

PRESS COMMENTS

Beware of Sports'Jingoism *amongst Nations 'in the Process of Development'!*

(Extract from Les Sports en France, bulletin No 49 of November 1962, issued by the National Sports Committee.)

A football match played for the 'Tropical Cup' to be contested between the Congo and the Gabon (French Equatorial Africa) teams took place in Brazzaville, last September, with a disastrous ending. In spite of the fact that Congo team won by three goals to one, the Congo supporters (25,000 people), were dissatisfied with the result of the match. The referee had to escape in a police car and the Gabon team with its French trainer had to hide under the steps of the grand-stand for more than two hours in order to evade the crowd's rough handling.

What happened afterwards was even worse. On their return to Libreville, the Gabon team launched an acute attack of 'chauvinism' amongst their compatriots. Serious acts of brutality were inflicted on the Congolese living in Libreville, which

drew forth, even more serious reprisals against the Gabonese living in Brazzaville.

In short, this little war, born under the pretext of sport, terminated in nine deaths and several hundred wounded.

The outcome of this quarrel was a dangerous state of tension between the two heads of the respective governments, Mr. M'Ba and Abbot Fulbert Youlou. The latter, anxious in spite of everything, to re-establish an atmosphere of calm, hastened with all speed to Paris, to ask General de Gaulle to act as final arbitrator of this singular match, started in Brazzaville Stadium and prolonged as a conflict between the two countries.

It goes without saying that the cause of the conflict did not originate purely on sporting grounds. It was however a simple

football match that ignited the powder which created a state of tension. This incident suffices to give food for thought.

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We live in an era where people, newly proclaimed independent, burn with the desire to raise themselves to the level of the already evolved nations. They must have everything and that at once.

Now it happens that, after collecting the funds, after the diplomatic delegations being received and admitted in the U.N., it is the promotion and triumph in the world of sport, which appeal to these newly independent States most. One can hardly think that they are prompted solely by purely sporting motives, for they are only too well aware, how, through the easy means of sport's propaganda, an excess of nationalism can be fostered.

On the other hand, the nations belonging to the XXth century, wishing to draw the newly independent nations into their camps, use every means in their power, even the most persistent overbids. They show a most conciliatory attitude, adopting the following system to attract these newly proclaimed States: 'You wish to develop sport? Perfect, we shall help you. We shall facilitate your immediate acceptance into the highest international sports gatherings. Here are the sports grounds, the stadia, the racing tracks; here are the equipments and the trainers. What else do you require?'

In fact, sport is developing by leaps and bounds everywhere in Asia and in Africa.

This is all very well, but unfortunately it is putting the cart before the horse. Namely

certain Governments are far more anxious to obtain, no matter what the price, the successes of prestige rather than cultivate the rational development of sport, as it should be: in schools - in organizing centres and in administrative organizations. Briefly, sports education yields unfortunately to the competition for achieving national prestige.

We are perhaps rendering them a disservice, in directing them without discrimination in any form of sport towards international competitions.

A slogan, fashionable for some years in Olympic circles is: 'Get rid of excessive jingoism in sport.'

In our opinion, it is more important to endeavour to stamp out jingoism in sport among nations newly promoted to the great international sport gatherings. It would be more judicious, to direct them, at least for a time, towards those sports which do not risk putting into display, the honour and glory of a nation.

This would consist in laying greater stress on the education in sport rather than on success in competition. Consequently, we should send them more educators, in the true sense of the word, rather than trainers.

If we fail to do this, we may be faced with incidents such as took place at Brazzaville and the sad misconception of the ideal of sport as we understand it.

It is now 150 years since the wellknown Goethe described the errors and disappointments which befell one... apprentice-sorcerer!...

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