



## DANIELE MASALA

by DANIELE MASALA

Newcomer to the Athletes' Commission, the Italian Pentathlonian, Daniele Masala, Olympic Champion at Los Angeles, tell us about his life in sport.

I remember the first time I read my name on the front pages of the sports papers; not local ones, but national and foreign papers, I, Daniele Masala, first the World Champion in 1982 and then 1984 Olympic Champion.

An indescribable feeling : after nearly twenty years of striving, of waiting patiently, of modesty mixed with a great deal of tenacity, after having wanted, at all costs, something "important" and "different", finally the dream had come true.

Perhaps the greatest satisfaction really lies in having been the first to "be the first" and having contributed as a protagonist in paving the way for the Modern Pentathlon in Italy.

for about ten years, my days have been devoted to this discipline — eight hours a day, six days out of seven. Some people mistakenly maintain that sport is a frivolous activity; I, naturally, am convinced of the contrary. After the experience gained and the long road travelled, I can affirm that sport is something that can offer a chance to grow and can serve as a "spring-board" to any individual.

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## The Athletes On Themselves

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Now that I am a father, I cannot think of anything better for my daughter Luna than sport; it is enjoyable, it shapes you physically and psychologically, you gain friends through it and, at times, it provides a ground upon which you can build character. In every respect, the sports world has meant everything to me: a fundamental choice, a way of life, a new personality, all that surrounds me, the feeling and emotions, my wife Francesca... all in all, what I am today.

Talking about myself is difficult for in doing so some fundamental aspects of the "real me" are lost. I believe, though, that I hold at least one particular facet of my personality quite clear in my mind: the characteristics I think I have (ease and flexibility in external relations combined, however, with a sense of reserve and introversion, with manners and attitudes which could seem contradictory, but which instead even out and compensate for each other), coincide with the type of sport I practise (a many-sided, eclectic sport whose disciplines seem to be so different from each other though in the end they are complementary).

Sometimes I ask myself if it was the Modern Pentathlon which shaped me in this sense or if I myself chose the sport because of my character. Thanks to this, though, I feel largely fulfilled and thanks to this again, today victories which "have to do with me" and allow me to look in the mirror with satisfaction as to the choices made are all mine.

A journalist once wrote, about my victory in the Olympic Games in Los Angeles and the competition, words which are still a source of pride and have particular significance because they constitute a confirmation of the type of life I identify with. He described the last two hundred metres of the cross-country race — the final event — as follows : *"Rasmussen passes Masala; Masala tries to catch up; Rasmussen, exhausted, stumbles on his own; Masala passes and wins; the Swede comes in behind him. Then, they embrace each other in a truly moving way. And in the embrace of these two athletes the truth of sport is also strengthened: in these two men of spirit, entwined, breathless, victory and defeat intermingle"*.

All of this is what I like about sport, what I believe in : an experience which can offer me



the opportunity to discover values, extremely important values, and to learn how to treasure them both humanly and morally.

Competition, yes; effort, yes; rivalry, yes; confrontation, yes; but always with loyalty, propriety, tenacity and serenity. In sport as in life.

D. M.

