

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Olympic Movement, on the threshold of the 21st century, can be seen as one of the most important sociological influences of the times. The Games are, in short, no less than the great testing ground of the Olympic phenomenon, imbued with, driven and governed by a mysterious spirit: the Olympic philosophy. In this respect, the competitive organizational efforts by the various host cities in the latest editions of the Games have led the highest authorities to qualify them as a constant improvement over preceding editions. This growth has a tendency to exacerbate the worrying syndrome of gigantism.

Although commercialization plays a vital and positive role in the development and continued support of Olympism and sport, external commercial pressure risks to turn sport, particularly elite sport, into nothing more than a vulgar exercise in marketing physical achievements. This is incompatible, in its essence and development, with the inherent humanism of sport. The Olympic ideals and philosophy have not experienced the same pattern of development, which might have been able to offset the many changes and pressures we witness today.

A similar crisis, with the exception of the time difference, occurred twenty-four centuries ago in Olympia, delivering a fatal blow to the already age-old institution of the Olympic Games. From that moment onwards, the institution suffered a long period of decline until the Games disappeared, in AD 393.

The International Olympic Academy (IOA) has always been an inspiration to, and an essential part of, the modern Olympic Movement. The Academy was conceived by Pierre de Coubertin as a key instrument in safe-

The Olympic

Academy today

guarding and defending the values of peace, education and training, which are inherent to the Olympic principles. Its inaugural session took place on 16 June 1961 in Olympia.

Twenty-nine years later, on 16 June 1990, the IOA was officially recognized in the *Olympic Charter*, following the International Olympic Committee's Session in Tokyo. Rule 31, which was modified and expanded accordingly, states in paragraph 2.1 that the mission of the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) is to protect the fundamental principles of Olympism at national level, and to contribute to the dissemination of Olympism in the teaching programmes of physical education and sport, encouraging the creation of institutions which devote themselves to Olympic education. It then goes on to state that, "in particular, [the NOCs] concern themselves with the establishment and activities of National Olympic Academies".

At this stage, it is especially important to consider the binding mandate set out in the *Olympic Charter* in view of the serious crisis that the modern Olympic Movement had to face during the first quarter of this year, since education and the dissemination of the fundamental principles of the Olympic Movement - both overshadowed to some extent during the last few months by mostly unfounded negative media coverage - are now more necessary than ever.

The dissemination of the ethics of competition is the most effective means of preventing and fighting the scourge of doping. However these are increasingly obscured by the mounting pressure of rampant commercialization, with its mistaken slogan that "winning is everything".

Management groups, coaches and journalists should be duly informed about, and instructed in, the principles and rules of Olympic philosophy, which form the primary mission of the IOA.

The improvement and promotion of the tasks of the National Olympic Academies is now more important than ever. This could be carried out by giving over some of the financial aid, which is granted yearly by Olympic Solidarity to the NOCs for the planning of their activities and courses, to the creation of Olympic Academies in those countries where they do not yet exist (more than one hundred), or to the activities of the Academies that are already established.

Repressive or sanctioning measures are clearly necessary to combat fraud in sport, but prevention by way of education in protecting the Olympic ideology is far more effective and a great deal less traumatic. This is the fundamental mission of the IOA.

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