

### Can the media come to the rescue of Olympism ?

by Jean-François Brisson,

UNESCO Consultant



With the inevitable slowness of agencies in the United Nations system, where each item of correspondence has to pass through several filters, UNESCO has decided to co-operate with the IOC - at the request of the latter - in order to encourage the teaching of Olympism at all levels in schools and universities, and in all countries, in accordance with the proposal put forward by the Maltese Olympic Committee.

Recommendation No. 7 of the International Committee for Physical Education and Sport, meeting at UNESCO Headquarters in March 1981, makes provision for the member states to be "earnestly" invited to "follow up the proposal aimed at the encouragement of the teaching of the Olympic Idea, according to the definition of the *International Olympic Committee*, in school curricula".

The definition <sup>1</sup> is therefore the first bridge to be crossed. Such a definition is full of pitfalls and can lead to much confusion.

At a meeting held at the close of the Congress at Baden-Baden, H.E. Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, and the Director General of UNESCO, Mr. M'Bow, finally met to discuss a common study of this problematical definition by both bodies.

Why should there be problems, since the current "Olympic Charter" gives some guidelines, and the subject itself has been dealt with unflatteringly by members of the IOC and within the International Olympic Academy.

Because the basic principles supplied by the Olympic Charter are very perfunctory, and the comments of glossary writers are often very divergent.

Also, because there are some cautious pragmatists within the IOC itself who wonder if the solid unity displayed by the Olympic Movement so splendidly at the Congress at Baden-Baden is not made easier by the inconsistency of this notion of "Olympism", which each person brings to, and draws from, whatever he wishes.

To which the idealists and the daring retort that great achievements are born of great ideas and nothing solid or durable can be built on inventions or approximations.

Their religious origins enabled the Ancient Games to last more than a millenium. It is not at all certain that the Modern Games, which are constantly under threat, will last beyond their first century.

A definition of Olympism today must come up to expectations, as many speakers at Baden-Baden confirmed, and the IOC has wisely indicated its intention to proceed towards this.

When it finally appears, it will, presumably, take account of the advice of Mr. Alexandru Siperco, member of the Executive Board, which was also given at Baden-Baden. "It is not easy to define Olympism, beyond a general framework", he said, "to define the Olympic philosophy in too much detail could lead to the adoption of some characteristics proper to one culture rather than another, and it would then run the risk of losing its universality. "

A general framework, the main idea, or even, quite simply, a clearer notion of what is contained by the term "Olympism" (interpreted in so many ways, but most commonly as an elegant synonym for the prefix "super" so abused by advertisers), such is the task to be undertaken. Much perseverance is

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required, since efforts will only bear fruit in the long term.

This patient effort must be made on two complementary circuits, on the one hand in teaching, where the process has already begun, and on the other in the media. This is the object of this analysis, undertaken at the request of Mr. Peter McIntosh. President of the committee on "Mass media, Sport and International Understanding" set up by the ICPEs (International Council for Physical Education and Sport) a non-governmental organization affiliated to UNESCO.

Within the limited scope of an article, this analysis will be confined to recalling some axioms, and to outlining possible responses to the questions which they give rise to.

1. *A rule common to all countries :*

The media (the written press as well as the audiovisual press) obey the laws of the marketplace. Articles and programmes must satisfy the needs and the curiosity of the readers, listeners and viewers. Even the best intentioned articles, and programmes of irreproachable quality are without effect if the public turns away and ignores them.

2. *A custom observed in many countries :*

The media devote themselves to the tasks of informing, explaining, enlightening, even distracting, but not teaching. There is not a teaching vocation, say those in charge, and this aspect of the press can only be episodic, incidental and indirect. Attempts to influence the behaviour of the public through the press, even for strictly humanitarian ends, frequently fail.

3. *The Olympic Games interests a vast public, "Olympism" leaves them cold :*

This fact explains the scepticism, the reticence and the sarcasm which sometimes characterise the remarks of many journalists and sports commentators.

Their contribution to mutual understanding and the encouragement of fair play, beyond observing the proprieties and making references to antiquity, have, up to now, formed the thin coating of "Olympic" veneer. There is nothing in the Games to give Olympic competitions a different character to others. The Federations which organize the world championships would also like to bathe in an

atmosphere of loyalty, decorum and the brotherhood of sport. At Olympic competitions, journalists record the same edifying examples, or unfortunate mistakes, as at non-Olympic competitions. And sometimes they conclude that the prodigious success, the astronomic sums paid for broadcasting rights, rest only on a mirage, or invention.

