

Mr. Mohamed Mzali: "Sport has evolved"



We complete below the publication (see our No. 107-108) of extracts of interviews given to journalists by Mr. Mohamed Mzali, President of the Tunisian NOC and new Vice-President of the IOC.

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Question¹:

What is the position of amateurism with regard to direct intervention of the State or public bodies?

Reply:

Sport has evolved. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, only well-to-do young people could go in for methodical and continuous training and could afford to devote a relatively considerable amount of time to their high level sports activities without running the risk of having financial difficulties. However, with the democratisation of sport in the world, the new conception of sport as a factor of education, promotion and social integration, and also after the Third World countries' emergence to independence, the complexion of the phenomenon "sport" has altered; today in all the countries of the world, whether they

are socialist, capitalist or non-aligned, sport is making spectacular progress and the leaders are encouraging all their athletes to achieve increasingly better performances. Some regimes consider their athletes' victories as a way of signifying their existence and proving the positive side of their socio-political system...

... The IOC thoroughly studied the file for many years, and after discussions with the International Federations adopted a new amateurism rule, called "eligibility rule", at its 1974 Session in Vienna. This is 'the famous Rule 26 of the Olympic Rules. This rule declares that to be an "amateur" an athlete must live from resources other than sport, that he must participate in sport from inclination because it gives him pleasure.

Now at the end of the twentieth century sport is a leisure activity which allows man to free himself from the social yoke, from the alienation of work. Sport thus shows itself to be an essentially humane, humanising and liberating activity.

To win, to beat records, the athlete must continuously devote himself to intensive training. Rule 26 broke new ground compared with the rules which dated from the beginning of the twentieth century because it acknowledged the athlete's right to accept repayment for the expenses he has to meet during the preparation and competition period. A few years ago this period was limited to two months. The new rule leaves the period to the discretion of the national federations and committees.

Another innovation: this rule eventually provides for compensation, authorised by the National Olympic Committee or the National Federation concerned, to cover any broken time resulting from the athlete's absence from work or impossibility to practise his profession on account of his preparation or participation in the Olympic Games and other international competitions.

¹ Interview published by the Tunis daily paper "La Presse" on 6th August 1976.

Rule 26 also allows athletes to accept prizes within the limits of the values stipulated by the respective national federations. And finally it authorises athletes to accept academic or technical grants.

Thus the IOC has modified the amateurism rules and has tried to find a balance between two imperatives of high competition sport—to achieve performances and live by one's own means, and practise sport as a free leisure activity, in which I personally believe as an educator, since sport must remain a means of human training and social education.

Like all rules, its application depends on the men responsible for enforcing it, so true is it that man's virtue and conscience are more important than the texts. It is the same in sport as in every other field, it is the moral and civic level of man which counts. The texts are only practical tools in these men's hands. They are worth what these men are worth.

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Is advertising a curse or a blessing for sport?

There is advertising and advertising. There is that which is inevitable. When there is a scoreboard or equipment in a swimming pool or stadium, nobody can stop this or that firm from putting its name or trademark on these technical or sports installations.

What the IOC condemns, and against which it is fighting, is when this advertising transforms itself into exploitation of the athlete and sport for commercial purposes, making the athlete a simple signboard and manipulating him to serve sordid interests.

The IOC's work in this direction is by no means easy because the materialistic tidal wave, in sport and all sectors of life in general, is so great, and the manufacturers' power of imagination is so vast that recommendations from the IOC and the Organising Committees are sometimes not observed. Just before the Mediterranean

Games I personally had to ask the officials of the city of Tunis to take down all the advertising boards in the stadium. However this is not always easy because the towns, the Organising Committees and the federal officials need advertising support to meet their expenses. This is a problem which has not yet been totally solved.

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"To win to exist." This is now the fashionable motto launched by the East Germans after Montreal. What do you think about this?

Perhaps there is indeed this desire to assert oneself, to show that the socio-political system chosen was the best. However the great success of this country must be seen in its education system itself. Here is a country which has chosen to democratise, generalise and even impose the practice of physical and sports education on every citizen regardless of sex, age or profession, which had declared that the right to sport is just as imperative as the right to education or work. Let us imagine 18 or 19 million people practising physical education, supervised by qualified trainers, doctors and qualified medical personnel, using proper sports infrastructures and benefitting from the officials' care—the medals are only the harvest of what has been methodically sown and upkept. It is exactly the same policy with the same results in Cuba.

All things considered, it could be the same in Tunisia although our social system has not chosen imperative planning. If we parents, educators and officials at all levels adopted a school timetable to include a large proportion of sport, if all our pupils and our workers practised sport every day and were well supervised, there would be no reason not to have great athletes and satisfying results. Quantity gives rise to quality, that's the rule!

Let us remember Gammoudi, who was discovered after an ordinary regional cross-country. It is all a question of will, organisation and choice. In this connection,

what is the percentage of the education budget or the general budget reserved for physical education and sport? This is the question! What funding do municipalities reserve for infrastructure and the encouragement of sport?

Personally I remember the long and absorbing discussions I had with the municipal authorities in 1960 and 1961... to secure a piece of land and funding in order to construct a swimming pool which was to allow a school population of 5,000 to practise swimming. My colleagues, in good faith, replied that it was more urgent to build a market or plant grass to improve the avenue. Of course these arguments were valid, but it was a question of choice.

How many parents encourage their children to practise sport? What funding do companies put aside for their employees' socio-cultural activities? Nothing comes by chance. Everything is planned, contemplated and invested, and everything is harvested, both the crops and the weeds.

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You have been elected Vice-President. It is a satisfaction for you, but also an honour for our country. What does this election mean to you?

I consider myself a sportsman, I like sport and I believe in its educational qualities. I am very honoured and proud to belong to the IOC since 1965, to be acquainted with and approach men of the quality of my IOC colleagues; meeting with them once or twice a year represents for me an escape from my daily problems, an enrichment, and I hope constitutes a contribution to the reinforcement of the Olympic ideal. What touched me most was my unanimous election. Perhaps through me my colleagues wanted to honour Tunisia which, since its independence, has not ceased to work for the popularisation of the Olympic ideal and the democratisation of sport in the service of Man.

