

HELLO FROM VIDY

Burning zeal? A good opportunity to open my dictionary.

Under "burning" I find "the intensity of passion"; under "zeal" I find "fervent devotion, intense ardour in the pursuit of an end or cause". So there we are !

The expression combines the ardour of feelings with that of action. Thus the intensity of the action derives from that of the feelings.

If we add the "fervent devotion to a cause", it was certainly a "burning zeal" which dwelt in Pierre de Coubertin throughout his Olympic adventure. And no-one can claim to follow in his footsteps without applying to the reality of every day that same authentic passion which he devoted to the noble cause of Olympism.

It is, for me, in this spirit that we should look at the recent Winter Games in Albertville, measured with the yardstick of the father of modern Olympism. These Games indisputably offer a wide and convincing range of examples of this "authentic passion" on the part of our French friends. Even without making an exhaustive list, there are plenty of examples. From the top bosses, Michel Barnier, Jean-Claude Killy and Jean-Albert Corrand, to the professional or volunteer organizers ; or the municipalities involved sometimes up to their necks in this marathon endeavour; the skiers in the Nordic combined and freestyle, and the women's biathlon team, to mention but the gold medallists: Now there is a fervent cohort who would have warmed the cockles of De Coubertin's heart, the man who so much wanted to "rebronze" the youth of France. Under the brightness of the sun on the Savoy snow, this bronzed look would have been very much in place !

But this demonstration in Albertville was not exclusively French, far from it. On

the roll of honour of these Games it is very much athletes from all horizons of snow and ice who feature, driven by the burning desire to triumph over themselves, and who succeeded so well that the other competitors found themselves beaten too. But the "burning zeal" does not explain everything. It is not enough to create surprise, to ensure victory. But its absence may be enough to explain defeat. Such is the lesson.

Is this true also for Olympic leaders in their daily work?

Of course, in those of them who have it, this "burning zeal" takes on a different form, one which is less spectacular, less telegenic, more internal, more carefully considered, tempered with experience. And yet our athletes, colleagues and those around us can detect it very quickly. For them, every leader either has or lacks this "burning zeal". If he has it, everything is possible, even after the worst defeats, the cruellest disappointments. If he does not have it, watch out !

For, as I said a long time ago in the May 1985 bulletin of the Swiss Olympic Committee of which I was president at the time, he could be one of those whom I described as "manipulators". Those who, whatever appearance they give, make use of Olympism before serving it. If, by ill luck, this breed should flourish, the credibility of Olympism would be called into question, its future blocked.

But of course this "burning zeal" is not self-evident. It needs to be maintained, protected, communicated.

So, as my dear friend Chevalier Raoul Mallet puts it with his elegant irony, here is another "amusing battle to give" to defend and promote the "burning zeal". Around us. Within us.



BURNING ZEAL

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