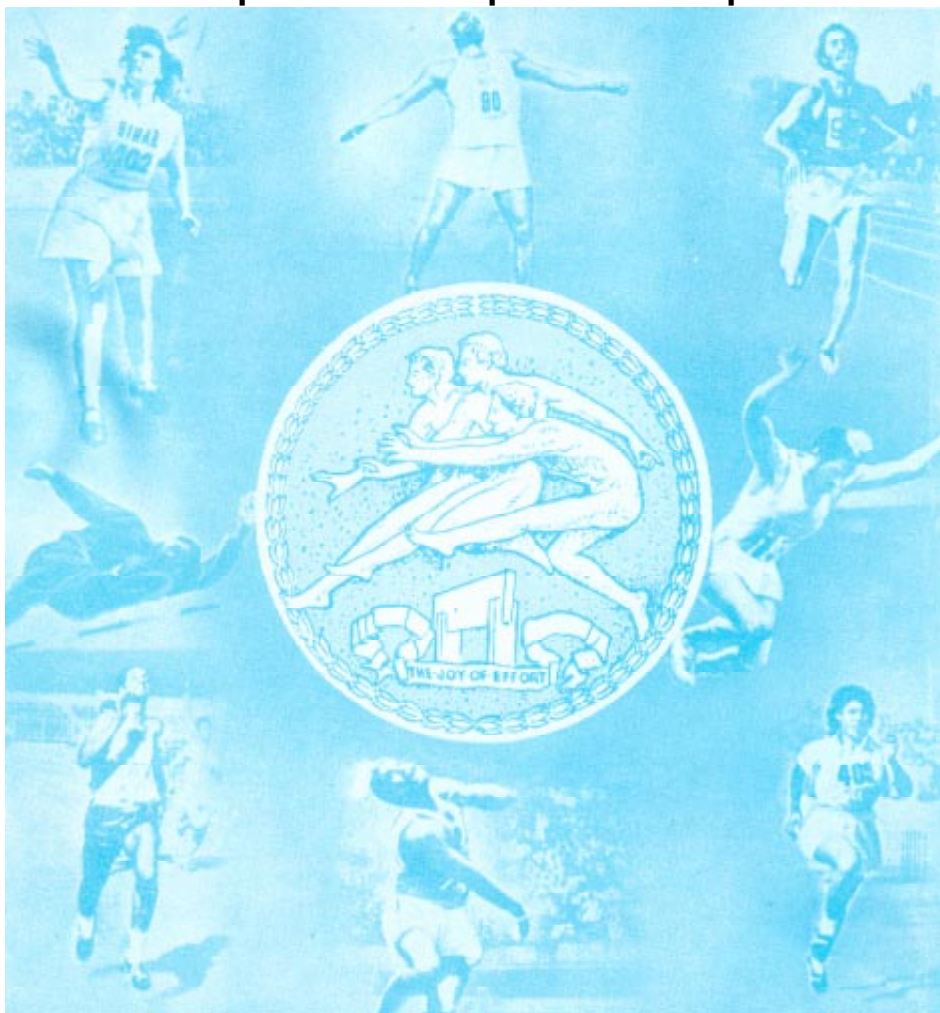


Sports and sportsmanship



by

Fal S. Pardivala

*well-known sports official
and historian of sport in Asia*

The dictionary meaning of the word "sport" is "amusement, diversion, fun, plaything or pastime through games and athletics". Sport is the only medium which can bring out in the open- many latent qualities of human beings. Under such circumstances, it has to be considered whether it is possible to ignore the importance of sports in day-to-day life.

It is difficult to locate the exact time as to when the importance of physical exercise was first recognised, or when people first entered sports competitions. Obviously, physical exercise and games make their first appearance right from childrens' cradle stage. Much attention is now being paid by almost all countries for the quick development of sport.

