment and criticism. In order to give an insight into these varying reactions we have asked a few sports journalists to be kind enough to give us their views in a few lines for the "Olympic Review". We very much appreciate their contribution.*



**Victor Banciulescu - "Sportul" - Rumania**

In the hundred years of the history of the amateur rules, battles have been won slowly, one by one. Yesterday we had an eligibility code which was better than the day before yesterday's; today we have one which is clearly superior to yesterday's. If it is true that discontent constitutes the first step towards progress, then the tribulations of the press, quiet or loud, will have served a purpose. Personally I am happy this time to find the ideas often debated at home with my compatriot and friend,

Alexandru Siperco, included in the bye-laws. Social development and modern life must of necessity seek their reflection in laws. But as Montaigne said, laws grow stronger as they get older. It only remains for us to hope that within the framework of the new rule the athletes themselves will discover the impetus and enough room to achieve honourably and loyally their aspirations of victory and human perfection.



**Jean-François Brisson - "Le Figaro" - Paris**

*The idea of making rule 26 more flexible was inspired by judicious realism; maintaining rules that were openly infringed could only bring down the authority of the IOC. However the essential thing is to stand fast on certain principles even if there are no means of closely controlling their application.*

*And on this point the IOC gives the impression of having sent the ball back into the International Federations' court, while they—or at least some of them—intended to rely on the moral authority of the IOC and even its strictness to resist pressure from their members, whether they be openly rapacious or not.*

*The Olympic athlete must not make his living from sport, or at least from its practice, and the IOC has opened a door to abuse by accepting "academic or technical scholarships" without stipulating the methods of application. This is almost ratifying a permanent course in a training centre since it is the federation which stipulates the length of the course.*

*This tolerance makes the severity of the second section (paragraph d), which excludes a professional coach or trainer from the Olympic festival, even more surprising. Yet he has a profession and he can enjoy practising "for his pleasure" a sport other than the one he teaches.*

*Conclusion: The IOC has never really had and will never have the means of controlling the application of its regulations everywhere. At the most it has been able to punish a few stars to make an example.*

*With abuses increasing, it will probably be necessary to start all over again. But above all the Olympic spirit should be better defined and more should be done to spread it...*

### **Petr Egorov - "Tass" Agency**



The USSR Federation of Sports Journalists has with interest familiarised itself with and studied the new text of rule 26, adopted by the Vienna Session of the International Olympic Committee. The leading Soviet sports journalists, Nikolai Kisselev ("Sovietsky Sport"), Boris Fedossov ("Izvestia") and Lev Lebedev ("Pravda"), whom we asked to comment on this decision, replied in the following way: The new rule 26 undoubtedly constitutes a step forward in the further improvement

and development of amateur sport. It opens up better possibilities for sports journalists to deal more completely and objectively with the competitions of the Olympic Games, to talk about and introduce the sportsmen. This will undoubtedly be facilitated by the elimination of restrictions concerning the direct contact of journalists with participants of the Games. The new rule 26 justly enhances the responsibility and enlarges the rights of National Olympic Committees and Federations as to the compliance with the International Olympic Committee's requirements in deciding upon the question of sportsmen's eligibility to the Olympic Games.

### **Alex Frere - "United Press International"**



*There is no question that the new rule 26 is an improvement over its predecessor. Its language is clearer and better defined, it no longer forces an athlete to perjure himself by signing a meaningless piece of paper, and from the IOC's point of view it shifts much of the responsibility of enforcement to the International Federations.*

*What remains unstated and what will be interesting to see is how the IOC intends to police the rule. In theory the International Federations should do this for them. Most will, but some will not. The first test will come at the 1976 Winter Olympics. If the rules are not correctly enforced*

*before then, the IOC will find itself in the same uncomfortable position it was in at Sapporo—having to make a decision on eligibility under pressure at short notice. It will therefore be the way the IOC enforces the rule which will be as important as the wording of the rule itself.*

**John Hennessy - “The Times” - London**



The new law 26 seems even more complicated than its predecessor and much too involved in its construction for ready assimilation. Thus it has been heralded by some as “progressive”, by others as “reactionary”. I am reminded of the observation that a camel is a horse designed by a committee. Where we had been hoping for a clear and concise statement of Olympic requirements there is evidence of frequent adjustment and rewording as a variety of interested parties has been successively consulted. One has to plough carefully through 430 words (compared with 102 words in the 1967 rule book) of bye-laws, sub-sections, sub-paragraphs and subordinate clauses before arriving at the general conclusion that the new law, for all its tortology, is an honest and enlightened attempt to come to terms with modern mores. But why, why, why is Jacky Stewart, for instance, denied a place in the Olympic clay pigeon championships because of his prowess, or rather his former prowess, behind the wheel of a racing car?

