

OPEN LETTER TO A FRIEND

Everyone is convinced that the basis of sports development is physical education and school and university sport.

When I was a physical education teacher in the fifties, inter-school competitions were considered throughout the world as major sports events, mobilizing all the youth. The Ministry of National Education recognized the importance of physical and sports education and allocated an appropriate budget so that all primary and secondary schools, as well as colleges and universities, be equipped with sports infrastructure and material.

Most of the schools in developing countries at the time had physical education teachers from the West. In my country, we had Swedes, British, Americans and French. The various amateur clubs recruited players within the school system. The Ministry of Defence cooperated by providing the Ministry of Education with military trucks to transport pupils and students taking part in the competitions. The Scouts maintained order and discipline amongst the spectators.

Gradually, with student numbers on the increase, a longer list of priorities, and budgetary restrictions, at least in developing countries, physical and sports education has lost its importance and value. The creation of Ministries of Youth and Sports has not improved the situation. On the contrary, these have worsened the neglect of school sport by concentrating on elite sport, which is more profitable from the point of view of political exploitation and nationalism.

by Fékrou Kidané



We speak a great deal about the youth in order to be politically correct. But when it is a question of providing the necessary means they need to come to terms with themselves and develop by taking their own initiative in the fields of culture, sport and leisure time activities within the local community, the coffers are empty. Efforts are, however, made to mobilize the youth through political parties for electoral campaigns and the parade on the occasion of the national holiday.

But, if there were inter-school competitions, the youth would have been in better health, in terms of body as well as soul. Due to lack of space, classrooms are now being built on playing fields in some countries. Due to lack of planning means, children who go to schools equipped with sports facilities continue to play football in the streets after school. While in industrialized countries such as Sweden, sports infrastructures and certain school libraries are used by the local community after classes for reasons of profitability and convenience, elsewhere

the doors are closed and children are left outside to practice what I call 'street sport'.

But, with good sense, logic and a little imagination, we could find solutions which would enable young people who still have the opportunity to go to school to let off steam on the playing fields they usually use for a few minutes during the breaks. After all, there are sports infrastructures everywhere which are rarely used, just like the so-called training-grounds.

Given that the game of bureaucracy is so complicated, there is only limited success by development which favours sports and leisure infrastructures

Non-governmental organizations specialized in physical education continuously sound the alarm and often call upon the Ministries of Education, Youth and Sports, either through UNESCO or other forums, to assume their responsibilities. Alas, the results are disappointing. The two Ministries are also conditioned by the trends dictated by society: the Internet and modern technology for the Ministry of Education, and doping for the Ministry of Youth and Sports. No physical education.

Should one lose hope? No. The struggle should continue to get physical education accepted as a fundamental element of child, adolescent and youth education.

In this globalized world, we buy and sell footballers, whose fate is even dealt with, in Europe, at the highest

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level of Government and in courts of justice. But there will never be factories to manufacture footballers or shops where we can go and order or buy a winger or a centre forward. The only factory able to produce sportsmen and -women is an educational institution where physical education is well developed. The major European football clubs are creating their own training schools for a good reason.

The founder of the International Olympic Committee, Pierre de Coubertin, wrote extensively about physical education and sport. Unfortunately, the Olympic Movement did not heed the lesson of the master, although he was a great teacher. After all, who has read Coubertin's works? Don't all answer at once.

The good news about physical education that I should like to share with you was received from Great Britain. The British Government's Ministry for Education and Employment, along with the Ministry for Culture, Media and Sport, commissioned the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to compile a report on physical education and school sport. The report, which came out last month, was the result of a three-year investigation among 34 schools throughout England.

Compiled by QCA on educational programmes at a national level, the report dealt with schools that were highly rated in terms of sport and physical education. The information, gathered by way of a questionnaire, revealed the following:

Schools with good records in physical education (PE) and school sport report higher attainment in PE among pupils, as might be expected, but also higher achievement across the curriculum.

High levels of participation were also characteristic of these schools with good attendance figures and improved behaviour reported as a result. It was also found that still the most popular extra-curriculum activity run by schools is competitive sport.

Here we are, dear Ministers of Education, Youth and Sport, and national and international sports leaders, be a subject to reflect on. Pierre de Coubertin said this very same blatant truth in his book entitled *A twenty-one-year campaign* published in 1909.