The State and physical fitness

The physical fitness of the people of a country is a matter of importance for the government. To achieve this goal, the Indian Central Government has established the All India Council of Sports whilst various State Governments have set up State Sports Councils. The idea behind such organisations is to increase sport in all its forms. Much responsibility falls on the executive of such institutions to create conditions far broad and popular involvement in physical education and sport. To achieve this ideal, it is necessary to have training schemes for producing specialists in different branches of sport.

Sport and labour are the two sides of the same coin. It goes without saying that one of the qualities of a good sportsman is that he is physically fit. Experience has shown that a physically fit man, in other words a true sportsman, has 10 to 15 percent more labour productivity. Sportsmen have a higher power of resistance to fatigue and lose fewer working hours as they are less prone to sickness than those who are not interested in sport. Recreation and sport are medicines without any cost for the promotion of health.

On the occasion of the First Asian Games held in March 1951 in New Delhi, the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, gave Asia a noble message. "*Play the game in the spirit of the game.*" This message stands for all time and has a deep significance.

The annual sports championships are not only a great festival but also an occasion for stocktaking.

Not only must the game on the sports field be played in the right and proper spirit, but the game of life, in its much wider context, must be played in the proper spirit.

A sportsman's code

What is the spirit of the game ? It lies not so much in playing with skill and dash and in merely obeying the referee's whistle or orders, but in something more, and that is playing according to the code of sportsmanship.

There is much pleasure and jubilation in scoring a goal with the back side of the stick, undetected by the referee—but this is a pleasure of a dubious kind. There is no honesty in it, no sporting spirit. At times a player derives satisfaction in deliberately hitting, undetected, the shins of the opponent who might have accidentally hit him. But you have made the opponent your enemy, and in the eyes of the spectators, you have let down your team and given it a bad name in the state or national game.

Sportsmanship does not lie in these ways, in allowing the immediate end to sway you from the ultimate one. The real aim should be to win honestly, to play in the spirit of friendship. Thus, sportsmanship goes much beyond victory or revenge, however sweet these may be.

But this is not the only or the chief value of sport. Educationists have come to realise that the building of character, the imbibing of discipline, the acquiring of the spirit of give-and-take and the developing of grit and determination—qualities so essential for success in life and for decent citizenship—are not acquired through sermons and peptalks or warnings and punishments. The only way to lead the young to acquire virtue is through encouraging "*doing*". And this "*doing*" must be along pleasurable lines. Just as the quinine pill is more easily swallowed when coated with sugar, stern virtues are best learned when they are associated with pleasure, joy and fun.

Games and sports are exhilarating. They are such good fun. They allow for the exercise of skill and give scope to the spirit of

emulation. Good health, self-control, mental development and team spirit can be built up through them. The right method is one of direct approach. Lead the young to virtue when they are engaged in pleasurable pursuits.

All this throws a great burden on the organisers of sports associations and on play leaders. The bearing of this burden is their chief function ; offices and managership of teams are subsidiary matters. Yet the latter loom large in the minds of those who should guide the youth in the right manner towards the right ends. Unfortunately we have not paid any heed to the motto, "*Play the game in the spirit of the game*". Games will not serve their real purpose and will not lead the young into noble citizenship if the leaders do not observe the spirit of sportsmanship. So the leaders must learn and teach the young "*to play the game in the spirit of the game*".

What constitutes a good sportsman

A good sportsman does not believe in the spirit of winning at any price. He regards victory as wholly desirable only when it is conceived in its true perspective. He is never communal in nature or outlook. His only religion is that of universal brotherhood.

A true and good sportsman is highly social by nature and gladly subjugates his personal interests for the welfare of others. He keeps in excellent health so as to serve mankind more and to derive more pleasure and satisfaction out of living. A good sportsman in a team competition believes in complete forgetfulness of the self while playing and is always loyal to his team and the captain. A good sportsman will always show give-and-take spirit and will recognise good play in others, he has a positive determined state of mind and a spirit of helpfulness, he leads a disciplined and regulated life, and is gentle in strength and courageous in weakness. He is gracious in his victory and magnanimous in his defeat ; always courteous, gentle and polite, cheerful, happy and alert and bears an excellent moral character.

J.D.P.

