

THE ALL-ROUND ATHLETE

by **PIERRE DE COUBERTIN**

The subject of this paper is the factors which contribute to the formation of a sportsman's personality. Coubertin can see a positive development there as a result of the constant increase in sports of all kinds, which are becoming an integral part of training, even in the case of specialists.

From the moment that a tendency to practise several sports at a time became apparent, sporting individualism was much strengthened. This result is seemingly a paradox. It would appear that just the opposite should have occurred. Not at all. Isolated in the enclosure of a single form of exercise, the individual's personality is hardly encouraged to develop. The fencer, limited to the customs, the lessons, the mentality of his club, will unconsciously seek to model himself upon his fellows, in accordance with the master's teachings. The same is true of the horseman, the gymnast, the oarsman. These circles used to be like so many little chapels in which muscles were trained in accordance with time-honoured and intolerant rites. The first benefit of the Olympic Movement was to replace the little chapels by a great church. From the moment that all sports appeared on the programme for the Olympic Games, it was essential that they should agree together in each country in order to ensure the national success. Today a new stage has been passed. It is no longer just the common action that is imperative for the purpose of obtaining, on a given occasion, a collective victory, it is — in the day-to-day work — the mutual assistance that has at long last been recognized and proclaimed effective. In order to improve himself, the oarsman makes use of running and the footballer of boxing. The horseman no longer disdains gymnastics; swimming, wherever possible, serves as the finale to the other sports.

The result is some very varied forms of exercise which diversify still further the practice of open-air and lightly clad activities. Each individual now has his choice to make, his programme to draw up, in the light of the circumstances, on

the one hand, and his own ambitions, on the other. He has to make up his mind what he *wants* to do and what he can do. What he wants to do, first of all. The "desire" must be higher than the "ability".

"What am I going to aim at?", the young sports volunteer says to himself. He consults his instincts. If he consults his interests, too, there is no harm in that. There are certain forms of exercise which will be more useful to him than others, according to the career or careers he has in mind and the kind of resourcefulness they require. Moreover, there are some sports that attract him: the effect of heredity, perhaps, or else a spirit of imitation. A fascinating exploit, the sight of which impressed his infant imagination, is sufficient to awake in the adolescent an active desire.

Once the effort to be made has been defined, there comes the question of achieving it and, to that end, of drawing up a list of the difficulties that must be overcome. There are external ones, which will very often be questions of money. However, the times have changed since sport was a luxury pursuit. Popular clubs have multiplied; equipment can if necessary be improvised; most of all, the costume has been simplified. In the past, one dressed up to devote oneself to sport; nowadays one contents oneself with undressing; hygiene is respected and snobbery banished.

The real difficulties are usually internal ones, the faults of the individual. The weakness of such and such an organ, a general muscular sluggishness, nervous excitability, hesitation, fearful movements, all kinds of physical failures, paralysing shyness in the presence of other people, touchiness and, lastly, the set of defects which make up what is called a bad sport... such faults are all too frequent; so many obstacles blocking the road of sporting progress. They can be overcome with much perseverance and by spending time on them.

There are many elements that thus go to make up the individual self-sufficiency of sporting youth. The general formulas which used to be sufficient will now have to be corrected and supplemented by the initiative of each individual. "*Know thyself*": said the philosophy of old. This recipe for wisdom has become a recipe for training and success in sporting matters.

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