Within the framework of this inquiry, one primary head praised his year six pupils who achieved the school's best ever test results and best ever teacher assessments for PE. Some pupils were taking part in up to 20 hours of PE and school sport a week. The PE subject manager attributed the school's good test results to the fact that pupils were fit, active and motivated, which had a knock-on effect on classroom performance.

In another case, in one school the provision for PE and sport was changed because the headteacher listened to the views of year ten girls during a working lunch.

The girls argued strongly for the introduction of football as a single gender sport. The subject teacher acted upon their request and girls now play in schools and in local clubs. Their interest and motivation in PE has increased and their standard of performance has improved.

The report states that PE teachers and sports coaches have a significant influence on young people's education when they are experts in their field, enthusiastic, believe in their pupils, talk to them about their progress, are will-

ing to learn and improve and give their own time to make things happen.

It has been proved that schools with successful PE and school sport programmes recognize their value. They include pupils' ideas in planning, celebrate young people's achievements, involve the community in providing physical activity, sport and dance. The head teachers, teachers and coaches the schools choose have vision and they make time and space for PE and school sport.

A pupil in one school (obviously rather too fond of his food!) was teased for being overweight and not being able to compete in cross-country runs. He asked for help from his PE teacher who put together a fitness programme with the help of a dietician. The programme was opened up to all pupils with weight and fitness problems through a lunchtime club. The pupil lost two stone, improved his running, felt happier, fitter and was no longer teased for his weight.

Commenting on the findings, David Hargreaves, chief executive of QCA, said: "A key message of this investigation is that an essential characteristic of a good school is that it has good PE and school sport provision. Perhaps even more importantly, good PE and school sport provision makes schools a better learning environment with less absenteeism and less disruption during the school day. This supports the argument that PE and school sport are a vital part of pupils' learning experience, potentially enhancing attainment in other subjects."

The report in question responds perfectly to the British Government's aim, which is to make all of its students participate in at least two hours of physical activity per week.

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It is worth noting that a Government whose country boasts elite sport at the highest international level, such as Manchester United Football Club, takes particular interest in physical education and school sport. Furthermore, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, is one of the few Government leaders to have consistently replied to Olympic mail concerning various matters of sport and Olympism.

This extensive work is of importance to every country wishing to develop sport and improve the well-being of the youth. With all the continental and world championships for the under-17s to 21-year-olds organized by International Federations and Confederations throughout the world, school and university sport should be the nucleus and main source of nourishment for these competitions. There would also be no need to lie about the age of players as is sometimes the case in certain African and Asian countries.

Olympic Solidarity has also been innovative in awarding study scholarships to different groups of young people to prepare them for their participation in the Olympic Games.

The university basketball championship in the United States, which is televised and attracts a huge audience, is a success story. In fact the best example in the world of school and university sport is the United States. Most Americans have practised sport in educational institutions and the best have distinguished themselves in national, international and Olympic Games. Another remarkable example is the Caribbean Games, known as CARIFTA, launched in the seventies in Barbados by IOC member Austin Sealy, with athletics as the main sport. The games, organized by different countries in turn during the Easter holidays, two editions of which I have had the opportunity to attend, bring together young boys and girls of different ages and take place over a few

days. The spirit of competition and camaraderie among the young participants and the solidarity between the leaders are exemplary. Instead of asking for 'wild cards', some NOCs would do better to put pressure on their Ministries of Education, Youth and Sports to promote inter-school competitions and take inspiration from the Caribbean model to develop each sport by placing the emphasis on young people. The active solidarity of the Olympic Movement with the recognized school and university sports organizations should also be more consistent.

Only after a great deal of hard work and close cooperation between the public authorities and the volunteer sports movement can the development of sport, with school sport as its basis, be guaranteed in the long-term. This would lead to the hoped-for results and the joie de vivre of children, adolescents and youth in general.

News

Albania

The National Opera in Tirana hosted a show entitled *We are Olympians*, which was produced by the Mehmet Akif and Turgut Ozal schools, in collaboration with the Albanian Olympic Academy. The programme included sports demonstrations and an Olympic quiz, as well as poetry, dance and music.

The show also provided an opportunity to promote and support the cause of disabled people. The large audience included political and sports personalities such as the Minister for Culture, Youth and Sport, Esmeralda Uruçi, the NOC president, Arben Jorgoni, and secretary general Stavri Bello.



A scene from the show *We are Olympians*.