

HELLO FROM VIDY

For the IOC, accompanied by many other members of the Olympic family, the atmosphere will be truly festive when it holds its 97th Session on British soil in a few weeks' time. Indeed, which of us is not aware of the influence that the predominant role of sport in British education had on Pierre de Coubertin's undertaking one hundred years ago? To "re-shape", physically and morally, the youth of his day was the great ambition of the young French baron. One of his strokes of genius was, in his quest for "homo olympicus", quickly to go beyond the frontiers of his own country and to forge, into a surprising and inimitable alloy, the best traditions and the noblest resources of the two worlds which had so often and so bitterly fought against each other: the latin and the anglo-saxon.

Five decades after the restoration of the Olympic Games, it was again Great Britain which gave birth to the dazzling display of values which ensured the survival of a nation. In 1948, in a weak and drained England, bruised in flesh but not in spirit by six years of combat endured with exemplary stoicism, the team around Lord Burghley accepted the challenge of organizing the first post-war Olympic Games. What a reunion!

In the simplicity and austerity imposed by the circumstances of the time, but with what dignity and warmth in the welcome given by our British friends, we saw once more the great hope born from the fraternal gathering of young people in the stadium, united in looking forward to better days ahead.

Better days, certainly, but ones which would be interspersed with difficult times, for world sport in general, and for British sport in particular.

For various reasons, both internal and external, the major influence which British sport enjoyed on an international level has been called into question. Our English friends have, moreover, studied this phenomenon themselves with as much lucidity as desire to remedy the situation by adapting to the changing conditions of modern sport while remaining true to themselves. And now, after a long absence of

43 years, the IOC is once again the guest of the British Olympic Association which has chosen the city of Birmingham and its brand new Congress Centre for this encounter which will awaken as many memories as it does new hopes.

Hopes, because the anglo-saxon contribution is indispensable to us, firstly because it incarnates the judicious combination of tenacity and the faculty of renewal. This combination has recently manifested itself in the clearly-evident desire of the British Olympic Association to unite its efforts in backing a British bid to host the Olympic Games, this time those of the year 2000.

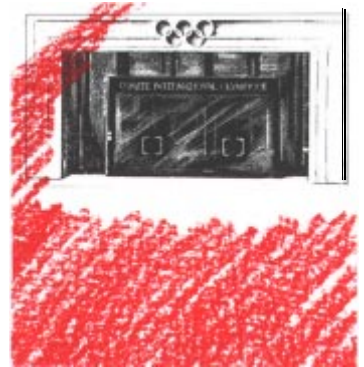
An indispensable contribution, secondly, through the heritage of fair play, the English term which has become universal as it expresses so well the essence of sportsmanlike conduct combining personal involvement taken to its limits with respect for oneself, one's opponent and the rules of the game.

Now, while the IOC is conscious of the ubiquitous and constant battle it has to wage to ensure the survival of fair play, the highest British sports authorities are also well aware that on their own soil, the jewel of British sport is, like everywhere else, in danger of being seriously tarnished.

Should not the encounter in Birmingham therefore be the occasion for the Olympic world to demonstrate its true unity through a commitment to ensure that the vocation of sport does not succumb to the repeated blows of chauvinism, violence and avarice?

Admittedly, fair play does not come naturally to the human being, and even goes against the grain of our innermost urges. It therefore has to be inculcated, taught, passed on and spread essentially by example. And this is a fact which none of us can pretend to ignore.

Without fair play, the Olympic spirit is a meaningless expression. It is in the desire to make fair play into the common possession of Olympism that the true unity of our movement lies, and it is appropriate to affirm this as we look forward to our reunion in Birmingham.



By Raymond Gafner
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