

*** The three aspects of sport



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As far as public opinion is concerned the problems of sport are generally dealt with as a whole. In this way physical education at school, adults' keep-fit and competition sport are often mixed up.

Consequently one reasons as though all these activities were closely linked and even commanded each other. However, I personally think that they are nothing of the sort and that they are three completely separate sectors. Contrary to what is sometimes said, very widespread practice of sport does not automatically produce champions. The examples of tennis and football prove this as a very sharp increase in the number of people practising these sports has not improved their international level.

Similarly, the development of school sport does not necessarily mean greater assiduity in physical effort once school life is over. Moreover, do we in 1975 need to recall the phenomenon of adolescents' frequent rejection of school activity as a whole?

And again, why wish to justify one thing by another? It seems to me that each of these three sectors is sufficiently important in national life to justify itself. And it is exactly in this way that we shall discuss them.

Let us take a look.

As far as sport for all is concerned we are right at the beginning, but our activity is

already underway in three directions. First of all leisure-time sport. On 30th November we helped to instigate forty odd cross-country runs throughout France and we got 30,000 people to run. We also want to try to instigate physical exercise at work. In this connection some interesting experiments have been made in firms in the Grenoble region. Finally, we are keen to start up sports projects on housing estates. All this is both very promising yet still in its infancy. I should add that I personally believe strongly in this dimension of sport.

Our effort at school, very extensively involved, must continue. The number of teachers has tripled in fifteen years, the principle of devoting one-third of the time to subjects other than French and maths has become a reality, and finally the recently passed Mazeaud law opens up fascinating perspectives by associating clubs with school activity. We still have a long way to go, but we have a fixed calendar and a clear policy. It will not be long before we see the results.

There remains competition sport, for which we have established a very elaborate Olympic preparation system. Two innovations are to be pointed out—the extent of financial effort which has doubled in one year, and the permanent character of the assistance, which from 1976 will concern our 1980 hopes. But on this point let us be clear; although money is indispensable, it does not permit the "manufacture" of a champion. Because a champion is primarily an athlete who has in him, stronger than the others, the desire to do anything to surpass himself and win. He is primarily extremely tense, fragile and generous. Of course like all of us he has his faults, his excesses, but they are often justified by the very enormity of his effort. The champion experiences an individual adventure which is probably the real reason for the admiration he provokes.

Thus the reality of sport is many-sided. By acting in these three distinct spheres we shall make France into a truly sporting nation.

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