

Sport and human progress*

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Sport, that multifunctional entity which at present comes into so many aspects of human life and society, has within the last few years entered the realms of science, either as a specific scientific subject or as a significant variant of the general subjects of science. Today sport is studied from the point of view of physiology, the analysis of movement, biomechanics, educational transference, macro-sociology, group dynamics, psychology of apprenticeship, psychology of personality, history and, obviously, all biological branches and specialities. I make no attempt to draw up an exhaustive list of the scientific fields involved, but merely wish to remind you of the most significant aspects of the modern science of sport or, if you are not willing to accept it as one, of the attention given to sport by science today.

Sport has also entered the field of culture as a whole: an «International Society for the Philosophy of Sport» has even already been set up at the highest level of theoretical consideration.

A result of the vast scope of this study is that sport is beginning to suffer the consequences of the exhaustive examination—bordering on dissection—that it is undergoing. That is why it is important to find a means of arriving at an interdisciplinary view of sport. I think that this is the way in which this invitation to study sport through the general prism of human progress should be taken.

There is no doubt that progress has been made in sport. The records set today would have been considered beyond the bounds of human possibility thirty years ago.

In 1935, the fabulous American black athlete, Jesse Owens, set the incredible record, for

the time, of 8.13 m. for the long jump. In 1968, at the Olympic Games in Mexico, Bob Beamon broke the existing world record with a prodigious leap of 8.90 metres. The present women's swimming records are better than the men's records 20 years ago. Thus, for example, on 1st September 1974, Rosa-Maria Kother of East Germany broke the world record for the 100 metres butterfly with a time of 1: 01.88, faster than the world record of 1: 02.1 set by the Hungarian Gyorgy Tumpek in the men's category on 20th November 1954. In November 1974, the East German Ulrike Richter clocking 1: 02.98 practically equalled the men's world record set by the American Oyakawa in 1954.

The spate of records continues unabated. No one would deny that many existing world records will undoubtedly tumble at the Olympic Games in Montreal; and it is very likely in fact that by the time of the Moscow Games in 1980, in athletics for example, not a single one of the present world records (apart from Beamon's for the long jump) will still stand.

In the 21st century, will athletes run the 100 metres in 9 seconds? Will they top the 2.75 metre mark in the high jump?

In 50 year's time, will sport have helped man to become better, to feel happier? It is not obvious that what we call «progress in sport» is at the same time real "human progress".

I do not intend to present my views in systematic form. In view of the form of open dialogue in which this symposium has been conceived, I prefer to present a series of suggestions in answer to a number of problems. We are not attempting to solve concrete problems in this symposium but, once the questions have been put, to try and answer them by careful study, hard work and planning, always supposing that solutions do exist.

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** See presentation of the author in "Olympic Review" No. 64-65, p. 119.

How can sport contribute to human progress today, to the progress of contemporary man?

A full, systematic study of the subject would require hundreds and thousands of pages. The first question is the following: what do we mean by human progress? There are as many answers to this question as there are philosophical conceptions of the notion "human".

In seeking to simplify, it might be a good idea to establish a common point of departure possessing a certain coincidence based on the different conceptions of man that exist.

Then, we shall have to tackle the subject of sport itself. There are many kinds of sport—competitive, record-hunting, for health's sake, as a means of surpassing oneself, educational, technical, political, a form of entertainment, a show, etc.

