

## Open letter to a friend

by Fékrou Kidane



Sport, which has become a major social phenomenon, is of particular interest to United States of America universities. There is even a sports in society studies centre at Northeastern University in Boston directed by Richard Lapchick, who in his day was one of the fiercest opponents of apartheid. There is also a wealth of literature on the subject. The specialist publishing house 'Human Kinetics Publishers' brings out a number of books every year on a variety of subjects related to sport and physical education, as do many other publishers. Unfortunately, owing to distribution reasons, problems of foreign currency and lack of information, interested parties, especially in developing countries, do not have access to these kinds of publications. Let us hope that the Internet will provide an appropriate solution for those who have computers.

A modest project launched by the International Olympic Committee, the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE) and Human Kinetics Publishers will make it possible to send books of their choice to underprivileged educators in various regions.

In the USA, sport, like politics and economics, benefits from continuous media coverage on all television channels and in the press in general. There is also an impressive number of specialist magazines. Sport is a lucrative market which generates billions of dol-

lars. During the final of the American football championships, the 'Super Bowl', 30 seconds of television advertising space cost a minimum of two million dollars. The budget of some sports bodies is well in excess of the national budget of some countries in the world. Sportsmen and women who play in the professional basketball, baseball, American football leagues, on golf or tennis tours, or boxers are millionaires and well-known celebrities. The baseball player Ken Griffey has just signed a nine year contract for 116.5 million dollars.

But the United States are the United States - one of a kind.

The Tufts University, near Boston, Massachusetts, the State where the Kennedy family has its roots, chose the globalization of sport as the opening theme to a series of symposia in 2000. These symposia are organized in the framework of a programme entitled "Education for Public Inquiry and International Citizenship - EPIIC", and involves the direct participation of students, who are responsible for it. The symposium I am invited to in February

is entitled "Global Games: sport, politics and society", with themes such as human rights, social justice, the social and humanitarian responsibility of athletes, women, sport and the media, the economy, doping, racism, politics, etc. In order to tackle these kinds of subjects, the University calls in particular on specialists to hold a dialogue with students from different faculties.

Each subject is of particular interest to each student in his training. All the students prepare themselves well before the symposium through courses on subjects on the programme. The symposium is open to the local community, journalists, professors and students of the University. Last year's theme was "Global Crime, Corruption and Accountability".

The days when the intellectual classes scorned sport seem to be over. American universities are a never ending source of the country's best sportsmen, with the rare exception of a few disciplines. The university basketball and American football championships are broadcast on television. All universities have first class sports facilities and qualified coaches. Inter-school competitions also take place there regularly. This is why the Americans love sport - for having practised it at school and university.

If the Games of the XXVI Olympiad in Atlanta, the Centennial Games, broke all records for numbers of spectators, for all competitions, it is because Americans are sport loving people.