

# ANOTHER KIND OF COMPETITION : RIVALRY BETWEEN SPORTS



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Competition is one of the essential elements of sport. Athletes always want to go faster, throw further or jump higher than their competitors, as expressed by the motto of the Olympic Movement, "Citius, Altius, Fortius". In the sports world, another kind of competition can nevertheless be discerned, that between sports, with a view to obtaining sponsorship, subsidies, television appearances, headlines in papers or new adherents.

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In fact, it is more a case of rivalry than competition. The latter takes place in a fair and correct manner, without animosity. Each sport must nevertheless fight to gain and hold on to its position, whether at a national or international level, and in this struggle it is often in competition with other sports.

This rivalry has intensified over recent years owing to the emergence of a number of new sports (for example, beach volleyball, triathlon, etc.) and the increasingly important stakes represented by sponsorship and television appearances.

In order to illustrate this situation, one need look only as far back as Sunday, 25th August 1991. On that day, those organizing and responsible for the following events were hoping to gain television coverage of their event on a worldwide level.

## THE TV CHANNELS MAKE THEIR CHOICE

Obviously, when the selection of sports on offer is that rich, the television channels are obliged to make a choice, as they cannot flood their network with sport and must also keep a certain number of hours of transmission for other types of programme. In these circumstances, they therefore try to please as many people as possible, and choose the most attractive events and those which arouse the greatest interest on the part of their viewers.

Faced with such a situation, the International Sports Federations take steps to improve their chances of seeing their sport figure amongst those chosen by the television channels. First of all, it is important to choose a date when the competition is not too strong, or at the very least to fix the timing of events to take account of the other competitions on that day. On that famous weekend mentioned above, for example, the FISA brought forward the rowing finals by one hour in order to avoid clashing with the finish of the World Road Cycling Championships which in many countries would have been preferred to rowing. Next, the competition programme must be arranged in an attractive manner,

avoiding gaps. Several federations have gone so far as to alter certain rules of their sport, in order to make their events more "telegenic". This has been the case for archery, modern pentathlon and the Nordic combined, in particular. Here, too, it is important for the federations to "sell" themselves as well as they can and this is why, in practice, each federation has now set up a publicity or public relations commission.

In addition, everything is linked, since anyone who appears frequently on televi-



*Capturing the attention of the television channels.*

sion will more easily obtain sponsorship and, with the money thus acquired, will more easily be able to institute quality competitions which television will be interested in broadcasting. Such rivalry amongst sports exists in many areas and can be found at all levels. At local level, for example, or in schools, sports clubs compete with one another to try to interest young people in their discipline rather than in another.

It is also known that the various sports disciplines frequently vie with one another for the available subsidies at the level of

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their national sports association, their NOC or the state.

I should like to mention one final way amongst many others in which sports compete with one another. In future, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) wants to limit the number of athletes participating in the Games to 10,000 along with 5,000 support staff. It nevertheless wishes to accept certain new sports. The programme will thus have to be reorganized and participation in certain sports decreased. Here, too, everybody hopes that he will not be affected, or in any case not affected too severely, and will try to satisfy as far as possible the criteria that the IOC takes into account in this operation.

In a free society, it is important that the population should have the option of being interested in a huge range of sports. With this aim in mind, minority sports must try resolutely to break the vicious circle whereby television and newspapers always present sports which are most "in demand" by the public. Otherwise, the majority sports will become increasingly strong and

popular, while the minority sports will find themselves on the fringe.

Indeed, the commercial firms which are prepared to invest in sport are looking for a publicity effect and are interested in the most media-oriented sports. These therefore dispose of increasing amounts of funds allowing them to develop even more, with a snowball effect: they can be sure of more television appearances which at the same time will make them even more popular, force the networks to include them in their programmes and provide them with additional sponsorship, during which time the minority sports are practically forgotten.

In this respect, I believe that those responsible for sport, whether in Switzerland or internationally, as well as journalists and television, have a moral responsibility to present to the public also those sports with which it is less familiar. The population will then realize that these sports can also be attractive and that they often have a technical finesse, a discipline and a philosophy worthy of interest.

D. O.

*The sports with most media coverage receive more from advertising.*