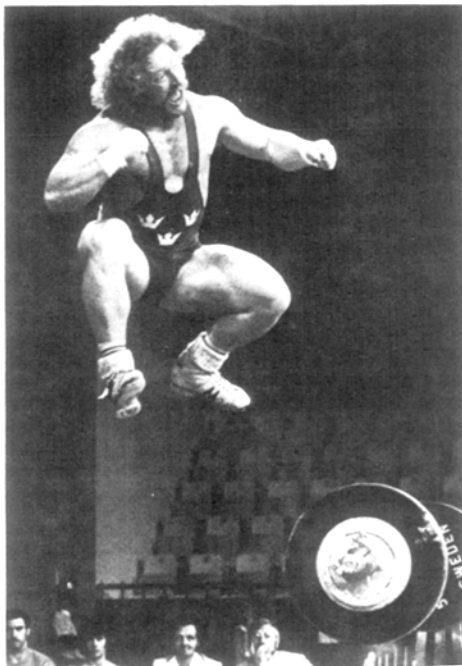
Which of these types of sport are we to consider? Is one of them more truly sport than the others? And what criterion should we use to diagnose the quality and authenticity of an educational, sociological, philosophical, historico-philosophical, popular, socio-political sport...?

The subject is vast, as vast as the social and human problems facing sport.

1. Human progress as opposed to fantasy

In an introductory document to this someone suggested a means or method of understanding human progress, which I find extremely apt for every possible philosophical conception:

To help man to progress is not to liberate him in every conceivable way but to enable



him to achieve his own liberation through mastery.

The concept of liberty is necessarily associated with that of the maturity of the ego. It is not being free in the sense of the neurotic and to an even greater extent the psychotic. These are the victims of the loss of their own personal equilibrium, of their flight from reality, the slaves of defence mechanisms used at childish levels and assimilated as a primordial apprenticeship. They flee reality but their flight does not free them. They are slaves of the irrepressible need to escape anguish by resorting to immature behaviour.

I agree with the notion that human progress is associated essentially with the idea of liberation and liberty. But man is an essentially limited being: "through his own dimensions and his own physical in-

sufficiencies, through his biological situation, through his psychic conditioning, through his cultural limitations, through his necessary social setting. Man cannot fly like a bird, nor live in water like a fish, nor speak with a tribe of Australian Aborigines unless he is one of them, nor understand all sciences, nor experience at the same time all forms of romanticism... He is a being that lives "hic et nunc"—here and now. The life of a human being at any given moment is focused on a single point in the immense pluridimensional cosmos indicated by complex space-time coordinates. This is an early frustration in the life of a human being, which is experienced, which is lived, instant by instant, concentrated in one reality and not in others. As the poet so aptly put it:

*"... but everywhere I fly dreaming as I go
I find myself alone,
wishing to live life as a whole
and be able to embrace it all,
imprisoned however in the small
reality that is my own."*

The main prerequisite for man to accede to a minimum degree of liberty and, consequently, progress, is to accept this concrete, physical, psychic, cultural and social location in space, which excludes all the other infinite possibilities existing at the same time but which are not his to experience.

The first guarantee of human liberty is the ability of man to assume his situation and his existence. The directly proportional relationship between liberty and the ability to accept is the—very simple—fundamental equation for human progress.

It is this saving realism that enables man to renounce with serenity the thousands of other situations and possibilities, the flight of the eagle high among the rocky peaks, the freedom of pollen in the spring, the falling of a drop of water in a waterfall... as well as the thousand and one varied forms of life that millions of other men live and experience at any given moment in different places and societies.

This realism is not in conflict with the dreams of poets, artists and ideologists. Dreams tend to integrate—and consequently liberate—when they are used as elements of equilibrium against the pressures of the real world or as an aim or a driving force for action or as a revitalising refuge, but not when they interfere with the acceptance of reality, when they are the

cause of man's rupture with himself. Dreamers are not always the opposite of realists. On the contrary, many great achievements in history are the work of great dreamers. But these dreamers were only successful when the dreams they dreamed did not break the ties with reality but rather strengthened them.

This acceptance of one's own reality and of the reality of others presupposes the ability to accept conflicts and frustrations.

The mature acceptance of oneself is a prerequisite for acceding to a situation of normality (not to be understood in its statistical meaning of average or mediocre). All human progress inevitably involves greater normality, that is to say a balanced maturity suited to every degree of eminence.

Some time ago WEGROCKI stated that the quintessence of "abnormality" was the tendency to try and escape conflicts and frustrations, a characteristic of immaturity.