If they are to convey some elusive message, they must first receive it and perceive it themselves.

There is little doubt that initially they will be inclined to echo the promotional action being planned in the teaching establishments, if this achieves its target, but it is continuous action which is required.

Without wishing to prejudge the method and content of the campaign to be selected by the IOC, with the support of UNESCO, it may be assumed that it will be based on the final declaration at Baden-Baden<sup>2</sup>. In the light of the speeches made at this Congress, it may be true to say that the formula proposed by Mr. Raymond Gafner, "*Sport in the service of Man*"<sup>3</sup>, is the best summing up of the Olympic Idea.

Besides, this expression is on the same lines as that put forward, rather fleetingly, at the Congress of Varna (1973) by Mr. de Coquer-eaumont, President of the FIC, who suggested "Olympic Sport is that which contributes to human perfection".

If this simple trend was widely circulated, many practical conclusions could be drawn from it by the media.

The world-wide adoption of a precise meaning for the word "Olympic" could do more to make the promotional campaign effective than any statements of doctrine, or psychological studies on what motivates different categories of sportsmen. And on this point, the powers of amplification held by the media could be decisive.

### Sport for all

There are many forms of sport - high performance sport, sport for the masses, sport for all, sport for health, sport for leisure, business-sport, propaganda-sport, all these expres-

## INDEPENDENT VIEWS

sions which suggest the image of a sports "explosion" and not of unified sport, come together under the pen of the journalist to clarify the diverse and often contradictory motivations of all who make up the agglomeration of sport; those who practise it, the leaders, organizers and sponsors, and, on the fringe, the politicians and businessmen, who orchestrate in secret, and harvest the spin-offs.

But up to now, "Olympic Sport" has not been included in this list of expressions, except to distinguish those sports which appear on the Olympic Programme from those which do not.

The general support of journalists would therefore be required in order to advance the use of the expression and so draw without delay from the Olympic spring when it is ready to gush forth in the schools and before the ideas patiently inculcated in children have had time to reach the great public.

In practical terms, journalists would have to consent to a new and precise utilization of the word "Olympic" and the substitution of the term "Olympic Sport" for "sport for all" in their battery of expressions. Because the Olympic spirit really is for all and can manifest itself every day at every level in the sporting pyramid from the base to the summit, without being the exclusive privilege of the elite which gathers at the Games.

"Olympism is not simply a sports competition", said Mr. Vasquez Raña (President of ANOC) in his concluding remarks at Baden Baden, "it is a philosophy of life". Nor should the term "Olympic" be confined to the column on sports spectaculars ; rather it should spring up, from time to time, in the columns on education, culture, health, the environment, womens' problems, etc.

The game will be won when "Olympism" calls to mind a lifestyle, an attitude towards sport where the prime motivation is not glory or money but the profound joy of stretching one's powers to the full, and developing oneself physically, intellectually and morally through sport. With the added comfort of knowing that throughout the world millions of other human beings are driven by the same humanistic convictions, and that harmony between the nations of this earth is possible.

It is the general adoption of such an attitude that will confirm the IOC in its vocation as the guiding light of world sport.

If such an attitude were also taken by those who practise sport, by the leaders, spectators, and commentators, it would contribute also to the reduction of tension, abuses, violence and dope-taking which have turned some of the big international competitions into "tracksuit wars" and made sporting confrontation a ferment of discord.

Journalists would no longer be tempted to use sensationalism in orchestrating national exaltation before a match, nor would they hesitate to vilify jingoism afterwards.

Commercial enterprises would reduce their investment in advertising in the stadia and on equipment because the public and the athletes would react badly to the multiplicity of these attacks on the environment and on human dignity.

The trend in sport throughout the entire world would then be successfully re-orientated.

The launching of this ambitious campaign is, however, subordinate to the revitalization of that newborn child, Olympism, which has been in hibernation now for 88 years.

Begotten by Coubertin in 1894 at the Sorbonne with a great flourish of eloquence, the infant was sickly at birth. It has now become lethargic.

May the IOC give it life again and, with everyone's help, watch over its growth to maturity.

*J.-F. B.*



<sup>1</sup> The follow up to be given to this definition will be included on the agenda of the next session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport (March 1983)

<sup>2</sup> "A world campaign" emphasising the advantages of practising sport"

<sup>3</sup> I'm my recent work "L'enjeu Olympique". I Suggested completing it by ", and not man at the service of sport". but that would have caused offence.