**Rolf Kunkel - “Westdeutscher Rundfunk” and “Die Zeit” - Germany**



*The IOC has started to adjust its regulations to present-day sports life and not the other way round as has been the case in the past. Since the eligibility rule is based on goodwill rather than on effective control, not much has changed. Competitors who economically can afford to be honest will be so. The others, and they are the vast majority, do not need to worry as long as they are not signing a pro contract. In my view it all comes down to preventing pure professionals from participation. To reach that goal too many words have been used, some completely superfluous, others annoying. The worst paragraph reads “A competitor must not be or have been a professional athlete in any sport.” One kind of professionalism is declared an original sin.*

*No jurisdiction would accept the IOC’s verdict that because a competitor received money at one time he can never in his life wear the white shirt of an Olympic athlete in any other sport. It looks as though Avery Brundage has had a come-back in the bye-laws.*



### **Serge Lang - Switzerland**

New rule 26 and its bye-law represent the instrument of a realistic sports policy. Both of them reduce the inequalities, due to different social origins or political systems, in qualification and preparation. To use a fashionable expression, sport, after the International Olympic Committee's Vienna Session, will become more transparent at its most representative level. But in regard to the stage of development of our different societies, should not other barriers have boldly been removed? In a world

which is no longer at all traditional, was it really important to defend a form of Olympic tradition rooted more in the rules and regulations than in people's minds? We all know that in every form of sport, amateur and professional, political occurrences and commercialism are two factors which threaten the integrity and credibility of sport and sportsmen, and are far more prejudicial than the material benefits an Olympic athlete may obtain from the competitions in which he takes part. By opening the Games to all sportsmen whatever their status, but by making them impervious, radically and without exception, to any form of commercial or industrial presence, by banishing with the same strictness the participants' political identification (flags, anthems, etc.), the Olympic Games would have become a far superior moral force, a bastion which sport, beyond the words which no longer have the same impact as they used, needs so much.



### **Gaston Meyer - "L'Equipe" - Paris**

*The merit of the new eligibility rule is that it takes into account the realities and universalisation of sport and of social evolution. In this sense it can be considered liberal. But this liberalism will only be justified if the IOC rigidly curbs any interpretation liable to violate the spirit and the terms of rule 26. This curb may even go as far as the rejection of certain sports or certain categories of certain sports in the private sector, and thus to their exclusion from the Olympic Games and important championships.*



### **Geoffrey Miller - "Associated Press"**

The new eligibility rule is commendably brief and simple, yet should go a long way towards straightening out irregularities. The IOC could hardly have gone any further without denting the basic principles of Olympic competition. Under the new bye-laws we are less likely to find one part of the world accusing another part of practising sham-amateurism under the umbrella of academic scholarships or state patronage, since scholarships and financial compensation for unlimited training time are now

expressly approved. For the moment everyone is happy, above all the international federations, which have campaigned for the right to decide on eligibility within

their own ranks and have now been given it. But at the same time the federations carry heavier responsibilities. Memories of Sapporo and the dilemma over skiers' incomes are still fresh, and observers will watch anxiously in 1976 to see whether some of the federations, left to their own devices to decide eligibility, can retain the IOC's confidence through an Olympic year.

### **Gian Paolo Ormezzano - "Tuttosport" - Turin**



*In my opinion rule 26 is one of the best as far as the sole aim, the sole real aim of a rule—that is, to be changed—is concerned. I think that rules, not only in the field of sport but everywhere, are made to be changed and not to settle a question forever. As soon as a rule is made it begins to be changed, either officially or secretly.*

*Some International Federations have already begun to interpret, that is, change rule 26 especially as far as the amount of money an athlete may receive is concerned.*

*I think the flexibility of its formulation, particularly in the French text, is perfect to allow one to do anything one wants without forcing the IOC to make a difficult and unpopular decision as was the case over Karl Schranz in Sapporo. At the same time rule 26 has managed not to bring the word professionalism into the Olympic sphere. The rule is intelligent, competent and practical. But in view of the world's new attitude that work is an opportunity to see life, to build oneself a complete life far beyond money, I wonder whether all the opportunities allowed and therefore offered by rule 26 do not suggest the idea of turning to sports professionalism.*

*In any case there is no harm; professionalism is not professional sport; professionalism in sport to my mind is the conscientious practice of sport with time, but also with the practice of a heap of other things besides (as theoretically all work should be practised). Rule 26 provides the athlete with a good professional practice. There's no need to become a professional.*

### **John Rodda - "The Guardian" - London**



The new rule 26 transcends the question of amateurism and eligibility and brings together those involved with the Olympic Movement. For the past twenty years Olympism has been slowly poisoned by a reluctance to accept social change, changes brought about by technical advance, by a world war and other wars, by a new distribution of wealth. Now that the offending tooth has been removed the integral parts of the Movement, the IOC, the NOCs and the International Federations (and through them the National Federations) have come together in a belief that the movement has a crucial purpose in modern society. There is no place in the

Olympic arena for professional sportsmen, but all others may strive for a position knowing that they may call upon the fullest possible support, material and financial, within the terms laid down. New rule 26 is merely the beginning of an era, there will be anomalies and contradictions as sport continues to develop and the Olympic Movement, through the IOC, NOCs and IFs, must be vigilant to these changes. No longer is there an excuse for hypocrisy.

### **Jerzy Zmarzlik - “Przegląd Sportowy” - Poland**



*The decision of the IOC Session was well received in Poland, which for years had been demanding changes to rule 26 which was based on the realities of the nineteenth century.*

*The new terms of the Olympic amateur rule constitute a good basis for research, analysis and future decisions.*

*It will be above all the Sports Federations and the NOCs that will have to decide on Olympic amateurism. Extremely varied economic conditions, unequal standards of living in different sports societies, changable geographical conditions and, no less important, the character of each sports discipline, require a very flexible definition of amateurism in sport.*

*One thing that is certain is that the practice of sport should not allow one to grow rich, to receive excessive material gain. It should not be an essential economic purpose in itself.*

*It simply remains that societies and governments should create the best possible conditions to allow gifted young people to raise their level of sport, as is done in other aspects of life such as science, fine arts, etc.*

*Future solutions will have to be sought in this direction to adapt Olympic amateurism to the needs of life.*