

# OPEN LETTER TO A FRIEND

This is my last open letter in the *Olympic Review*, before the end of my term of office next March at the IOC and as Editor-in-Chief of this magazine, created by Pierre de Coubertin and of which he was Editor-in-Chief for a long time. I will return to the grassroots as an Olympic militant, to work with the people for the people. Making my modest contribution to the promotion of sport and Olympism in developing countries, helping the leaders and sport of my continent, Africa, playing a role as motivator, continuing the fight against racism, injustice and inequality, and be involved in humanitarian affairs and the eradication of poverty, seeing a bit more of my grandchildren, Gil and Laura. and certainly the doctors. will be my main activities, God willing. There is also a 'duty' of writing which should be undertaken for the sake of memories. Don't we say in Africa, that when an old man dies, it is like a library burning! I do not want that to be my fate. The fact is that I will remain in the Olympic Movement, with which I have been associated since 1956, to strive with you all for the well-being of our society. Our first concern must be that of Olympic education. Olympic culture, in the proper sense of the term, is deteriorating through a distinct lack of passion. The Olympic Games

by Fékrou Kidané



without Olympism would quite simply be a series of different sports competitions. Pierre de Coubertin is sometimes confused with Pierre Cardin. Participating is no longer as important as winning medals, for which Governments commit themselves to paying out bonuses. Physical education is losing ground everywhere, including in industrialised countries where children are increasingly attracted by sedentary activities such as the Internet and video games. The sporting landscape is changing more and more in concept and the media increasingly imposes its own rules. Sport has become a show, with its stars and millionaires, and the hundreds of millions of sportsmen and -women at the bottom of the pyramid are neglected. The majority of sports do not enjoy television coverage, but their practice continues and develops for the joy of their participants and supporters.

Amateur sport certainly exists, even though the word "amateur" has been bannished from the *Olympic Charter*. Professional sport is only the tree which hides the forest. The professionals come to the Games once every four years to pit themselves against the amateurs. Most of the 28 sports on the programme of the Games of the Olympiad are placed in the "amateur" category. Olympic champions in these sports are just as talented as the others, even though they do not attract the media attention. Unless I am mistaken, the vocation of the Olympic Movement is to develop amateur sport.

However, in order that sports development is no longer focused just on producing champions or top-level competitors, a debate is needed at every level, with several paths of reflection. Greater dialogue and consultation with the grassroots, familiar with the situation on the ground, through democratic rather than superficial means, is absolutely essential. Without generalising, sports leaders must show the same type of courage that drives athletes to success. The blossoming of the Olympic Movement has been hampered most by people who are brave in the corridors of power, but silent in the debating chambers. It is true that courageous critics are categorised in one way or another.

However, it is also true that those who are most dedicated and courageous, most imaginative and entrepreneurial, still reach the highest echelons in their respective organisation. Success in a task tends to guarantee re-election. Unfortunately, some are elected through unconventional means and, right from the outset, start working towards their re-election. Others are elected not to serve but rather to serve themselves. To eliminate all these contradictions in sports leadership, at local, national, regional and world levels, the rules of democracy, transparency, justice, equality and solidarity must be stringently applied. The Olympic Movement should be able to set an example. Whether we like it or not, the Olympic Movement reflects the face of our society. It is also undermined by sycophants, opportunists, social climbers, arrogance and racists who succeed in exploiting ignorance, naivete and poverty. Personal interest and prestige before general interest seems to have become customary at all levels. Nowadays, we speak less and less about sport and Olympic education, but more and more about marketing. Of course, we need money to develop sport and Olympism, but not to the extent that we should sell our soul. The money raised should be used advisedly to help those most in need, not to make the rich richer. To celebrate humanity, sports leaders should adopt a wider vision of solidarity, generosity and social justice, as well as a fundamentally human approach void of hypocrisy. The French writer

Victor Hugo said, "*The paradise of the rich is made from the hell of the poor*".

Pierre de Coubertin did not have plenty of financial means with which to found the IOC and revive the Olympic Games. He only possessed great powers of persuasion, conviction and determination, with ideas, principles and objectives concerning education, health and youth. If we all claim to be supporters of Coubertin's thinking, the least that we can do to pay tribute to him is to promote physical, sports and Olympic education, to care for all the youth and not just for the competitors, and to support the academics and institutions investing to follow in the footsteps of Pierre de Coubertin. It is not because they do not bring in money like the sponsors that professors, historians and researchers should not be treated with consideration. I know what I am talking about. It is also unfortunate that the argument of the Organising Committee of the Salt Lake City Games not to accommodate the youth camp was accepted. The successful camps in Nagano (Japan) in 1998 and in Sydney (Australia) in 2000 should have served as an example.

Through Olympic Solidarity, the IOC should help the NOCs to set up an information and documentation centre so that they can preserve their Olympic and cultural heritage. It should promote sports development by involving Governments who are the first concerned with providing experts and advisers in sustainable development. Success depends on

the members of the sports and Olympic family acting with innovative ideas, courage and determination, each in the field to which they are assigned.

To conclude this farewell letter, I would like to express my gratitude to the Marques de Samaranch and Judge Keba Mbaye, and sincerely thank all those whose support and cooperation I have enjoyed: the members of the IOC, International Federations and National Olympic Committees, Organising Committees of the Olympic Games, Government and United Nations officials, organisations specialising in physical and sports education, my colleagues and staff of the secretariat. My special thanks to the staff of my department - Sylvie Espagnac, Katia Mascagni, Michelle Irachabal, Rachael North and Marie-Helene Velosa; of the former Executive Office - Annie Inchauspe, Sarah Ordoyno, Laura Vidal and Carme Eberenz; the *Olympic Review* Spanish editorial team - Alejandro Gaytan de Ayala and Maria-Dolores Vazquez; the translators; the photo library; Thierry Deillon, in charge of production, and his team at T&T. Finally, my thanks to the staff of the Continental Hotel in Lausanne, where I have lived for the past eight years, for their service and kindness. As President Jacques Rogge settles in to his first year in office, I would like to wish him every success in his difficult task, and hope that his battlehorse will be the universality of the Olympic Movement.

Goodbye.