A new concept, equally difficult to define, that of maturity, has appeared. In the field of psychology there are two fundamental acceptations of the word maturity: the relative and the absolute...

... It is not possible to talk of a person's true liberty unless he has achieved relative maturity.

All these terms: liberty, maturity, capacity of adaptation, normality (in the sense of proper functioning) have a high correlation on the level of personal behaviour...

... A man born to this world adopts fundamentally one of two attitudes: either he faces his own reality and that of his environment, or he flees them. There remains the possibility of converting his environment but this is only possible when he is fully conscious of it and has enough strength to carry it out, which again is only achieved by facing up to reality.

The principle of felicity¹, of the improvement of man or human progress depends on a person's ability to feel at home, at peace with himself wherever he is obliged to live: on his ability to adapt to the system because he likes it or even to rebel against it because he considers that it is unjust, but not because he is incapable of adapting.

But man always *manages to learn* how to live one way or another. It depends in part

¹ I shall refrain from using this word in future because of its Utopian connotations.

on his genetic heredity, but above all on the way in which he is helped to exist, to find himself, on the facilities he is given, the love or hostility he receives in his first experiences of life with others, of coexistence, etc. This brings us to the problem of deciding how to help a child learn to live; the eternal problem of education at all levels.

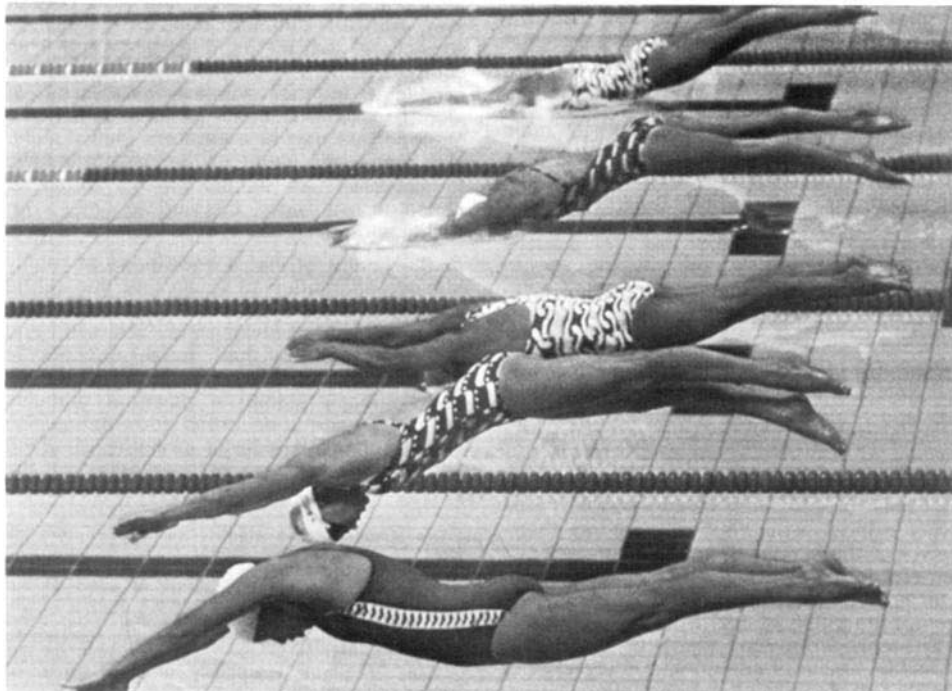
This extremely vast subject of education touches all fields of life. We are going to look at it here from a precise point of view, that of the establishment of habits of behaviour which can be derived from the practice of sport.

An essential condition for the existence of a mature, free man is the establishment of the necessary conditions for the formation of a strong "ego", not based simply on repressions of the "id" but—the impulses of the "id" being accepted and respected—on a condition such that he has completed an apprenticeship enabling him to avoid being overwhelmed by them whenever the principle of adaptation to reality requires it: making him capable of striking a balance between desires and checks.

