

Sport offers everyone, everywhere, the opportunity to participate among its ranks. A few of these participants will reach great levels of achievement and so cast their fate to the rewards they seek. Yet the decision to dedicate one's youth to the practice of sport must be made with proper direction and purpose to avoid the pitfalls that could cost us all dearly.

When considering the value of practising a sport, either for ourselves or our children, we must remember that victory, if obtained, does not always guarantee self-fulfilling success. The satisfaction of achieving an elite-level status can bring financial, material, and media windfalls that are generally associated with personal contentment and envied by the public. Often, competing at a high level provides athletes with a special sense of worth allowing them to feel they are in complete control of their destiny. Some even feel that their feats, both on and off the field of play, can influence the lifestyles of others. Perhaps even leaving a lasting mark for posterity.

The process of "natural selection" crowns a number of athletically

Risks

and rewards of a sporting life

endowed individuals as spokespersons and role models of our day and time. However, neither the public nor the athlete must forget what it cost to ascend the scale of responsibilities that goes along with sporting achievements. The enormous dedication required to master the needed skills takes years to perfect. Often a decade, or two, or even more, is spent in pursuit of an elite athlete ranking. Practice must be steady and all-consuming. There can be no neglecting the plan or process set forth in one's quest to the top. Concentration cannot be wasted on non-contributing events or activities. Today's athlete is often forced to sacrifice the simple

pleasures non-athletes take for granted: vacation, casual friendships, popular diets, free time, etc.

The elite athlete is perennially at risk of injury, isolation, even alienation from the mainstream of society. Perhaps this is why they are so exalted when victory is theirs. Yet as so many come to learn, victories are brief and the public's memory can be even briefer. Often the best years of a champion's career are spent fighting his or her way up the competitive ladder. Once on top of the sporting world, many athletes find it to be a cold pinnacle surrounded by criticism and contempt.

A life dedicated to sport sharply pulls the participant in one direction: away from commonality and into notoriety. As the athlete grows and evolves he or she must also develop a thick skin to protect against controversy. Their self-imposed mission transforms athletes into a type of modern spiritual leader. With this comes the responsibility to conduct oneself with unquestioned ethical integrity. The elite athlete no longer owns his or her soul but rather is obligated to bear it in the leadership of others. Their accomplishments belong to the public and so such athletes' reputations are handed over to the masses for evaluation and judgement.

Experiences from their early years of training always come back to personify the elite athlete's public image. Only if they are exposed to a proper blend of confidence and humility can we



Liston Bochette (centre).

expect them to demonstrate a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. A true champion can provide a worthy and positive influence over the many souls that watch. Through his or her conduct a trend can be set; perhaps even "influencing posterity". As role models and "heirs apparent" elite athletes are entrusted to the care of their coaches' and parents' guidance. Having reached adult years and attained a certain level of competence, the elite athlete, we hope, will transfer the good lessons learned on to others. However, let's not assume this to be guaranteed. Only if we show strong leadership to younger athletes can we expect the new elite to demonstrate these better values of sport to the public.

We are entrusting our future to those we help prepare. These athletes are not only citizens but special role models for everyone to focus on. Every youth should be given the best advice possible and instilled with the finest sporting morals we can provide. The practice of sport can have an enrich-

ing impact on all our lives. The risks are a reality but so are the rewards if we prepare them properly. Sport may be our world's most cherished tool for collective peace and cohesive progress. By preparing our elite athletes to accept the responsibility of leadership we are making an invaluable

contribution to their future and to the future of humankind as well.

The rewards certainly demand that we take the risks. But applying anything less than a firm guiding hand would mean risking it all.

*Artist.



Two young hockey players listen to their coach.

News flash

Art and Sport 2000 competition

The IOC Cultural Commission has launched the Art and Sport 2000 competition to give artistic athletes and young artists from all over the world the opportunity to have their sport-inspired creations exhibited during the Cultural Olympiad in Sydney in the year 2000. Of the 59 NOCs which have officially announced their participation, the Ecuadorian

is one of the first to have launched the competition. In the presence of 200 guests including personalities from the art, sport and media worlds, Alberto Cordero Aroca, director of the Ecuadorian Olympic Museum and organizer of the first phase of the competition, spoke about the country's cultural and sporting heritage, and asked all

the guests to lend their support to the competition. Similarly, the Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee confirmed its participation in this most significant cultural activity. Mr Ching-Kuo Wu, the IOC member in Chinese Taipei and member of the IOC Cultural Commission, has been appointed chairman of the Cultural Commission of the Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee to initiate this Art and Sport Contest. The National Sport

Council also granted its support. All entries will be preliminarily selected by a jury, which will consist of top art critics and sport officials. These pieces will be displayed at the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall from 1 to 15 January 2000. There are various promotional activities planned beforehand to publicise and promote the event. The Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee hopes through this effort it will attract a high standard of entries.