

THE ATHLETE'S PLACE IN SOCIETY: A THESIS



*Philippe Riboud defends his thesis
before the jury.*

By Robert Parienté?

During the eleven-and-a-half years of his presidency, Juan Antonio Samaranch has travelled a great deal, visiting all the countries in the world. He has met top politicians, taken part in numerous symposiums and seminars and been awarded several honorary doctorates, but he had never, by his own admission, chaired a board of examiners. This has now been done, after Philippe Riboud's doctoral viva on 4th march. The French fencer, world champion, Olympic team champion and silver medallist in Seoul, a student at the European Business Institute in Paris, was presenting his thesis on "The Evolution of the Olympic Movement, Education, Training and Social Integration of the Top-Level Athlete". After an exemplary sporting career, Philippe Riboud has successfully accomplished the next task he had set himself.

"I have often been asked", President Samaranch has said, "what the difference was between sport and Olympism. I have always replied that Olympism is sport plus culture." If proof were needed, Philippe Riboud has offered it.

The fruit of three years of work, this thesis received praise from another quarter, the CNOSE President Mr Nelson Pailou, spokesman for the board of examiners. "It is symbolic that a top level athlete has been able to produce such an important and sound study. After what we have just experienced at the Games in Albertville, where Olympism triumphed, this work only adds to our conviction. The timing of it is highly gratifying, coming just when we are preparing for the IOC Centenary Congress and asking ourselves what will become of Olympism in the 21st century. This thesis", Mr Pailou added, "shows quite clearly that Olympism must respect a balance between cultural ideology and political and economic dimensions without subordinating the Games to financial demands."



For his part, Philippe Riboud affirmed that Olympism must not abandon its ideals, even partially, as the price of its success. Recalling the kind of fight which Pierre de Coubertin waged, he said : "Olympism was at the outset a means of fighting against the archaic French educational system and bringing about a revolution in teaching". He clearly indicated that high level compe-



tion must not repudiate the humanistic origins of Olympism. And to back up his belief he had a proposal all ready. Former champions who had the vocation for it should be able to serve the Movement after following a training programme. Sanctioned by a qualification or diploma, this training, which could be provided by a Foundation in the form of an Olympic institute, would be organized along the lines of the French or American university post-graduate system, under the aegis of the IOC.

Without judging in advance what the future of this project might be, Philippe Riboud's thesis has already achieved notable success by obtaining the high commendation of the board of examiners.

R.F

After their sports performances, athletes have to face the challenge of reinsertion.