The essential work must be accomplished during the first years of a child's life, the period of the formation of the so-called "webs" or "patterns" (ROF CARBALLO), or of the "primigenious relation" (NEUMANN) or the "oral dependence" (ALEXANDER, M. KLEIN) or the "pre-objectal state" (SPITZ), or the "cognitive assimilation" (PIAGET) or the "stamp of individuality" (*Prägung*) (LORENZ).

As the subject for which we are gathered here—sport—is not something which, in the specific sense of the word, has to be inculcated in the first years of life, I shall not enter into the concrete and vital problem of the establishment of the basic environment (family, nursery school, etc.) necessary for the sturdy growth of the individual from the very beginning, based on the maximum possible equilibrium between the "id"—the "ego" and the "super-ego".

But at the stage when the "foundations" of a person's character have already been laid, one must not neglect the educational and social environments in general which surround the human being in this second phase of his childhood; they are less



transcendental perhaps than those that are germinal, but highly decisive nonetheless for the subsequent development of numerous human capacities.

Among the various elements for the acceptance of one's own reality, I intend to consider two of the most essential: a knowledge of reality (one's own and that of others) and auto-equilibrium (or self-control). What role can sport play in this subtle endeavour?

2. In sport

Just as in speaking of human progress and liberty, we had to restrict ourselves to considering only one aspect or one element of this progress which is always partial, no matter how essential, so in reflecting on sport, one has to limit oneself to only one of the many realities it constitutes in the present world.

Allow me to give here, as a framework for the whole, an outline that summarises an examination of contemporary sport in all its manifold aspects, which I presented at the Congress of Sports Sciences in Moscow (Nov. 1974).

From the three original constituent elements of sport—play, physical exercise and competition—we have passed to the multi-functional variety of sport today. This diversity of human and social realities can be summed up according to two main trends: first, sport as entertainment, that is to say sport that is demanded for its entertainment value, and organised, promoted and determined in terms of this demand. Second, sport that is actually practised, for reasons of varying importance—health, education, recreation, establishment of spontaneous social relations, etc.²

Of the two great trends of sport in our time, I am going to examine the second, that is to say sport "praxis", the practice of sport for its own sake. It is not that I am inclined to despise the other or to judge it as a degenerative form of real sport, a tendency that is still only too prevalent among certain "arm-chair critics" who have not yet rid themselves of the clichés of sports romanticism. I am restricting myself to the second only for the sake of method and brevity. And even here, I am going to deal with the practice of sport only from the points of view of a possible means of acquiring a knowledge of reality and a means of self-control.

Facing up to reality

In order to face up to reality and cope with it effectively, one has to know it.

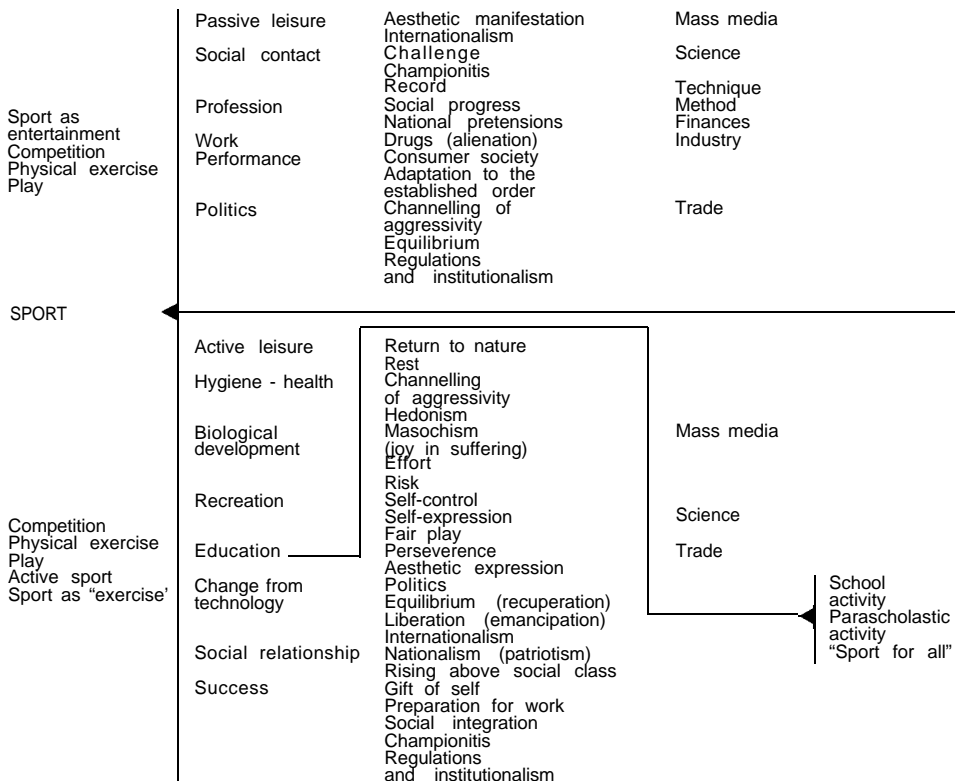
All the rules and methods that contribute towards this knowledge favour human progress.

An axiom of common sense, earlier than any science and methodology, says that the best way of learning how to live is simply to live. There is a great deal of truth in this axiom compared with the excessive artifices and complications of education. Just as a dog learns to run by running and a duck to swim by swimming, so man must learn to live by living. But man, unlike other animals, has a cultural dimension. And culture is not in an animal's nature. Culture springs from patterns—instinctive or constitutional—of behaviour. Accepting the fact that man is a cultural being and lives steeped in a cultural society, it is indispensable to teach him culture, to adapt him to culture. Man learns in one way or another to live his own animality, but he must be taught how to learn his own cultural reality and the cultural reality surrounding him.

Thus the family, the nursery, the kindergarten no matter how liberal and how careful they are, turn out thousands of models, of stereotypes that the child learns to ape. This complex world of modules of the "ideal self" produced in the primitive processes of identification with one's parents constitutes an important part of a person's individuality, with which the world of impulses will have to establish an equilibrium in order to constitute an "ego" adapted to one's own reality and the reality of others.

At the centre of man's knowledge of reality and his adaptation to it, we find this subtle and transcendental dynamism concretised in the relationship between the "real self" and the "ideal self" by their mutual acceptance and their convergence. A remote "ideal self" may perhaps signify a powerful stimulus which may end in desertion and rupture. The "ideal self", a wonderful structure of which we dream, must base its foundations on the

² The attached table which I have taken from the work "Elements for a theory of sport", prepared for the Moscow Congress, outlines the situations, the functions, values and terms of sport in our time according to these two main trends which, like diverging lines, grow wider and wider apart as a result of their distinct social, socio-economic and socio-political implications, but which do not in fact constitute completely different forms of human behaviour.



solid rock of reality, being bound to it by the mortar of basic fusion.

The subject of relations between the real self and the ideal self has been studied and measured according to various terminologies, the one of which that has become current being the one centered on "the level of aspirations". To progress in life, one has to have aspirations of a high level but not too high for one's capabilities, otherwise there will be excessive discordance between this level and the level of achievements. Too great a difference causes a rupture and the permanence of this break leads to escape into the delirium of a paranoiac or to the renunciation of a person suffering from depression. These subjects have been extensively studied and methods are being worked out for the discovery of concrete levels.

In a competitive society like the one in which we live, the levels of aspiration tend

to rise. This results in two increasingly frequent reactions: a) the divergency we referred to above between the level of aspirations and effective ability (with a tendency towards frustration or delirium); b) inhibition, the abandonment of effort, of all ambition, of progress (with a tendency towards margination or self-destruction).

That is why it is necessary, when one sets up a system of education, first of all to get the levels right, so as to favour the creation of a living, active "ideal self" but, especially in our society, to enable a man to get to know through the hard school of experience his own ability and his own personal position.

J. M. C.

(to be continued)

